Great Multicultural Books for Young Children

Africa
Mama Panya’s Pancakes: A Village Tale from Kenya by Mary and Rich Chamberlin – a mother and son’s trip to the market to buy pancake ingredients turns into a party for many people.
For You Are a Kenyan Child by Kelly Cunnane – adorable illustrations show a day in the life of a Kenyan boy
Happy Birthday, Jamela! by Niki Daly – adorable book about a girl, her birthday and a new pair of shoes. Set in South Africa.
Papa, Do You Love Me? By Barbara Joossee – a young Masaii boy questions his father about love.
In the Small, Small Night by Jane Kurtz – An older sister comforts her little brother with stories from their native country of Ghana.
This is the Oasis by Miriam Moss – Vivid illustrations and simple repeating text show life around a Sahara desert oasis.
Elizabeti’s Doll by Stephanie Stuve-Bodeen

Asia
The Empty Pot by Demi – Story about the importance of honesty.
Hush! A Thai Lullaby by Minfong Ho – a mother settles her child to sleep in this award winner.
The Way We Do It in Japan by Geneva Cobb Iijima – a young boy moves to Japan with his family.
Bee-Bim-Bop by Linda Sue Park – a little girl helps her mother prepare a delicious traditional Korean dinner in this bouncy, happy book.
Kami and the Yaks by Andrea Stenn – a young, deaf Sherpa boy finds the missing yaks and must lead his father and older brother to where they are stranded.
Round is a Mooncake by Roseanne Thong – a little girl contemplates shapes in the world around her. A simple book with beautiful illustrations peppered with traditional Chinese objects.
Good Morning, China by Hu Yong Yi – Beautifully illustrated yet simple book shows many people in a park in China moving and playing on a lovely morning.

Central America
Abuelas Weave by Omar S. Castañeda – A young Guatemalan girl and her grandmother prepare to sell their weavings at the market.
Angelina’s Island by Jeanette Winter – A young girl dreams of the beauty of Jamaica as she struggles to settle into her new life in NYC

South America
The Streets are Free by Kurusa – Children in the barrio of San Jos de la Urbina in Caracas, Venezuela inspire the neighborhood to create a playground.

Middle East
Mystery Bottle by Kristen Balouch – a young boy flies on the wind of a magic bottle to visit his Grandfather in Iran.
Nadia’s Hands by Karen English – A young Pakistani American girl participates in her Aunt’s wedding and enjoys the henna decorations on her hands. (For young schoolage children)
Count Your Way Through Afghanistan by Jim Haskins – part of a series of counting books that give young children a feeling for countries around the world.

Sitti’s Secrets by Naomi Shihab Nye – a young girl visits her grandmother in Palestine in this beautiful picture book about family.

Afghan Dreams: Young Voices of Afghanistan by Tony O’Brien – 35 young Afghans tell their stories.

Silent Music: A Story of Baghdad by James Rumford – a young Iraqi boy talks about his love of calligraphy.

The Librarian of Basra by Jeanette Winter – True story of an heroic librarian who saved thousands of books during the bombing and looting at the beginning of the Gulf War.

North America

African American

Luke on the Loose by Harry Bliss – hilarious easy reader about a boy who runs off while daydreaming.

Those Shoes by Maribeth Boelts – Jeremy’s grandma can’t afford the shoes he really wants but a “too small” thrift store pair seem to fit the bill until Jeremy finds a better use for them.

No Bad News by Dr. Kenneth Cole – A young boy notices all the disrepair of his neighborhood as he walks to the barbershop, but the people there change his perspective and suddenly it all looks great.

Full, Full, Full of Love by Trish Cooke – little Jay Jay enjoys the warmth of his family at Grandma’s Sunday dinners.

Gettin’ Through Thursday by Melrose Cooper – A little boy tries to be patient for his mother’s payday.

Bigmama’s by Donald Crews – a reminiscent story of Donald Crews’ memories of his Grandmother’s house.

Honey Baby Sugar Child by Alice Faye Duncan – gentle poem about a mother’s love for her young child.

Jamaica Louise James by Amy Hest – a budding young artist paints brightens up the subway booth where her grandmother works.

My People by Langston Hughes – beautiful photographs accompany Langston Hughes classic poem.

Yo, Jo! by Rachel Isadora – Two brothers try out the slang of the neighborhood, but still remember how best to speak to their Grandpa.

Black Magic by Dinah Johnson – a young girl celebrates the beauty of black.

The Snowy Day by Ezra Jack Keats – classic story of a little boy enjoying the snow.

Please, Puppy, Please by Spike Lee – two children have adventures just trying to keep up with their energetic puppy.

Henry’s Freedom Box by Ellen Levine – one of the most interesting stories from the Underground Railroad told in beautiful picture book format.

