

Diversity in Child Care

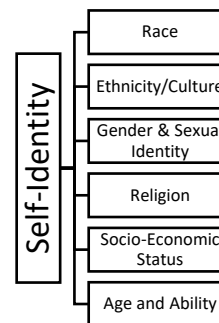
Created for Wildwood Resources 2020 (3 hours of Social Emotional Continuing Education)

What is diversity and how is it reflected in childcare settings?

By definition, **diversity** refers to inclusion of different types of people. In practice, diversity mean having an awareness of and inclusion of a variety of races and ethnicities, foods, cultures, languages, historical influences, and so much more. At its root, diversity is about race and culture, yet those areas alone have expanded over the years based upon how humans identify themselves. Before we can explore how diversity impacts child care settings, let's first consider how humans classify themselves into specific groups to create a personal identity.

There are six common pillars of self-identity:

- Race
- Ethnicity/Culture
- Gender & Sexual Identity
- Religion
- Socio-Economic Status
- Age and Ability



We'll explore each of these pillars to understand how they might influence children's self-identity, both individually and in combination with the other pillars. As children learn and grow, they compare everything they experience to what they already know. For example, a young child may understand that a dog is a creature with four legs. When a child encounters another four-legged animal, maybe a horse or an elephant, he will group the new creature with what he already knows and assume that the new animal with four legs is also a dog. As children learn, they begin to notice the fine details of new items to correctly label and categorize them into a growing knowledge base.

Eventually, a child will understand that not all four-legged animals are dogs. To be labeled as a dog, a child may add additional details to help him determine if somethings fits into the "Dog" category. The creature may also have a wagging tail, tongue hanging out, and make barking or woofing sounds before he will label it a dog. Noticing details (both similarities and differences) is how children learn to differentiate between various animals, places, and people in their lives. Discrimination in this case is not a negative word. Instead it is recognizing the differences between similar, yet different, things. Naturally, children do this with people also, which can cause some odd or embarrassing moments when labeling happens publicly. A child might comment loudly at a family gathering, "Grandpa is fat and has no hair." This is a child's way of noticing the difference and wanting to learn more about what makes people the same and different.

The most important thing to teach is that although we may look different, or speak different languages, on the inside all people are the same. We all come from the same species, human.

Note: Please keep in mind that whenever people categorize others into groups of this nature, there is the real possibility of unintentionally offending others. The acceptable and preferable language regarding various identity groups are constantly evolving. We have done our best to recognize and reflect acceptable terms in this course based on current professional guidelines.

The Six Pillars of Self-Identity

Race: A category of humankind that share certain distinctive physical traits; a family, tribe, people or nation belonging to the same stock.

Race is based upon biological, genetic traits, like skin, hair, and/or eye color. Some races have been disadvantaged and may feel stigmatized (thought less of) or held in reverence (thought greater than) by others based on previous experiences or historical influences. In the past, people of black or African American ancestry were treated as property, enslaved and not afforded the same rights as whites simply because of the color of their skin, even though they are equally capable. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, Japanese American's were considered a threat and imprisoned out of fear. Although progress has been slow, American's awareness and acceptance of equality, based on race, continues to overcome the biases that were held in the past.

Because race is the most visually noticeable of the human pillars, children are likely to mention the differences they see in others. For example: a child says, "That girl has brown skin or that man has curly hair." These comments are perfectly normal and should be encouraged to open the dialog about the differences. It is also important to talk with children about the similarities we share with other people. We'll dig deeper into this topic after covering the pillars.

Ethnicity/Culture: a group or kind of people unified by shared interests, habits, or characteristics. Culture often includes language, traditions and behaviors shared with a group of like-minded people.

Ethnicity/Culture may also include geographic regions, country of origin, and language as influences and factors. For example: The U.S. Census Bureau defines the ethnonym Hispanic or Latino to refer to "**a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race**" and states that Hispanics or Latinos can be of any race, any ancestry, any ethnicity.

