

The background of the slide features a stack of books. The top book is open, displaying text on the left page and a vibrant, multi-colored illustration on the right page. The text on the left page includes phrases like "like farting", "Ma takes it to mean", "She takes", "my not-quite-finished", "as she rinses the", "in the kitchen and", and "in trouble with". The book's spine is a bright pink color with the word "ARK" visible in large yellow letters. Below the main title, the text "Reach Out and Read Annual Meeting 2025" is displayed. The overall image is slightly blurred, emphasizing the text overlay.

Mirrors, Windows, & Connections

Reach Out and Read
Annual Meeting
2025

Why book choices matter





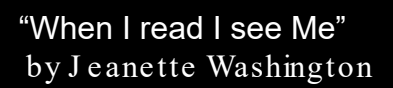
Dipesh Navsaria

Professor of Pediatrics and Human
Development & Family Studies |
University of Wisconsin–Madison



Tessa Michaelson Schmidt

Director of the Cooperative Children's
Book Center (CCBC) |
A Library of the School of Education
University of Wisconsin-Madison





The CCBC is a noncirculating examination, study, and research library for Wisconsin school and public librarians, teachers, early childhood care providers, university students, and others interested in children's and young adult literature.



School of Education
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON



WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF
Public Instruction

The CCBC is often asked: *What makes a great children's book?*

- An abundance of anthropomorphic animals
- Written by a celebrity author
- Includes an important lesson or affirmation
- Use of kid-like font or similar “fun” fonts
- Text written in a tight rhyming scheme
- More than a book! Stickers or product tie -ins!
- Nostalgic moments for the adult reader
- Written in emojis because 32 pages is long



Charlotte Zolotow Award

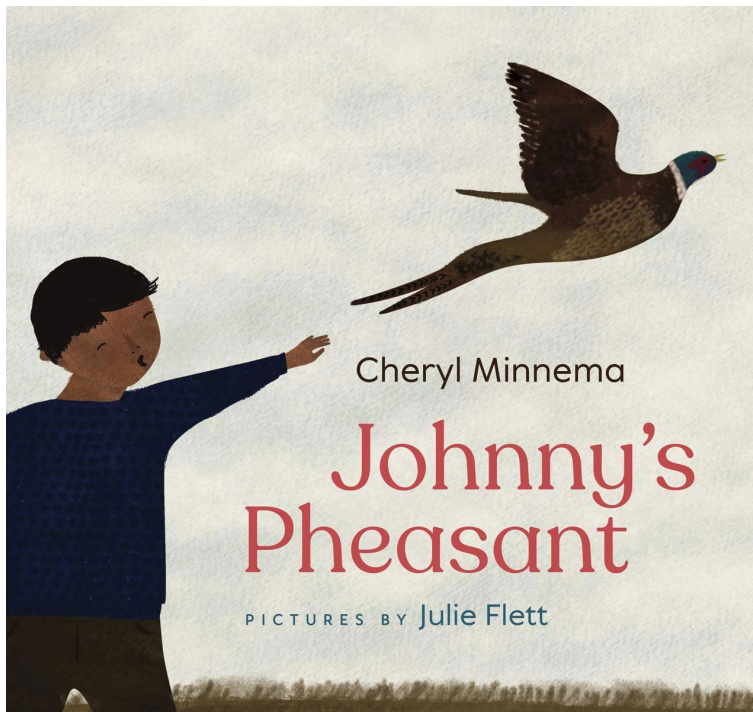
The Charlotte Zolotow Award is given annually to the author of the best picture book text published in the United States in the preceding year.

What would you expect
to be a criterion for a
picture book award?

Charlotte Zolotow Award Criteria

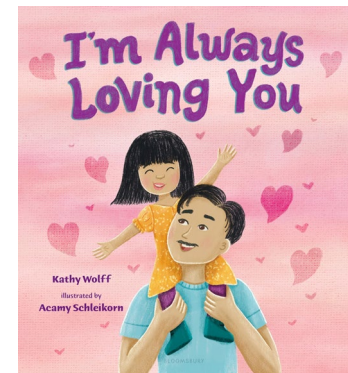
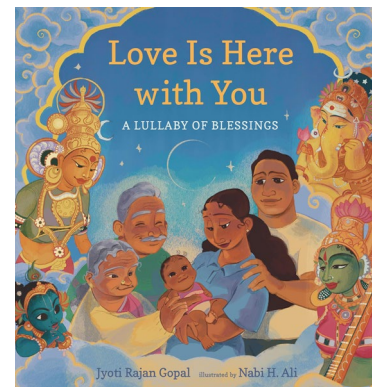
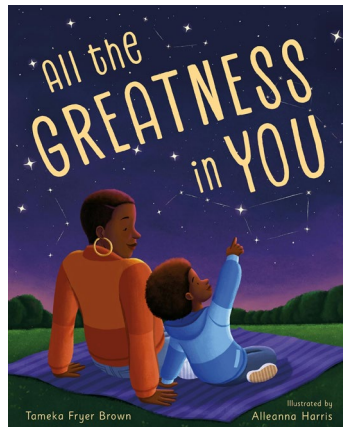
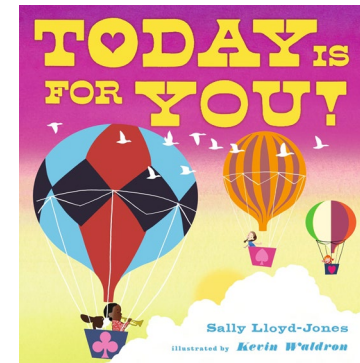
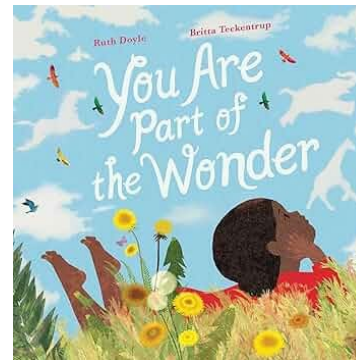
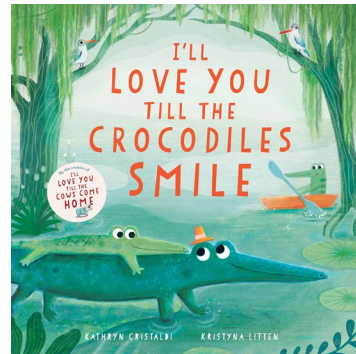
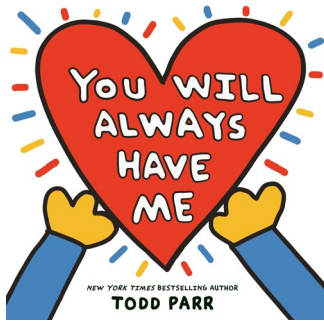
1. A child protagonist and/or an issue that concerns children
2. A strong sense of story and consistency; a regularity of character and place
3. Language that is vivid and concrete, with rhythm and flow
4. Topics that expand awareness of the world and life experiences
5. An enjoyable story that doesn't overtly teach or moralize
6. A gratifying sense of truth, fairness, integrity, and honesty
7. Precisely chosen words, plot, characters, and an overall sense of quality
8. Originality, humor, and ways to stretch the mind, giving readers new ways to think about our similarities, differences, and possibilities as human beings

