

TRJ bibliography 2024-2025

*** New this year

BOARD BOOKS

Cat's First Baby / Natalie Nelson

Mom and Dad bring a new baby home, and the cat is fascinated. The newcomer doesn't look, sound, or smell like a cat. Readers will enjoy this sweet story of a cat and baby learning about each other and becoming friends.

******Families Grow*** / Dan Saks, illustrated by Brooke Smart

(Adoption inclusive)

A gentle read that shines light on different ways families may grow including surrogacy and adoption.

Give Me a Snickle! / Alisha Sevigny

What happens when you combine a snuggle and a tickle? You get a snickle! This delightful board book introduces a diverse cast of adults and babies sharing higgles, sniggles, snuggles, and of course, snickles. Pure joy!

Who Takes Care of You / Hannah Eliot, illustrated by Jade Orlando

An aunt, a mommy, a grandfather, a babysitter and others take care of young children in this sweetly-illustrated board book. The text is rhymed and told from the perspective of the children as they go about their day, from having breakfast in the morning to stories at bedtime.

PICTURE BOOKS

All Are Neighbors / Alexandra Penfold, illustrated by Suzanne Kaufmann

Preschool-Grade 3

This beautiful book answers the question, "what is a community?" The colorful illustrations are full of wonderful details. Readers will enjoy visiting this happy diverse neighborhood, full of people going to work, taking a walk, meeting friends, and so much more. Check out other books by the same pair of creators, including ***Big Feelings***.

All Are Welcome / Alexandra Penfold, illustrated by Suzanne Kaufmann

The Day You Begin / Jacqueline Woodson, illustrated by Rafael Lopez

Grades K-3 – Book Corner, August 2022

The first day of school is scary – especially when you are worried about fitting in. Will there be other kids who look like you? Will the other kids like you if your clothes or lunch or language is different from theirs? Both of these reassuring books feature happy inclusive classrooms. Children of different colors, nationalities, and religions are shown learning and having fun together. Reading one – or both – of these books with your young child will help ease the back-to-school jitters.

******Duck, Duck Tiger*** / Brittany R. Jacobs, illustrated by Suzanne Kaufmann
Grades preK-3

(girl focus, LGBTQ focus)

A young girl feels different inside and is wary to share her feelings of otherness until she finds a community that embraces her.

Everything In Its Place: A Story of Books and Belonging / Pauline David-Sax, illustrated by Charnelle Pinkney Barlow
Preschool-Grade 2

When it's time for recess, Nicky helps in the school library instead of going outside. She doesn't think she has a place in the groups of kids playing games on the playground. She loves to read and feels at home surrounded by books in the library. The story ends hopefully, as Nicky makes a friend who shares her love of poetry. Nicky is on her way to finding a place to belong. A good book to share with a shy child who needs encouragement to reach out to others.

I Am Me: A Book of Authenticity / Susan Verde, illustrated by Peter H. Reynolds
Preschool-Grade 3

We are all different, and “difference is what makes life beautiful and miraculous.” With engaging illustrations and text, *I Am Me* encourages readers to show who they really are, find their spark, celebrate the things that have meaning for them, surround themselves with those who accept and support them, and so much more. An Author's Note about mindfulness meditation ends this affirming book, which would be a great choice to read and discuss. Check out the other books by this author and illustrator, some of which are also available as board books.

Ice Cream Face / Heidi Woodward
Ages 3-5

Mixed media illustrations depict a young boy's love of ice cream, his anticipation of going to an ice cream parlor, and the disappointment he experiences when his scoop falls from his cone.

The Me I Choose to Be / Natasha Anastasia Tarpley, illustrated by Regis and Kahran Bethencourt
Preschool Grade 3

Beautiful photographs and rhyming text describe some of the amazing possibilities open to young readers. “I am a planet, a limitless galaxy, and I am the me I choose to be.”