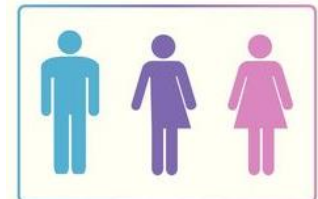
Some personal values and behaviors may be related to ethnicity or cultural identity. Consider the **individual verses collective mentality**; whether a person is more concerned with their own place in the world or how they fit into a group, family, or society. For example, western cultures, like the United States, are thought to be more individually motivated, whereas eastern cultures like Japan, China, or Korea may place higher value on collective identity. A child raised in a collective society, even after they are grown, may feel a deep sense of responsibility to their parents and family before personal goals. Please be aware that this is a **generalization or stereotype** and is not true in all cases.

When people move from one geographic region to another, they may begin to take on behaviors, language and/or traditional culture of the new location. This change is called **acculturation**. Although change is often part of a geographic move, it may take one or more generations for acculturation to occur. Some attributes of a previous culture may be retained, like the language. People may choose to keep the old ways of doing things in the new location as a means of preserving and honoring the past.

A good example of this occurs when non-English speakers immigrate to the United States. Because the United States is primarily English speaking, we might expect that anyone who comes here would be motivated to learn and speak the language of the majority. This is not always the case. Some immigrant families keep their native language, traditions, and beliefs for several generations with children learning the English language at school and acting as interpreters for their parents and/or grandparents. This language barrier can create a challenge in finding employment, medical care, arranging for quality care for children. In addition, there may be confusion or misunderstanding regarding behavioral expectations and norms in the new location.

Gender Identity: A sorting mechanism that historically has had only two categories, male and female, based on biological sexual characteristics observed at birth. Gender roles are often influenced by race, culture or other factors; however, gender identity is more recently accepted as being fluid, neutral, or on a spectrum (based on feminine and masculine identification). Not all people identify themselves as being exclusively male or female.

As a childcare provider, it is important that gender not be used as a determinant in the toys, games, or dramatic play a child is allowed or chooses to engage in. Gender stereotypes and biases, while less common than in the past, are still present in parenting practices. You may encounter parents who don't want their son to play with dolls or their daughter to play with trucks or pretend to be a construction worker based on their own gender identity beliefs.



In an effort to reduce discrimination and raise awareness for inclusion, the role of a care giver should be to encourage all children to play with age-appropriate toys that interest them, regardless of gender. Allow children access to a variety of toys, experiences, and role play in a neutral setting without judgement, focusing instead on safety and variety in their exploration.



Sexual Preference: is the attraction to and decision to live, couple, or marry persons of the same, opposite, or neutral gender identity as oneself. Sexuality, which was once a socially inappropriate topic, has only recently become mainstream conversation. The reason sexual preference is part of this topic is because there is sometimes a stigma, discrimination, and strong beliefs by some people regarding those who do not fall into the majority.

As a childcare professional, you may have children in your program whose parents are not in a traditional man/woman, same race couple. Children learn to accept what is part of their usual environment as normal. If you talk about relationships only in man-woman context, children begin to set their expectations to that pattern. However, if you talk openly about relationships being between any two people, regardless of gender, race, or ethnicity, that allows children a more open expectation of what relationships might look like.

Religion: A belief system that honors a higher power, force, or entity and often stems from the family of origin. Religious beliefs and expectations may be passed from generation to generation through scripture, ceremony, and/or storytelling.

Religion is one of the largest historically persecuted groups within the six pillars of identity. From ancient times to World War II, when Hitler and his regime tortured and killed millions of Jewish people simply because of their religious affiliation, continuing to current religious conflicts in the Middle East, where war and power struggles are a constant social influence on the population. Religion is a motivating factor for many immigrants seeking asylum in the United States each year, the freedom to openly practice and worship the religion of choice without fear of incarceration, discrimination, or other negative personal or social consequence is reason for people to leave the only place they may have lived and move to a strange new home. Religious beliefs influence daily principles, cultural values, holiday celebrations, meal practices and food choices, as well as gender roles within the family structure.

