

**Integration and Experiences of Immigrants Within Canada**

By Sarah Kattini

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### Foreword

The main goal of this portfolio is to highlight the perspectives and lived experiences of immigrants within Canada. Being the child of Syrian immigrants who landed in Canada in the mid 1990's and experienced heightened anti-Arab, anti-immigrant sentiments in two separate time periods (the early 2000s and then again around 2011), this topic is one of great importance to me. In the early 2000's following the tragedy of 9/11 and the fall of the twin towers, I, along with many other Arabs experienced anti-Arab sentiments, along with Islamophobia (which was odd in my case, since my family and I are not Muslim, but Druze). At that point, I was far too young to understand any sly comments being thrown my way, or why certain teachers knocked marks off of my tests, while giving other students bonus points for answering in the same way, etc. I just chalked it up to me being unlikable and different from many of my classmates. Even though I went to fairly diverse schools, where at least 40% of my classmates were immigrants or children of immigrants, I was typically the only Arab child within my entire grade. During the Arab Spring of 2011, and the refugee crisis that followed swiftly after, anti-Arab sentiments rose again, and I was finally old enough to understand the xenophobia I had experienced then for what it was. If I thought I had a rough go of navigating those times of strife, watching my extended family who escaped Syria try to acclimate to Toronto, whilst also learning a new language, and dealing with the grief of leaving a homeland they had never intended on parting with, put my experiences in perspective.

I had followed my extended family's path as they adjusted to Canada from 9 years ago to now. In the case of my family members, they had spent a significant amount of time within LINC services, and yet walked out of those classes with minimal improvements in their English language skills. Most of them had been engineers or architects in Syria, but they now work for slightly above minimum wage at retail positions in Canada. Their younger children

had found help with ESL courses in elementary school, but their older children had felt like the high school ESL courses were not providing them with adequate resources or assistance for the post-secondary school programs they were hoping to apply to. Their journey has been one filled with overcoming one struggle to only find another one awaiting them, and unfortunately, their experiences are not singular to them. After conducting the research necessary for this project, I saw that many of the issues my extended family had gone through, that my parents had gone through, were common to the immigrant experience within Canada. Especially if those immigrants came from racialized countries.

Nonetheless, I am grateful that my family and my extended family were able to find their way to this country, where the problems faced by those who still remain in Syria today, seem so out of the ordinary and impossible. Droughts and food shortages, along with an unjust regime, are far out possibilities within Canada. And even beyond being grateful for the safety we have here in Canada, I am grateful for my extended family's arrival for the simple fact that they provided me with validity in my own experiences as a Syrian- Canadian. There were times where I felt like I was neither Canadian enough, nor Syrian enough for anyone's standards. My family changed that. I bonded with my cousins over the simple fact that Canadian fruit, while tasty, lacks the depth of flavour that Syrian fruit has. That Syrian peaches were the best we had ever tasted, and we missed the way every single stone fruit was so ripe, you couldn't eat one without its juice trailing down your elbows. We bonded over the mountain trails we hiked in Canada, comparing them to those we missed in Syria. We bonded over the safety in knowing we had a healthcare system here that didn't have to consistently run on generators. The arrival of my family created a third-space for us, where recipes of Arabic cuisine, English songs, animes and books that varied in language could be shared, where we felt both Syrian and Canadian enough.

Almost every immigrant I have spoken to can attest to the feeling that adjusting to Canada had been an uphill battle. And yet, there is a sort of camaraderie gained in that acclimation that not many can understand without having been enveloped within these communities, that makes the work worthwhile. Many of the parts of this portfolio were created with the hope of making the acclimation process that much easier for immigrants newly arriving within Canada. The children's book I wrote was in part inspired by my own experiences, and the experiences of a cousin who came to Canada when she was of a similar age as the main character. The literacy guide was created for kids, who like me, wished they could see main characters that represented their own lived experiences, or who simply even looked like them. And the literature review was created for informational purposes, but even more so to confirm to myself that there truly is a genuine need for improvements within Canadian policy and programs made for immigrants.

### **Abstract**

This portfolio was created with the goal of better understanding and closely examining the various difficulties and barriers that newly landed immigrants face upon entering Canadian society. Immigrants make up a large portion of Canadian society, and yet many changes need to be made within federal and provincial policies to create a more equitable living experience for them. This portfolio is composed of three different parts: a literature review, chapter book (with AI generated images), and a diverse literature guide. The AI generated images were a choice that was not taken lightly, as I found struggle in creating images using digital art softwares. My experience as a Syrian-Canadian, the daughter of Syrian immigrants, and the relative of Syrian refugees, has influenced the creation of the chapter book and diverse literature guide, as they mirror my own childhood desires and experiences. I hope to have my diverse literature guide used throughout schools in Canada as a basis for teachers to reach for when they are unsure of how to include positive media representation of diverse students within their classroom. Furthermore, I hope to have my chapter book published, so that the many children within Canada who come here not knowing much English, can know that their experiences are valid. And even better, so that their classmates who do know English are able to be more empathetic and understanding of what it is like *not* to speak the main language of a country.

### **Acknowledgements**

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**Table of Contents**

## Part 1: Literature Review (8)

Identity and Belonging (8)

Immigrants and the Economy (14)

Culture Acclimation (20)

Language Acquisition and Challenges (22)

Education Policies and their Impacts (Diversity, Inclusion) (26)

Discussion (29)

Conclusion (30)

References (32)

## Part 2: I Know Hello? (35)

Chapter 1- First Day Jitters (36)

Chapter 2- Jet Plane Butterflies (38)

Chapter 3- Into the ~~Lion's Den~~ Classroom (40)

Chapter 4- A small Mistake (42)

Chapter 5- A BIG Mistake (44)

Chapter 6- A Little Bit of Hope (47)

Chapter 7- A Little Setback (49)

Chapter 8- Mission Apologize (51)

Chapter 9- A Few Months Later (53)

## Part 3: Diverse Literature Guide (55)

Why Diverse Literature Matters (58)

Why Use These Books? (59)

Picture Books (60)

Early Reader Chapter Books (75)

Junior/ Intermediate Books (81)

Young Adult Books (88)

Other Notable Books (95)

References (97)

## Part 1: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

Parting with one's home can be sweet sorrow, in more ways than one. Not everyone departs from their home countries for the same reasons, or the same desires. There are those who immigrate willingly, in search of better opportunities, or those who leave because of factors outside of their control, like war or famine. No matter the reason, newcomers and immigrants are a cornerstone to Canadian society, and are constantly being welcomed into it. It is important then, to consider what the immigrant experience within Canada is like, and what can be done to make the transition from one society to another all the smoother.

Areas of interest include the effect of immigration on the newcomers identity, finances, culture, language, and education. Furthermore, the question of how discrimination and racism permeate these topics is also delved into. By the end, there should be a clearer understanding of what goes into the immigrant and newcomer experience within Canada, and what can be done to ensure better immigrant satisfaction.

### **Identity and Belonging**

Relocating to a different country is a taxing decision, even when it is made under the best of circumstances. When conditions do not provide for the best of circumstances, as is the case of many refugees fleeing their origin countries, there are other factors to consider on how it can affect the displaced persons. Said (2002) discusses the effects of being an exile from one's homeland in his essay 'Reflections on Exile' (2002). Given current events, and the global plight of refugees fleeing different dangerous situations across the globe, this essay has become more relevant than ever before.

Said (2002) argues that the state of the exile has been romanticized by Western literature and artists. There is a certain longing that can only be captured by the absolute displacement from one's homeland, argues Said (2002). Furthermore, there is a distinction



between the state of exile and simple rehoming- not every immigrant that lands in Canada has been *truly* exiled from their homeland, never allowed to return. Yet, there are strings of common occurrences that can tie every displaced person and immigrant to the experience of the exile.

In 'Reflections on Exile', Said (2002) delves deeply into the identity and belonging of an exile within their new country, specifically that there is a sense of disconnect that follows the exile around. Said (2002) writes, "Exiles are cut off from their roots, their land, their past" (p.177). There are not enough words, Said (2002) argues, to fully encapsulate the sense of 'wrongness' that comes with being removed from one's known culture, language, and nationalism. The state of the exile is not new, but the "scale" of which it is occurring is new, completely modern (p.174). For this reason, 'Reflections on Exile' appeals for the reader to have empathy for the exile, for those who for reasons out of their own control, have essentially experienced a form of 'banishment' from their homeland, no matter how temporary or permanent it may be.

Beyond just exploring the state of loneliness that befalls an exiled person, Said (2002) also mentions the many benefits that come from exiled people being integrated into their new societies. For one, there is a form of creative wisdom and art that comes from being exiled, as Edward Said can attest in himself. The outsider status given to the 'exile' allows them to see things from a different perspective and to challenge established norms (Said, 2002). For another, integrating 'exiled' peoples into their enveloping society can provide a much needed push to the rigid boundaries of that society's nationalism (Said, 2002).

Obviously, not every immigrant that lands within Canada has been exiled from their homeland in the same way that Said (2002) writes. With that caveat in place, it is important to remember that there are certain things that can exacerbate any immigrant or displaced

person's feelings of exile within a new society, things that can challenge their ability to feel like they belong to their new societies. A few articles touch on the aforementioned causes.

One of the causes for a feeling of displacement within Canadian society was studied by Creese & Wiebe (2012). Creese & Wiebe (2012) conducted a study that looked into the funneling of immigrants into what they deemed 'Survival Employment'. The immigrants who were studied within this case study were of African descent and lived within the greater Vancouver area. They studied people from a range of social classes, some who came from blue collar backgrounds prior to their move to Canada, and some who came from white collar backgrounds who began working jobs below their credentials.

Survival employment, according to Creese & Wiebe (2012) are jobs that an immigrant or racialized individual takes that are "low-skilled, low-wage, insecure, contingent forms of employment; work that usually [does] not provide an adequate minimal standard of living" (62). Furthermore, a survival job is one that is "well below [the immigrant/ racialized individual's] qualifications- and their dignity- [taken] in order to ensure basic economic survival" (61). Many of the immigrants that participated in this study found a drastic shift in their identity within Canadian society, purely due to their change from one economic class to another.

This shift was nearly immediate upon their arrival to Canada, and was due to what Creese & Wiebe (2012) call a systematic "deskilling" of newly landed immigrants. Many of the immigrants in this study worked white collar jobs within their origin countries, but within Canada were forced to work blue collar labour jobs, due to a failure to recognize their local credentials. Furthermore, Creese & Wiebe (2012) found that settlement programmes were essentially funneling newcomers into "low wage survival work" which only served to keep these immigrants in a cycle of work from one low wage job to the next (69). Even when they tried to get promoted from one form of work to another, (i.e. going from working in the back

of house in a factory to a receptionist position), the participants found that their African accents were a barrier, a reason that was cited to them by their employers (Creese & Wiebe, 2012, 65). Even if their English language skills were good (most of the participants in the study were bilingual, and were fluent in English), they felt that their accent was being used to unjustifiably discriminate against them and keep them in their lower paying jobs (65).

This was due to the immigrants lack of what Creese & Wiebe (2012) identify as “cultural capital”. Cultural capital can be both “institutionalized cultural capital (academic credentials) and embodied cultural capital [...] (like the “right” accents, work experience and cultural knowledge)” (60). Since many immigrants cannot get their local academic credentials recognized within Canada, and many employers search for “Canadian experience”, they find themselves in a position where they have little to no institutionalized and cultural capital, ultimately forcing them to be “deskilled” and leading to them working in jobs far below their original standing in their origin countries.

Obviously it is not hard to imagine that this deskilling, and robbing of one's known identity can have an adverse effect on an individual. The barriers that many immigrants face when first arriving to Canada, especially in regards to re-evaluating their local credentials within a Canadian system, cause a shift in self-image, and self-belief. We have all heard the anecdote of the taxi-driver who used to be a doctor/lawyer/engineer/etc in their home country, but now has to work in survival employment to make ends meet. The immigrant character in this anecdote finds themselves stripped completely of the institutionalized and cultural capital that they had plenty of prior to their move to Canadian society. This has become a normalized and easily accepted narrative within the West that is just par for the course of an immigrant's journey. Coupled with the feelings of displacement that can come with being ‘exiled’ from one’s own land, there are tolls that are taken on the immigrants identity.

Kitchen, Williams, & Gallina (2015) conducted a study which looked into the sense of belonging among Canadian born participants and immigrant participants. The study looked into small to medium sized urban communities, focusing on Hamilton, ON, Saskatoon, SK, and Charlottetown, PEI. Participants were asked questions in regards to subjects like quality of living, sense of health and well-being, the respondents socio-demographic info, among other things (Kitchen et al, 2015). To ensure that there was no confusion amongst participants, they were asked to describe their sense of belonging to their local community, rather than sense of belonging overall.

The results of this study were on the positive side. Many of the participants, regardless of their place of birth, felt like they had a fairly good sense of belonging to their local community, with most positive rates being in the 60th percentile or higher. Although Kitchen et al (2015), did find that immigrants living within Canada for 5 years or less, had less of a sense of belonging than respondents who had lived within Canada for longer periods of time. Their study concluded that immigrants had an increased sense of belonging within their communities the longer that they spent within them, mirroring other known data (Kitchen et al, 2015). It was also found that participants (regardless of place of birth) with an increased sense of belonging, had improved mental health in comparison to those who did not have a sense of belonging to their communities (Kitchen et al, 2015).

Albeit, the study did find that many of the immigrant respondents within these mid-size communities had faced different forms of discrimination within these towns. Kitchen et al (2015) write, “participants in all three cities expressed tensions in belonging to their new cities”, as many of the participants “discussed feelings of discrimination and racism”. This was in line with other studies conducted about this topic in particular. Participants who admitted to discrimination within the study said that most discrimination was “related to employment experiences” (Kitchen et al, 2015). This also correlates with

findings in Criesse & Wiebe (2012), whose participants felt the most out of place and discriminated against in places of employment.

Kitchen et al (2015) conclude their findings by recommending that more work be done in connecting prospective immigrants with employment that better suits their skills, and the labour demands of the city they would move to. Ideally federal and provincial governments would work together by, “tailoring the skills and qualifications of immigrants to specific professions, particularly those where there are shortages, [which] would help to address some of the obstacles that newcomers face” (Kitchen et al, 2015). The reason this is so important is that Kitchen et al (2015) found that long term, and steady employment, coupled with home ownership, lead to a better overall sense of belonging, and in turn, improved mental health. Finally, they recommend that local governments that desire improved overall satisfaction within their total population, “ should continue to invest in cultural activities and recreational facilities that meet the needs of the entire population, including recent and longer-term immigrants” (Kitchen et al, 2015). All of these things coupled together would decrease the strain on new-coming families, aiding in their sense of identity and belonging to their Canadian communities.

When it comes to immigrant identity within Canadian society, and their sense of belonging to that society there are many factors that can affect it overall. For immigrants who have left their home country for reasons beyond their control, there is a sense of yearning and longing for what has been lost, that can only be truly understood from one refugee, immigrant, or exile, to another. Furthermore, the consistent deskilling, the stripping of institutionalized and cultural capital, and the funneling of immigrants into ‘survival employment’ negatively affects an immigrant’s sense of self and their ability to envelop themselves into Canadian society. Ultimately, these are important things to consider, when a positive sense of belonging relates to overall satisfaction and positive mental health. Luckily,

as Kitchen et al (2015) show, immigrants who live longer than five years within a community find that their sense of belonging increases over time. Ideally, both the federal and provincial governments should do far more work to create policies and put programs in place that lead to better employment opportunities for newly landed immigrants, so that they are not being directed to survival employment off the bat (Creese & Wiebe, 2012). In addition, working to create services and programs that are designed to envelop immigrants into their new communities and cities increase overall sense of belonging and happiness (Kitchen et al, 2015). There are steps that can be taken that would drastically improve the immigrant experience in regards to their sense of belonging and identity within Canada, should the Canadian government (federal, provincial, local) choose to take them.

### **Immigrants and the Economy**

There is a belief that immigrants (be it positively or negatively) affect the economy of their new country, which in turn negatively affects the national-born people of the new country that takes them in. This belief alone can commonly be traced back to anti-immigrant sentiments and beliefs (Raj, 2024). Interestingly enough, studies done into this topic found that policy changes in immigrant selection caused a lack of effect on the Canadian economy, specifically in regards to job shortages or lowering in the overall economy. Picout & Hou (2014), found that in the 2000's there was a dramatic response to the previous immigration selection policies of the 1980's and 1990's which had caused lower economic prospects for immigrants in those decades. This study tackled the idea of the direct effect of immigrants on the Canadian economy from 1995 to 2010.