Winners often meet many (but not necessarily all!) of the criteria



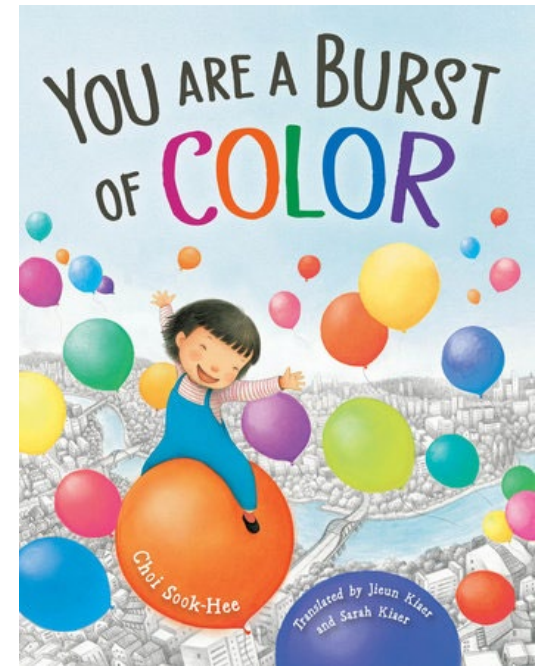
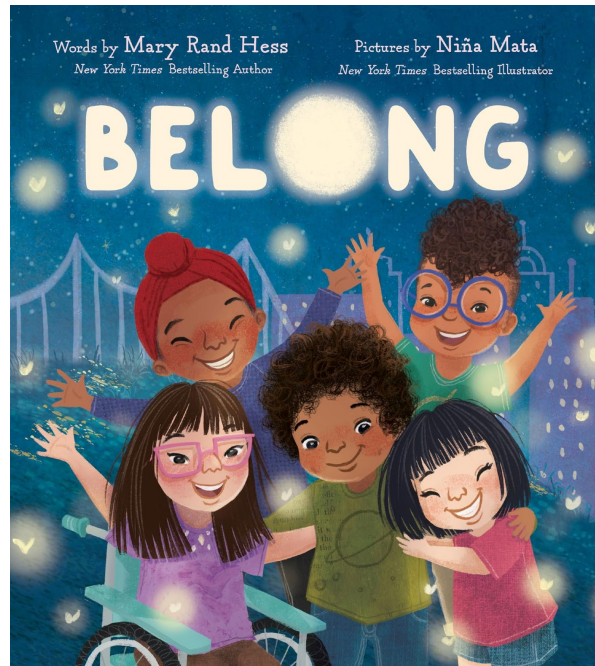
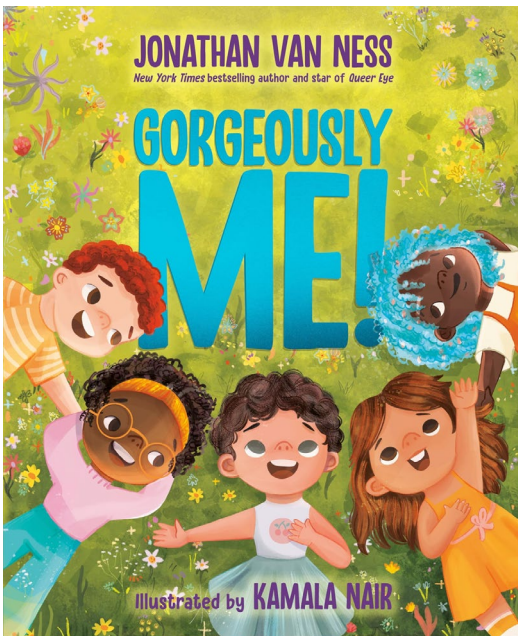
1. A child protagonist
2. A strong sense of story and consistency; a regularity of character and place
3. Language that is vivid and concrete, with rhythm and flow
4. An enjoyable story that doesn't overtly teach or moralize
5. Precisely chosen words, plot, characters, and an overall sense of quality
6. Originality, humor, and ways to stretch the mind, giving readers new ways to think about our similarities, differences, and possibilities as human beings

All books begin with good intention. What else does it have going for it? Which criteria does it meet?

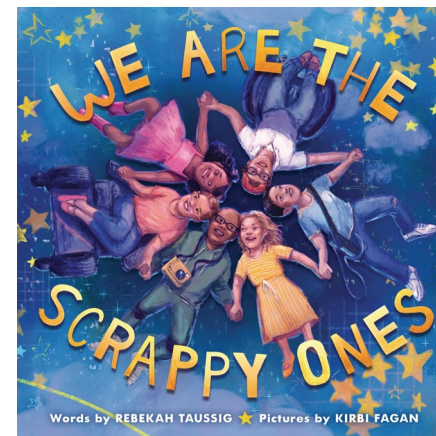
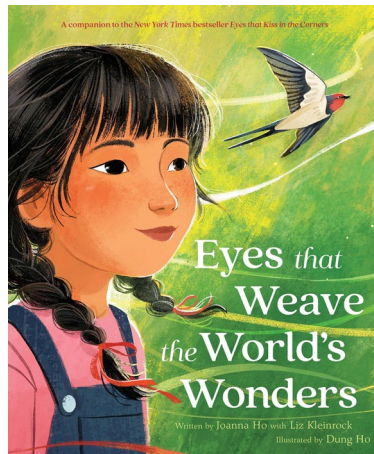
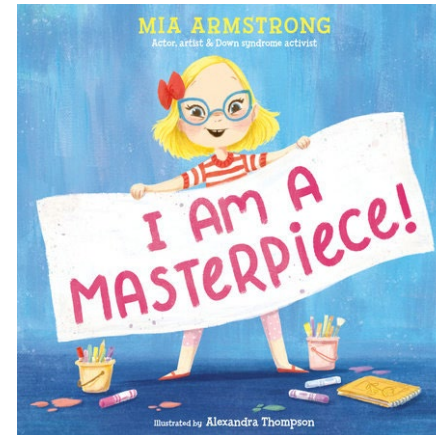
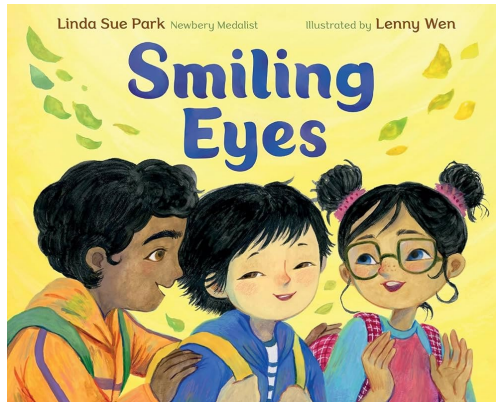