Song in the City / Daniel Bernstrom, illustrated by Jenin Mohammed
Preschool-Grade 2

A young blind girl named Emmeline hears music in the city sounds, but her grandmother just hears noise. Grandma is in a hurry, and rushes Emmeline along. When they get to church and the choir sings, Grandma says “now, I tell you, that’s a song.” This book has booms, rumbles, clickity-clacks, and a sweet ending when Grandma hears music in the city’s sounds.

Stacey’s Extraordinary Words / Stacey Abrams, illustrated by Kitt Thomas
Kindergarten-Grade 2

As a young child, Stacey Abrams loved words. She loved them so much that she entered several spelling bees. This is the story of her first spelling bee and how she learned that “failure is never more than an invitation to try again.”

Why Not You? / Ciara and Russell Wilson, illustrated by Jessica Gibson
Preschool-Grade 2 – *Book Corner, May 2022*

How can children make their big dreams come true? The encouraging rhyming text of this colorful picture book encourages kids to believe in themselves, work hard, and try again when they meet obstacles along the way. The joyful illustrations are action-packed with diverse children playing and pursuing their dreams. ***Why Not You*** is a happy and inspiring confidence booster!

The World Belonged to Us / Jacqueline Woodson, illustrated by Leo Espinosa
Kindergarten-Grade 3 – *Book Corner, July 2022*

It’s summer! Travel back to the 1970s, when kids spent their days playing outside and enjoying their freedom from school and grown-ups. Set in Brooklyn, this exuberant book shows a diverse bunch of kids making their own world of fun in the streets. Jumping rope, making games with bottle caps and cans, playing stick ball and tag, and so much more. ***The World Belonged to Us*** is a joyous way to encourage free play, creativity, and making friends. Go outside and play!

The Year We Learned to Fly / Jacqueline Woodson, illustrated by Rafael Lopez
Preschool-Grade 3

A brother and sister are bored because it’s raining and they can’t go outside. Their grandmother tells them to “Lift your arms, close your eyes, take a deep breath…” The children close their eyes and learn to free their minds and fly. When they argue, their grandmother encourages them to fly away from being mad. Inspired by Virginia Hamilton’s classic book ***The People Could Fly: American Black Folktales***, Jacqueline Woodson has created a story to encourage young people to fly past hard times.

CHILDREN'S FICTION

Blended / Sharon Draper

Grades 4-7

Girl focus, divorce, blended families, biracial

Told from the perspective of an 11 year old, whose parents are divorced, Izzy / Isabella relays her experiences being shuttled between both parents' homes (she can't call either house her home). Her mother is white and her father is Black and not much is ever said to her about being two different races until a racist event (targeted at her close friend) happens at school.

Suddenly, Izzy is forced to "check the box" as to what her racial identity is and she doesn't know what to do.

As the story unfolds, more events related to Izzy's racial identity occur. A boy seems to like Izzy, but it hurts when she finds out he's curious about her "exotic" looks. When she and her Black stepbrother get profiled by the police while getting ice cream, they're both pulled from the car and the situation becomes racist and violent.

Since everything is relayed in Izzy/Isabella's voice, the story is accessible to young adolescents. There are tough topics related to blended families, divorce, race and racism that make this a reading journey to be shared between responsive parents or adults and children reading this book.

Enemies / Svetlana Chmakova

Grades 5 and up

Felicity wants to do great things, but has trouble finishing the ambitious projects she starts. She decides to show everyone – especially her “perfect” sister - that she can be successful. She and three friends sign up for a big contest at school, and Felicity is determined that her group will win. Things don't go as planned, though, and soon everyone is mad at Felicity. Graphic Novel readers will enjoy following Felicity and her diverse group of friends through the challenges of middle school friendships.

For Black Girls Like Me / Mariama Lockington

Grades 4-7

Girl focus, transracial adoption, mental illness

Spoiler Alert! This review reveals some of the plot.