As a childcare provider, you may choose to share your religion with the children in your care, however, this practice may not appeal to some potential clients if it clashes with their own beliefs. As an alternative, you could exercise neutral, non-religious views within your business, or you might take an omniscient (all-encompassing, well-informed) perspective on religion to educate and represent many different religious views for the children and families in your program. Either of the latter options would fit within a diverse childcare program.

Some religious platforms omit certain foods from the diet or use fasting as part of spiritual practices during recognized religious events. It is important to discuss parental expectations and communicate your willingness or lack thereof to accommodate religious preferences parents may have for a child in your care. Awareness and Inclusion involves open communication to ask questions and seek information about the various religious practices of the families in your care. Not knowing about other religions or cultures is not wrong, but not asking or making assumptions may be seen as insensitive or biased.

Socio-Economic Status: The ability to earn or access financial resources to meet the needs of the individual and family.

Socio-economic status often coincides with other factors, like race, culture, and geographic location. Some locations have high rates of poverty and have a large percentage of a certain race or ethnicity. A low socio-economic status reflects people living at or below poverty, while a high socio-economic status represents wealthy, affluent people. **Both high and low income, along with middle-class families need high-quality care options.**



Rates for childcare services vary widely based on the cost of living in various parts of the United States. Some states/counties/cities have programs in place to subsidize the cost of childcare through tax-based funding for families in need of assistance.

As small business owners, childcare providers must set their rates in a manner that covers operating expenses in addition to making a profit that provides income for their own well-being while also meeting the needs of potential clients. When interviewing prospective clients, it may be helpful to explain some of the expenses associated with operating a childcare in order to justify your hourly or weekly rate. Parents may assume that a provider is getting rich, while in reality the business owner is struggling to make ends-meet. When clients understand that program expenses include many invisible costs, like electricity, water, licensing, etc., they are more likely to feel good about the money they pay for quality care.

Childcare rates are often related to the cost of living of the geographic location as well as advanced education and/or rating of the provider or program. There is often a wide range in fees from one provider to another based on the services offered and the quality of care. Likewise, there is a wide range of services that parents want and need when they are searching for a care provider.

Age & Ability: Age and ability are areas of biological human development that overlap when related to developmental readiness within typical child development. When a person does not follow typical developmental milestones, as in the case of physical, mental, or emotional developmental delay, then the two areas will be represented separately for that individual.

Age and ability of children automatically defines some of their self-identity as well as our expectation for their behavior and actions. In some cases, based on age, a child will not understand or comprehend certain topics or concepts. Likewise, until a child is developmentally ready, he will not be able to perform certain tasks. For example, until a child develops the muscle strength and coordination to do so, he will not be able to walk across a room unassisted. Even after a child can walk, he may not be allowed to cross the street by himself based simply on his age and limited cognitive ability to comprehend the danger of the task. As children become ready, parents, care providers, and even other children can help them to learn the skills and abilities to reach their goals. In this way, a person's ability or inability may become a means of identification in specific groups, like infants, toddlers, pre-K and big kids being labeled or separated within the same program.

This differentiation occurs spontaneously in some situations and intentionally at other times. Children who can run may join a game of tag on the playground. Whereas a caregiver may allow children who no longer nap to play with small manipulatives (like Legos or puzzles) while the little ones are sleeping. In this way, the activities offered in the childcare setting are diversified by age and ability, while also protecting some of the children from the hazards presented by certain items.

One benefit of having a mixed-age group in a care setting is that older children can assist younger ones with tasks that are familiar and/or easy for the older child and more difficult for the young. This process helps older children to learn empathy and nurturing behavior that may lead to feelings of pride and self-confidence when practiced in a positive and supportive, supervised environment.