Many books are just a generic message of love or encouragement from an adult to a child. Is there a specific protagonist? Does it tell a story?

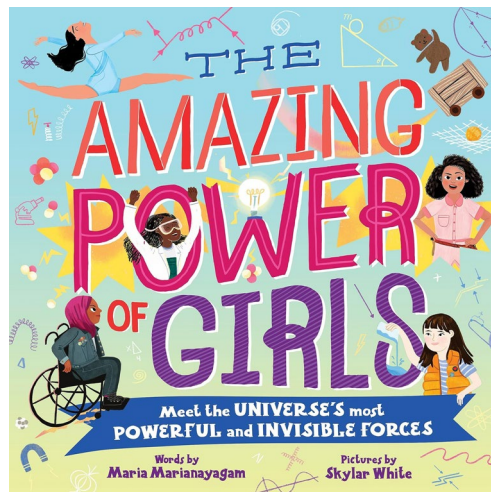
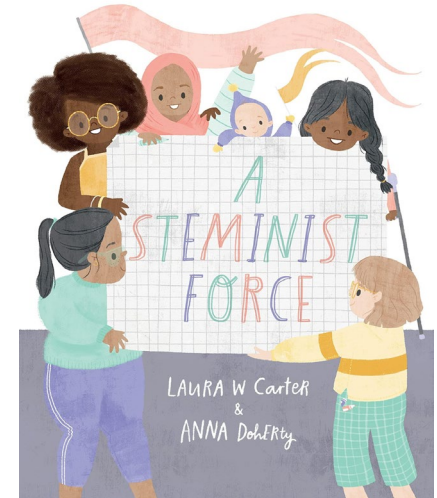
Many books are written with the sole purpose of affirming children. We may agree with the message, but does it tell a story?



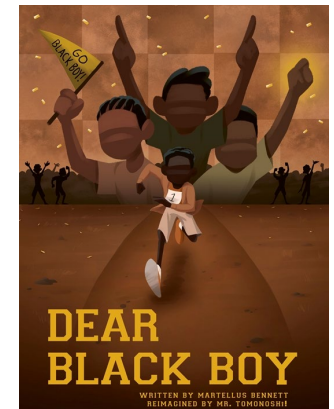
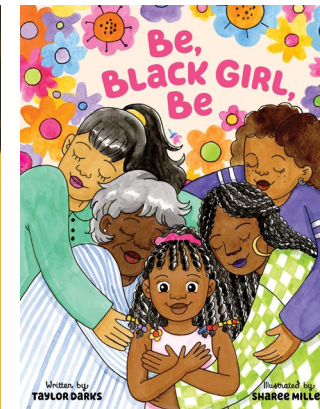
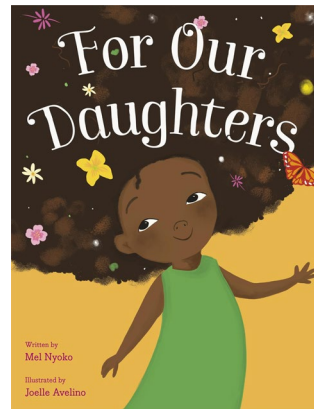
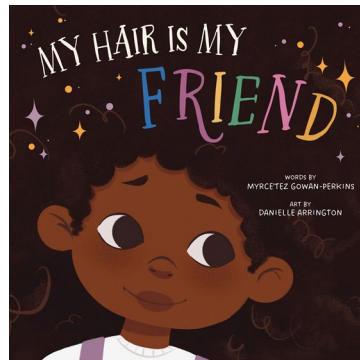
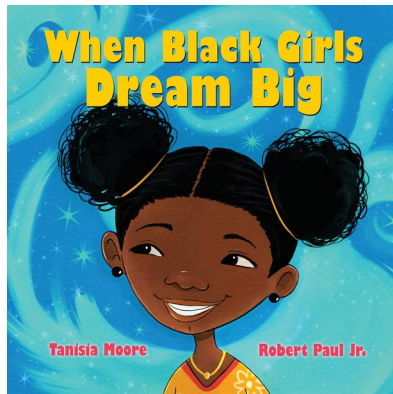
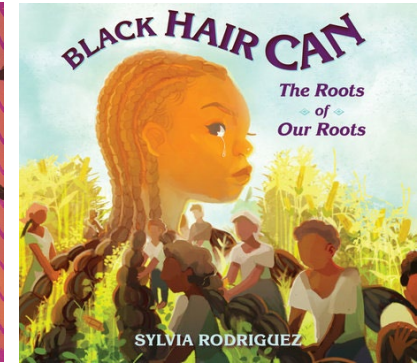
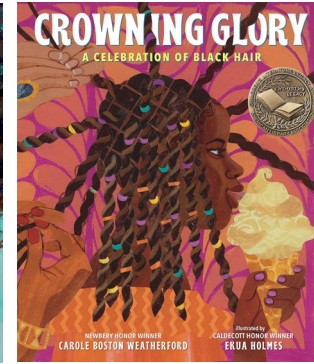
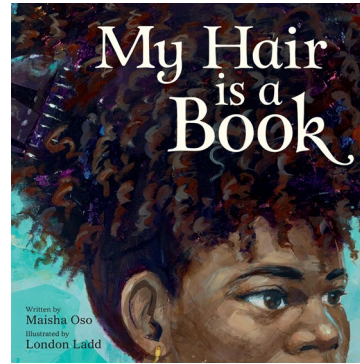
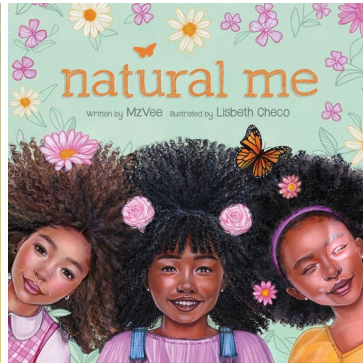
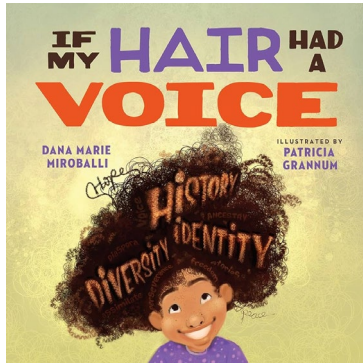
Examples of books whose purpose is to send an affirming message to children with a specific identity (Asian heritage, disability).
What other qualities does it have?