Picout & Hou (2014)'s research found that immigrants in the mid to late 2000's had no clear indirect effect on the Canadian economy, at least not in the sense that they had taken jobs from Canadian born citizens. There has always been concern that Canadian-born nationals would have to compete against immigrants who may take lower wages for the same

job. Picout & Hou (2014) state that, “it seems likely that the indirect effect of immigration on low income or family income inequality among the Canadian-born population would be quite small”, essentially declining the concern that there is need for the Canadian-born citizen to worry about competition against immigrant workers (p.176).

Interestingly enough, much of the research conducted by Picout & Hou (2014) found certain patterns that would be good to look at through a sociological perspective. For one, they found that when the low-income rate increased in the 1980s through to the 1990s by around 50 percent, it “was evident across all education, age and language groups, but was concentrated primarily among immigrants from Asia, Africa and southern and eastern Europe” (Picout & Hou, 2014). This alone is concerning, considering that those primarily affected could be easily racialized.

Picout & Hou’s (2014) research found some information that points towards improvement in immigrant economic conditions depending on which city they reside in. When Canada introduced policies that encouraged immigration to more Midwest provinces (i.e. Saskatchewan and Manitoba), low income rates rapidly declined over a decade for recent immigrants to those regions. This is important, as it was through government policy changes in immigration that immigrants were first being recommended applying to those regions. Overall, smaller cities seemed to better benefit immigrants when compared to the low-income rates in immigrants who reside in the three major Canadian cities (Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver), as those rates did not decline as much or as steadily. From this data it can be easy to assume that the province as well as the city can have a large effect on an immigrant’s income.

In the later 2000’s the criteria for people who would be successfully chosen for immigration programs to Canada changed to encourage the selection of immigrants who were skilled in certain professions that were in need of workers. Due to this change in policy and

the general increase in the economy overall, when the income rates increased from the mid 2000's to 2010, immigrants income was also on the rise, with little discrepancy between immigrant to Canada-born incomes (Picout & Hou, 2014). With that being said, even when incomes increased due to better economic conditions, “the high-income rate among recent immigrants, while increasing, remained much lower than among the Canadian-born” (Picout & Hou, 2014, p.189). In conclusion, Picout & Hou's (2014) research really only found that immigrants are affected by the economy, rather than having a major effect on it.

While Picout & Hou's (2014) research is extremely important, and easy to digest, ideally, this same research would be conducted within this post COVID-19 world, especially with the recent refugee crisis that are occurring around the world. According to Statistics Canada (2022), 23% of Canada's population recorded that they had been or were landed immigrants or permanent residents at some point. Statistics Canada (2022), also states that in a post COVID-19 world, “job vacancies in late 2021 [hit] 80% higher than pre-pandemic levels”. These are the jobs that the Canadian government hopes would be filled by their newly added population. The topic of immigration and its effect on the Canadian economy is one that should be studied further, with the same depth as Picout and Hou (2014) research in previous years.

Cukier, Ying Mo, Karajovic, Wilson, Walker, and Lee (2023), wrote an extensive report on the experiences of Racialized Canadians and Newcomers. Since the work by Cukier et al (2023) is more recent than Picout & Hou in terms of current employment trends, it sheds light on the current experiences of immigrants within the Canadian job market. According to Cukier et al (2023), “Canadian labour market data shows that newcomers and racialized people have higher rates of unemployment compared to Canadian-born and non-racialized people” (ii). Given that the Canadian government increased immigration acceptance rates post COVID-19 to assure the job market could be filled, these findings were unpleasant. The



reason as to why immigrants and racialized Canadians find it hard within the labour market is explained extensively in the section entitled 'Barriers to Employment for Immigrants and Racialized People'.

Unfortunately, much of what Creese & Wiebe (2012) found in their study of African immigrants in Vancouver still applies to racialized Canadians and newcomer immigrants currently, according to Cukier et al (2023). Many things act as barriers for immigrants within the Canadian labour market. According to Cukier et al (2023), "Immigrants and racialized people face other challenges, such as devaluation of credentials, lack of access to relevant training programs, social capital and networks, uneven quality of programs and the presence of bias and discrimination in the workplace" (p.24). These were all things cited as issues within Creese & Wiebe (2012), studied more than 10 years prior to the publication of Cukier et al (2023). It is disappointing that many of these issues have not found proper headway in resolving them.

While Canada is scrambling to find people to fill current employment vacancies (Statistics Canada 2022), many immigrants are struggling to find jobs that actually utilize their skills. Cukier et al (2023) state that "Within Canada, highly skilled workers are the most desired for immigration, yet the current evaluation standards for immigration fail to recognize work experience obtained outside of Canada and international credentials are devalued in Canada [...] Despite employers calling for more STEM skills, almost half of internationally educated engineers are unemployed" (p.27). The issue of assessing past credentials lies beyond just finding a way to accredit, as discrimination is found within all corners of this topic. Many immigrants who come to Canada struggle with getting their local credentials accredited since the "credentialing process can be costly and takes time" (Cukier et al, 2023, p.27). Coupled with the fact that discrimination can be found in the process as there is an "unexplained amount of scrutiny applied to the recognition of credentials from some

countries versus others” (p.27). The process of accreditation is also made ultimately harder when, as Creese & Wiebe (2012) concur, immigrants are being funneled directly into survival employment upon their arrival.

This is extremely important to keep in mind when studying immigrant income rates. Cukier et al (2023) found that the “devaluation of international credentials leads to not only employment issues, but also wage gaps between immigrant and non-immigrant professionals” (p.27). Cukier et al (2023) compared Australia’s immigrant earnings to Canadian ones, and found that Australian immigrants and Australian born professionals had little discrepancy in their wage gaps. Whereas in Canada, “over 50% of newcomer engineers [...] earned less than 50% of the median income of their Canadian-born peers (Cukier et al, 2023, p.28). Evidently, there is more work that needs to be done in terms of policies surrounding immigrant accreditation processes.

As if that was not enough, Cukier et al (2023) found that immigrants lacked access to the correct social networks that would be able to assist them in locating prospective employment. According to Cukier et al (2023), 85% of jobs are filled through social networks, and newcomers along with racialized Canadians, “who often are from lower socio-economic backgrounds, often face challenges navigating these networks and processes” (p.28). There is a lack of programming and support that can aid immigrants in actually getting their foot in the proverbial door, let alone actually working through how to navigate these social networks, i.e. making the right connections, etc. It is crucial for these programs to be developed and implemented as, “when immigrant workers are provided with the appropriate support, they can build confidence, increase innovation and contribute more effectively to Canadian society” (Cukier et al, 2023, p.28). These are all things that would better benefit Canada as a whole, considering their intentions behind their increase in immigrant intake. As pointed out in Creese & Wiebe (2012) and then concurred in Cukier et

al (2023), many programs created for the purpose of supporting immigrants focus purely on increasing their English or French language skills, rather than assisting immigrants to find ways to use their previous/ local qualifications.

Beyond the struggle of not being able to use their past credentials in finding suitable employment, many immigrants and racialized individuals experience discrimination in the process of looking for a job. Cukier et al (2023) point out that “often [immigrant] skills and qualifications are undermined by prejudice, discrimination and xenophobic attitudes held by prospective employers” (p.31). This can be further proven by the resume bias that occurs with resumes that have racialized names (Asare, 2024). Be it language, lack of Canadian work experience, or racism/prejudice, there are many things that immigrants applying to jobs within Canada have found to be a barrier within the process.

There is hope though, as programs are being made to help immigrants overcome these overarching barriers within employment. Cukier et al (2023) state that Work Integrated Learning (things like field placements, internships, apprenticeships, co-op placements, etc) can assist immigrants and racialized individuals in creating the Canadian work experience they may need, as well as building upon skills achieved through their post-secondary education. This can help them address employers' concerns about lack of skills or experience, as their resume will be boosted by programs like this. Research on the use of WIL “has confirmed a positive correlation between WIL and employment outcomes in Canada” (Cukier et al, 2023, p.32). Unfortunately the use of WIL in programs like humanities and social sciences is less available than those in STEM, which has a negative impact on “women, Indigenous Peoples, persons with disabilities, members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, and some racialized groups [who] tend to be overrepresented in the humanities and social sciences fields (Cukier et al, 2023, p.33). The integration of WIL into most- if not all- programs offered for immigrant assistance, as well as post-secondary education, would be of

great benefit to those attending the programs. Clarity surrounding how to get into WIL programs would also be greatly beneficial.

Overall, there are a great number of things that impact immigrants and their ability to perform in the job market. There is the concern that immigrants are taking jobs away from natural born residents, leading to anti-immigrant sentiments, and worry that immigrants are negatively affecting the economy, especially within the USA, Europe and recently in Canada as well (Raj, 2024). Beyond that, immigrants within the workforce struggle to find jobs that are suitable to their skills and local credentials. They also face bias and discrimination within the workforce. There are things that can be done to better improve immigrant job acquisition processes, that can lead to more equitable work, and better economic outcomes for immigrants within Canada, but policy and community changes need to take place first.

### **Culture Acclimation**

Beyond the struggles with losing certain parts of one's identity, and the challenges with finding suitable work, one would assume that immigrants may struggle with acclimating to Canadian culture. Understandably, there can be some cultural differences between that of an immigrant's home country to that of a Canadian community- and the change can vary in forcefulness depending on which city the immigrant lands in. Although, this is not the grand issue that should be addressed when thinking of ways to improve immigrants' lives.

'Beyond "Culture Clash" Understandings of Immigrant Experiences' by Bic Ngo (2009), is an important reminder that there is more that goes into 'culture shock' than just a change in the majority or traditions. Ngo (2009) argues that when focusing solely on the simplistic idea of immigrants struggling to assimilate because of 'culture clash' we underscore real issues that prevent them from prospering within Western society. More than that, Ngo (2009) points out that the belief of immigrants being unable to mesh well within Western society is antiquated and prejudicial, as the immigrant is believed to come from a

society which is, “traditional, patriarchal, and rural, in contrast to a highly modern and civilized [West]”. As Ngo (2009) goes on to explain, “Because identity is reflective of power and takes place within discursive relations, characterizations of immigrants as traditional, patriarchal, and resistant to assimilationist demands are neither neutral nor harmless. They reflect political positions, values, and social practices”. This is troubling for a number of reasons, but the most important of them being the way that Western culture (the one in the position of power) assumes that immigrants are stagnant, or stuck in a stasis that does not develop, denies immigrants a large part of human identity (Ngo, 2009).

The idea of immigrants being stagnant in their identity is untrue. Ngo (2009), points out that immigrants are constantly evolving, as their identities are constantly being constructed and reconstructed. Part of being human is the constant metamorphosis that comes with learning, with exploring, and with life. Immigrants are not exempt from that, Ngo (2009) reminds us, and yet Western society likes to believe that the ‘culture clash’ is the sole reason for immigrant dissatisfaction within the West. After reading Creese & Wiebe (2012) and seeing their findings on social capital, it is evident that ‘culture shock’ alone is not reason enough for any unhappiness, although it is an adjustment. Ngo (2009) points out that to underscore the agency that immigrants have in being able to adapt and change as any other human can, removes the onus from the actual systemic issues that provide strife for newcomers to the West.

Bhaba (2003) article entitled, ‘Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences’, goes into depth on the idea of what he calls ‘Cultural Hybridity’. Keeping in tune with Ngo (2009) on the idea that immigrant cultural identity is not something that is stagnant, Bhaba (2003) argues that cultures are not static, but constantly changing through interaction and exchange. The immigrant is not exempt from this process. Bhaba (2003) brings to light the idea of the ‘Third Space’ in which Cultural Hybridity can take place. He writes, “It is in this space that

we will find those words with which we can speak of Ourselves and Others. And by exploring this hybridity, this 'Third Space', we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves" (Bhaba, 2003, p.209). All of this is to say that part of being an immigrant is entering a place of negotiation and transformation where new cultural meanings and identities emerge, disrupting binary oppositions such as self/other and us/them.

Understanding that there are power dynamics in play when discussing cultural identity and the assimilation from one to the next is extremely important. Bhaba (2003) points out that cultural differences are often constructed and maintained through unequal power relations. Otherwise, why would the lack of cultural assimilation to that of the Canadian be bothersome to the Canadian born? As Bhaba (2003) points out there needs to be empathy in the process of melding one cultural identity to the next. Part of creating that Cultural Hybridity, of entering that Third Space, is the translating of cultural practices and meanings from one context to another, which leads to the creation of new hybrid forms (Bhaba, 2003). This process would go far smoother with some form of empathy and understanding from the cultural identity that is in power, as Ngo (2009) emphasizes in his article.

### **Language Acquisition and Challenges**

Part of being able to understand societal constructs within a new land, comes with being able to converse and share ideas and contexts with those who live there. For this reason, among many others, immigrants must learn the common tongue of the country that they have moved to. Understandably, learning a new language can come with a host of struggles and rewards. New (2003), explains that language plays a large role in the construction of one's identity, and with that in mind, the addition of a new language creates new facets of a person's identity, as it can alter the way one views themselves in the context of

the world. New (2003) argues that language is ever changing and constantly adapting with the new cultures that are enmeshed within it.

Taking that into account, it is important to note that many different things can affect language acquisition, and that dominant language acquisition within Canadian society can play into power dynamics that can either assist or hinder a new immigrant. Adamuti-Trache (2012) writes that “Regardless of circumstances that may affect linguistic practices, immigrants must initiate and negotiate the acquisition of language capital to avoid the negative effects of being linguistic outsiders in the host country”. Canada has a program, entitled Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC), that has been of use to newcomer immigrants, but according to Adamuti-Trache (2012), it does not address the language deficiencies of long-term immigrants. Moreover, the LINC program underserves highly educated immigrants hoping to accredit their local degrees as “many of them are qualified in knowledge occupations that require effective language skills as well as soft skills (i.e., interpersonal, intercultural) that are gradually acquired through interactions with the host society” (Adamuti-Trache, 2012). LINC programs do not provide the support or experiences needed for that type of language acquisition. In this case, use of WIL, within LINC programs could be more effective.

Although LINC can be beneficial in the beginning by helping attain basic language skills, Adamuti-Trache (2012) underscores the importance of lived experiences such as formal language classes, community programs, and workplace training. These are crucial for gaining a better understanding of both French and English. Most immigrants found that learning English through post-secondary education was more beneficial than LINC programs were (Adamuti-Trache, 2012). Unfortunately, it can be difficult to gain access to those various learning sources, especially when not every immigrant that enters Canada is rich in monetary resources. Findings show that, “Immigrants are caught up in a vicious circle: those

who cannot access labor market opportunities and/or are socially excluded have less chance to practice the destination language and acquire new skills that would make them more competitive in the labor market” (Adamuti-Trache, 2012). Being funneled into ‘survival employment’ that does not allow excessive use of the province’s main language will disallow the immigrant from being able to practice in said language, which in turn would keep them in low-income ‘survival employment’ (Creese & Wiebe, 2012). Adamuti-Trache (2012) advocates for the importance of real-life practice of the language, encouraging a change in Canadian policy that provides immigrants with more chances to attain that practice.

When it comes to most immigrant children, the task of teaching them a second language separate from that of their native tongue usually falls onto the public school system. In Ontario, the use of ESL within public schools is necessary, as Ontario receives more permanent residents than other Canadian provinces (Duarte, 2023). Within Ontario alone, 63% of elementary schools, and 58% of high schools have English Language Learners, yet only 38% of those schools have ESL teachers (People for Education, 2017). In part the lack of ESL teachers within Canadian schools can be attributed to increasingly reduced ESL funding (Ngo, 2007). Ronson (2022) found that lack of funding within the private sector for ESL programs was discouraging teachers from applying to ESL positions, especially since there is concern “that teachers are leaving to take more lucrative jobs in other fields”. Funding within Ontario schools has been facing large cuts, which can lead to undeserving “our most vulnerable students, including those with special education needs, Indigenous and racialized students, and English language learners” (ETFO, 2024). The issue as pertains to cuts for ESL programs has been a constant one since the early 2000’s as evidenced by Ngo (2007), and Bullock (2000). ESL, when funded and supported correctly, could be a cornerstone to creating a sound foundation for newcomer and immigrant students within



Canada's education system. Policies need to be altered to ensure that this funding is allocated correctly, with the best education practices put in place.

Finally, even when the Canadian language of choice is well attained, struggles begin in translating one's identity from one language to another. Rao (2003) agrees with New (2003) perspective that language and identity go hand in hand. In his article entitled, 'Language and Spirit' Rao (2003) explains the difficulties of telling stories in the English language, when his heart speaks it in his native tongue. Rao (2003) writes, "The telling has not been easy. One has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought-movement that looks maltreated in an alien language" (p.296). Everything from pacing to style is changed in the translation process, leaving a story that is entirely new, entirely its own. In a way, it is representative of the immigrant identity as explained by Bhaba (2003) and Ngo (2009); something that is not as it was before, but ever evolving to adapt to its surroundings, to its audience.