In contrast, age and ability can create bias or limitations at the other end of the spectrum in a childcare setting. Older people may feel or be told that they are no longer able to do what they want. Grandma can no longer drive because her eyes don't work as they once did. A parent may not choose a provider who is older, due to concern about the person's ability to do the job, lack of hearing, or inability to keep up with the children. Try to keep an open mind when it comes to age and ability and teach the children in your care to do the same. Don't count anyone out until they tell you themselves that they are not able to perform a specific task. Even then, look for accommodation that can be made to enable a person with limitation to accomplish a task in a different way, or with assistance.

If you have a child in your care that does not seem to be following a typical pattern of development, it is important to talk about your concerns with parents. Parents can seek professional evaluation and services for a child based on your experience with child development. In rare cases, if parents do not share your concern, providers may contact the county directly to request an evaluation of a child. (Keep in mind that some parents may feel this is over-stepping. As mandated reporters, providers are required to report or seek evaluation if they feel a child's needs are not being met.)

Diversity past and present

After covering the pillars of identity, you may see how diversity begins with one's self-identity as he or she compares his or her own genetic traits and cultural dynamics with others. As society becomes more global, we see people moving farther from where they were born and raised. Gone are the days when a person would stay in the same geographic region for their entire lifetime. Today humans from all walks of life may vacation, permanently relocate or travel simply to experience cultures different than their own. The important thing to remember about diversity is that there is always more to learn because cultural dynamics are constantly changing. At various times in life, personal values and interests may change. When this occurs, activities, behaviors, or groups of people that were once important may be left behind while new ones take their place.

Inclusion has come a long way from the days when people with developmental delays lived away from their families, to the present, when we seek early intervention services for students who are not following typical development to ensure they have the tools and resources needed to reach their full potential, regardless of physical, mental or emotional delay.

Diversity in the play setting

Within the childcare setting diversity may be represented in various ways. Regardless of the race and ethnicity of the children in the program, it is important to represent and make available toys and activities from various races and/or cultures.



Having baby dolls with a variety of skin tones, hair type, and eye color is a great start. Even toys like Legos have diverse people characters, with race, and age variations. Dramatic play areas might include clothing from various cultures, like a Sari, Turban, Kimono or other cultural clothing. Art supplies, like crayons, colors pencils or markers with inclusive skin tones allow children to create images in their own likeness, or different from their own, as they learn about and recognize the visible variations in human traits.

Adults sometimes get in the habit of doing things only one way. When teaching acceptance and awareness of our differences it is the small details that make a big impact. Whatever your religion, a childcare should have books and toys representing several religious affiliations to teaching that there is not only one option or one religion that is better than another. For example, a Dreidel is an important symbol of the Jewish faith during Hanukkah.



Reading books about other parts of the world and traditions that are different than their own lets children see that they are only a small part of a global community. Children are often fascinated by the traditions of other cultures. Having books on historic subjects as well as fables/fairytales begin the discussions about what is real and what is fiction or make-believe. Children have vivid imaginations and can construct stories from any subject matter when given the chance.

Imaginary or pretend play is a vital aspect of childhood and allows children to act out the roles they learn about and experience in daily life. In part, this is how children begin to discover how they fit into the world and shape their own identity.

Diversity of food

Another opportunity to introduce diversity as well as nutritional variety is in the foods served at the childcare program. Many providers serve only foods that are familiar to them personally. Instead of sticking to the same routine, try something new, or ask parents of the children in your program to share traditional foods from their home culture.

American cuisine often includes burgers, hot dogs, and chicken nuggets, but is it easy to trade those items for tacos, enchiladas, perogies, chow mein, eggrolls, soups or casseroles that are less familiar to the children to broaden their experiences and open a dialog about diversity, geography, and the world we live in. When trying a new food, why not add a couple books, a song, or an art activity from that culture. You'll be amazed at how interested children will be once you begin to introduce new cultural concepts. Children soak up new knowledge about cultures different from their own like sponges and love to share the information with others they meet.