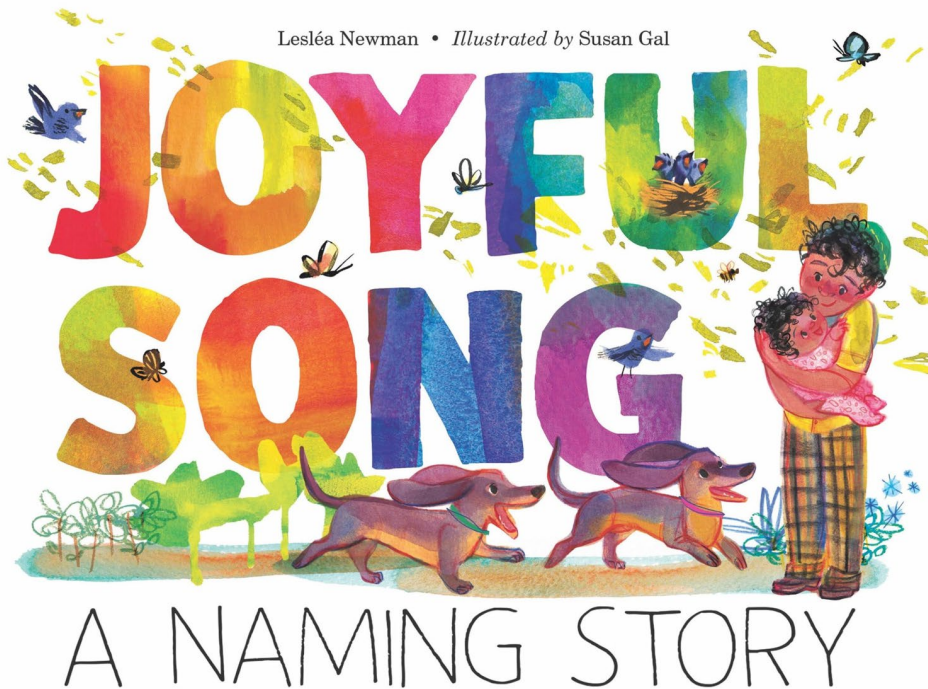
More examples of identity -related affirmation/ message (girls in STEM)



These were all published in the last 12 months. Are the text and approach fresh and original? Does it offer something new?

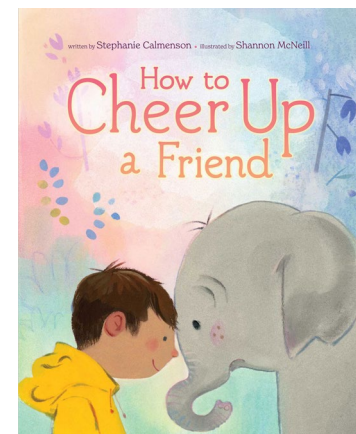
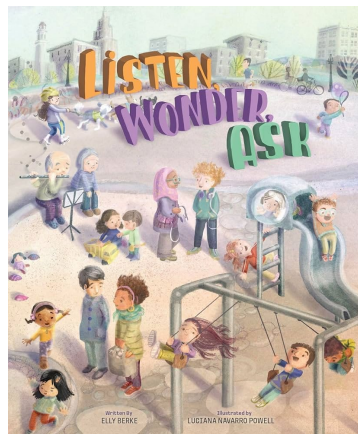
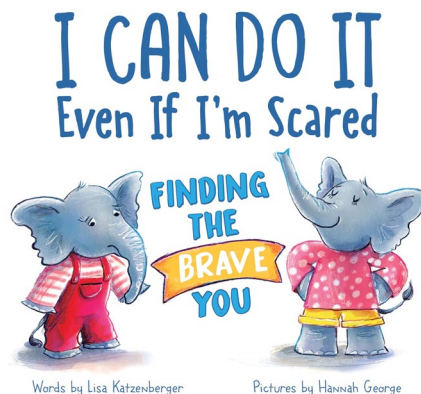
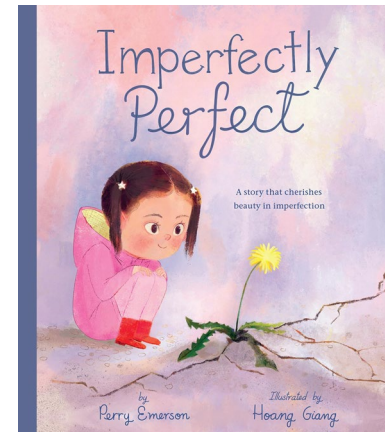
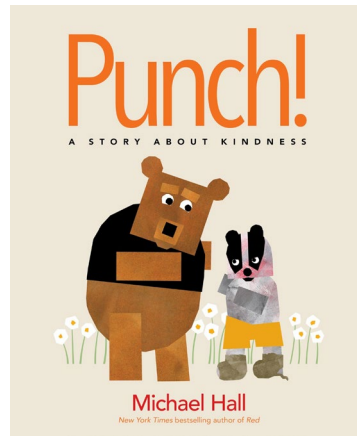
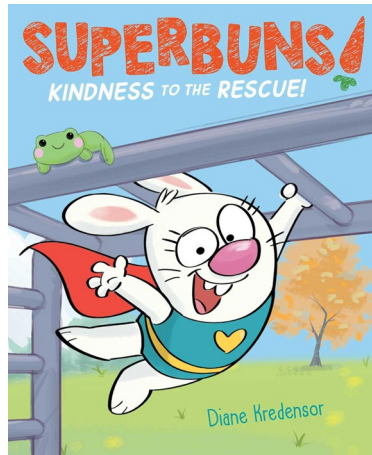


