

## Celebrating Black Voices Book List

Tandem, Partners in Early Learning<sup>®</sup> is a nonprofit organization working towards equity and racial justice in the area of early learning and care. At Tandem<sup>®</sup>, we believe that magic happens when a child and an adult gather together around a book—and we take pride in providing families with books that promote rich, meaningful conversations between children and their grownups.

We take pride in the uncompromisingly high quality of our book collection. Consisting of 1,300 unique titles in 21 languages, Tandem's book collection tackles the diversity problem in children's literature head on: the titles in our library provide authentic, affirming representations of individuals from diverse backgrounds and many of them are in [#ownvoices](#), lifting up the work of authors and illustrators who represent the communities they write about.



A cornerstone of Tandem's work is the enduring idea that books should reflect children's lived experiences and introduce them to the lived experiences of others. And that's the spirit behind this book list. The sixteen titles in this list introduce children to Black characters in a variety of settings. For some children, these books will be mirrors that reflect their backgrounds and experiences; for others, these books will be windows that open up opportunities to learn about new people, places, things and experiences.

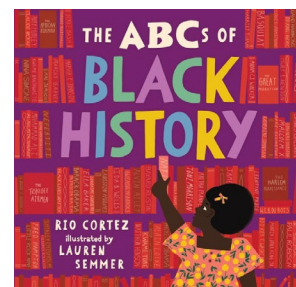
When children are able to share their own experiences and learn about the experiences of others, especially those who represent cultures and communities different from their own, it helps them develop empathy, compassion, and the capacity for inclusion—thereby laying the foundation for an equitable society.



## The ABCs of Black History

written by Rio Cortez and illustrated by Lauren Semmer

*The ABCs of Black History* is a wonderful collection of poetry that spans centuries of Black experiences and heroes. The verse is moving and accessible, introducing children to several aspects of Black history, including some that may be lesser-known. It elevates the typical alphabet book, abandoning the elementary “a is for apple” for newer, fresher associations. For example, readers learn that “Z is for zenith, the highest, the peak! The top of that mountain King said we would reach.”



**Age level:** Preschoolers and Kindergarteners

**Talking Tip:** Ask your child to choose their favorite page(s) from the book. Go on an internet (or library) scavenger hunt with your child and learn more about the heroes and movements from the pages your child loves. Discuss how the experience of your child/ family is similar or different than the hero or movement and why.

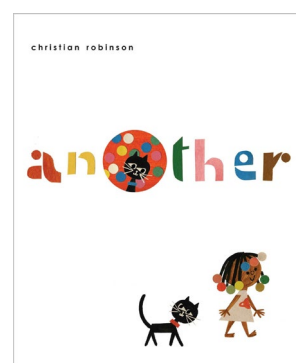
**Teaching Tip:** Use this book to introduce children to [sense of self](#), [phonological awareness](#), and [vocabulary](#).

## Another

illustrated by Christian Robinson

When a portal of light opens up in a young girl’s bedroom, she finds herself in a topsy-turvy world that looks very much like our own. Did she just go through a wormhole? Is this a parallel universe? Suddenly, she sees a child that looks just like her. What could it all mean? She finds what she’s looking for and heads back through the portal to her own space and time. Safe at home, her adventure seems like a dream. But was it?

Aside from a few notable exceptions, Black writers are underrepresented in the genres of science and fantasy fiction. With this developmentally-appropriate wordless picture book for young children, Christian Robinson introduces a young Black character into the sci-fi literary canon.



**Age level:** Preschoolers and Kindergarteners

**Talking Tip:** Co-construct the story with your child. Because this book is wordless, it invites an opportunity for your child to tell you the story—and the story can be different each time! Point out what the characters are wearing and talk about what they look like. Compare the characters with their opposites. What remained the same? What changed?

Ask your child: *If you went through a portal and found your opposite, what would that person look like and act like?*

**Teaching Tip:** Use this book to introduce children to [critical thinking](#) and [early mathematics](#).

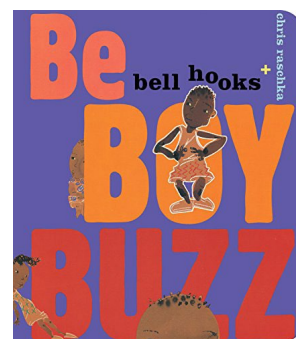
## Be Boy Buzz

written by bell hooks and illustrated by Chris Raschka

*Be Boy Buzz* is a whirlwind of emotion for readers. It is fast, exciting, and happy. Featuring illustrations by Chris Raschka, it depicts Black boy joy in a manner that is accessible for very young children.

**Age level:** Infants/Toddlers and Preschoolers

**Talking Tip:** bell hooks uses words that start with “B” to describe all the wonderful qualities of boys. No matter what gender your child is, ask your child name words that describe them. Ask them to name as many qualities as they can that start with the letter “B.” Then, ask them to find words that describe them that start with a letter of their choice.



**Teaching Tip:** Use this book to introduce children to [phonological awareness](#), [sense of self](#), [relationships](#), and new [vocabulary](#).

