

Culturally Diverse Books Selected by SLJ's Review Editors

By SLJ's Reviews Editors on May 1, 2014



Illustration by Vanessa Brantley Newton

In her groundbreaking *Shadow and Substance: Afro-American Experience in Contemporary Children's Literature* (NCTE, 1982), Rudine Sims Bishop first articulated a concept of multicultural literature that would become the framework by which generations of librarians and educators would think about books for children. She emphasized the critical importance of multicultural literature for children and used the metaphor of “windows and mirrors” to explain the ways in which children experience other cultures and

see their own culture reflected and validated through the books they read. She later went on to develop several categories of multicultural literature: “culturally specific,” “generically American,” and “culturally neutral.”

Recent conversations on blogs, listservs, and other social media—as well as alarming new statistics on the state of multicultural literature for children—have underscored the continuing need for books that reflect the growing diversity of an increasingly global society. The debate over which kinds of multicultural literature are best or most needed has also been reignited.

To celebrate and shed much-needed light on books that feature cultural diversity, the *SLJ* Reviews editors selected recent titles that beautifully illustrate Bishop's concept of “windows and mirrors.” The list is divided into two major sections, culturally specific and culturally generic or neutral (please see the margin notes for a definition of terms). Neither list is meant to be exhaustive or comprehensive; they comprise but a small selection of recently published titles that the *SLJ* reviews editors have particularly enjoyed and feel deserve a place on most library shelves. The month in which the full review appeared follows each annotation; previously starred titles are noted. We encourage our readers to contribute additional title recommendations in the comments section below.



CULTURALLY SPECIFIC

PRESCHOOL TO GRADE 4

★ **CUNNANE, Kelly.** *Deep in the Sahara.* illus. by Hoda Hadadi. 40p. glossary. Random/Schwartz & Wade Bks.. 2013. Tr \$17.99. ISBN 9780375870347; lib. ed. \$20.99. ISBN 9780375970344. LC 2011050245.

Gr 2-4— Poetic text and evocative illustrations detail the story of a young Mauritanian girl who longs to wear a *malafa*—the head-to-toe covering worn by some Muslim women—like her mother and

Defining “culturally specific”

Expanding upon Bishop's original definition as books that “illuminate the experience of growing up a member of a particular, non-white cultural group,” we have selected fiction published since 2013 that features authentic and positive

sisters. A positive and empowering portrayal of Muslim culture.
(Nov. 2013)

★ **JOHNSON**, Angela. **All Different Now: Juneteenth, the First Day of Freedom.** illus. by E. B. Lewis. 40p. S. & S. May 2014. Tr \$17.99. ISBN 9780689873768.

portrayals of people from diverse ethnic, racial, and religious backgrounds, as well as characters who identify as LGBTQ or are from underrepresented socioeconomic groups.

Gr 2 Up— Johnson's stirring prose and Lewis's stunning paintings tell the story of a Juneteenth celebration through the eyes of a young girl on a plantation in the South. Both joyous and somber, this picture book offers children a glimpse into what life was like for slaves before and after emancipation. (May 2014.)

★ **KHAN**, Rukhsana. **King for a Day.** illus. by Christiane Krömer. 32p. glossary. Lee & Low. 2013. RTE \$17.95. ISBN 9781600606595. LC 2013007506.

PreS-Gr 2— Malik, a Pakistani boy who also happens to be in a wheelchair, is looking forward to Basant, the springtime festival and annual kite-flying contest. Vibrant and detailed collage and mixed-media illustrations show off the beauty of Malik's city and his exuberant joy as he wins the contest. Back matter offers readers additional information on the annual celebration of Basant. (Nov. 2013)

TONATIUH, Duncan. **Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote: A Migrant's Tale.** illus. by author. 32p. glossary. websites. Abrams. May 2013. RTE \$16.95. ISBN 9781419705830.

Gr K-2— When Pancho Rabbit's papa goes to El Norte to work in the lettuce and carrot fields and does not return, the young hare goes in search of him, running into a villainous coyote who promises him safe passage for a bit of his food. This award-winning picture book offers an allegory for the struggles faced by many migrants. (Apr. 2013)

GRADES 5 & UP

AGOSIN, Marjorie. **I Lived on Butterfly Hill.** tr. from Spanish by E. M. O'Connor. illus. by Lee White. S. & S./Atheneum. 2014. Tr \$16.99. ISBN 9781416953449. ebk. \$9.99. ISBN 9781442494763.