2025 CZ Highly Commended title: Affirming, and so much more!

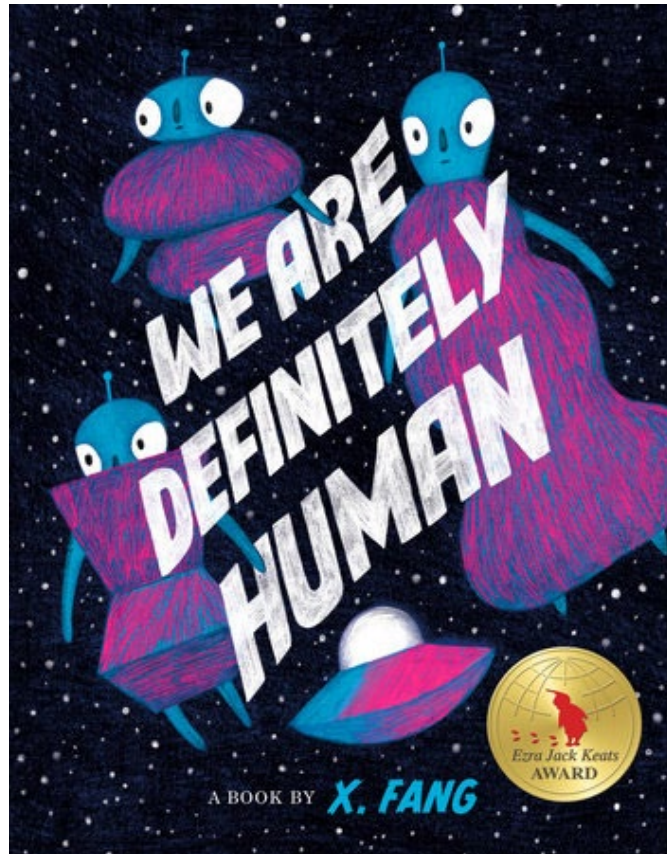


- Identity -related affirmation (Jewish child of color with two moms)
- Underlying message of community and belonging
- Specific protagonist in a specific family, living in a specific neighborhood, celebrating a specific event
- Text has repetition, pattern, carefully chosen words, a satisfying ending, comes full-circle

Other books set out to deliver a heavy-handed message, purpose, or lesson. Is literary quality sacrificed to get a message across?



2025 CZ Highly Commended title: An original, well written story with a subtly delivered message

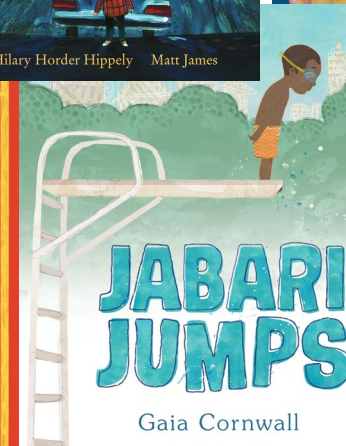
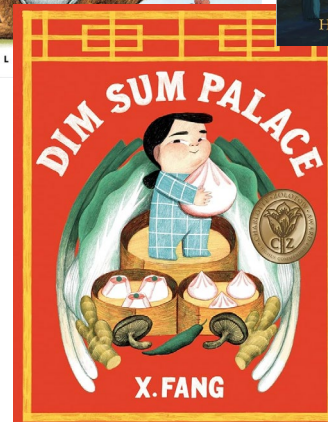
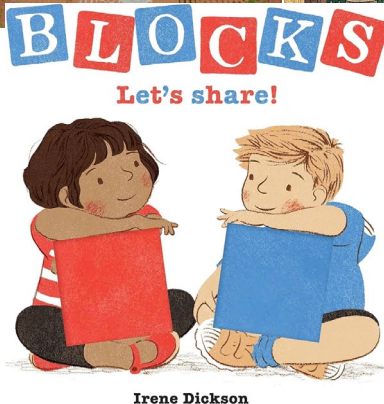
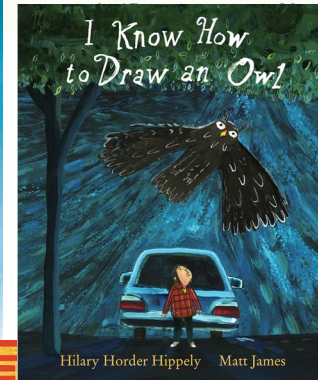
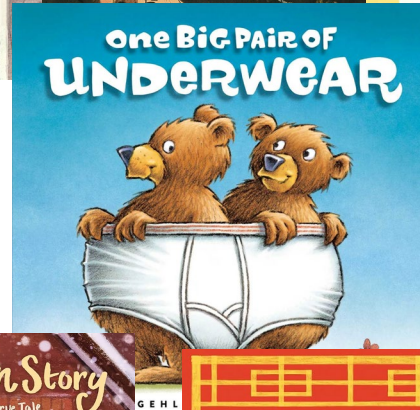
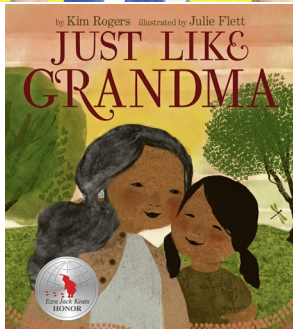
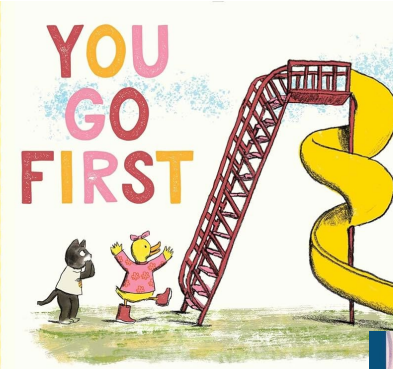
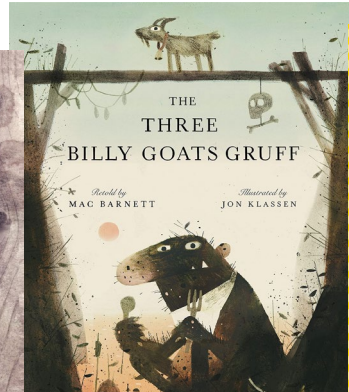
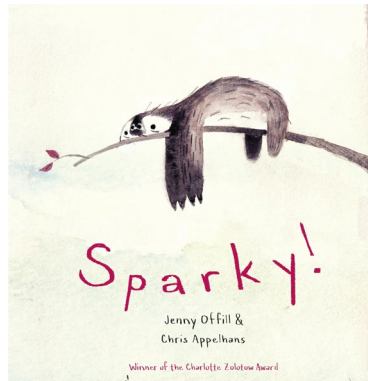
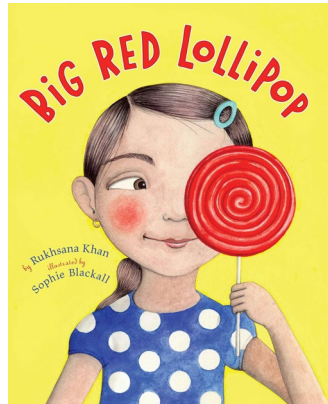