Language acquisition for immigrants is a multifaceted journey that not only involves learning new words and grammar but also navigating complex societal and cultural constructs. While programs like LINC offer foundational support, they often fall short in addressing the advanced linguistic and soft skills needed for professional and social integration. Real-life language practice and access to diverse educational and workplace opportunities are crucial for overcoming the barriers posed by limited initial language instruction. ESL programs, while an essential part of English language learners' journey, are facing constant budget cuts, and underfunding. Moreover, the challenge of translating one's identity into a new language underscores the profound connection between language and self-perception. Immigrants must continually adapt, finding ways to express their authentic

selves in a new linguistic landscape, ultimately enriching the cultural fabric of their new home.

### **Education Policies and their Impacts (Diversity, Inclusion)**

Canadian schools play an important role in the assimilation process for newcomer youth and immigrant children. This is a huge responsibility, as “education remains one of the strongest predictors of social mobility and employment” (Cukier et al, 2023). Studies show that there are vastly uneven outcomes for immigrant and racialized youth. Black students, along with Portuguese students are half as likely to finish high school or attend post-secondary education, while on the flip side, immigrant students along with racialized individuals tend to be the highest performing students within the Toronto District School Board (Cukier et al, 2023). This is important to note, as Black students “felt they did not belong at school”, pointing to a more serious issue of racial discrimination (Cukier et al, 2023). Indeed, schools can allocate more work towards creating a more inclusive and safe space for all students, especially those of newcomer, racialized, or immigrant backgrounds.

Studies have shown that at least 58% of students within Canadian schools have seen racialized students bullied, insulted or excluded based on their ethnicity (Lee, 2021). An extraordinarily large number, that points towards a trend of Canadian schools not teaching enough about Canada’s racist history, or about anti-racism in general (Lee, 2021).

Interestingly enough, the study found that “Children in more diverse schools are significantly more likely to say that they have learned about racism in Canada’s history, Indigenous treaties, residential schools, and multiculturalism, than those who say their student body is made up of kids from mostly the same background” (Lee, 2021). Teachers should not be waiting until their classroom is made up of a multitude of ethnic backgrounds to teach on topics of anti-racism, anti-colonialism, and inclusivity.

Education within Canada has changed minimally in response to its increasingly racially diverse population. This can be attributed to a number of factors, of them being that students experience “primarily white teachers and instructors, and textbooks that describe them in “majoritarian language,” that is, from the perspective of white, western society with all of its privileged assumptions” (Glenn, 2020). Racialized students feel like they are consistently side-lined in comparison to their white classmates. In a study conducted by Guo, Maitra, Guo, (2019), found that “children reported how teachers often lacked proper interventions when it came to addressing bullying or racist remarks” as they often ignored or did find the issue to be pressing. The students studied in Guo et al (2019) found it distressing being bullied due to racial prejudice, as this was a foreign concept to them. While the Ontario curriculum changes to include more diverse content, more needs to be done to ensure that teachers are culturally responsive enough to interact mindfully with the subject material, as well as their racialized students (Government of Ontario, 2024).

Lack of representation within the curriculum aside, racially diverse, immigrant, and refugee children rarely seem themselves portrayed in media consumed within the classroom. This can be attributed to a lack of clarity within the curriculum on how to integrate diversity within lessons, or teachers not knowing where and when it is the right time to introduce representative media. Ultimately, the lack of representation causes issues for diverse students, as culturally responsive education is becoming more and more important. Having materials that reflect students' lives is essential. As Armstrong (2022) writes, “Students may identify with characters based on familiar circumstances and life experiences, similar personalities, shared hobbies, common heritages, and social identity such as race, ethnicity, and gender. When materials are mirrors, students are more positively engaged in their learning process (i.e., asking questions and completing assignments)”. True educators know the value of

students in engaging with material because they want to, not just because they have to.

Inclusive materials can be a bridge to that end goal.

Unfortunately, finding materials that are representative of racialized or immigrant students can be difficult. As Armstrong (2022) points out, “Studies of children’s books indicate that most of the characters within the sample are White, ranging from half to 90 percent of the illustrations. Characters who represent Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities are about 10 percent of the illustrations or fewer, with some ethnic and racial groups featured at 1 percent”. With that being acknowledged, there has been improvement within the publishing of racially diverse books, as in a 2022 analysis around 45% of books published had a non-white author, illustrator, or compiler which may not seem like much, but the number has risen 8% from 2014 (Greenspan, 2023). There are materials available to teachers, should they know how to request them, or where to look for them. The issue comes when teachers have no desire to do the work that comes with being culturally responsive. Schools are miniature replicas of our larger societies, and teachers are still members of that outer society. This means that teachers are just as susceptible to having internal bias and racism (Will, 2020). An ideal solution to this would be creating clear expectations within the Canadian curriculum surrounding the use of diverse topics and materials, along with guides that can be easily accessed that can provide teachers with information on how to integrate these materials more effectively.

Schools have the potential to be an assimilation bridge for newcomer students and their family’s, especially when support and resources are available to newcomer and immigrant students. Studies have shown that Canadian schools still have a ways to go until they are teaching racialized, immigrant and newcomer students with the same effectiveness as their white counterparts. Bullying and harassment of racialized students is a serious issue within Canadian schools, and there is concern that not enough teachers know how to properly

manage this issue. Part of the solution comes with the inclusion of culturally responsive materials, and ideally the Canadian curriculum will start to integrate more clear and concise expectations for how to do so.

### **Discussion**

Not surprisingly, there is a lot that factors into the immigrant experience that can work as a barrier towards providing them with the same experiences as Canadian born nationals. Through the assessment of this literature, it is easy to see that immigrants must face multiple systemic hurdles, which can differ in severity depending on certain factors. No matter what, these systemic barriers are present in every aspect of the immigrant experience. From a renegotiation of identity, to being funneled into survival employment (Creese & Wiebe, 2012), to a lack of support in mastering social networks (Cukier et al, 2023), to ineffective language acquisition programs (Adamuti-Trache, 2012), immigrants and newcomers have a lot going against them. Interestingly enough, as Ngo (2009) points out most of these barriers are attributed to ‘culture clash’ when in reality it is a systemic undermining due to lack of organization and proper funding on our government’s part.

Canada has made it abundantly clear that they are in need of immigrants for multiple reasons, be it low birth rates, or multitude of job vacancies (Statistics Canada, 2022), but little work has been done to smooth the integration process for these immigrants. This alone has led to anti-immigrant sentiments within the Canadian population (Raj, 2024). It does not help that there is a lack of culturally responsive education within certain parts of Canada, that can lead to racialized and newcomer students to feel like they have been ousted from a community that they have just barely joined.

All of this points to a need for change at the grassroots level. Policies within federal and provincial levels need to be altered to match the needs of newcomers within Canada’s current society. Furthermore, there is not enough research being conducted on a multitude of

areas concerning immigrants and their integration within Canadian society. Too few articles have come out surrounding immigrant and newcomer student experiences in a post COVID-19 world. Most of the articles on culture clash, culture integration, language acquisition, and financial barriers are almost 15 to 20 years old. This is a field of study that needs to be more closely examined, especially considering the ever changing landscape of Canadian society, and the ever increasing desire of the Canadian government to increase immigration numbers.

### **Conclusion**

Evidently, there is a great deal of work that needs to be done to create a smoother transition for immigrants and newcomers to Canada. A large cornerstone of this work, and a big part of its solution, is better funding in educational institutions that support immigrants. Through the work of Creese & Wiebe (2012) and Cukier et al (2023), as well as a few other articles and studies, it is clear to see that the accessibility of accreditation programs, as well the accreditation programs themselves need to be revised and reconsidered by policy makers within Canada. Many of the immigrants that land within Canada are hard working and well educated individuals that have been failed by educational institutions within Canada, be it the LINC programs, public schooling, or other facets of the education system. The solution is clearly present and it lies within our schooling systems, as Cukier et al (2023) point out. The use of WIL programs, culturally responsive education, and better English language acquisition programs are necessary for removing barriers that immigrants face upon their arrival to Canada. Moreover, the increase of empathy from the Canadian-born population to the immigrant one is absolutely necessary, as it factors into a multitude of areas that affect immigrants at a systemic level. Each article that wrote about these issues surrounding the immigrant and newcomer experience detailed fairly simple solutions to the problems, and almost all of them had to do with education and the ability to access it easily. If we want

immigrants to not only survive within Canadian society, but also to thrive within it, more needs to be done in accordance with providing them the ability to educate themselves at the same level as the Canadian-born population. In doing so, we will see vast improvements in immigrant financial outcomes, identity retention, and sense of belonging within Canadian society.

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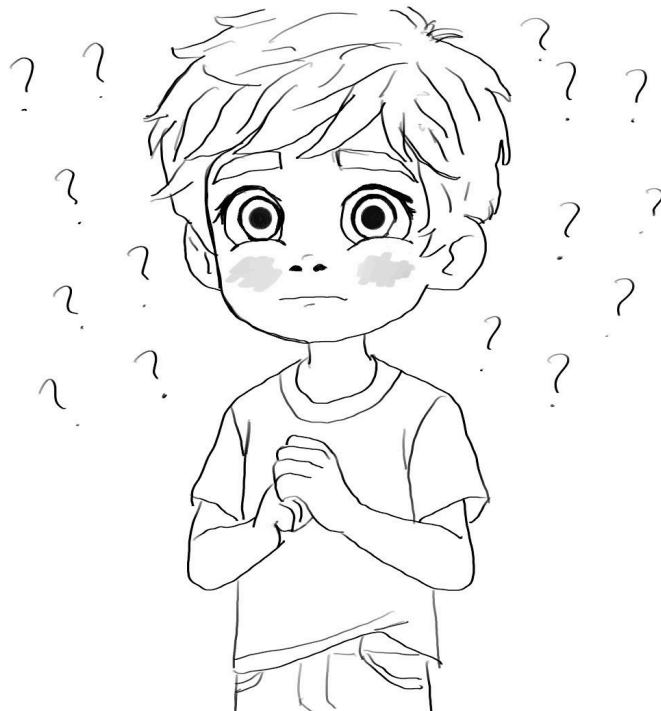
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Part Two: Chapter Book

I Know Hello?

By: Sarah Kattini

An Early Readers Chapter Book Intended for Ages 8 and Up



## Chapter 1

**First Day Jitters**

Ziad was new to this town. In fact, he was new to this country! His parents had left their home country of Syria in August. When they first got to Toronto, there were soooooooooo many things that Ziad was not used to.

He wasn't used to the subway trains.

He wasn't used to the big, tall, tall, *tall buildings*.

He wasn't used to the food, but he did like it.

And the biggest change of all, *Ziad was not used to the language*.

Actually, Ziad did not know how to speak English- not even a little bit!

His parents had tried to teach him when they were still in Syria. But Ziad didn't want to lose his time learning when he could be playing with his friends.

So, he ignored the worksheets that they threw at him. He ignored the TV-shows they tried to watch with him. And he ignored the tutor who tried to teach him.

At the time, it had felt like a REALLY good idea. Ziad thought it had been the best idea he had had all year.

But now... now Ziad was starting to think that maaaaaybe it had been a bad idea.

It was his first day at a brand-new school, in a brand-new grade, with a brand-new language, in a brand-new country.

And Ziad was starting to feel a little sick about it all. He was standing in front of the door of his new school, stuck to the ground. It was like superglue had been used to keep him in his place. He did **not** want to go inside. What he wanted was to turn right back around and go home and hide in his bed.

He turned to his mom and tugged on her jacket.

"Mama, I think I have a fever." He said in **fluent** Arabic.

His mom just stared down at him with her eyebrows raised.

"A fever? You were feeling fine this morning."

"I didn't feel like throwing up this morning, but now I do!" Ziad whined.

Mama put her hand on his forehead. "You feel fine to me."

"No, I don't! I'm burning up, I promise! You can cook an egg on my head, that's how hot it is," he huffed.

She just laughed. "I think you might be a little nervous, my heart."

Mama always called Ziad her heart when he was feeling a little funny. It was a little nice and a little embarrassing. He was nine years old, not a baby!

She bent down and gave him a **BIGGGGGG** hug. And he felt a little bit better.

"You are a strong, brave boy. I'm sure you will make lots of new friends here, just be a little patient," Mama said.

"But Moooooooooom," he whined.

"No buts. You will be ok."

"But I don't know the language! How can I make friends without speaking to them?"

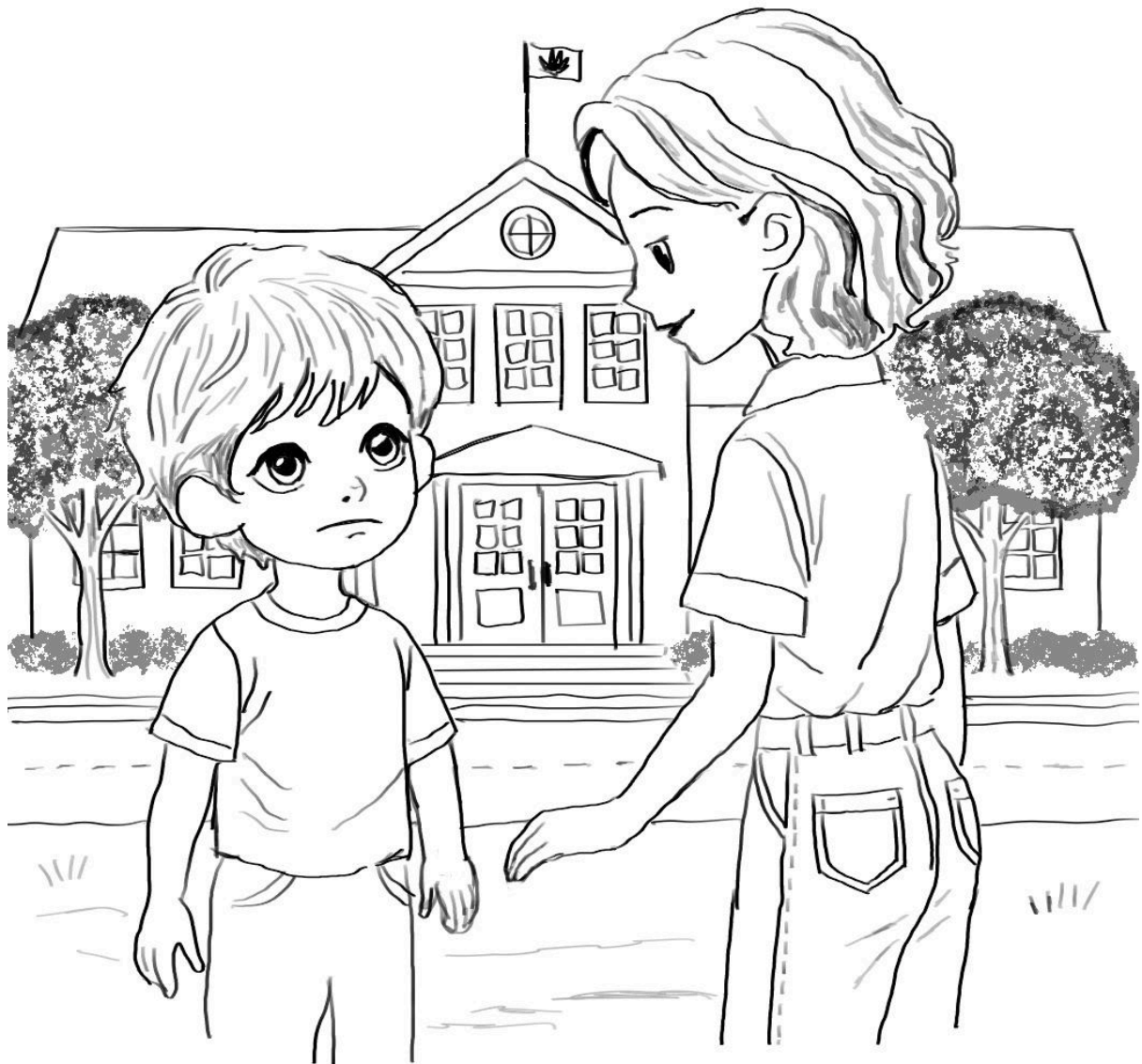
"You know some words, right?"

Ziad shook his head. "No, I don't!"

"Yes, you do. You know 'hello' and that is the most important word of all."

Ziad crossed his arms. "It's not enough."

Mama patted his head. "You can make it enough."



## Chapter 2

**Jet-plane Butterflies**

Ziad was standing outside his classroom door with Mama, because she had dragged him in. Now his knees felt a little wobbly.

*I don't know if I can go in there*, he thought.