Teaching Acceptance and Awareness to Children

While we would like to say it is easy to raise children who are colorblind to the differences and inequity in the world, that is not an easy thing to accomplish. Research shows that children naturally associate their own traits and culture as being better than those that are different than them. When given a choice between baby dolls with several skin tones and asked which is nicer, smarter, or better, most children choose the doll most like themselves as being superior to the other options. Parents often make the assumption that if they don't say anything negative about racial differences that children will be neutral and feel that all people are equal. Unfortunately, the less parents and caregivers talk about the variety of physical traits children see on the outside, the more biased children become.

Research shows that true progress to reduce racial bias is made when parents and caregivers are willing to open in-depth discussions with their child (children) about what makes us different and what makes us the same. In those instances, children become less superior-minded. When the baby doll activity is repeated, those same children respond that all of the skin tones of baby dolls are equal, after several months of open communication on the topic. Although it sounds simple, talking openly about racial differences is very complex. In one research study, a group of parents that was prepared and notably willing to talk with their child about racial awareness found the topic so uncomfortable, that the majority dropped out of the research study. (Vittrup 2006).

Consider all there is to learn about the various people of the world, the holidays, traditions, food and so much more. Kwanzaa, Ramadan, Chinese New Year, Cinco de Mayo, Hanukkah, St Nicholas Day and countless cultural traditions to discover and celebrate with the children in your life.

While diversity is a broad topic, opportunity to start conversations and raise awareness are all around us. The discussions may not be easy, but the results are worth the effort. When children understand and celebrate not only what makes us different, but also what makes us the same. Fear or bias of people who are different is a thing of the past. Help the children to create a new normal, where acceptance is the expectation, and learning about others invites compassion and understanding.

The following information includes a Tip Sheet for talking to children about race as well as a book list to offer a starting point about both common and sensitive topics.

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10 Tips for Teaching and Talking to Kids about Diversity

1. Start early

By six months of age babies are able to notice racial differences; by age 4, children have begun to show racial bias. Let your child know that it is perfectly acceptable to notice and talk about skin color, race and cultural dynamics. Start talking about what the differences mean and what they don't mean.

2. Encourage your child

Encourage children to ask questions, share observations and experiences, and be respectfully curious about race, religion, gender, culture or other differences. Expose children to different cultural opportunities – photographs, music, movies, books, or events and discuss the experiences afterward. You don't have to know the answer to every question. Work together to find accurate information.

3. Be mindful

You are a role model to your child. What you say is important, but what you do, how you behave, and the diversity of your relationships, is likely to have a bigger impact than your words. If your neighborhood and support circle are not diverse, seek out events and activities to broaden children's experiences away from home.

4. Face your own biases

Everyone has some biases yet allowing children to see you learning to overcome your own challenges shows them a positive path. Give children an example of a bias, racial or otherwise, that you hold or have held in the past. Share with your child things you can do to confront and overcome that bias.

5. Know and love who you are

Talk about the histories and experiences of the racial, ethnic, and cultural groups that you and your family identify with. Talk about their contributions and acknowledge the less than flattering parts of those histories as well. Talk about the challenges your family members (parent, siblings, aunts, uncles, grandparents, ancestors) have faced and overcome.

6. Cultural literacy

Develop literacy skills by learning about and respecting others. Study and talk about the histories and experiences of groups we call African Americans, Latinos, Hispanics, Asian Americans, Native Americans, whites and others. Be sure children understand that every racial and ethnic group includes people who may believe different things and behave in different ways. There is diversity even within the racial, ethnic and cultural groups.

7. Be honest

Be honest with children, in age-appropriate ways, about bigotry and oppression. Children are very observant of noticing patterns. Help them make sense of those patterns and recognize that historical oppression and discrimination are sometimes part of those explanations. Make sure your child knows that the struggle for fairness is still happening and that your family/group can take part in positive change to reduce the struggle for equal rights.

8. Tell stories

Every big story of racial, religious, or cultural oppression is also a story of people fighting back and speaking up. Teach children those aspects of the story too. Include women, children, and young adults among the “Freedom Fighters” in the stories you share. Most historic oppression included people from all ages, genders and socio-economic status.