Lola at the Library by Anna McQuinn – we follow a little girl as she visits to the library.

Boycott Blues: How Rosa Parks Inspired a Nation by Andrea Davis Pinkney


Tar Beach by Faith Ringgold – a quilt story of a young girl drifting over NYC on a hot summer night.

A Chance to Shine by Steve Seskin – a boy’s ideas about people change after his father helps a homeless man.

Baby Says by John Steptoe – adorable and simple book for the youngest readers.

I Love My Hair by Natasha Anastasia Tarpley – Lovely book about a young girl and the many varied ways she can wear her hair.

Baby Dance by Ann Taylor – a daddy and baby celebrate being together.
Rosetta, Rosetta Sit by Me! by Linda Walvoord – chapter book based on the life of one of Frederick Douglas’ daughters.


Jazz Baby by Lisa Wheeler – A family celebrate jazz music in this wonderful rhythmic romp!

I See the Rhythm by Michele Wood – prose, poetry and art take the reader on a gorgeous journey through the history of African American music.

Something Beautiful by Sharon Dennis Wyeth – a young girl finds beauty in her run-down neighborhood.

Arab American

Time to Pray by Maha Addasi – Yasmine learns about how and when to pray even though there are no mosques in her neighborhood.

Big Red Lollipop by Rukhsana Khan – a young Pakistani American girl gets invited to a birthday party and is forced to bring along her little sister.

Ramadan Moon by Na’ima Robert – A young girl explains the essence of the month of Ramadan.

Asian American

The Name Jar by Yangsook Choi – A young Korean American girl solicits the help of classmates to choose a more American name for herself.

Minji’s Salon by Eun-hee Choung – A little girl plays beauty parlor with her dog. Adorable!

Grandfather’s Story Cloth by Lisa Gerdner – a young Hmong American boy worries that his Grandfather is forgetting their life in America so he creates a collage of American life inspired by his grandfather’s story cloth from Laos.

I Hate English! By Ellen Levine – a young girl from Hong Kong learns to speak English in New York city.

Dim Sum for Everyone by Grace Lin – A family enjoys all sorts of Dim Sum at their favorite restaurant.

Henry’s First Moon Birthday by Lenore Look – An American big sister helps prepare for her baby brother’s first moon birthday – a tradition in Chinese households.

Uncle Peter’s Amazing Chinese Wedding by Lenore Look – funny and touching book about a young girl’s jealousy that her favorite uncle getting married.

Mama’s Saris by Pooja Makhijani – A young girl can’t wait to change her plain corduroy dress for one of her mother’s beautiful saris. (Best for young schoolage children)

Dear Juno by Soyung Pak – a young Korean American boy and his Korean grandmother find ways to correspond in letters even if they don’t speak the same language.

Sumi’s First Day of School Ever by Soyung Pak – a young Korean girl endures her first day of school in America.

Babies Can’t Eat Kimchee! by Nancy Patz – A young Korean American girl complains of all the things her baby brother can’t do (and actually looks forward to things that they might someday do together.)

My Mother’s Sari by Sandhya Rao – very simple book about a young girl’s feelings about her mother’s beautiful sari.

My Name is Yoon by Helen Recorvits — A young girl newly immigrated from Korea struggles to adjust to living in her new Country.

My Dadima Wears a Sari by Kashmira Sheth – two little girls celebrate their grandmother’s beautiful saris.

No Dinner! The Story of the Old Woman and the Pumpkin by Jessica Souhami – fun story from India

Angel Child, Dragon Child by Michele Maria Surat – a young Vietnamese girl tries to find her place in her school in America.
Red is a Dragon: A Book of Color by Roseanne Thong – This beautiful book takes the reader on a tour of colors using traditional Chinese objects.

Apple Pie 4th of July by Janet S. Wong – A little girl wonders if anyone will come into her family’s restaurant to eat Chinese food on the 4th of July.

Who Likes Rain? by Wong Herbert Yee – a little girl celebrates the rain. (Great book for the Northwest!)

Hispanic American
I Love Saturdays and Domingos by Alma Flor Ada – a young girl rejoices in her English speaking family and her Spanish speaking family.

Mi Musica/My Music by George Ancona – photographs of children and adults playing, singing and dancing to traditional Spanish, South and Central American music.

Friends from the Other Side/Amigos del Otro Lado by Gloria Anzaldúa – beautiful picture book for older readers about Mexican “illegals”.

Hairs/Pellitos by Sandra Cisneros – a little girl ponders the different sorts of hair that adorn each of her family members.

Si, se Puede! Yes We Can! Janitor Strike in L.A. – bilingual picture book looking at this moment in history through the eyes of a young boy.