This was going to be his first day of grade three and he was as nervous as could be. He kept thinking of scary things that could happen and the scaredy butterflies in his tummy just got **bigger** and **bigger**.

What if he couldn't make friends because he didn't understand English?

What if nobody wanted to play with him today?

What if they made him eat lunch in the bathroom?

And he wasn't being dramatic but...

What if a **GIANT** bird broke through the window and stole his backpack?

Or even worse, what if a **GIANT** bird broke through the window and stole *him*? He wouldn't even be able to ask for help!

Ziad was going to be sick.

Everyone was going to make fun of him, he just *knew* it.

All he knew was the word 'hello'. That wasn't enough! He couldn't make a full sentence with just that word, it would be too silly.

Ziad wished he had a time machine. If he did, he would **zzzzzip** back in time and force himself to study with his tutor.

The door to the classroom opened, and out walked a woman who was really, really, really tall. Even taller than Mama!

She smiled down at Ziad, and he started to feel a little less nervous. She didn't look mean at all. She actually looked kind of nice.

"Hello, Ziad," She said to him.

"Hello," Ziad replied, quietly. He went and stood behind his moms back, holding on to her jacket.

The woman said something else to him, but he didn't understand what.

He looked at his mom and hoped that maybe she knew what the woman had said to him.

"Mama," he whispered. "What did she say?"

Mama nodded at the woman, and then looked down at Zayn. "My heart, she said that she is your teacher. You can call her Ms. Lee, and she is very excited for you to be in her class."

"She is?" Ziad asked. "Really, even if I can't speak English?"

Mama nodded. "Even if you can't speak English."

Ziad bit his lip and nodded his head. Ms. Lee put out her hand, and Ziad put his hand in hers.

He looked at his mom. Ziad was so scared, the butterflies in his tummy started flying faster than jet planes.

Mama smiled at him. "You can do this!"

Ms. Lee patted his head, and said something else that he couldn't understand, but it sounded nice.

Maybe Ziad didn't know the language. But he would try **really, really, really** hard to be brave and make it through his first day.  
He could do that, right?

## Chapter 3

**Into the Lion's Den Classroom**

He waved goodbye to his mom and walked through the front door. The classroom was big and smelled a little bit like markers and cleaning spray. Ziad scrunched up his nose.

The room was decorated with so many different posters, and colours, and around the border of the class he could see the English alphabet. He did not know how to speak or read very well, but he did know his ABC's. It was only when the letters were put together that it started looking like a **jumbly, bumbly, mess** to Ziad.

He stopped looking at the class and started looking at the people inside the room. There were so many other kids in this classroom, at least 20 of them! 20 people that he could not speak to... the butterflies in Ziad's stomach changed from jet planes into giant roaring dragons. There was a very good chance that he might be sick ALL over the floor.

Before the roaring dragons in his stomach ate him all up, Ms. Lee took Ziad to a desk near the front of the class and showed him where to sit.

There were three other people sitting beside him, one girl and two boys. He gave them a small smile.

And then he surprised himself by saying, "Hello."

"Hello!" They all said back to him.

Whew, that wasn't too bad!

But right when Ziad started to feel a little better, the girl sitting beside him opened her mouth and a WHOLE bunch of words came out that he did NOT know.

Ziad's head felt all jumbly and bumbly and messy. He didn't understand a single word!

What was he going to do? Ziad scratched his head trying to think about it.

In his mind he had a few options:

- 1) He could laugh, but maybe what she said wasn't funny?
- 2) He could ignore her, but then she would think he was mean.
- 3) Or, he could say "Hello" again and hope for the best.

Finally, after a little too much time passed, Ziad told the truth.

"Me," Ziad pointed to himself. "I, um... no English."

Ziad could feel his face get hot, and he wanted to hide under his desk.

"Ohhhhh," said the girl. And then she pointed to herself and said, "blah blah blah Emily."

Ziad knew enough English to understand that was her name!

He smiled at her and said, "Emily!"

Emily then pointed at the little boy across from Ziad and said, "blah blah blah Aaron."

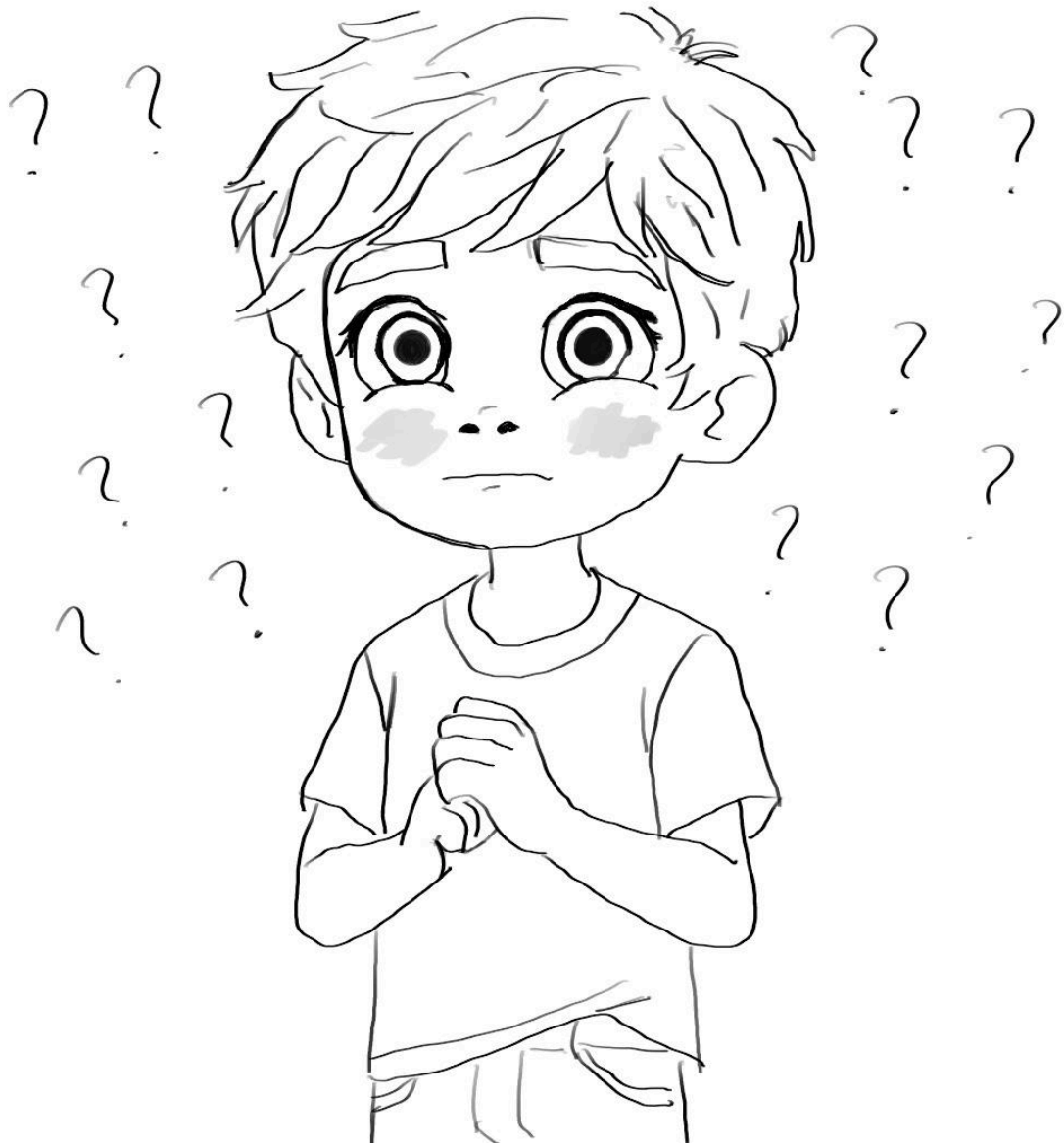
Aaron waved at Ziad and Ziad waved back shyly.

The last little boy in the group just pointed at himself and said, "Min Ho."

Ziad nodded his head, and said, "Hello Aaron, Emily, and Min Ho."



They all smiled back at him. Maybe today wouldn't be as bad as he was worried it would be.



## Chapter 4

**A small Mistake**

Just when Ziad started to think things were going to get better they got much much much worse.

Ziad spent the first lesson of the day not understanding a single thing that was being said. Not when the teacher spoke. Not when his new friends spoke. At this point, he was worried he wouldn't even understand when *he* spoke too.

And on top of all of that Ziad was BORED. He was soooooooooo bored; he couldn't stop moving things on his desk. Ms. Lee had come and placed markers and pencils and papers in the middle of their table. He was colouring with them right now.

On his paper he had drawn a **giant** green dragon. When he looked around at Min Ho, Emily, and Aaron's papers, they were writing letters and making words that Ziad didn't know.

Ms. Lee started walking around and looking at everyone's work. Ziad was excited for her to see just how cool the dragon he drew was.

But when Ms. Lee saw Ziad's drawing, she didn't look very happy. She looked a little upset.

"No Ziad," Ms. Lee said and then she pointed at Emily's papers.

Ziad wasn't sure what she wanted him to do. Did she want him to take Emily's papers? That wouldn't be very nice. Ziad just shrugged and looked down at his desk.

He didn't like not knowing what to do. It made him feel really icky on the inside.

In Syria, Ziad was the best student in his class. Here, he didn't really know what to do with himself.

Ms. Lee got a chair and sat down beside him. She took a new paper and wrote down a word on it and pointed at it. Then she gave him the pencil.

"Try Ziad," she said.

He knew that word. 'Try' meant he just had to do his very best. He could do that, right?

Ziad picked up his marker and began to write.

He wrote the letter F, and then R, and I, and E, and N, and last of all, D.

All put together, it looked like this: FRIEND. It looked a lot like the word Ms. Lee had written.

Not a bad job at all!

Now if only he knew what 'FRIEND' meant.

After all, this was a new word for him.

Ms. Lee patted Ziad on the head, and said, "Good job Ziad!"

He may not have understood the entire sentence, but she sounded excited enough for him to know he did well.

Ziad just smiled shyly.

For the rest of the lesson, Ziad wrote the word 'FRIEND' over and over again, until it got easier and easier.

It wasn't a big first step, because he still didn't know what he was writing, BUT it was a step in the right direction.

Ms. Lee stood at the front of the class again and said a whole bunch of words that sounded like, "Blah blah blah blah blah. Blah blah blah blah blaaah. Two, blah blah blah, seven."

He understood the numbers!

Before he knew it, there were numbers being put up on the board! Then there were math questions, and these were questions that Ziad actually knew how to answer.

He knew this! Ziad started to get excited. His legs couldn't stay still, and he almost wanted to jump out his seat and say "Whoopee! I know this stuff!"

Luckily for him, he was able to hold himself back.

But boy oh boy, was he excited to show Ms. Lee how smart he was in math!

When Ms. Lee walked around and gave him a worksheet filled with questions Ziad wasted no time and started to work on them right away.

After he finished the first sheet, he ran straight to Ms. Lee to show her his good work. She was busy helping another student, but he thought she would be happy to see worksheet.

Ms. Lee smiled up at Ziad and said, "blah blah blah, Ziad."

He didn't really understand most of what she said, but he shoved his paper right in front of her face.

"Good work!" Ziad said. What he would have liked to say was: Look I did a good job and finished all my work!

He only wished he knew how to say it.

"Wow Ziad!" Ms. Lee said. And then she said something to the student she was helping and went back to her desk.

Ziad didn't really know what to do, so he followed behind Ms. Lee.

Ms. Lee turned around after looking through her desk and looked surprised to see Ziad there. She grabbed some more worksheets and gave them to Ziad. Ms. Lee mimed Ziad working on them.

Ziad looked at them. These were more math worksheets! He felt himself smile BIG and GIANT.

He could totally work on these!

As he walked back to his desk, all Ziad could think was, "*wow who ever thought I would be excited about math one day?*"

## Chapter 5 A BIG Mistake

Ziad was feeling a million, trillion, gajillion times better after that math lesson. At least Ms. Lee knew Ziad was smart now!

Before moving to Canada, Ziad used to *hate* math A LOT. Like a lot, A LOT. But now, he really really liked it. He felt like he could do that work so easily, even if he couldn't read the English words around it. He knew how to add, and subtract, and work with fractions. Math was easy peasy.

Nothing was going to shake the smile off of Ziad's face, he just knew it. Things were finally going his way! Maybe school wasn't going to be that hard after all.

When the class was finished with the math worksheets, everyone went out into the hallway to pull out their snacks. Ziad's mom had packed him some berries and another snack that he had tried and liked when he came to Canada. It was chocolatey and had something called 'granola' in it. It was delicious!

Everyone else had snacks that were like Ziad's, but sometimes he wished he could still have the snacks that he used to have back in Syria.

He really missed the chocolate *Ruby* bars, and the special cereals, and chips that his family could not find anywhere in Canada. Canadian snacks were not bad at all, but he still missed the ones from home sometimes.

When snack time was over, everyone started putting on their coats and outdoor shoes to go out for something called 'recess'.

This was the part of the day Ziad was most nervous for. When he got on the playground Ziad looked around and found that no one from his class wanted to play with him.

Ziad crossed his arms and tried not to cry. He didn't even know how to ask anyone if they wanted to play with him.

There were some kids playing tag, some were tossing a ball around, and some were playing this weird game where they hopped on some drawings.

Ziad decided to go up to the hopping kids first.

"Hello," he said quietly. The kids did not stop hopping on those weird lines, that were shaped like the letter 'T'.

Ziad cleared his throat, and said louder this time, "Hello!"

The kids stopped hopping.

"Um, hi?" One of them said. And then they started laughing and went back to hopping. They were ignoring him!

That was... That was SO... That was SO MEAN. Ziad had never had anyone treat him like that!

If he was almost ready to cry before, he was probably going to start crying now.

Before the tears could fall, Emily came up to Ziad and tugged on his arm. She pulled him to the group of kids playing with the ball.

"Come Ziad!" Emily said. She pointed to the ball. "Play?" She asked.

Ziad nodded his head. He would like to play ball more than playing that weird hopping game.

Goodness he was happy Emily asked him to play with them.

Emily tried to explain the rules of the game to Ziad, but he couldn't really understand her. He nodded his head anyways like he could, so that she wouldn't kick him out of the game.

It looked like a regular game of catch. That was pretty easy, right?



There were about 3 other kids playing, and Ziad only knew Emily. They tossed the ball to each other, and sometimes they jumped in front of each other to catch it. Ziad could do this! The ball was thrown up, up, up into the air, and Ziad started to run towards it. He was going to catch it before anyone else could! Then the kids would want to play with him more, he just knew it!

Ziad kept his eyes on the ball and began running faster than a cheetah. At least it *felt* like he was running faster than a cheetah.

One kid started yelling, "Blah blah ZIAD!"

Ziad wasn't sure what he was saying, but it sounded like they were cheering him on!

Another kid screamed, "ZIAD!"

And before Ziad knew it, he was running headfirst into Emily.

BAM!

Ziad held onto his head. OUCH that really hurt.

All Ziad could hear was crying. He was in pain, but he didn't understand why he was crying about it.

Wait... that wasn't Ziad that was crying. It was Emily.

Ziad looked at her. She was sitting on the ground, holding onto her elbow that was scraped really badly. It was cut up and bleeding and Ziad just felt so, so, so bad about it.

This was all his fault. If only he could speak English, then he would have known that the other kids weren't cheering him on. They were trying to tell him that he was about to bump into her.

Ziad opened his mouth to apologize to her but no words were coming out. He didn't even know how to say sorry properly.

The best thing he could do was leave. He turned his back on his friends and ran away.



## Chapter 6

**A Little Bit of Hope**

Ziad didn't get very far before a teacher found him. He didn't know this teacher, but he was nice enough. The teacher held his hand and took him to the office inside the school where the principal, Mrs. Singh was.

This was it. Ziad was going to get kicked out of school. He was in too much trouble already. He couldn't speak the language. He didn't know the school rules. To top it all off, he had already injured one of his friends.

And this was all on the first day of school! Ziad was a mess, and this was all his fault.

When Mrs. Singh saw him, Ziad couldn't even explain what had happened. Instead, he had just started crying.

Before he knew it, Mrs. Singh was giving him the phone.

Ziad took it and said, "Hello?"

"Hi, my heart. I heard you were having a tough time," Ziad's mom said on the phone.

Ziad couldn't help it. He started crying harder and harder, until he thought the room might fill up with water and he would float away.

"Ziad," Mama said. "Can you please tell me what happened?"

"M-mama, it was all my fault!" Ziad cried. "I couldn't understand how to play the game and I bumped into my friend. She got really hurt, and it was because of me!"

"Oh, my heart," Mama said. "Did you apologize to her?"