Gr 6 Up— Inspired by events surrounding Pinochet's takeover of Chile in the late 1960s, this is the story of 11-year-old Celeste, whose parents send her to live in Maine while her country is in turmoil. Strong supporting characters and rich details bring to life Celeste's Chilean culture. (May 2014.)

★ **BASSOFF**, Leah & Laura DeLuca. **Lost Girl Found.** 216p. chron. further reading. glossary. maps. Groundwood. 2014. Tr \$16.95. ISBN 9781554984169; ebk. \$14.95. ISBN 9781554984183.

Gr 8 Up— Poni, a Didinga girl caught in the midst of the brutal Sudanese civil war, must journey through many dangers to a refugee camp. Though much attention has been paid to the Lost Boys of the Sudan, Bassoff and DeLuca offer readers a heartbreaking look at what life was like for many women and girls who survived the conflict. (Apr. 2014)

★ **BURG**, Ann E. **Serafina's Promise**. Scholastic. Tr \$16.99. ISBN 9780545535649; ebk. \$16.99. ISBN 9780545549943.

Gr 4-6— In this poignant novel in verse, Serafina, a girl living in poverty-stricken Haiti, wishes to become a doctor. Caught in the middle of the devastating 2010 earthquake, Serafina must overcome both physical and metaphorical obstacles in the pursuit of her dream. (Nov. 2013)

★ **EDINGER**, Monica. **Africa Is My Home: A Child of the Amistad**. illus. by Robert Byrd. 64p. map. notes. Candlewick. 2013. Tr \$17.99. ISBN 9780763650384. LC 2012947752.

Gr 4-8— The events surrounding the *Amistad* slave ship and the famous trial are brought to life through the eyes of nine-year-old Magulu, abducted from her home in Sierra Leone. Meticulously researched, with folk-art-style illustrations that reflect her fears and hopes, Magulu's story illustrates this wrenching and pivotal moment in the history of the slave trade. (Aug. 2013)

FREEDMAN, Paula J. **My Basmati Bat Mitzvah**. 256p. Abrams/Amulet. 2013. Tr \$16.95. ISBN 9781419708060; ebk. \$16.95. ISBN 9781613125236. LC 2013005791.

Gr 4-7— This humorous middle-grade novel introduces readers to 12-year-old Tara Feinstein, who is learning to navigate her religious beliefs and her own sense of self as a half-Indian, half-Jewish girl. Tara struggles realistically with the biased perceptions of others but ultimately finds strength and pride in her diverse heritage. (Dec. 2013)

PARRY, Rosanne. **Written in Stone**. 208p. Random. 2013. Tr \$16.99. ISBN 978-0-375-86971-6; PLB \$19.99. ISBN 9780375969713; ebook \$10.99. ISBN 9780375985348. LC 2012012491.

Gr 5-7— In 1918, a 13-year-old girl from the Makah tribe of the Pacific Northwest struggles with the sudden death of her father and tries to preserve the stories and ways of her people in the face of cultural and environmental upheaval by white whalers. (Jun. 2013)

★ **WILES**, Deborah. **Revolution**. 544p. (The Sixties Trilogy: Bk. 2). Scholastic. May 2014. Tr \$19.99. ISBN 9780545106078. ebk. \$19.99. ISBN 9780545634007.

Gr 5 Up— This title follows the intersecting stories of a black boy and a white girl living in Mississippi during the tumultuous Freedom Summer. Through song lyrics, biblical verses, photographs, speeches, essays, and other ephemera, this documentary novel places readers in the middle of one of the most important—and dangerous—moments during the Civil Rights Movement. (May 2014.)

★ **WOODS**, Brenda. **The Blossoming Universe of Violet Diamond**. 240p. Penguin/Nancy Paulsen Bks. 2014. Tr \$16.99. ISBN 9780399257148.

Gr 4-6— Eleven-year-old Violet, who has grown up in a mostly white environment, longs to reconnect with the African American side of her family. Violet's struggles with not fitting wholly into either world reflect the reality of many biracial kids. (Mar. 2014)

YANG, Gene Luen. **The Shadow Hero**. illus. by Sonny Liew. 176p. First Second. July 2014. Tr \$17.99. ISBN 9781596436978.