This is the story of eleven-year-old Keda. She's a transracial adoptee who doesn't know much about her family of origin. She has a best friend named Lena who is also Black and adopted. However, Keda and her family have to move to another state for her father's job. Her sister Eve and their mother are angry, upset and vocal about the move. They have lots of tears and tantrums, but Keda doesn't. She keeps her thoughts and worries bottled up inside and, instead of airing them, she bites her tongue or her lip. She begins to pull out her hair too!

At her new school, a girl bullies Keda and calls her the “N” word too. Keda isn’t feeling safe with her mom or close enough to her sister to let either of them know. She writes about the experiences in a journal she shares with Lena (they mail it back and forth to each other). One day, Keda’s mom finds the journal, reads about the bullying Keda’s been enduring and immediately goes to school to withdraw both of her daughters. Unfortunately, there’s no conversation about the racism or bullying Keda’s endured, and no other support is provided either.

The girls’ father leaves for a long, music tour of Europe. The night before he leaves, Keda intensely wishes he would stay, but the words don’t pass their lips. For many valid reasons, she can’t air her grief or worries to anyone in her family. Meanwhile, her mother grows more irritable and is sleeping a lot. To get away from the situation, Eve takes a summer job. This leaves Keda even more isolated.

How can Keda hold on with no friends, an absent father, a mentally ill mother and an angry big sister who is afraid she’ll inherit her mother’s mental illness? Things come to a climax when Keda’s mother runs away with the girls while in a manic state. Some pretty bad things happen (her mother attempts suicide).

What’s important about this book for families formed by transracial adoption you might ask? It’s a story that speaks a lot about what not to do, yet it’s a read that could prompt some serious yet necessary conversations between friends and family members about adoption, race, racism, heredity, bullying, mental health, school, friendship and being safe at home, at school and in the world.

Miles Lewis, Whiz Kid / Kelly Starling Lyons, illustrated by Wayne Spencer
Grades 1-3

It’s time for the Science Fair, and Miles is excited. Last year’s project was okay, but this year he wants to do something great. He and some friends form a team and, with help from Miles’ cousin, come up with an awesome project idea. Constructing the project is challenging, though, and Miles becomes angry and jealous. He feels like the odd man out, and keeps making mistakes that slow the team’s progress. Readers will be happy to see Miles overcome his self-doubt and help the team make a project they can all be proud of. Other titles in this series include ***Miles Lewis: King of the Ice*** and ***Miles Lewis: Matchmaker***.

Playing the Cards You’re Dealt / Varian Johnson
Grades 4-7

Ten-year-old Ant has one goal – to win the annual Spades Tournament. Winning at spades is a family tradition, so Ant has something to prove. Unfortunately, the deck seems stacked against him. Jamal, his best friend and spades partner, is grounded after a playground fight. Ant has to find a new partner, so he asks Shirley, the new girl in school. She’s a great spades player – and very pretty, too. Between being teased about playing with a girl, difficult conversations with Jamal, and the pressure he’s putting on himself to win, Ant is having a tough time. And something is going on with his father,

too. Ant sees him gambling on the computer when everyone else is sleeping and maybe drinking, too. Ant doesn't want to get his dad in trouble with his mom, but how long can he keep his father's secrets? And should he? The book deals with many important subjects - friendship, first crushes, trust, and honesty, as well as alcohol and gambling addiction. Readers will be rooting for Ant to make good decisions – and to win the tournament.

Swim Team / Johnnie Christmas

Grades 3-7

Bree and her father have moved from New York to Florida. At her new school, Bree is put into a swimming class, and is too embarrassed to admit she can't swim. Happily, one of her new neighbors was a champion swimmer in her youth, and gives Bree private lessons. Bree turns out to be a natural in the water, and ends up on the Swim Team. Readers will be rooting for Bree and her team as they compete with the nearby private school for a chance to go to the State Championship. The characters in this Graphic Novel are confronted by racism, and their friendships are put to the test, but they are truly champions – in the pool and in life.