- Message of kindness, belonging, welcoming the stranger...
- Told via a funny story with an original voice, specific characters in a specific situation
- Never feels sentimental or earnest

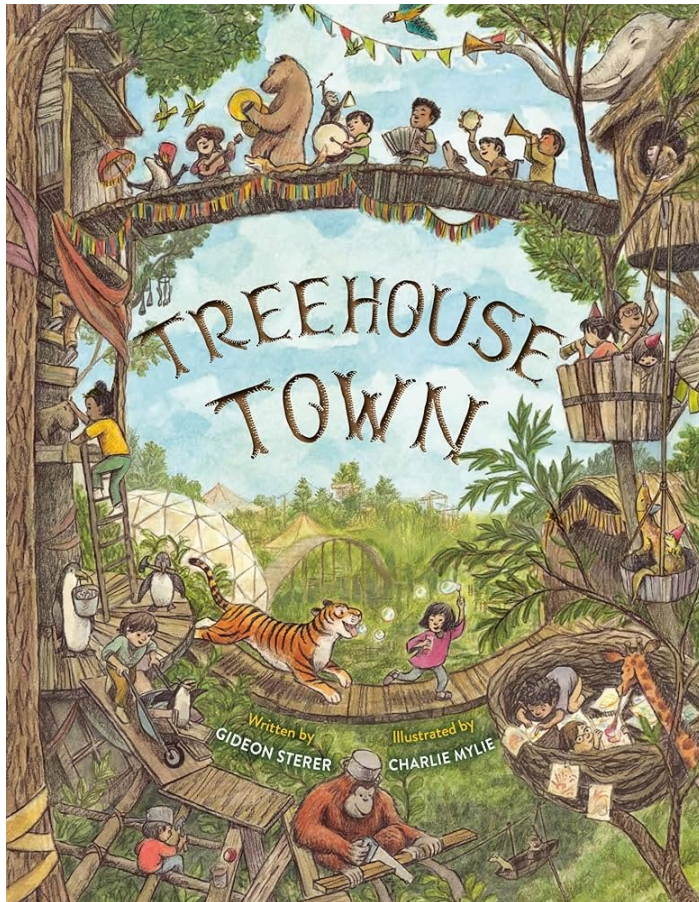
Child appeal is important, but...

- Does it have literary quality as well?
- Every child is different and likes (and dislikes!) different things.
- Not every book is meant to appeal to every child, or to every age. Far from it!
- Some books work well in big group or classroom settings. Some are better in small groups or one-on-one reads.

Various CZ Books: They appeal to lots of different tastes!



Language



(Not a CZ book)

Rhyme

Does it have a consistent meter?

Are the words chosen to fit the rhyme rather than the story? Is the wording unnatural?

Does it sound good when read aloud?

*“Papaya Path has snacks and sweets
and every fruit you’d dream to eat!”*

*“Careful now, we’re up high.
Grab a vine, and with us fly!”*

Language

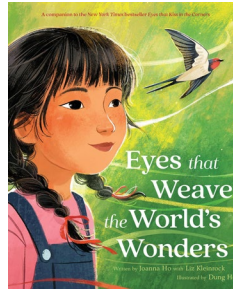
Prose

Is the language vivid and concrete?

Does it have rhythm and flow?

Does it sound good when read aloud?
Natural? Not awkward?

It doesn't need to be fancy to be good!



Sounds beautiful, but I'm not sure what it means!

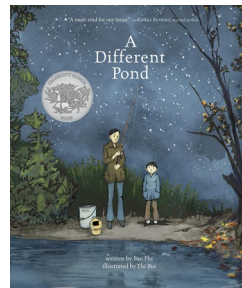
NOT a CZ book

I have eyes that spin stories and weave the world's wonders.

They're silk strands that soak up the sun and shimmer with the hues of hopes and dreams I braid into tales only I can tell.

My questions are eyelets through which I tie the whispered wishes of the past to the fearless designs of my future.

(*Eyes That Weave the World's Wonders* by Joanna Ho and Liz Kleinrock)



Accessible similes; sensory details

A kid at my school said my dad's English sounds like a thick, dirty river. But to me his English sounds like rain.

I feel the bag of minnows move. They swim like silver arrows in my hand.

(*A Different Pond* by Bao Phi)

Language

Prose

Is the language vivid and concrete?

Does it have rhythm and flow?

Does it sound good when read aloud?
Natural? Not awkward?

It doesn't need to be fancy to be good!



Nice use of onomatopoeia, integration of Native language

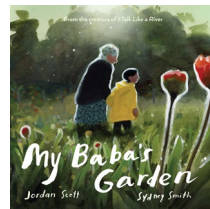
From my window, every day Cacussh! Cacussh! Cacussh!

Closer and then farther.

haw ekwa! Let's go!

At the park, I imagine myself riding a skateboard on the path that winds like a river.

(Let's Go! hawekwa! by Julie Flett)



Concrete, descriptive language

*When my dad drops me off, my Baba doesn't come to the door, but I know where she is.
I let myself in and walk into the kitchen...*

And there she is, hidden in the steam of boiling potatoes, dancing between the sink, fridge, and stove.