"No," Ziad sniffled. "But only because I didn't know how to. I wanted to say I was sorry, but I didn't know the words Mama. Now Emily probably hates me."

"Ziad she won't hate you. But you do need to say you're sorry to her. I can teach you how to say it. My heart, things will get better I promise."

"I don't see how they will," he whined.

"You'll learn the language soon. It might be hard until then, but you are **smart** and **brave**, and **kind**, and you have gone through so much to get here. This is just a little bump in the road," Mama said. He could almost hear her smiling through the phone, but Ziad didn't know if he believed her.

This was all just too much newness for Ziad. Everything was **too** new. And it had been fun at first, but now Ziad just missed the way things were before.

"Mama I think I want to go back home," Ziad said as quiet as a mouse. He was surprised that Mama had even heard him.

"My heart, you still have the rest of your first day. I know you can do it!" Mama replied.

"No... I mean Syria. Can we just go back? Please?" Ziad asked.

Mama got really silent for a second. Ziad was worried she might have hung up.

She sounded sad when she finally spoke. "I wish we could Ziad. But we have to stay here. And trust me, you're going to love it soon. I promise you."

Ziad knew that was going to be her answer. But he thought he should try anyways, just in case this time was different.

"Ok Mama. How can I apologize to my friend?"

“That’s my brave boy!” Mama said, and he could hear her laugh through the phone. “First you have to...”

By time Ziad got off of the phone with his mom, and she had explained what had happened to the principal, Ziad was starting to feel a little better. He had a plan to fix things. All he had to do was get back to class and apologize.

Hopefully, Emily would forgive him. He was going to try his very best to earn her forgiveness.



## Chapter 7

**A Little Setback (Or is it?)**

Ziad had been planning to apologize to Emily right when he got back to class. He was going to say exactly what his mom had told him to say. He even practiced it with Mrs. Singh.

He would tell Emily, "I am very sorry." And his mom said she would get her a card and write in it for him, so he could give it to her at lunch.

He had a plan, he just needed to do it.

Only now, as a new teacher was walking him back to class, Ziad realized that his plan was going to be put on hold.

This was not his classroom. This new classroom was super small. It didn't smell funny like his other classroom did. This classroom just smelt like paper and books. And boy oh boy, was this room filled with books.

The classroom had bookshelves filled with little books, and papers, and worksheets. It also only had one round table right in the middle of the room. In fact, the teacher sitting at the desk was not Ms. Lee. It was another lady that Ziad did not know.

Ziad didn't know if she was taller than Ms. Lee, because she was sitting down. But she had pretty brown hair, and these funky pink and brown glasses that Ziad really liked.

"Hi Ziad!" The new teacher said.

"Hello..." Ziad replied. Who was she?

She pointed to herself. "Mrs. Nutting."

Ok so her name was Mrs. Nutting. That was good to know. The teacher who had brought Ziad to the classroom said a few words to Mrs. Nutting, and quickly walked off.

Ziad had no clue what was happening. Was this his new teacher?

Where were the other students?

Mrs. Nutting waved Ziad over. He sat in the chair beside her, and she showed him a book with English letters and pictures in it.

He had seen these books before. His English tutor in Syria had some books just like these ones! Only when he saw them before, Ziad had run as far away from them as he could.

He wasn't going to do that now.

Now, he was **determined** to learn English, and get as good at it as he could.

"Ok Ziad," Mrs. Nutting said. And then she pointed to the letter **A** and looked at Ziad.

He knew she wanted him to say the letter, so he said "**A**."

"Good!" Mrs. Nutting said. Then she pointed to the picture of a fruit beside the letter. He knew what that was!

Well at least he knew what it was called in Arabic. Before he could say the name for it, Mrs. Nutting said, very slowly, "**A-pp-l-e, Apple.**"

"Try, Ziad," Mrs. Nutting asked.

"A-pp-l-e," Ziad sounded out. As he said the word slowly, like Mrs. Nutting had said the first time, she moved her fingers to follow the letters in the word.

Ziad was starting to get it a little more now.

"Apple," Ziad said again, with more confidence.

“Good job Ziad!” Mrs. Nutting said.

They spent the rest of the afternoon sitting at that table and learning new words and letter sounds. Some of the words Ziad learned right away. Some of them he kept forgetting. But by the end of the lesson, Ziad was starting to feel a little bit better about his chances of learning English.

## Chapter 8

**Mission Apologize**

By the time Ziad had finished class with Mrs. Nutting, everyone had gone outside for lunch recess. Ziad had eaten his lunch with Mrs. Nutting, and they watched videos on different letter sounds and words. It was good practice, and he was going to ask Mama to play those videos for him at home too.

But now it was recess again, and Ziad was on a *mission*. He had an apology to deliver. Mama had brought the apology card during lunch, with some extra chocolates to make Ziad feel a little better too.

He was a little bit nervous, but Ziad knew he could be **brave** and do the right thing.

Ziad looked all around the playground. He couldn't really see Emily in the giant field of grass, or on the dark tarmac, or even near the basketball nets.

Goodness, golly, there were A LOT of kids here.

Ziad put his hands on his hips and began to search the crowd. Then he got an idea!

In the movies, whenever people look for something, or someone they use **binoculars**. Ziad didn't have those on him right now, but he could use his hands!

He brought both of his hands to his face, fisting them in a way that made them look like **binoculars**. Ziad began to scan the crowded field again like a hawk.

There she was! Emily was playing tag with Min Ho, and a few other kids from class.

Before he lost her again, Ziad quickly ran to her.

"Emily!" Ziad yelled.

When Emily saw Ziad, she didn't look too happy to see him. She actually looked a little sad.

"What Ziad?" Emily asked.

Ziad swallowed and cleared his throat. He could do this!

"I am very sorry, Emily," Ziad said. And he really meant it too.

Emily nodded her head.

"For you," Ziad continued and took the apology card out of his pocket and gave to Emily.

Emily opened the card and read it in front of him.

It was a little awkward, because he didn't really know what to do with himself as she read it.

His mom told him what she was going to write in there for him, but Ziad still didn't know how Emily was going to react.

Mama said she was going to explain that Ziad was very sorry, and that the only reason he had run away without apologizing was because he didn't know how.

Ziad could only hope that Emily would accept his apology. He really meant it too.

Emily finished reading the card. This was it. She was either going to forgive him or hate him forever.

Ziad gulped. He really hoped she would forgive him. She had been so nice to him all day, and he really didn't want to lose a friend like her.

"Thank you," Emily finally smiled. And then she gave Ziad a big hug.

Ziad smiled and hugged her back. He was so happy she forgave him!

His mom had also taught him something else to say to Emily, if she did forgive him.

He had practiced this with the principal too.

“Can I play with you?” Ziad asked.

Emily nodded her head. “Yes, you can!”

And for the rest of that recess, Ziad played tag with Emily and Min Ho, and all of his new friends.

He knew things were going to be tough on him for a little while. He was going to have to learn a lot before he could catch up to his friends at school. But Ziad was **brave** and **smart** and **kind**, just like Mama said. He knew he could do it, especially if he tried his very best. And he promised himself that he would try his very best. Ziad could do it!

## Chapter 9

**A Few Months Later**

It was winter now, and Ziad had been in Canada for a few months. Though he still missed his friends and family in Syria, he was really starting to love Canada too. This winter, the only thing he was having a hard time with was his snow pants. They were so *bulky* and hard to move in.

But they did keep him warm. And Ziad knew he needed them. He had never seen so much snow in his life! This winter in Toronto, Ziad had seen enough snow to make houses out of. He had spent every day playing in it, making snowmen, and snow forts. It was so much fun, he even forgot about the annoying snow pants.

Even now, Ziad was putting his snow pants on to go outside for recess, and he didn't hate them as much as before.

"Snow pants are like magic," Emily said to Ziad.

Ziad laughed. "No Emily, they are plastic, not magic."

"I said they were *like* magic, duh!" Emily replied.

"Are you two fighting about snow pants again?" Min Ho asked them.

"No!" Emily and Ziad replied together.

"Oh, they were so fighting about snow pants again," Aaron said.

"No, no, Emily said snow pants are magic, but they are plastic," Ziad explained. When he spoke, he still had an **accent**, and there were lots of words that he was still learning. But Ziad had made so many **improvements**. Even Mrs. Nutting said so too.

"No, I did not!" Emily said.

"Here we go again," Aaron moaned.

"Let's go deal with this outside." Min Ho suggested. "We'll make snowmen, and they can judge if our snow pants are magic or plastic."

Ziad didn't really know what *judge* meant, but he went along with it anyway. He would ask Mrs. Nutting what it meant later.

"Ok, deal." Emily agreed.

They all walked out to the field, dressed in their snow pants, with mittens, and warm coats, and began to build their snowman.

Ziad had worked really hard to get to this point. He had been **determined** to learn English as quickly as he could, and with Mrs. Nutting, his parents, and his friends' help, he had done it. He still had a lot of work to do until he was **fluent** in English, like he was in Arabic, but he was very proud of himself. Ziad could now understand his friends, and he could understand his teachers. Well, at least he could understand them most of the time. And that was so much better than before!

Now, he was practicing his reading and writing, and he still found it really hard. But Ziad would keep working on it, until he could read the same books as his friends.

Ziad knew he could do it too. That's because he knew he was a **brave**, **smart**, and **kind** boy. Ziad had gone through a lot to get to Canada, and he had gone through even more changes to get used to Canada.

Ziad was going to master the English language one day soon!  
For now, Ziad would build snowmen with his friends, and talk about magic snow pants.



Part 3: Diverse Literature Guide

# Diverse Children's Literature

Sarah Kattini





# Table of Contents

Why Diverse Literature Matters (2)

Why Use These Books? (3)

Picture Books (4)

Early Reader Chapter Books (19)

Junior/Intermediate Books (25)

Young Adult Books (32)

Other Notable Books (39)

References (41)

# Why Diverse Literature Matters

I would like to start off by thanking you for reading this guide, and using it to introduce the child(ren) in your life to characters who may look like or look nothing alike to them. Literature as a whole is such an important tool of development for young children. Literature, especially when used at a young age can aid in the development of language skills, emotional understanding, and cultural awareness, among many other important areas (Curphey).

Picture books have been known to increase empathy and compassion within their readers, making them an extremely useful tool within classrooms (Barton et al, 2019). Knowing the impact literature is capable of means knowing the importance of being intentional with the books we choose to spotlight in the day to day. For this reason, it is our task as adults to choose books that are an accurate and kind representation of marginalized groups within our society.

Teachers will be familiar with the concept of “Mirrors, Windows and Sliding Glass Doors” as written in the essay by Dr. Rudine Sims Bishops of the same name. Books can **mirror** a child's experience, and in turn show the importance of their story while still validating it (Flores et al, 2021). They also function as a way to provide those children with hope to dream big and achieve their dreams. **Windows**, show readers a world that is different to their own, highlighting experiences and perspectives that they may not understand, but can they empathise and learn from (Flores et al, 2021). The use of both mirror and window books is essential to growing and developing a child's social emotional learning and increase empathy (Flores et al, 2021).

Making a lasting difference and change for the better starts with providing students and children with a chance to explore experiences that are similar to their own, or completely different from their own, while still encouraging them to find importance in both types.

# Why Use These Books?

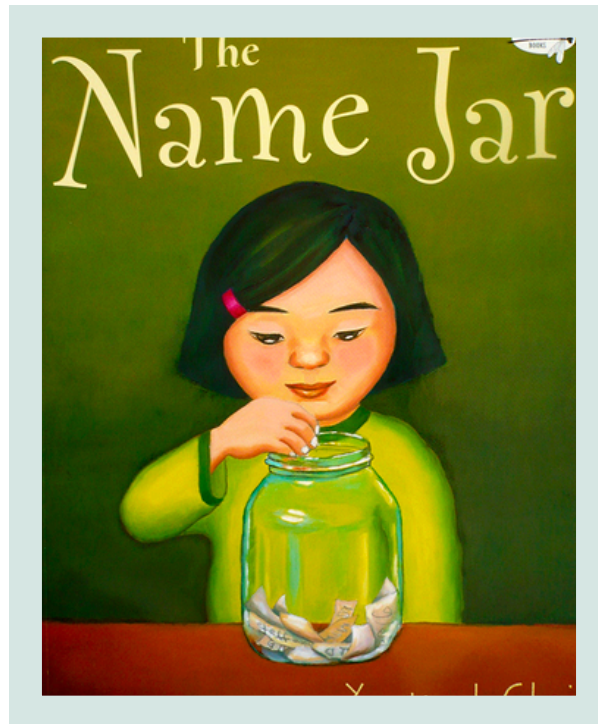
You may be wondering what makes these books better than the other books featuring diverse characters published and within our libraries currently. To begin, these books are only a small percentage of the lovely books that mirror the perspectives of diverse children. With that being said, I chose these books simply because they stood out to me the most. These books were all chosen with one goal in mind: to provide diverse students and children with positive mirrors to their lives. This means giving students the opportunity to read books that have characters who come from a similar background or culture to them, who look like them, or who mirror their lived experiences.

As an arab woman who grew up in the Greater Toronto Area, and went to a fairly diverse elementary school, I rarely saw myself represented within the media used within the classroom. I rarely saw myself represented in the adults I interacted with daily, or saw myself in the materials we worked with. Any representation I did see was poor, or focused heavily on trauma (think. refugee crisis, war ridden society, etc.). All I had wanted growing up was to read a book about an Arab princess, or an Arab girl who overcame her fear of spiders. Basic stories that mirrored the small everyday experiences I lived or wishes and dreams that I held in my heart were non-existent in the literature I consumed. Luckily for the children of today, this is no longer the case. I tried to include as many books with a non-trauma based storyline as I could within this guide, but in truth, more of those books have yet to be written or published. It was easier to find books with non-trauma based lens in the young adult novels and early chapter book sections. With that being said, I do believe that there is something for everyone within this guide, and there are notes featured on how to kindly and mindfully integrate the novels with heavier topics in your classroom.

# Picture Books

Books for  
Grades K-3

**The Name Jar**  
By: Yangsook Choi



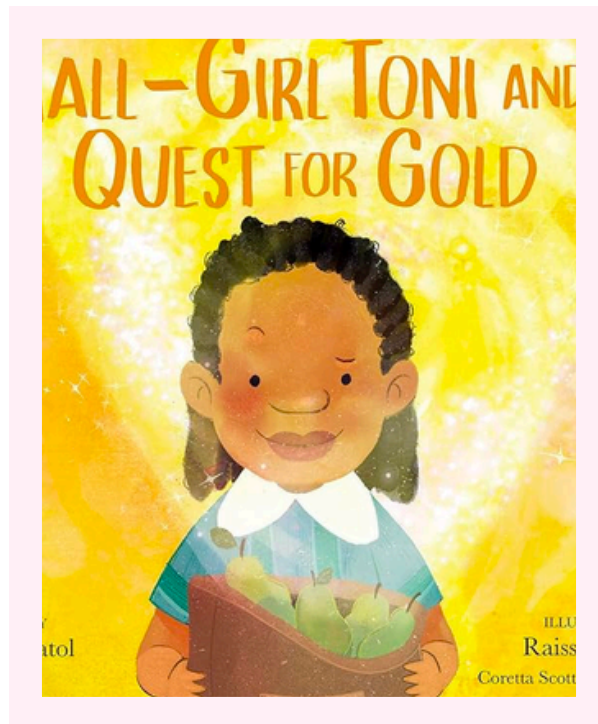
### Summary:

Unhei has just arrived in America from Korea and has a lot to adjust to. Not only is she worried about making new friends, she soon comes to realize that her new American friends cannot pronounce her name. In an effort to fit in, she decides to tell her friends that she has no name. Her well-meaning friends create a 'name jar' and each day Unhei tests out a new name to replace her old one. After one of her classmates visits her neighbourhood, he learns the beautiful meaning of Unhei's name. When it comes time for Unhei to choose a new name, the name jar disappears. Unhei's friends encourage her to share her true name, and she takes the time to teach them how to pronounce it properly.

### Why is this Important?:

This book shows how a seemingly unwelcoming and ignorant environment (like the one in which Unhei first walks into) can change into an environment in which everyone works collectively to be welcoming for all. Unhei's classmate visiting her neighbourhood and learning the true meaning of her name, and liking it, was such a powerful turn in the book, as he has shown her there is at least one friend who accepts her as is. This gives her the confidence to accept her name and her heritage. This book shows a key part of the immigrant experience.

**Small-Girl Toni and The  
Quest for Gold**  
By: Giselle Anatol and  
Raissa Figueroa



### Summary:

A book inspired by the life of Toni Morrison, *Small-Girl Toni and The Quest For Gold* follows Toni, a young girl and her journey to find gold through story-telling. Toni has loved telling stories her entire life, and she is really good at it. She believes that her stories can spin gold, but everyone discourages her. She believes that her stories can change the world. To disprove them, she goes on a journey with her siblings, and comes to realize that the gold she is searching for is within everyday moments, not a physical treasure.