Quinito, Day and Night by Ina Cumpiano – Bilingual book about a day in the life of a young boy

Abuela by Arthur Dorros – a young girl and her grandmother sail over their NYC neighborhood.


In My Family by Carmen Lomas Garza – 13 paintings depicting life in a Mexican American family in Texas.

My Colors, My World by Maya Christina Gonzalez – a young girl looks for colors in the desert landscape in which she lives.


Siesta by Ginger Fogleston Guy – Sleepytime is portrayed in this bright and colorful book.

La Mariposa by Francisco Jiménez – a non English speaking boy struggles to fit in at school until he begins to draw.

The Color of My Words by Lynn Joseph – a short novella celebrating the poetry of Dominican Republican Ana Rosa.

Book Fiesta! Celebrate Children’s Day/Book Day by Pat Mora – a wonderful celebration of books and reading

Gracias by Pat Mora – a gentle poem about everything for which a young boy is thankful. Bilingual.


My Very Own Room by Amada Irma Pérez – a young Mexican American girl longs for a room of her own.

I Am Latino: The Beauty in Me by Sandra L. Pinkney – evocative photographs of young latino children.

Tortillas and Lullabies by Lynn Reiser – beautiful bilingual book about four generations of women in one family.

Big Bushy Mustache by Gary Soto – hilarious story about a young boy and a big, big mustache!

Chato’s Kitchen by Gary Soto – A cool cat gets an unwelcome surprise when he invites a family of mice over for dinner. (Part of a series)

Too Many Tamales by Gary Soto – a young girl worries that she has baked her mother’s ring into the tamales for Christmas dinner!

What Can You Do with a Rebozo? by Carmen Tafolla – a young girl illustrates all the ways a person can use a rebozo.
What Can You Do with a Paleta? by Carmen Tafolla – Colorful sequel, this time about an ice cream treat.

Dear Primo: A Letter to My Cousin by Duncan Tonatiuh – An American boy exchanges letters with his cousin in Mexico.

Something Special for Me by Vera Williams – a young girl decides what “treat” to buy with the family’s saved pennies.

Jewish American

The Boy Who Loved Words by Roni Schotter – a wordsmith of a boy struggles to share his word love with the world.


Native American
Powwow by George Ancona – extensive text, but the amazing photographs make this a wonderful book for all ages.

Baby Learns About Animals by Beverly Blacksheep – simple board books about a young native girl.


The Good Luck Cat by Joy Harjo – a young girl worries about her cat and how many lives it may have left.


Mama, Do You Love Me? by Barbara M. Joosse – an Inuit girl questions the depth of her mother’s love.

My Arctic 1 2 3 by Vladyana Krykorka – counting book depicting animals and the people who live in the Arctic.

When the Shadbush Blooms – the double page spread in this lovely book show both a Lenape family as they move through their lives over the course of a year and their ancestors over the same seasons.

On Mother’s Lap by Ann Herbert Scott – gentle story about a young Inuit boy worries about whether there will be enough room on his Mother’s lap for him now that the new baby is here.

Mixed Culture or Mixed Race
The Neighborhood Mother Goose by Mother Goose, Nina Crews – Traditional rhymes with updated photographs of children.

Black is Brown is Tan by Arnold Adoff – beautiful poem about the author’s biracial family.

Voices in the Park by Anthony Browne – though the characters in this book are illustrated as gorillas, Browne paints a touching story of class difference, discrimination and unity.

Priscilla and the Hollyhocks by Anne Broyles – an historical picture book for elementary aged children about a young slave girl who is separated from her mother and ends up on the “Trail of Tears” march.

Pop’s Bridge by Eve Bunting – picture book about two boys whose fathers are working on the building of the Golden Gate Bridge.

A Castle on Viola Street by DyAnne DiSalvo – a little boy and his family work with Habitat for Humanity to build themselves a new home.

City Green by DyAnne DiSalvo – a young girl encourages her neighbors to create a community garden
Uncle Willie and the Soup Kitchen by DyAnne DiSalvo
Oscar’s Half Birthday by Bob Graham – a biracial family celebrate the baby’s 6 month birthday.  
Night Shift by Jessie Hartland – festive look at the workers who work while city people sleep.  
Skin Again by Bell Hooks – looks at skin color and then beyond.  
Somebody’s New Pajamas by Isaac Jackson – two boys discover cultural differences on sleepovers.  
Less Than Half, More Than Whole by Kathleen and Michael Lacapa – a boy worries about being part Native American, part Caucasian.  
As Good as Anybody: Martin Luther King Jr. and Abraham Joshua Heschel’s Amazing March Toward Freedom by Richard Michelson – picture book account of the lead up to the Civil rights marches.  
Bein’ with You This Way by W. Nikola-Lisa – A celebration of all the ways people look different but are still alike.  
The Family Book by Todd Parr – show many, many different kinds of families.  
Lots of Moms by Shelly Rotner – Lovely photographs of mothers and children. Very simple text.  
Shades of People by Shelly Rotner – photographs of children of all shades and sizes.  
All the World by Elizabeth Garton Scanlon – beautifully illustrated book about children and families throughout the world.  
Mama, I’ll Give You the World by Roni Schotter – a young girl transforms her mother’s beauty parlor into a dance hall to try and lift her hard-working mother’s spirits.  
The Skin You Live In by Michael Tyler – a poetic celebration of skin and skin tones.  
More, More, More Said the Baby by Vera Williams – three caregivers spend their days playing with babies.