A hand holding a beet, a leg opening a cupboard, an elbow closing the fridge door.

My Baba hums like a night full of bugs when she cooks.

(My Baba's Garden by Jordan Scott)

Language

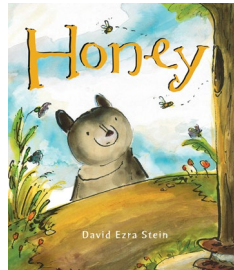
Prose

Is the language vivid and concrete?

Does it have rhythm and flow?

Does it sound good when read aloud? Natural? Not awkward?

It doesn't need to be fancy to be good!



Sparse text
that is carefully
chosen,
evocative

It was his second year. "I'm back!" he said.

His stomach growled like another bear.

As he dug and scraped for things to eat, he remembered honey.

Warm, golden, sweet, clear, slowly flowing, spicy, aromatic, sparkling with sunlight—

"Honey!"

But it was too soon for honey.

(Honey by David Ezra Stein)

Language

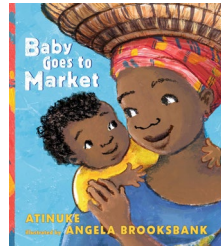
Prose

Is the language vivid and concrete?

Does it have rhythm and flow?

Does it sound good when read aloud?
Natural? Not awkward?

It doesn't need to be fancy to be good!



Simple words for young children, with nice use of repetition, numbers counting down

Baby goes to market with Mama.

Market is very crowded. Baby is very curious.

Baby is so curious that Mrs. Ade, the banana seller, gives Baby six bananas.

Baby is so surprised. Baby eats one banana... and puts five bananas in the basket.

Mama does not notice. She is busy buying rice.

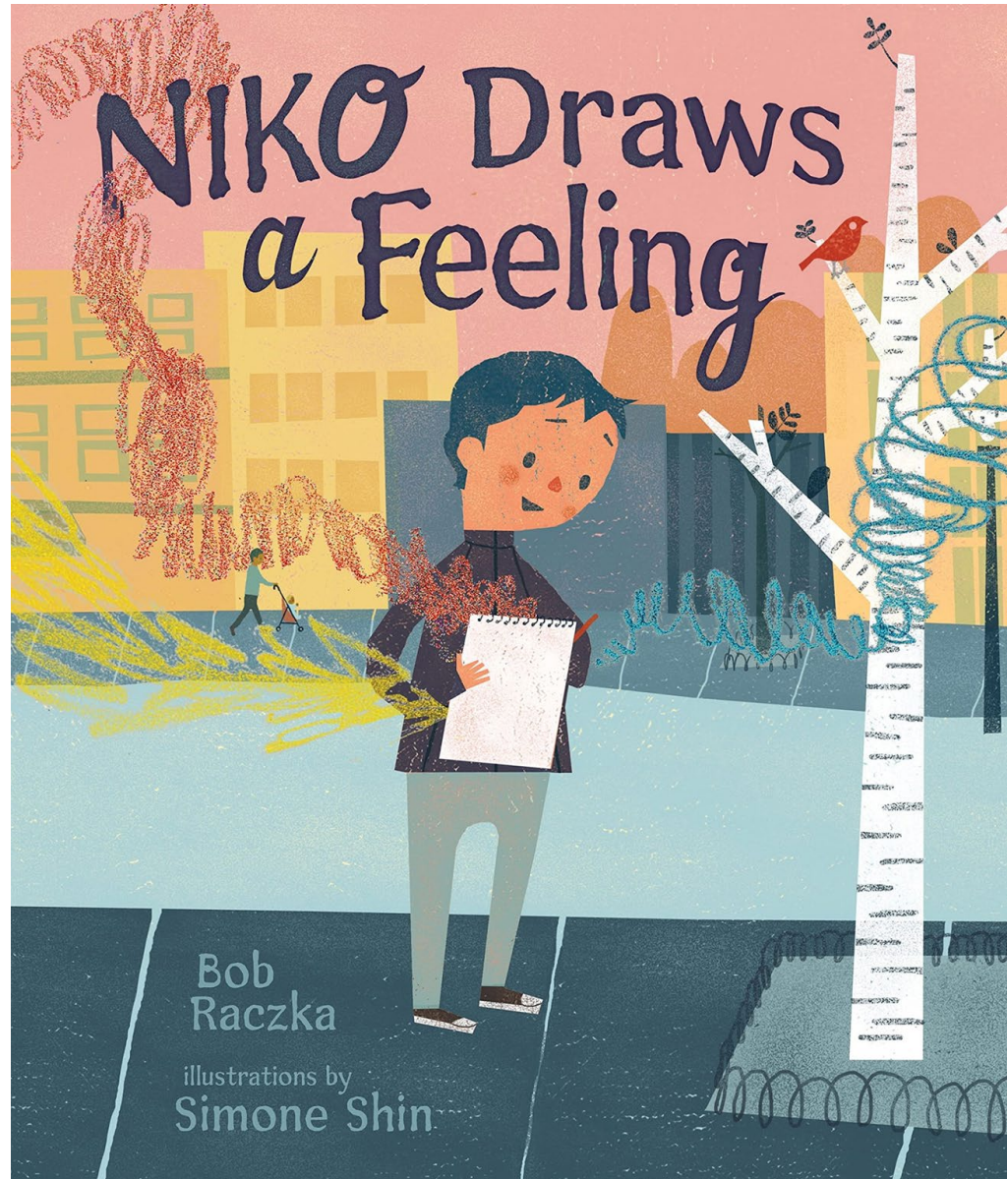
(B Is for Baby by Atinuke)

Illustrations

- The text does not need to be completely divorced from the illustrations, which are a key feature of successful picture books.
- Illustrations should complement and work with the text.
- Illustrations should be worthy of the text but should not overpower the story.
- Illustrations should not be so poor as to detract from the quality of the book.

Illustrations

This book is about Niko's drawings, which are shown in the illustrations. They complement the text and complete the picture book, but they are not the primary component of the book.