### Why is this Important?:

This book is a work of literary art for both the adult audience member (who loves Morrison's work) and the child audience member who will appreciate the story and the beautiful artwork. This book shows the importance of storytelling, and can be used in multiple ways within the classroom. It also focuses on a great Black-American author, and can be a follow up on lessons about her. Finally, this novel is not trauma-based, making it a good everyday representation, that can be used at any point in the school year.

**We Love You as Much  
as the Fox Loves Its Tail**  
By: Masiana Kelly and  
Tamara Campeau



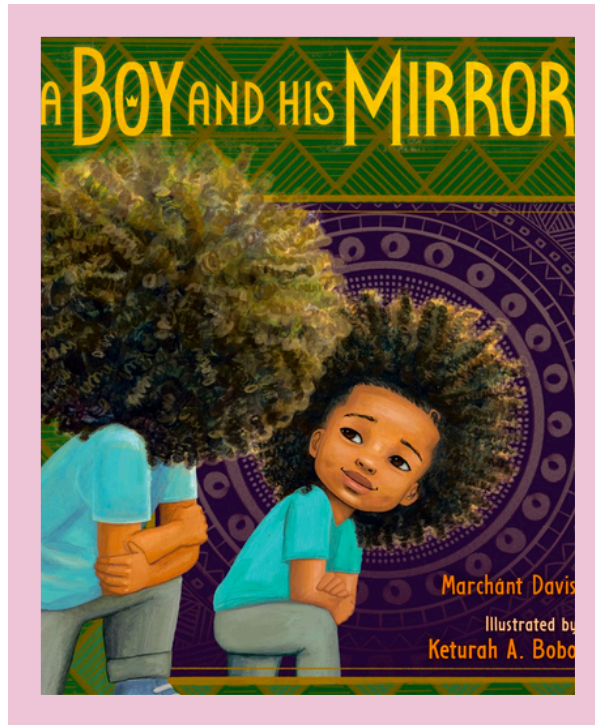
### Summary:

A beautiful poem that shows the process of welcoming a new member to one's family. This book showcases the many beautiful animals found within the arctic, and casts their perspectives through the love and celebration that comes with preparing for a new family member. With beautiful illustration, and a wonderful rhyme scheme, this picture book is well suited for the early age groups found within Elementary schools.

### Why is this Important?:

This book is written by Masiana Kelly, who is of both Dene and Inuk heritage and is a love letter to the world in which she grew up. Kelly, who is a school teacher herself, brought in inspiration from her own teaching experiences. This book would be a lovely addition to a social studies class on families, or even teaching younger Kindergarten students about the different animals within the Arctic region. *We Love You as Much as the Fox Loves Its Tail* does such a lovely job intertwining the natural, celestial, animal, and human world in a way that is both harmonic and beautiful. This picture book is one that is easy to integrate into everyday-lessons, and provides a small introduction into the world of Indigenous people in Northern communities.

**A Boy and His Mirror**  
**By: Marchánt Davis and**  
**Keturah A. Bobo**



### Summary:

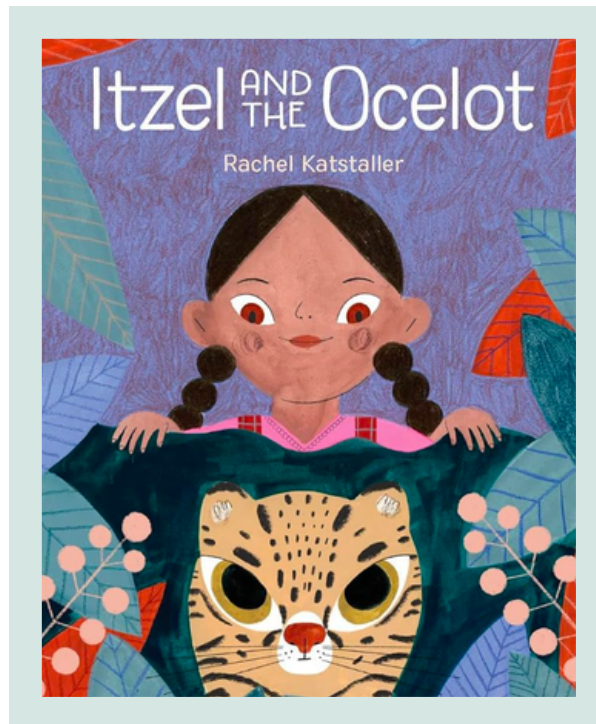
Chris has beautiful curly hair that he really likes. Unfortunately, the kids at school like to tease him about it, calling it girly and big. Chris can't understand why they do that to him. When looking in the mirror, a woman appears and tells Chris that his hair makes him look like a King! Chris decides to go to school and act like a king. The kids at school still treat Chris unkindly, Chris visits the mirror lady again to get more advice and she tells him to show the children at school what is in his heart. Soon after, all the kids in school learn that being kind and not making fun of each other is the way to go.

### Why is this Important?:

This picture book is multi-faceted in the sense that it tackles a few different issues at once, making it great for different lessons in the classroom. There is a theme of anti-bullying, that culminates at the end when everyone agrees to stop making fun of each other. Even better, *The Boy and His Mirror* touches on how all hair is beautiful and should be accepted and celebrated by each other. This is a great book, with positive representation, that can be used year round.



**Itzel and the Ocelot**  
**By: Rachel Katstaller**



### Summary:

Itzel loves to hear her nana tell the story of the giant snake who was awakened whenever their village needed rain. Her nana tells her that now that no one believes in the snake, it has retreated. It is an extremely dry season, and now, Itzel will do anything to get some rain to water her and nana's crops. Itzel goes on a journey to try awaken the snake, and is joined by jungle creatures who also rely on the rain. Itzel learns the power of courage and optimism.

### Why is this Important?:

This picture book is beautifully illustrated and well written. Beyond that, it also shows the care the author took to write about a folk story she grew up hearing in El Salvador, featuring words from the Indigenous language Nawat. Not only is Itzel a wonderful character to focus on, the book has a great environmental aspect that can support a lesson on climate change, as well. Itzel is a great character that students can enjoy being mirrored by.

**Imagine a Garden**  
**By: Rina Singh and Hoda**  
**Hadadi**



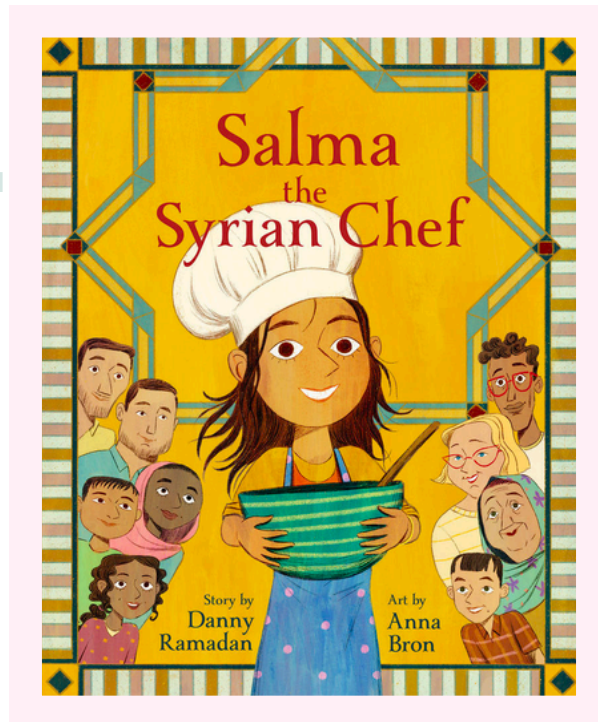
### Summary:

'Imagine a Garden- Stories of Courage Changing the World', is a resonating story about seven real-life average people who did amazing things for their communities in times of strife. This book focuses on moments brightness and bravery, even during war, poverty and violence. The book uses beautiful prose to discuss topics that are difficult to approach.

### Why is this Important?:

Rina Singh did a wonderful job working through human struggles that are important to discuss, in a way that is not hard to digest, even for early readers, ages 6 to 10. 'Imagine a Garden' goes through difficult topics with a lens of compassion, love and empathy. It is a great tool for teaching children about events that are ongoing in the world. While this book is a great, diverse, teaching tool, it should not be the sole representation of diverse students within your classroom. **Ensure that you are using this book alongside other, less trauma-based, diverse books.**

*Salma the Syrian Chef*  
by: Danny Ramadan and  
Anna Bron



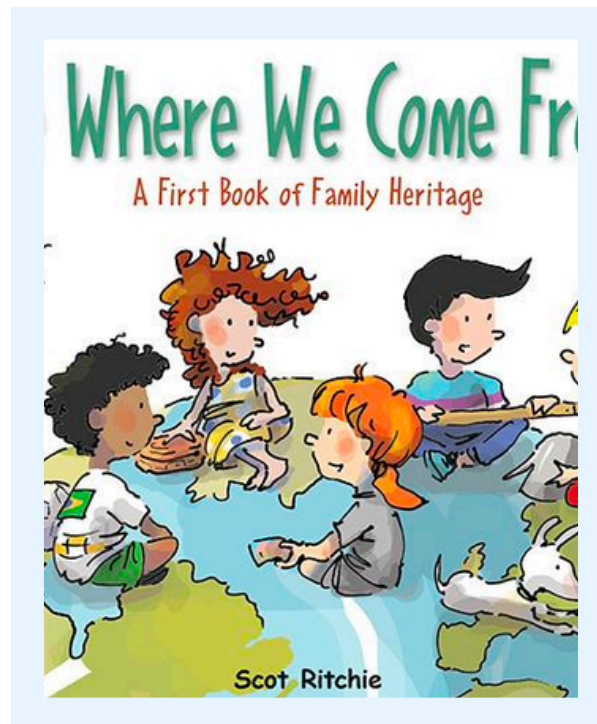
### Summary:

Salma's mom has been having a rough go of it lately. She's been trying to learn English, find a job, and a host of other things while missing Salma's dad who is still in Syria. Salma decides that she wants to make her mom happy by cooking her a homemade Syrian meal, but she doesn't know where to start! Luckily for her, the Welcome Center and the lovely people there are more than happy to lend her a hand. By the end, Salma shows her Mama that there is cause for hope and celebration.

### Why is this Important?:

Ramadan does a wonderful job encapsulating the Syrian migrant experience, while still keeping it light hearted and showing parts of Syrian culture through cuisine. The ending message that everything will be alright, and that there is still cause for hope is so extremely important, and valuable for all readers. This book is a good addition to any classroom, and can be a tool for culturally responsive pedagogy.

**See Where We Come  
From  
By: Scot Ritchie**



### Summary:

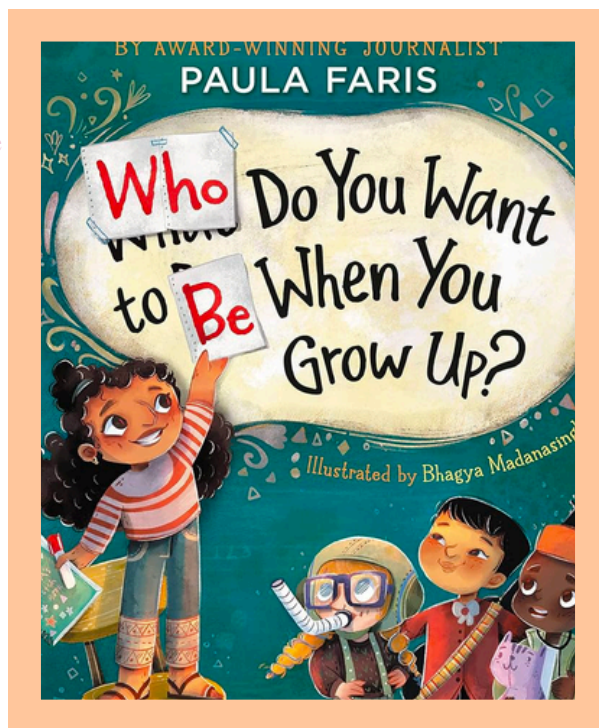
This picture book is a great introduction to the concept of heritage, and is a wonderful learning tool to use in the classroom. The five friends in Ritchie's series are very excited! The school is hosting a Heritage Festival and everyone is invited to share their culture and traditions with the school. Martin, Sally, Pedro, Nick and Yulee, are all excited to share their heritage. They share their music, food, language, games and more! By doing this, they come to realize that sharing culture and heritage makes everyone feel welcome.

### Why is this Important?:

'See Where We Are From' can benefit every classroom. This would be a perfect book to use while also hosting a Heritage Festival in your classroom, or better yet, making it an entire school event. Even if it is just used as a support to introduce young learners to the concept of heritage, this book does a great job at explaining a facet of multiculturalism.

**Who Do You Want to Be  
When You Grow Up?**

**By: Paula Faris and  
Bhagya Madanasingh**



**Summary:**

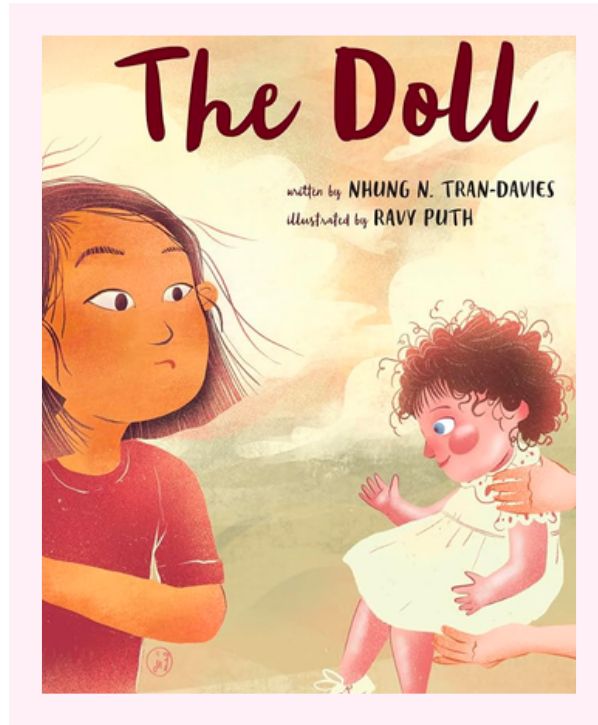
Career day is coming soon, and Lina has no clue what she wants to be when grows up. She knows that she has so many options! Lina's mother asks her a few important questions and Lina comes to understand that what she grows up to be is not as important as *who* she grows up to be.

**Why is this Important?:**

'Who Do You Want to Be When You Grow Up' is a great book to get young readers to think about the importance of their own gifts and talents, and how that can shape who they are. Paula Faris shows the audience that while a job is important, our character, the things we do for others, and how we change the world, is of far more importance. The mother in this book asks Lina some very important questions, that can also be valuable to ask young students. In the words of Paula Faris, she is inspiring children to "dream beyond the job". This book features positive diverse representation, without diversity being the main focus.

## The Doll

By: Nhung N. Tran-Davies and Ravy Puth



### Summary:

This picture book tells the stories of two young girls who arrive to North America as refugees, but a generation apart. Both young girls are greeted with a doll upon their arrival. The first girl who arrives years before the other character, recounts her experiences in North America. When she sees that there are more refugees seeking peace in N.A, she decides that she wants to give them the same kindness she received as a child. And so she goes and greets the new refugees and gives the youngest one a doll, just like how she received one.

### Why is this Important?:

This book is important for a number of reasons, one of them being the solidarity shown between one refugee to another. It shows that the refugee experience is not as lonely as some may believe it is. It is an experience shared by many, and it can provide hope that the main character has grown up and was able to share the same kindness she received with the next generation. Furthermore, this book shows that even the simplest act of kindness can help in situations where everything is new.

**A Sweet Meeting on  
Mimouna Night**  
By: Allison Ofanasky



**Summary:**

This story follows Miriam as she shares the Moroccan Jewish holiday of Mimouna with her Muslim neighbours. Miriam and her family want to make moufleta (a yummy dessert), but they don't have any flour at home! They decide to ask their neighbours for some flour, where Miriam becomes friends with Jasmine. Miriam and Jasmine go to bring the flour, and after that they move the party to Miriam's house where they share moufleta all together.

**Why is this Important?:**

This book shows the importance of inter-faith friendships, as well as providing a great look into Moroccan traditions. The end of the book provides the readers with a recipe for moufleta. This book can be used as a support for lessons on Passover, or even to show the importance of new friendships, and the respectful sharing of customs and traditions.