9. Be active

Help children understand what it means to be a change agent. Teach them to stand up for others, especially those who cannot protect themselves. Connect your conversations to the change you and your child want to see and ways to promote and bring about that change.

10. Plan for a marathon, not a sprint

Make talking about our differences a routine part of everyday experiences. Build character in each child by providing a supportive environment for exploration of knowledge, curiosity for learning, and resources to guide the way. Revisit these topics again and again in a variety of ways to gain a better understanding of the world we all share.

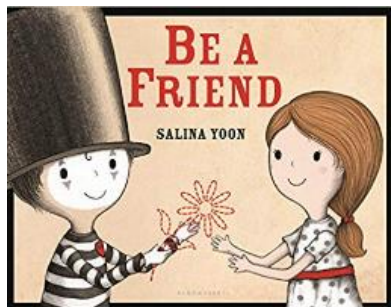
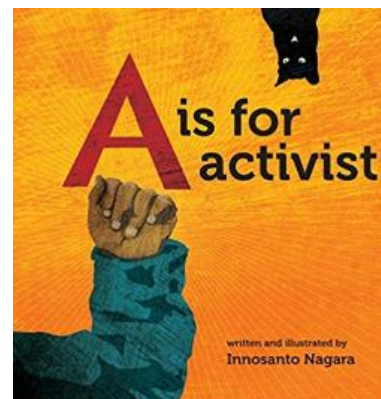
Booklist of diverse topics for children

A Is for Activist by Innosanto Nagara (2013)

Alvin Ho (series of titles) by Lenore Look

American Born Chinese by Gene Luen Yang (2006)

Amina's Voice by Hena Khan (2017)



Be A Friend by Selina Youn (2016)

Be Boy Buzz by Bell Hooks (2002)

Bee-bim Bop! by Linda Sue Park (2005)

The Book Itch by Bunmi Laditan (2018)

Call Me Tree = Llamame Arbol by Maya Christina Gonzalez (2014)

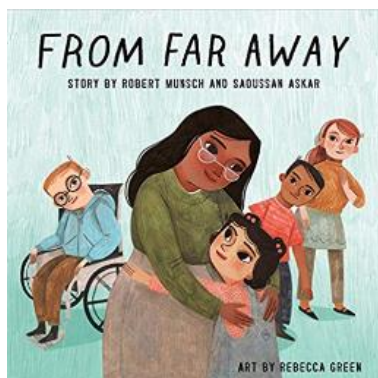
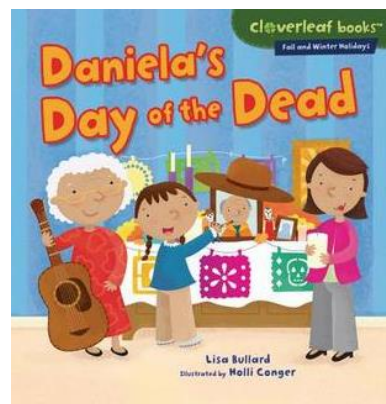
Daniella's Day of the Dead by Lisa Bullard (2012)

El Deafo by Cece Bell (2014)

Festival of Colors by Kabir Sehgal (2018)

Firebird by Misty Copeland (2014)

From Far Away by Robert N Munsch (2017)



From North to South by Rene Colato Lainez (2010)

Ganesha's Sweet Tooth by Sanjay Patel (2012)

Island Born by Diaz, Junot Diaz (2018)

I'm Here Now by Anne Sibley O'Brien (2015)

Just A Minute by Yuyi Morales (2003)

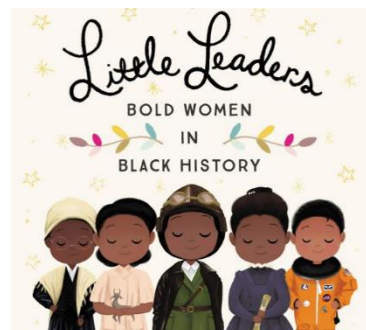
Last Stop on Market Street by Matt de la Pena (2015)