Ways to Make Sunshine

Ways to Grow Love

Ways to Share Joy / Renee Watson

Grades 3-6

Ryan Hart is a fourth grader who loves cooking, reading, her family, and her friends. She's coping with moving to a new neighborhood and other challenges, but always finds a way to see the bright side and find a solution. Readers will enjoy getting to know Ryan, her mischievous brother, and her friends and frenemies at school. The Ryan Hart books are full of warmth – a great choice for readers who enjoy realistic fiction.

TEEN FICTION

The Girl I Am, Was, and Never Will Be: A Speculative Memoir of Transracial Adoption / Shannon Gibney

Ages 14-17

Gibney features herself as the protagonist in this part memoir, part speculative fiction novel. Shannon Gibney and Erin Powers are one and the same person. However, there's a primal difference in that one was adopted and the other wasn't.

Using documents like vital records, correspondence written from her birth mother to her adoptive mother, and photographs of herself and family members, Gibney delivers a layered, complicated and enthralling tale told in the often underheard voice of a transracial adoptee. The author using her own name and photographs in the book make this book read like part autobiography and part science fiction.

The book is a challenging read that requires some suspension of disbelief. However, in the often misunderstood or misrepresented narrative of adoption, this story is an “authentic” piece of fiction written by a transracial adoptee. Shannon/Erin gets to be an explorer who time travels and jumps to other dimensions in order to piece together the story of not only the families that made and raised her but of the family she builds for herself well into her adulthood.

This book comes highly recommended for families formed by transracial adoption. The style and subject matter don't make for an easy read but what valuable books are (easy reads)?

Don't just hand this off to a teen to read in a vacuum, read it with them. If they want to talk about it, then discuss. If they don't want to talk it's still important for non-adoptees to read books like and show they care about the perspective, identity and narrative of the transracially adopted person. Just as Shannon and Erin catch glimpses of each other or their birth father at different points in space and time, the reader may catch glimpses of what it's like to walk in the shoes of a transracial adoptee.

Highly recommended!

Kings of B'more / R. Eric Thomas
Ages 12-17

Harrison and Linus are gay best friends who live in Baltimore. When summer is over they'll be high school juniors, but for now they're enjoying hanging out and talking about almost everything. Linus is keeping a secret, though. His father is moving to South Carolina and taking Linus with him. When Linus finally tells Harrison, there are only a couple more days until the move. Harrison makes a plan full of surprises for Linus' last day in town – a schedule of things Harrison thinks Linus will love to do. The day doesn't go as planned, but in the end all is well. The boys take a train to DC to visit the Museum of African American History, return to Baltimore for Pride, spend time with friends old and new, and so much more.

YOUTH NONFICTION

B is for Breathe: The ABCs of Coping With Fussy and Frustrating Feelings / Dr. Melissa M. Boyd
Kids Healthy Coping Skills Series
Ages 2-5 – *Book Corner, October 2022*

What can kids do to cope when they have big feelings? Some might find it helpful to create art. Others might want a hug, or to listen to music, or go for a nature walk. ***B is for Breathe*** contains all of these ideas and many more – one for each letter of the alphabet. Reading this book would be a wonderful way to start a conversation with a child about healthy ways to deal with their emotions.

A Child's Introduction to Hip-Hop: The Beats, Rhymes, and Roots of a Musical Revolution / Jordannah Elizabeth, illustrations by Marika Jenaie

Ages 8-12

This year represents the 50th anniversary of the birth of hip-hop, and Jordannah Elizabeth's book celebrates the cultures, artistry and genius of Black musicians throughout history, beginning with the roots of African music and its influence on American music styles.