**How to Eat in Space**  
 By: Helen Taylor and  
 Stevie Lewis



### Summary:

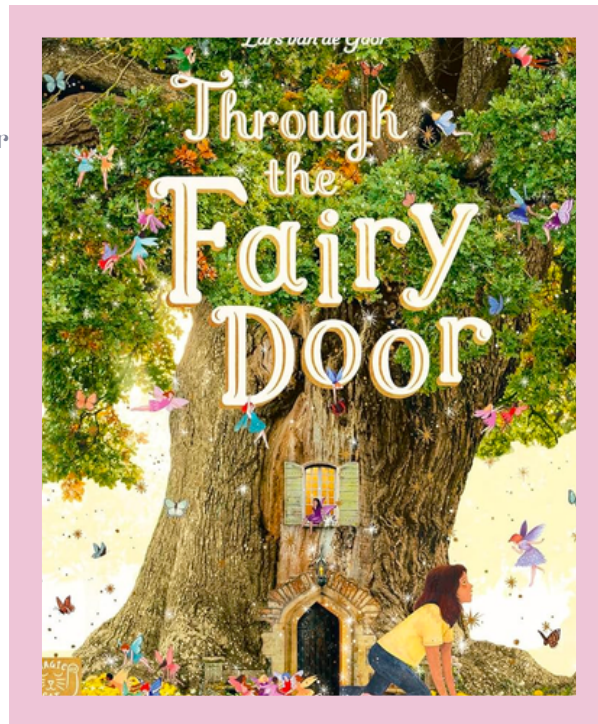
This book takes a deep dive into the history of space food, from the origin of tubed purees to food that is far more appetizing for current astronauts. It discusses the unique challenges that come with eating in microgravity, in a way that is accessible and enjoyable for early readers. It features interesting fact on NASA, and has real life pictures of astronauts.

### Why is this Important?:

This book is a perfect classroom addition that can be used in either a science or literacy class. It can be a great support for lessons on gravity! Furthermore the book features a diverse cast of characters doing something as awe inspiring as traveling in space, which can be a great culturally responsive tool for young readers to see themselves mirrored within.



**Through The Fairy Door**  
**By: Lars Van De Goor,**  
**Gabby Dawnay and**  
**Guilia Tomai**



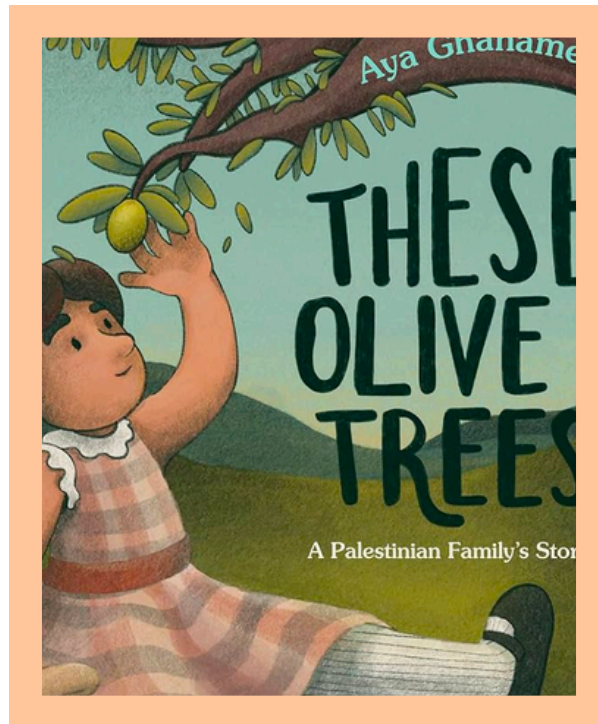
### Summary:

A beautifully illustrated fantasy book about a young girl who escapes the hustle and bustle of her city by simply taking the time to notice things around her. A red bird guides her to a tiny door, and after she steps through it, she is transported to a magical land, where fairies nourish the world around them. She learns of the importance of living harmoniously with nature, and upon returning home, she has hope that everything can change with something as simple as a seed.

### Why is this Important?:

'Through the Fairy Door' is a book that has great representation for diverse children. Though the main character's ethnicity is not specified, this text can still be relevant to diverse students and their experiences. This book can be a great mirror as it features positive representation. It can be used in multiple areas within the classroom, as it can work for a science lesson, literacy lesson, or can be used to support lessons on Earth Day.

**These Olive Trees**  
**By: Aya Ghanameh**



### Summary:

Oraib loves the olive harvest season. Sometimes she is too impatient to wait for the olives to be stomped and brined, so she bites them and finds that they are bitter. Sometimes though, she likes the bitterness. The olive trees are like a part of her family, and Oraib's mother always tells her daughter about the olive trees she used to have when she was a young woman living in a different city, before they had to move to the refugee camp. Even as they are uprooted once more, Oraib promises her olive trees that she will care for them, and visit them again.

### Why is this Important?:

This book shows a simple part of the refugee experience that is easy for young students to digest, without it being an overly emotionally heavy text. It can provide a small insight into the refugee experience, without deeply diving into the traumas associated with that experience. This text is important to use in classes, but **should not be the sole diverse text** that Arab and Middle Eastern students can connect to in your classroom, should you choose to use it.

# Early Reader Chapter Books

Books for  
Grades 2-4

**Salma Joins the Team**  
by: **Danny Ramadan and**  
**Anna Bron**



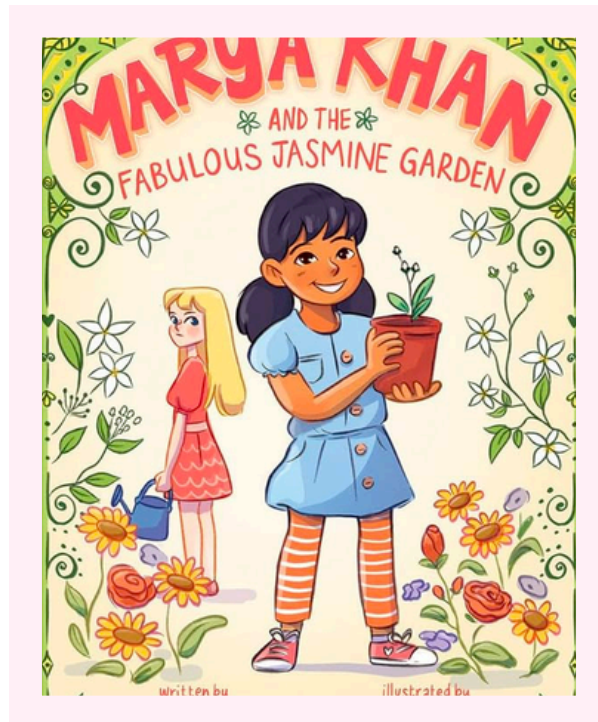
### Summary:

Salma wants to be a great swimmer, just like her idol the Olympian, Yusra Mardini. She practices hard, but when the older girls at the pool start to make mean comments, and the women at the mosque start to bring up body image and self-esteem issues, Salma thinks she might not be able to swim anymore. With the help of her family and friends, Salma goes back to pool and doesn't give up on her dreams.

### Why is this Important?:

This chapter book is a lovely work on the importance of self-love and believing in oneself. It touches on super important issues of self-esteem and the many things that can affect one's confidence. This book is great representation for Syrian girls, as it encourages self-confidence, while also being a great learning tool on topics like body image and self-esteem.

**Marya Khan and The  
Fabulous Jasmine  
Garden**  
By: Saadia Faruqi and  
Ani Bushry



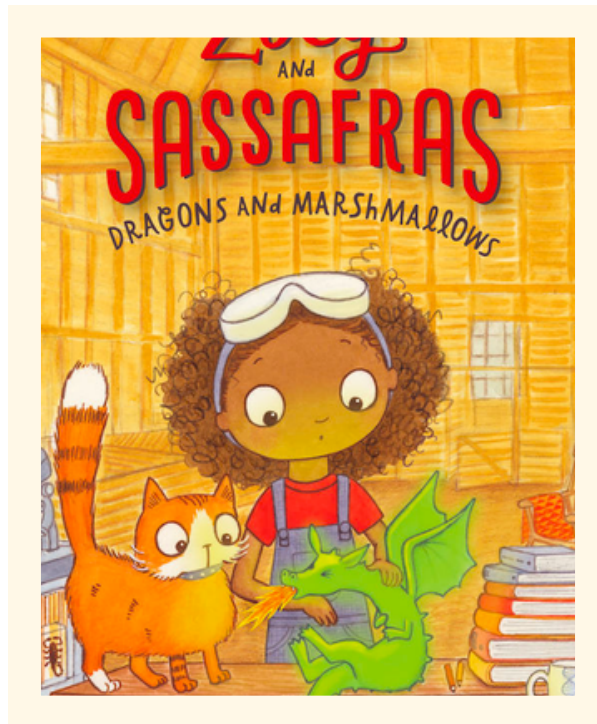
### Summary:

Marya's school has just started planning for a community garden, and is looking for a student to take the lead. Marya wants to be in charge so bad, especially since her mom is helping with the project, *but* so does her classroom nemesis! Will Marya be able to be the leader, when everything seems to go wrong? Even the birds are eating her plants!

### Why is this Important?:

Faruqi writes a cute and poignant novel about the difficulties that come with attaining one's goals, and the power of working together. It shows students the importance of caring for the earth around us, and just how much work goes into tending for a garden. This book is great representation for Pakistani North American students,

**Zoey and Sassafra's  
Dragons and  
Marshmallows**  
By: Asia Citro



### Summary:

The first book in a great series for early independent readers, Zoey has found a glowing photograph, and now all these magical creatures keep showing up at her door to get treated for injuries! This book focuses on helping a sick baby dragon. Will they be able to find out what is wrong with Marshmallow before it's too late?

### Why is this Important?:

'Zoey and Sassafra's' is a tried and true chapter book series that is sure to have all readers enjoying it. Beyond that, it provides wonderfully diverse representation in the field of fantasy. This book acts as a great mirror for diverse students and allows them to see themselves in admired positions (a vet that treats magical animals!!).

**The Magnificent  
Makers #1: How to Test  
a Friendship**  
By: Theanne Griffith  
and Reggie Brown



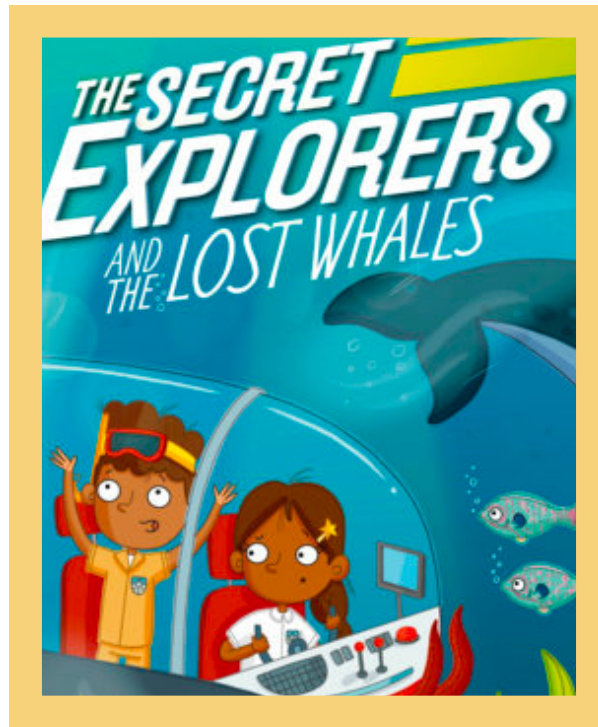
### Summary:

Violet and Pablo, best friends who love science, discover a riddle that opens a magic portal in their school's Science Space. With their new classmate Deepak, they find the Maker Maze, a magical makerspace with robots, 3D printers, and an antigravity chamber. Guided by a quirky scientist, the Magnificent Makers embark on exciting adventures that help them learn school science concepts and explore themes like failure, teamwork, courage, and jealousy.

### Why is this Important?:

This book holds positive representation for diverse students, as well as featuring a male lead character, which can be kind of tough to find in early reader chapter books. Overall, this book can be great to support science lessons, or used to help students understand the purpose of science spaces within the school, getting them excited to participate in activities. Furthermore, the book shows students the importance of friendships, and just what to do to be a good friend. It also features two science activities at the end!

**The Secret Explorers  
and the Lost Whales**  
By: SJ King



**Summary:**

The Secret Explorers, are a group of smart kids from around the world who solve problems and mysteries across the planet and beyond. They receive their missions at the Exploration Station and this time around, marine life expert Connor and space expert Roshni use a submarine to help a pod of lost humpback whales. Facing challenges like lost baby whales and a fleet of boats, they strive to steer the whales back on track.

**Why is this Important?:**

This adventure is filled with fun illustrations and facts about marine life and climate change, which can keep new readers engaged while learning about the natural world. Great to use for classroom read alouds, or as a book for quiet time. This culturally diverse novel allows students to see themselves in inspiring situations, and deals with the environmental issues in a way that is fraught with learning and hope.



# Junior- Intermediate Books

Books for  
Grades 5-8

## Opportunity Knocks

By: Sara Farizan



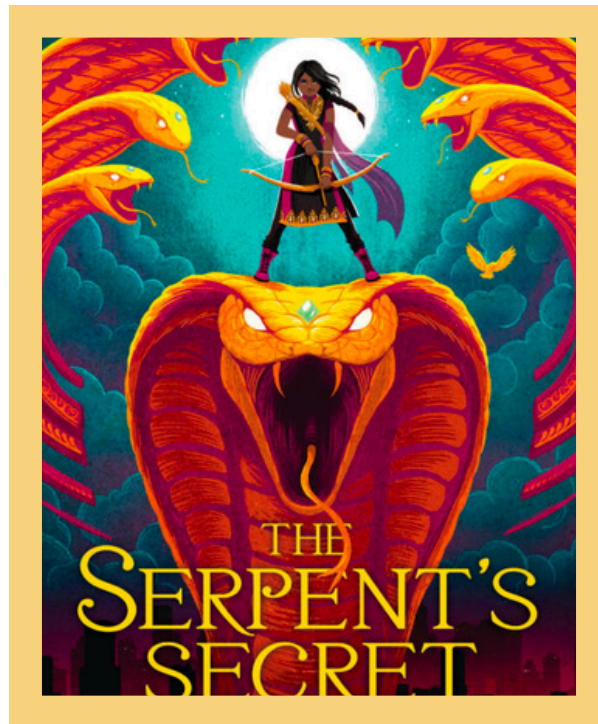
### Summary:

Lila feels left behind as her talented sister and athletic friend find their passions. She thinks she's found hers in her school's new band program, but its funding may be cut. When visiting a bank to secure a loan for the band program, Lila is shoved by a stranger who leaves behind a mysterious box with an old key and a message: "Remember to unlock the door for Opportunity." The key is magical, and after Lila falls asleep with it, a glowing door appears and when Lila unlocks it, a girl named Felise, representing luck and opportunity, emerges and offers Lila seven serendipitous days of luck. But, the man who lost the key will do anything to retrieve it from Lila.

### Why is this Important?:

This book provides a lovely fantasy element to the coming of age of a young girl. Everyone goes through a phase where they question who they are or what they are good at. Lila's interactions with Felise, and her questions about herself, are extremely relatable at that young age. An engaging book, with sensitive and inclusive representation, great for independent readers.

**Kirannmala and the  
Kingdom Beyond: The  
Serpent's Secret**  
By: Sayantani DasGupta



### Summary:

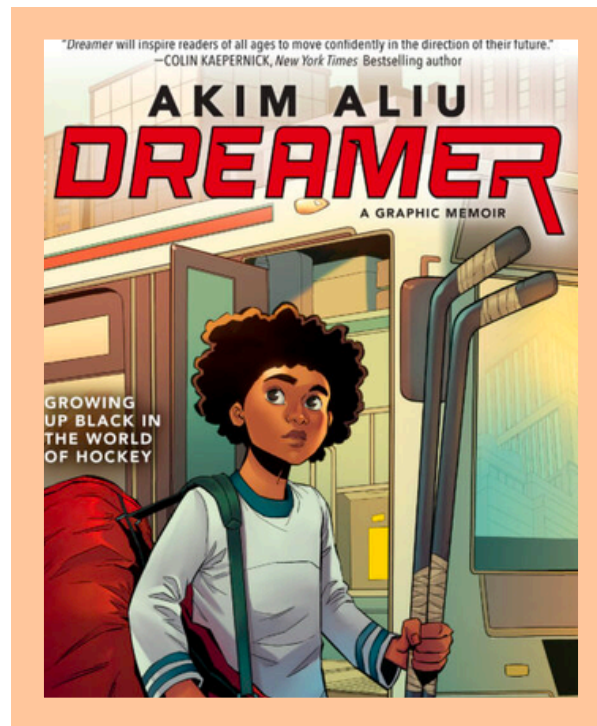
On her twelfth birthday, Kirannmala, a regular sixth grader in New Jersey, faces a shocking turn of events when her parents mysteriously vanish and a drooling rakkhosh demon bursts into her kitchen, ready to eat her. She soon discovers that her parents' fantastical stories might be true: she is a real Indian princess from a secret realm. Two cute princes arrive to rescue her, and Kiran is swept into a magical dimension filled with winged horses, moving maps, and talking birds. To find her parents and the world she must solve riddles and battle demons while evading the Serpent King and the Rakkhoshi Queen.