Gr 7 Up— Rediscovering an obscure comic book hero from the 1940s, the Green Turtle, who may have been the first Asian American superhero, Yang and Liew have breathed new life into this hero, giving him a backstory. The son of Chinese immigrants, Hank's an unlikely comic book protagonist: after all, his mother is the one who's decided he's destined to become a hero. Yang and Liew play expertly with the concept of clichés and racial stereotypes, creating both a fast-paced and action-packed tale of sequential art and a rich story laced with an intuitive understanding of cultural nuances. (Forthcoming Jun. 2014)



CULTURALLY GENERIC/NEUTRAL

PRESCHOOL TO GRADE 4

LIN, Grace. **Ling & Ting Share a Birthday**. illus. by author. 48p. Little, Brown. 2013. Tr \$14.99. ISBN 9780316184052. LC 2012040965.

PreS-Gr 1— Lin has created another engaging beginning chapter book about a pair of Chinese American twins. Ling and Ting are real kids with individual strengths and weakness and their own brand of problem solving, here applied to familiar birthday topics

Defining “culturally generic/culturally neutral”

Combining and modifying Bishop's categories of “generically American” and “culturally neutral” books, we selected fiction titles published since 2013 that

as gifts, shopping, baking, wishing, and writing a story to capture the highlights of a special day. The gouache artwork extends the clever and amusing story line, which celebrates the fun and friendship aspects of twindom, while subtly reinforcing the cultural representation. (Aug. 2013)

MACHADO, Ana Maria. **What a Party!** tr. from Spanish by Elisa Amado. illus. by Hélène Moreau. 32p. Groundwood. 2013. Tr \$18.95. ISBN 9781554981687.

feature positive portrayals of diverse characters. These books are those in which the main character(s) "just happen" to be a member of a non-white, non-mainstream cultural group. These stories, rather than informing readers about individual cultures, emphasize cultural common ground.

PreS-Gr 1— A birthday party gets a bit out of hand when the host instructs guests to bring as many people and favorite foods as they like. The colorful fiesta explodes across the pages as diverse characters join in on the chaotic but exuberantly joyful celebration.

MONTIJO, Rhode. **The Gumazing Gum Girl: Chews Your History.** illus. by author. 128p. (Gum Girl: Bk. 1). Disney/Hyperion. 2013. Tr \$14.99. ISBN 9781423157403.

Gr 2-4— A freak accident turns Gabby Gomez, bubble gum aficionado, into the sticky, super-powered Gum Girl. Readers will laugh along with and root for the daring Latina heroine in this graphic novel/chapter book hybrid. (Jul. 2013)

THOMPSON, Carol. **One, Two, Three...Crawl!** illus. by author. 12p. (Little Movers). Child's Play. 2013. Tr \$4.99. ISBN 9781846436147.

Baby/Toddler— With few words and charming illustrations, the latest addition to this board book series features an adorably diverse group of tots crawling around, exploring, and chewing on their gorgeously textured fabric and tissue-paper collage environment. For use one-on-one or in a baby storytime, this title begs for repeated readings.

GRADES 5 & UP

★ **ALEXANDER**, Kwame. **The Crossover.** 240p. Houghton Harcourt. 2014. Tr \$16.99. ISBN 9780544107717. LC 4500437263.

Gr 6 Up— This lyrical novel in verse stars twin African American middle-school athletes, Josh and Jordan, who have both benefitted from their dynamic dad's coaching and their mom's firm but loving support. Conflicts arise as one boy is more successful socially and feelings of jealousy and abandonment affect their relationship on and off the court. Alexander's poems can be powerful and propulsive, humorous and raucous, and introspective and moving. Ultimately, this family story hums with energy and touches readers where they live. (Mar. 2014)

BACIGALUPI, Paolo. **Zombie Baseball Beatdown.** 304p. Little, Brown. 2013. Tr \$17. ISBN 9780316220781.

Gr 5-9— Though this fun read is an adventure-packed, thrill-a-minute zombie ride, it's more than that; it's also a hilarious and well-written story that addresses some serious themes: immigration, food safety and the meat industry, and more. While the characters touch on race and culture in meaningful but age-appropriate ways—first-person narrator Rabi is Indian American, and his friend Miguel is Hispanic—the underlying issues will appeal to a wide range of readers. (Aug. 2013)

DE LA PEÑA, Matt. **The Living.** 320p. Delacorte. 2013. Tr \$17.99. ISBN 9780385741200; lib. ed. \$20.99. ISBN 9780-375989919; ebook \$9.99. ISBN 9780375984358.