The book outlines the birth of hip-hop, different eras in the evolution of the music, and regional differences in style. Biographical profiles of important and influential artists, informative sidebar features and fact bubbles are featured throughout. In addition to discussing the profound impact of hip-hop on American music, the book also provides important context regarding other aspects of hip-hop culture, such as DJing, graffiti, break-dancing, and fashion. The author also briefly mentions some of the controversies surrounding certain artists or songs, such as misogynistic or violent lyrics, although she does not delve deeply into these issues. Although the book is recommended for ages 8-12 (per Amazon), this book may be challenging for kids at the younger end of this range. The text can be dense and is filled with a great many details that might go above the heads of younger readers/listeners.

I Am Ruby Bridges / Ruby Bridges, illustrated by Nikkolas Smith

Preschool-Grade 3

In 1960, six-year-old Ruby Bridges became the first Black child to integrate a white school in the South. Ruby wrote this book from the point of view of her six-year-old self. She wanted to introduce this important moment in history to young readers in a different way. With child-like humor she "meet[s] picture book readers eye to eye."

Mae Jemison / Maria Isabel Sanchez Vegara, illustrated by Janna Morton

Preschool-Grade 2

Mae Jemison watched *Star Trek*, every Thursday, and dreamed of traveling in space like Uhura, a Black female officer on the Enterprise. Unfortunately, at that time only white men went to space. When Mae grew up, she became a doctor and volunteered with the Peace Corps. After she returned, she was accepted into NASA's astronaut class, and in 1992 Mae became the first woman of color to go to space. This inspiring book is part of the ***Little People, Big Dreams*** series, which includes biographies of Maya Angelou, Rosa Parks, Wilma Rudolph, Michele Obama, Amanda Gorman, and many more.

ADULT

******Letter to my Daughter*** / Maya Angelou

Book Corner, May 2023

A beautiful book full of accessible insights that was dedicated to the daughter Maya Angelou never had. It's filled with essays, poetry, lived experience, kindness and advice for all of the world's daughters. This small volume can be used as a touchstone for the meaningfulness of what it means to be a human being.

******The Life of Frederick Douglass*** / David F. Walker, Damon Smyth, Marissa Louise

Award winning comic book writer and filmmaker, David Walker takes a break from Marvel superheroes to focus on an intimate, accessible and compelling portrait of Frederick Douglass. The book holds an accessible way to refamiliarize yourself with famous figures from American History like William Lloyd Garrison, Susan B. Anthony, John Brown, Harriet Tubman, and events such as the Missouri Compromise and the Dred Scott Decision. Smith and Louise complement the biography (which is told in first person yet is not an autobiography) with beautiful illustrations that resemble the comic books of my youth. Inserted essays with topics such as "A Brief History of Slavery in America" and "A Brief History of the Civil War" add important details to more fully explain the life and times of Frederick Douglass. This book could be shared with older teens but be forewarned there are graphic depictions of enslaved people and the brutalities they endured. Highly and strongly recommended!

Somewhere Sisters: a Story of Adoption, Identity, and the Meaning of Family / Erika Hayasaki

Book Corner, March 2023

Vietnamese twins Loan and Ha were separated when they were babies. Ha was raised by her aunt in a loving home in rural Vietnam. Loan was adopted, renamed Isabella, and grew up in a loving home in a Chicago suburb. Isabella's American family weren't told their daughter was a twin, and when they found out, Isabella's mom started to search for Ha. After many years, Isabella and Ha finally met and began to truly reunite.

Somewhere Sisters is the story of Isabella, Ha, and their families, but it's much more. Their story is a framework for information about many aspects of adoption and twinship. Readers will learn about twin research, the history of international and transracial adoption, how a child's environment affects them, and much more. ***Somewhere Sisters*** is touching, informative – and very hard to put down!

Surviving the White Gaze: A Memoir / Rebecca Carroll

Transracial adoptee Becky had an idyllic early childhood in a loving family. Living in a rural community, she was the only person of color in her town, and as she grew older, Becky felt isolated and confused. Life became even more difficult when she met Tess, her white birth mother, at age 16. Tess refused to talk about Becky's Black father and undermined Becky's identity and self-esteem. Becky's journey to find herself is an illuminating – and ultimately hopeful - read.