Let It Shine by Ashley Bryan (2007)

Little Leaders by Vashti Harrison (2017)

M Is for Mustache by Catherine Hernandez (2015)

Milo's Museum by Zetta Elliott (2016)



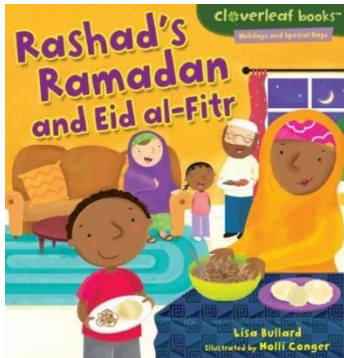
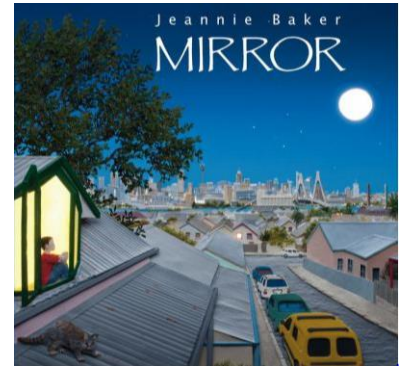
Mirror by Jeannie Baker (2010)

Mommy's Khimar by Jamilah Thompkins-Bigelow (2018)

No Kimchi For Me by Aram Kim (2017)

One of a Kind Like Me by Laurin Mayeno (2016)

The Palm of My Heart (compilation) (1996)



Peek! By Minfong, Ho (2004)

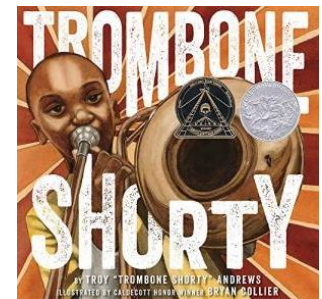
Radiant Child by Javaka Steptoe (2016)

Rap A Tap Tap by Leo Dillon (2002)

Rashad's Ramadan & Eid Al-Fitr by Lisa Bullard (2012)

Red: A Crayon's Story by Michael Hall (2015)

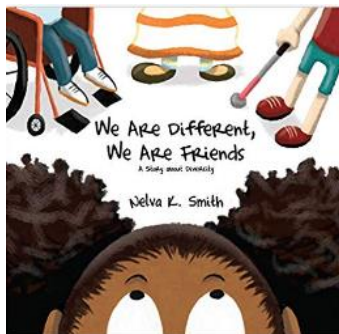
Sparkle Boy by Leslea Newman (2017)



The Wheels on the Tuk Tuk by Surishtha Seghal (2015)

Trombone Shorty by Troy Andrews(2018)

Viva Frida by Yuyi Morales (2014)



We Are Different, We Are Friends by Nelva K Smith (2019)

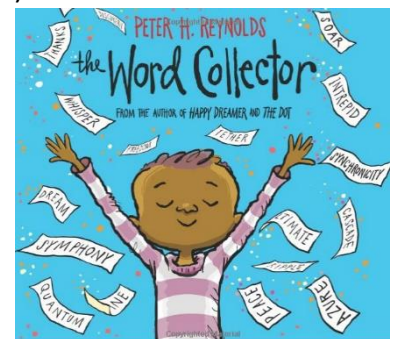
What Can You Do With a Paleta? By Carmen Tafolla (2009)

What's the Difference? By Doyin Richards (2017)

When We Were Alone by David Robertson (2016)

Where's Halmoni by Julie J Kim (2017)

Thank You Omu by Oge Mora



The Word Collector by Peter Reynolds (2018)

You Hold Me Up by Monique Gray Smith (2017)

This list is not intended to be complete, instead it provides a starting point to begin talking with your child(ren) about what makes us different and what brings us together. Please search for other diversity focused literature and continue to add to your collection.



When you have completed this course,
click [HERE](#) to take the test.

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<https://forms.gle/awPyZok6gKPM7MhT6>

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