Gr 9 Up— Recipient of a 2014 Pura Belpré honor, this edge-of-your seat disaster thriller stars a biracial boy named Shy, whose job on a cruise ship lands him in the middle of "The Big One," a massive earthquake that wreaks havoc on the California coast. Underneath the rollicking survival tale is a thoughtful exploration of race and class in modern America. (Oct. 2013)

FEDERLE, Tim. **Five, Six Seven, Nate!** 304p. S. & S. 2014. Tr \$16.99. ISBN 9781442446939; ebk. \$10.99. ISBN 9781442446960. LC 2012051239.

Gr 5-8— In this follow-up to the multiple award-winning *Better Nate Than Ever* (S. & S., 2013), Nate juggles being an understudy in a Broadway production of *E.T.: The Musical*, having a secret admirer, and trying to find a boyfriend for his aunt. Federle's gentle and positive exploration of the preteen's sexuality, combined with charming supporting characters and laugh-out-loud high jinks makes this one of the best new middle-grade series. (Feb. 2014)

JOHNSON, Alaya Dawn. **The Summer Prince.** 304p. Scholastic/Arthur A. Levine Bks. 2013. Tr \$17.99. ISBN 9780545417792; ebk. \$17.99. ISBN 9780545520775.

Gr 9 Up— Set in a futuristic Brazil in which sexuality is fluid and unrestrained, this gender-bending novel features budding graffiti artist June, who falls in star-crossed love (along with her best friend, Gil) with the daring and charismatic Enki. The pair create revolutionary masterpieces to rebel against the government's strict laws banning new technology, all the while counting the days until Enki—the newly crowned Summer King—must die ceremoniously according to their matriarchal society's customs. (Apr. 2013)

JOHNSON, Varian. **The Great Greene Heist.** 240p. Scholastic/Arthur A. Levine Bks. May 2014. Tr \$16.99. ISBN 9780545525527; ebk. \$16.99. ISBN 9780545525541. LC 2013029145.

Gr 5-8— Jackson Greene, a middle-school troublemaker with a heart of gold, concocts an elaborate con in order to help the girl he likes. Johnson's characters are charming and funny and represent a refreshing diversity of ethnic backgrounds. (Mar. 2014)

★ **KADOHATA**, Cynthia. **The Thing About Luck**. illus. by Julia Kuo. S. & S./Atheneum. 2013. Tr \$16.99. ISBN 9781416918820; ebk. \$9.99. ISBN 9781442474673. LC 2012021287.

Gr 5-8— Summer Miyamoto, daughter of wheat harvesters, has had a long year of bad luck. She's hoping that a summer on the road, traveling from farm to farm with her grandparents and younger brother, will turn things around. Summer's unique relationship with her Japanese immigrant grandparents—the quarrelsome Obaachan and gentle Jiichan—brings a tenderhearted depth to this multigenerational story. (Jun. 2013)

LACOUR, Nina. **Everything Leads to You**. 320p. Dutton. May 2014. Tr \$17.99. ISBN 978052 5425885; ebk. \$10.99. ISBN 9781101593509.

Gr 9 Up— Emi is a mixed-race teen working her way up in the LA film industry and getting over her first love when she falls for a beautiful, mysterious girl who's at the center of a Hollywood secret. The novel briefly touches upon the hardship some teens face upon coming out as LGBT but primarily focuses on the wonders of a burgeoning attraction and relationship, rather than the girls' sexual identity. With likable characters, an interesting plot, and themes of love and loss, this one will have widespread appeal. (May 2014.)

★ **MEDINA**, Meg. **Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass**. Candlewick. 2013. Tr \$16.99. ISBN 9780763658595; ebk. \$16.99. ISBN 9780763663544. LC 2012943645.

Gr 8 Up— Piddy Sanchez just wants to make it through high school, but Yaqui Delgado tries to make life miserable for Piddy. This realistic portrayal of teen bullying features two Latinas against the backdrop of an ethnically diverse Queens neighborhood. (Apr. 2013)