### Why is this Important?:

This book provides a modern day fantasy story, giving the readers insight into culturally diverse lore, and a great protagonist. This book would be wonderful for independent readers, who love to mix together magic and science. Perfect for fans of epic fantasy journeys, like that of Percy Jackson!

**Akim Aliu: Dreamer**

**By: Akim Aliu**



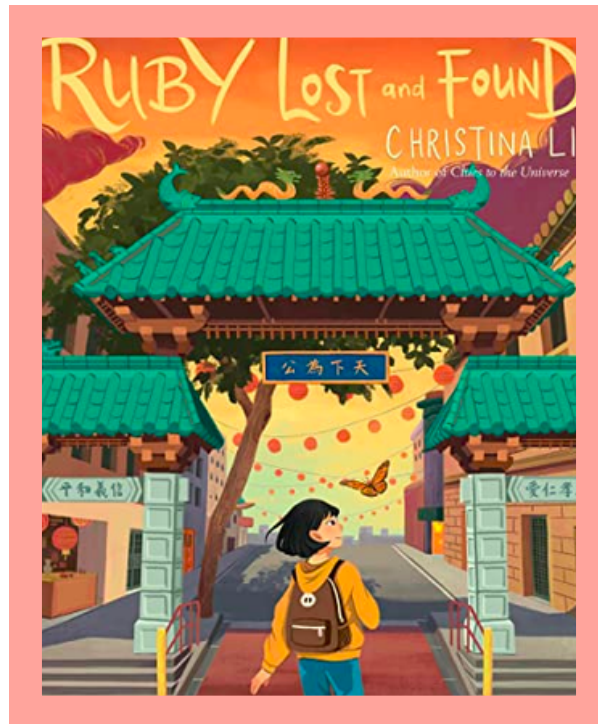
### Summary:

Akim Aliu, known as "Dreamer," is a Nigerian-born, Ukrainian Canadian professional hockey player who faced systemic racism throughout his global career. This graphic novel recounts Akim's remarkable journey, from being the only Black child in his Ukrainian school to enduring a brutal attack by a racist teammate in the Ontario junior league. A gripping graphic memoir, it serves as a powerful reminder to never stop dreaming, even in the face of adversity.

### Why is this Important?:

This book shows the effects of racism, while still providing the reader with hope that adversity can be overcome. Aliu's success in the field of hockey did not come easily to him, and he has faced racism in every aspect on the road to his dreams coming true. But this did not prevent him from achieving his goals. This book serves as a powerful reminder that racism is never ok, but it can also be a mirror to students who have experienced racial prejudice, reminding them that they too can overcome it.

**Ruby Lost and Found**  
**By: Christina Li**



**Summary:**

This award-winning novel follows thirteen-year-old Ruby Chu as she navigates her grief over her grandfather Ye-Ye's death through his epic San Francisco scavenger hunts. Ruby reconnects with her family, and fights to save a historic Chinatown bakery in her changing hometown as she spends the summer at a senior center with her grandmother Nai-Nai and her friends- and unexpectedly teams up with classmate Liam Yeung. Together, they work to save the bakery while Ruby retraces Ye-Ye's scavenger hunt maps, uncovering family secrets and finding herself along the way.

**Why is this Important?:**

'Ruby Lost and Found' shows the unexpected effects of grief, and the importance of remembrance in healing, as Ruby works through these tough emotions. Li does a great job touching on important topics, like gentrification, grief, and friendship, all the while showing that change can be adapted to, but not all change needs to be accepted.

**The Star that Always  
Stays**  
By: Anna Rose Johnson



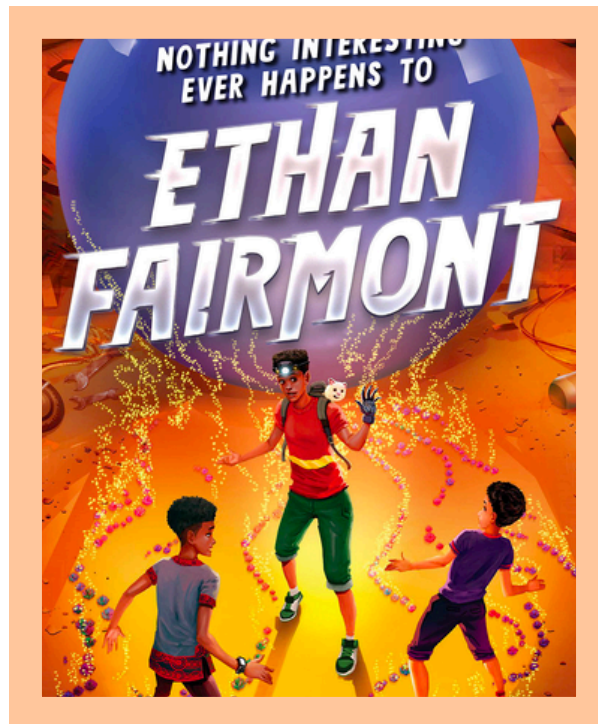
**Summary:**

Growing up on Beaver Island, Norvia was proud of her Ojibwe heritage, learning stories, songs, and crafts from her Grand-père and grandmothers. But in the city, Norvia's mother forces her to hide her Ojibwe identity, even from her new stepfather and stepbrother. Everything is new to Norvia in this town, with its movies, soda shops, and automobiles and the adjustment is overwhelming. Despite the changes and the threat of world war, Norvia and her five siblings are determined to make 1914 their best year ever. Norvia just doesn't know how to do that when she has to hide who she is...

**Why is this Important?:**

This beautifully woven coming-of-age historical fiction story, tells the tale of a brave heroine who overcomes racism, and assimilation. As well as first crushes, new friendships, and the building of a new family. Norvia is a well written, inspiring character, who is easy to relate to, for a multitude of reasons.

**Nothing Interesting Ever  
Happens to Ethan  
Fairmont  
By: Nick Brooks**



### Summary:

Ferrous city is the most boring place in the world, at least that is what Ethan Fairmont, a genius inventor (well at least he thinks he is), has to shelter in an abandoned garage. It's there that he runs into his ex-best friend Kareem, Juan Carlos and... Cheese? Cheese is an alien whose become stranded and needs the trio to help him with his repairs, and to bring him some spicy snacks. Will the boys be able to help Cheese or will the secret agents who've come looking for him get him first?

### Why is this Important?:

A lovely science fiction novel that focuses in on repairing friendships and spaceships. Ethan learns the importance of teamwork, as they work to conduct this intergalactic space rescue mission. A great work, that features positive representation of male friendships, while being fantastical and engaging.

# Young Adult Books

Books for  
Grades 9-12



**Fire Keeper's Daughter**  
By: Angeline Boulley



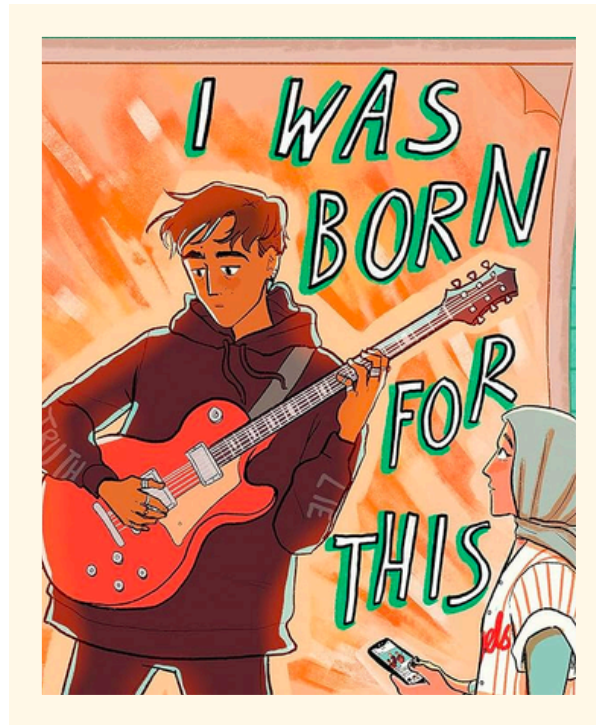
**Summary:**

Daunis is an unenrolled, biracial tribal member, who has always felt a little out of place. When she is sent to take care of her ailing mother, Daunis accidentally stumbles upon a murder. Asked to go undercover, Daunis agrees, but sees that more and more people are starting to get hurt. When the danger comes to her community, how far will Daunis go to protect it?

**Why is this Important?:**

This book is heavy, with some tough subject matter, which is important to be aware of, prior to picking it up. For older readers, it provides a good look into the strength of humans, and Daunis is a character who is great and weaving an interesting and engaging story. This book is super important, but it should not be the sole representation of Indigenous people within your classroom.

**I Was Born For This**  
By: Alice Oseman



### Summary:

For Angel Rahimi, life revolves around The Ark, a pop-rock trio of teenage boys who have captured her heart and given her a sense of belonging. As a devoted fan, The Ark defines her friendships, dreams, and identity.

Jimmy Kaga-Ricci, The Ark's frontman, has always wanted to be in a band, but his life has recently turned into a nightmare. When Angel and Jimmy are unexpectedly brought together, they must confront the unexpected and often challenging reality behind their dreams.

### Why is this Important?:

This book provides readers an easy to relate to work on coming to understand who you are and what matters to you in life. It also features representation on gender and sexuality, and the friendships that help make living in reality a little easier.

A Bánh Mì for Two

By: Trinity Nguyen



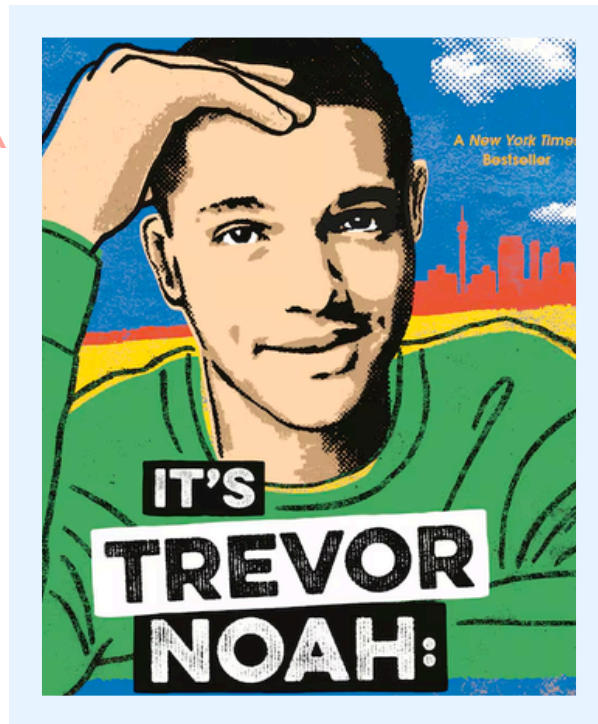
### Summary:

In Sài Gòn, Lan balances her duties as a perfect daughter, caring for her mother and their bánh mì stall, while secretly missing the food blog she once shared with her late father. Meanwhile, Vietnamese American Vivi Huynh, who has never visited Việt Nam, secretly travels there during her freshman year of college to uncover why her parents left and to try the dishes from her favorite food blog, A Bánh Mì for Two. When Vivi and Lan meet, they make a deal: Lan will guide Vivi through Sài Gòn and help her uncover her family's past, while Vivi will help Lan revive her blog and enter a food contest. In this journey, secrets and love are uncovered.

### Why is this Important?:

This book encourages readers to explore different parts of their identity and work through tough emotions. The main characters journey through their pasts, while Vivi also discovers more about her heritage and culture, through food, and through love. Great book for diaspora kids!

**It's Trevor Noah: Born A  
Crime: Stories From A  
South African  
Childhood  
By: Trevor Noah**



### Summary:

In his memoir adapted from the #1 New York Times bestseller *Born a Crime*, Trevor Noah, host of *The Daily Show*, recounts his upbringing in South Africa as the child of a black mother and a white father during apartheid—a time his existence was illegal. Using his sharp wit and smarts, Noah navigated a life marked by racial oppression and barriers. Luckily, his mother's relentless love and determination played a big role in his success. This eye-opening memoir gives readers an interesting view of South Africa's disturbing racial history.

### Why is this Important?:

'South African apartheid is one example of what humans can do to each other when ignorance and prejudice win out over compassion and human empathy. Trevor Noah rehashes his childhood in South Africa, living as a kid who was unlawfully born, in a way that is easily digestible and understood by young readers.

**Legendborn**  
By: Tracy Deonn



**Summary:**

After her mother dies in an accident, sixteen-year-old Bree Matthews escapes to a residential program at UNC-Chapel Hill, only to witness a magical attack. She encounters a flying demon, a secret society of “Legendborn” students who hunt such creatures, and a teenage mage who fails to erase her memory of the event. This failure awakens Bree’s own magic and uncovers a hidden link to her mother's death—a Merlin was present at the hospital. Needing to know the truth, Bree infiltrates the Legendborn. She teams up with Nick, an ex-member of the society, and their partnership reveals deeper secrets. Like how the Legendborn, who turn out to be descendants of King Arthur’s knights, must prepare for a looming magical war. Will Bree expose the society or joining their fight?

**Why is this Important?:**

A modern fantasy retelling, that beautifully weaves fantastical elements whilst also providing readers with culturally responsive and diverse characters. This book can act as a great mirror for students who may find themselves underrepresented in the fantasy genre.

**We Hunt the Flame**  
**By: Haf'sah Faizal**



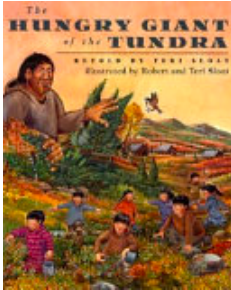
### Summary:

Zafira's community knows her as the Hunter- someone brave enough to traverse the Arz, a haunted forest that claims many. They also believe the Hunter is a man. Nasir is the prince, who kills anyone who goes against the rule of his father the Sultan. If anyone finds out the Hunter is a girl, or that Nasir is actually compassionate, both will face dire consequences. When Zafira learns that there is a possible cure for the Arz, she sets off on a journey to find it. The only problem is Nasir is sent on that same journey- with the added task of killing the Hunter.

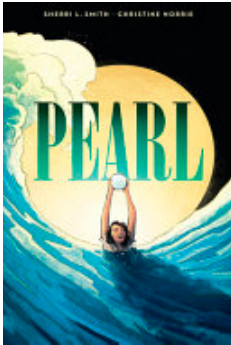
### Why is this Important?:

A beautifully written book that poignantly encapsulates parts of Arab tradition and culture in a fantasy setting. The main characters are well fleshed out, with good character arcs, and are culturally responsive. This novel would suit well within a literature course at the more advanced levels!

# Other Notable Books



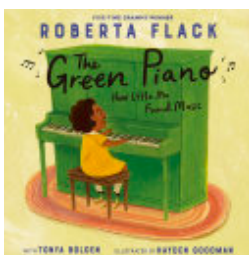
The Hungry Giant of the Tundra  
By: Olinka Michael, Robert Sloat and Teri Sloat



Pearl  
By: Sherri L. Smith, and Christine Norrie

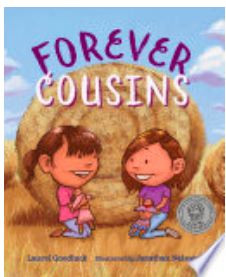


The Kindred  
By: Alechia Dow

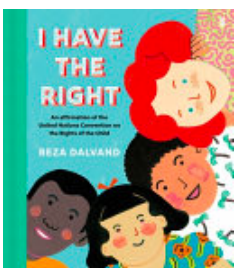


The Green Piano  
By: Tonya Bolden, Roberta Flack and Hayden Goodman

# Other Notable Books



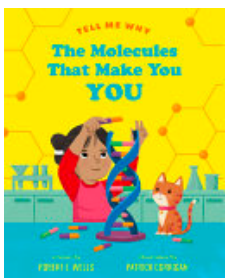
Forever Cousins  
By: Laurel Goodluck and  
Jonathan Nelson



I Have the Right  
By: Reza Dalvand



Hike  
By: Pete Oswald



The Molecules That Make  
You You  
By: Robert E. Wells and  
Patrick Corrigan



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Thank You For  
Reading