

**Lynne Dorfman's Suggestions for Grades 4-8:
Picture and Chapter Books Supporting Social Awareness**

Here is a brief annotated list of books for upper elementary grades and middle school you may want to add to your classroom or school library shelves (and the group of books older students read to younger ones).

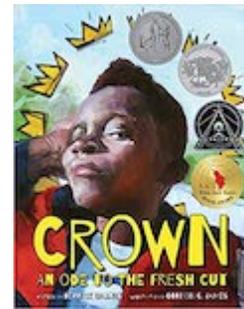
See my MiddleWeb article for more discussion and book ideas:

<https://www.middleweb.com/45195/>

Picture Books

Barnes, Derrick. *Crown: An Ode to the Fresh Cut*. 2017. Bolden Books.

A trip to the barbershop by a young African-American boy is told through the boy's eyes. See the barbershop and dream with the boy as he imagines who the other men are and who he can become after his "fresh cut." A multiple award winner!



Byers, Grace. *I Am Enough*. 2018. Balzer & Bray.

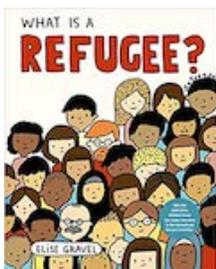
Organized with similes, a timeless picture book about appreciating our own gifts and the gifts of others. An ode to kindness and self-acceptance.

Danticat, Edwidge. *Mama's Nightingale: A Story of Immigration and Separation*. 2015. Dial Books.

When Saya's mother is placed in an immigration detention center, she sends Saya bedtime stories inspired by Haitian folklore on cassette tapes. Saya is inspired to write her own story, and Papa sends her letter with her story to the newspapers. Then everything changes!

Díaz, Junot. *Islandborn*. 2018. Penguin Young Readers Group.

Lola and her classmates are asked to draw a picture of where their families emigrated from, but Lola can't remember the island she came from because she left as a baby. But with the help of her family and friends, Lola creates something meaningful to represent the Island in her. By Dominican American author and Pulitzer Prize winner Junot Diaz.



Gravel, Elise. *What is a Refugee?* 2019. Schwartz & Wade.

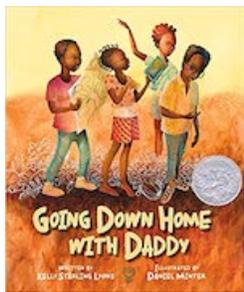
A simple book to introduce students to the meaning of the term "refugee." Humanizing and compassionate, the book ends with a two-page spread with quotes from refugees and another two-page spread with short bios about famous refugees.

Hood, Susan. *Ada's Violin: The Story of the Recycled Orchestra of Paraguay*. 2016. Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers.

The true story of Ada Ríos growing up in Cateura, a community of people who live and feed themselves by picking through the tons of trash generated by the capital city of Paraguay. When a music teacher named Favio Chávez arrives, he discovers there are not enough instruments to go around. So the children create them out of material from the trash dump. The orchestra gets to travel around the world to perform. Inspirational!

Le Guen, Sandra. *The Refuge*. 2020. Amazon Crossing Kids.

Iliana is a new girl at school who is trying to learn a new language. Iliana tells Jeannette about her difficult journey as a refugee who had to leave her country. Jeannette and Iliana's family meet and share their stories. A book about empathy, friendship, and the power of storytelling.



Lyons, Kelly Starling. *Going Down Home with Daddy*. 2019. Peachtree Publishing Company.

Lil Alan tries to find the perfect gift to his great-grandma for their annual family reunion. Lyon explores the power and importance of rich family traditions and the connections we have to a special place that binds us together. A 2020 Caldecott Honor Book.

Medina, Meg. *Tia Isa Wants a Car*. 2016. Candlewick.

Tia Isa is determined to save enough money for a car. But saving is hard, since she is sending money back home to Puerto Rico where many relatives still live. Her niece decides to do different jobs to help raise the money. A book about pursuing one's dreams, working together, and never forgetting family.

Phi, Bao. *A Different Pond*. 2017. Capstone Young Readers.

An eye-opening experience for many, this small-moment story has positive messages about family values and acceptance. A story of a father/son fishing trip told from the boy's perspective, quietly yet powerfully showing us the costs of being a refugee. "Phi created the book because of his desire to have books about people like himself to read to his daughter."

Robertson, David A. *When We Were Alone*. 2017. HighWater Press.

Author David Robertson is a member of Norway House Cree Nation. Told through the voice of a grandmother, a little girl learns about her culture and heritage and the practice of Native American boarding schools through her Nókóm's experience.



Tarpley, Natasha Anastasia. *I Love My Hair!* 2001. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers.

Keyana grows in self-esteem and confidence as she learns to celebrate the beauty of her hair as part of her cultural heritage.

Chapter Books

Bell, Cece. *El Deafo*. 2014. Amulet Books.

This 2015 Newberry Honor book is a graphic novel/memoir. Cece Bell tells the story of her hearing loss and then going to school wearing the Phonic Ear - a very powerful but awkward hearing aid. It allows CeCe to hear everything, even things she shouldn't, but also isolates her from her classmates. "Funny and touching and oh so smart." - R.J. Palacio, author of *Wonder* (Grades 4 - 7)

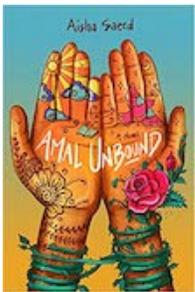


Craft, Jerry. *New Kid*. 2019. Quill Tree Books.

A graphic novel about a seventh grader, Jordan Banks, who struggles to fit in at his new school. Honest, compelling, heartbreaking. A story for all kids who are searching for a place to belong.

Medina, Meg. *Merci Suárez Changes Gears*. 2018. Candlewick Publishers.

Winner of the 2019 Newberry Award, this book tells the story of 12 year old Merci Suarez as she navigates sixth grade as a "scholarship" student at a private school in Florida. Merci deals with school and friendship issues as well as problems that arise in her Cuban-American household when her grandfather becomes ill.



Saeed, Aisha. *Amal Unbound*. 2020, Puffin Books, reprint ed.

This book gives readers a glimpse into life in Pakistan and a world where freedom and education are not guaranteed rights for all. A powerful message – we all have the power to make changes in the world. In the afterword, Saeed mentions that Amal's story was inspired by Malala. A story about bravery, perseverance, and resistance. (Middle grades chapter book)

Venkatraman, Padma. *The Bridge Home* 2019. Puffin Books.

On the streets of Chennai, India two runaway sisters find friendship and family with two homeless boys when they find shelter on an abandoned bridge. As they scavenge for food and to make a living, they learn about freedom and independence, loyalty and taking care of each other. (Middle grades chapter book)

Weeks, Sarah & Varadarajan, Gita. *Save Me a Seat*. 2016. Scholastic Press.

Joe and Ravi are two boys from two different backgrounds, American and Indian. As school starts they find themselves with common problems – finding friends and a shared bully. Over the course of the novel they learn about friendship, fitting in, family, and cultural differences. (Grades 4 - 7)

Yang, Kelly. *Front Desk*. 2018. Arthur Levine Books.

Ten-year old Mia has many secrets. She sits at the front desk of the Clavista Motel where she lives and her parents clean the rooms,. Her parents hide immigrants from the hotel owner, and she wants to be a writer. Will she keep her job, help the immigrants, and go for her dream? *Winner of the Asian/Pacific American Award for Children's Literature*. (Grades 4 -7)