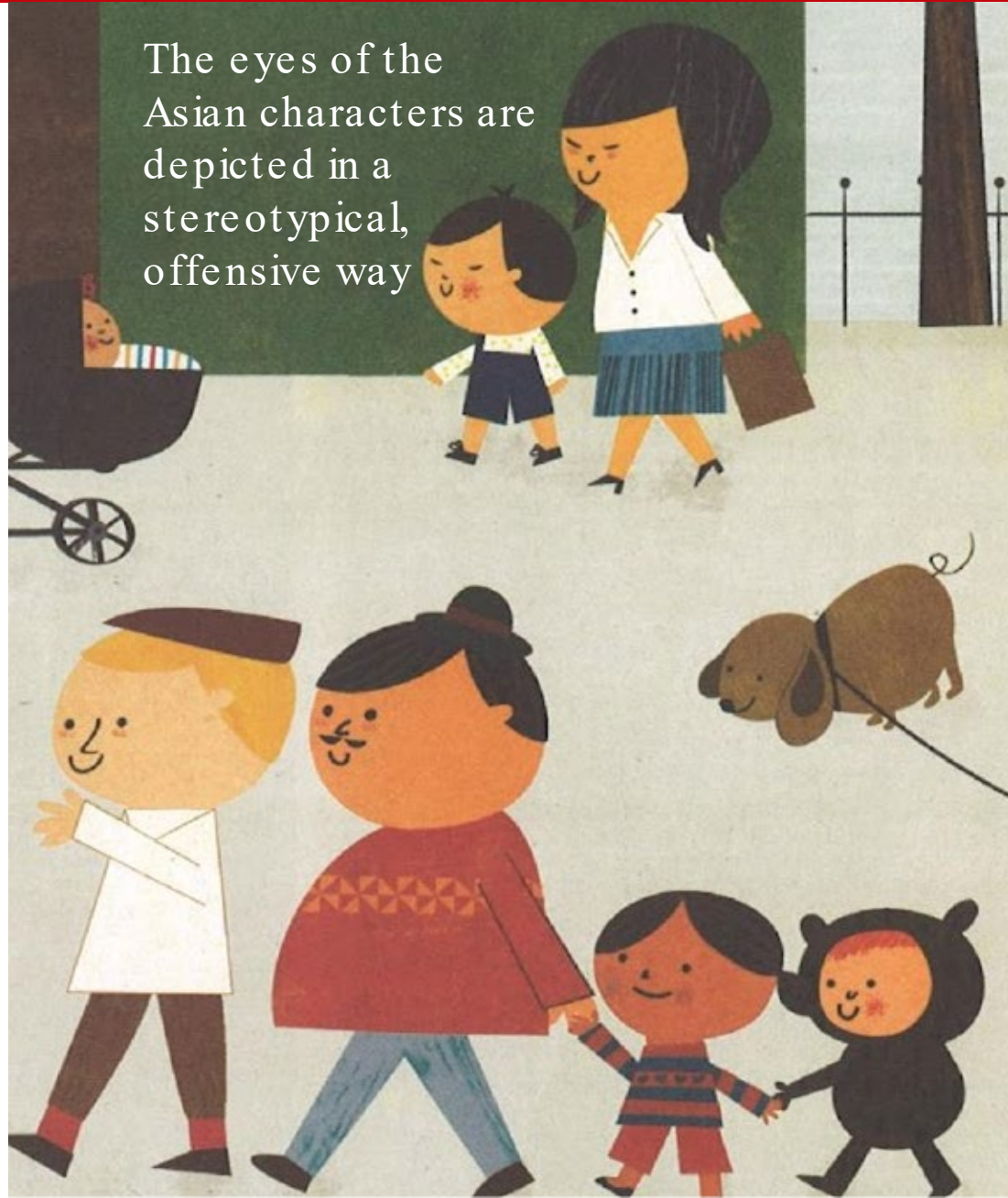
Sometimes a book will seem PERFECT but have a fatal flaw...





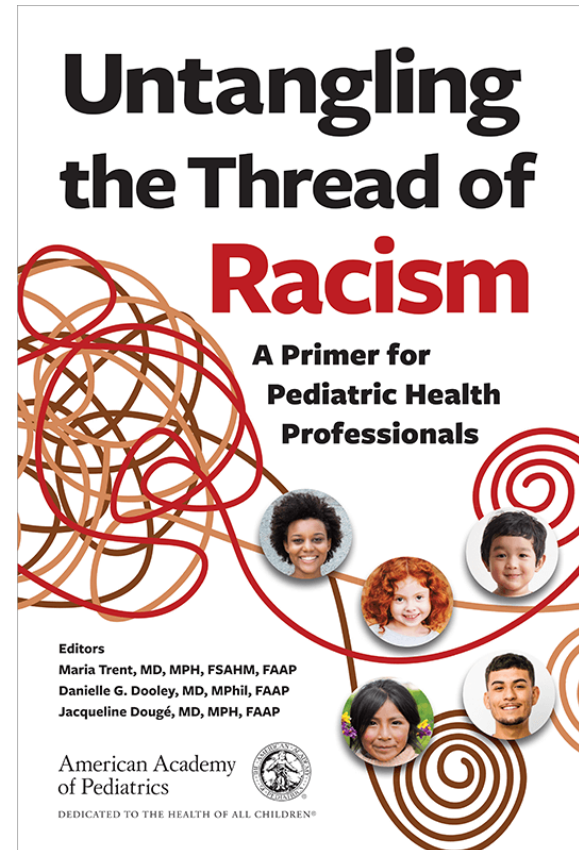
Usually it is something problematic or offensive, and sometimes it's easy to miss! But if it's problematic, it can prevent us from recognizing a book with this award, even if everything else about the book is excellent.

The eyes of the Asian characters are depicted in a stereotypical, offensive way



Considerations from Practice

- Self-Education in Key Concepts
 - Childhood Innocence
 - Color-blind Parenting
 - Essentialist Thinking
- Consider using “less than optimal” situations as opportunities for conversations about inequity, assumptions, or bias. (e.g. gendered books about sports)



Avoiding Stereotyping

- Avoid the 5 “Fs”:
 - Food (e.g. “Mexican” or “Chinese” cuisine)
 - Fashion (e.g. Native American regalia)
 - Folklore (e.g. tales found in numerous traditions)
 - Festivals (e.g. holidays such as Kwanzaa or Cinco de Mayo)
 - Famous People (e.g. 1960s US Civil Rights leaders)

These *can* be well-written and useful, but should not be the only selections offered.



Questions / Comments



ccbc.education.wisc.edu

↪ “Recommended Books” tab

@ccbcuwmadison



School of Education

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON



Dipesh Navsaria

navsaria@wisc.edu



Tessa Michaelson
Schmidt

tessa.schmidt@wisc.edu