Other  
Fly Away Home by Eve Bunting – a homeless preschooler and his father live in the airport and look for better times. Bittersweet.  
I Get So Hungry by Bebe Moore Campbell – A young girl struggles with being overweight and loving “junk” food.  
A Circle of Friends by Giora Carmi – a young boy leaves a good portion of his muffin for a homeless man on the street which begins a beautiful circle of giving.  
Tight Times by Barbara Shook Hazen – a young boy longs for a dog, but times are tough for his family.  
An Angel for Solomon Singer by Cynthia Rylant – a poor man finds solace at a Café in the city.  
Hair for Mama by Kelly Tinkham – a young African American boy tries to find a hair solution for his mother who is undergoing cancer treatments.  
Visiting Day by Jacqueline Woodson – a young girl visits her father in prison.  
Seven Blind Mice by Ed Young – seven blind mice discover they must work together to figure out what a strange object is.

Around the World  
Children from Australia to Zimbabwe by Maya Ajmera- beautiful photographs of children all over the world. Includes facts about each country.  
To Be a Kid by Maya Ajmera and John D. Ivanko – gorgeous collection of photographs of children around the world just being kids.  
Is There Really A Human Race? by Jamie Lee Curtis – an amusing look at people all over the world.  
This is My House by Arthur Dorros – Children around the world show where they live.  
All the Colors of the Earth by Sheila Hamanaka  
My Family by Sheila Kincade – photographs of different kinds of families all over the world.

Market! by Ted Lewin – Shows marketplaces all around the world.

Hello World! Greetings in 42 Languages Around the Globe! by Manja Stojic – large paintings of the world’s children saying “hello” in many languages.

World Team by Time Vyner – children all over the world prepare to play soccer.

Children with Disabilities

My Pal Victor by Diane Gonzales Bertrand – two best friends do many things together. And you don’t discover that one of them is in a wheelchair until the book’s last page.

Brothers and Sisters by Laura Dwight – wonderful photographs of many brothers and sisters where one of them has a disability.

Looking After Louis by Lesley Ely – a young school girl observes the ways in which her classmate, Louis, does things differently. A touching story about Autism spectrum disorder.

A Smile from Andy by Nan Holcomb – a young boy with Cerebral Palsy wishes people would talk to him as easily as they talk to his baby sister.

Ian’s Walk: A Story About Autism by Laurie Lears – a young girl and her autistic brother go for a walk

Hooway for Wodney Wat by Helen Lester – a little rat’s speech impediment ends up being a blessing when dealing with a bully.

Knots on a Counting Rope by Bill Martin Jr. – a young Native American boy and his grandfather recount the stories of the obstacles the boy has overcome despite his blindness.

Zoom by Robert Munsch – A young girl gets a new (and very fast) wheelchair.

We’ll Paint the Octopus Red by Stephanie Stuve-Bodeen – a young girl wonders if her baby brother who was born with Down’s syndrome will be able to do all the things she had planned to do with him.

Ballerina Dreams by Lauren Thompson – The true story of young girls with cerebral palsy who work toward a ballet recital. Gorgeous. (Keep the hankies handy!)

Lesbian and Gay Families


Uncle Bobby’s Wedding by Sarah Brannen – a young girl worries that her favorite uncle won’t have time for her after his wedding, but discovers that she’s not losing an uncle but gaining another one!

King and King by Linda de Haan – A queen insists that her son marry, but his choice of spouse is a bit of a surprise.

Mini Mia and Her Darling Uncle by Pija Lindenbaum – a young girl’s jealousy grows when her favorite uncle brings a friend along on their outings, that is, until she realizes that this friend has a special talent.

Felicia’s Favorite Story by Lesleá Newman – a young girl likes to hear her two mothers tell the story of her adoption.

And Tango Makes Three by Justin Richardson – true story of two male penguins from the Central Park Zoo who hatched an egg and raised a chick together.

The Daddy Machine by Johnny Valentine – while their two mothers are out, a brother and sister build a machine to create a Daddy. Unfortunately, the machine is a bit more effective than they anticipated. Funny!