## [Bedtime for Sweet Creatures](#)

written by Nikki Grimes and illustrated by Elizabeth Zunon

Author Nikki Grimes is one of the first and longest-lasting Black voices to emerge out of children's publishing. Having published her first children's book in 1977, she continues to uplift the black community in her works of poetry, biography, and storytelling. *Bedtime for Sweet Creatures*, illustrated by Elizabeth Zunon, is one of her newest picture books. Featuring a boisterous and well-loved child, it shows that emotion is part of the human experience, and that its healthy expression is not only permissible, but also something to be cherished.



**Age level:** Preschoolers and Kindergarteners

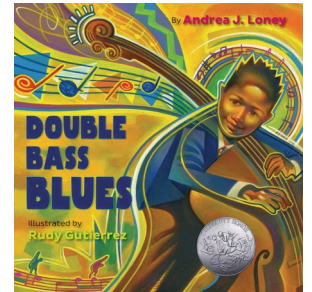
**Talking Tip:** The child in this book does not want to go to bed. Talk to your child about how bedtime happens in your house as compared to the book. What is the same? What is different?

**Teaching Tip:** Use this book to introduce children to [sense of self](#), [relationships](#), and new [vocabulary](#).

## [Double Bass Blues](#)

written by Andrea J. Loney and illustrated by Rudy Gutierrez

Little Nic plays the “bull fiddle,” a double bass, just like his granddaddy Nic. And just like granddaddy Nic and his friends, little Nic plays like the sounds of his city. In this onomatopoeic book by Andrea J. Loney, Rudy Gutierrez’ full-color illustrations beam! This expansive book brings the music of the city to life.



**Age level:** Preschoolers and Kindergarteners

**Talking Tip:** Little Nic hears the sounds of the city around him. What are the sounds that you and your child hear around you? Compare the sounds you hear to the sounds in the book. Which sounds are the same? Which ones are different?

**Teaching Tip:** Use this book to introduce children to [sense of self](#), [relationships](#), and [phonological awareness](#).

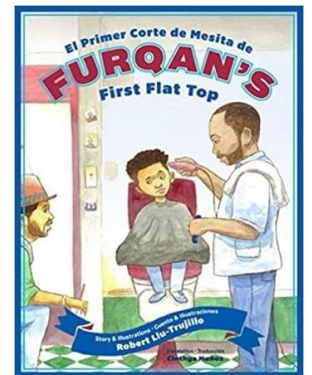
## [Furqan's First Flat Top](#)

written and illustrated by Robert Liu-Trujillo

Join Furqan in his first time getting a flat top fade haircut—just like his brother Marcus. Through the ups and downs of excitement and nerves, Furqan gains the courage to try something new.

**Age level:** Preschoolers and Kindergarteners

**Talking Tip:** Furqan was nervous to change his hairstyle, but in the end, he loved his new flat top haircut! Talk to your child about the experience of trying something new. Share your own experiences and ask about theirs. Compare your experiences to Furqan's by discussing similarities or differences.



**Teaching Tip:** Use this book to focus on [sense of self](#) and [relationships](#).

*This book is bilingual in English and Spanish*



## [Hair Love](#)

written by Matthew A. Cherry and illustrated by Vashti Harrison

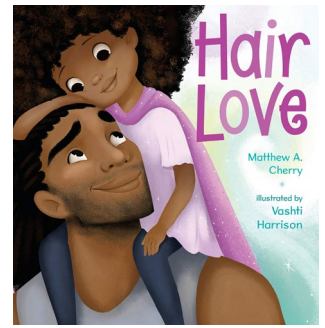
Adapted from an Oscar-winning animated short film, *Hair Love* by Matthew A. Cherry tells the heartwarming story of a family surviving the turbulence of illness through love and mutual care. It is also the story of Black hair: its power, its beauty, its versatility, and its interpersonal significance.

On this important day, Zuri wants to look just right. She asks her dad for a special hairstyle but the thought of coiffing all of her hair feels very overwhelming to him. With a little encouragement from a faraway loved one, and a lot of patience and perseverance, Zuri's dad is able to give his child this poignant act of love.

**Age level:** Preschoolers and Kindergarteners

**Talking Tip:** Zuri wants a special hairstyle to visit her mom in the hospital, but Dad has never done her hair before. Discuss and compare hair routines in your family to Zuri's family: who usually combs your child's hair? Does your child like getting their hair combed like Zuri? Does your child like to try new hairstyles like Zuri or do they like to keep it the same every day?

**Teaching Tip:** Use this book to introduce your child to [sense of self](#) and [relationships](#).



## [Hands Up!](#)

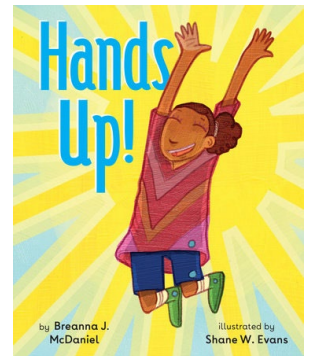
written by Breanna McDaniel and illustrated by Shane W. Evans

This joyful picture book reclaims the charged phrase, "Hands up!", by highlighting the joyful, triumphant ways in which it is part of a Black girl's everyday life—hands up to the sun, hands up to reach a book on a high shelf, hands up for a hug, hands up in class, hands up for a high five—before culminating in a moment of resistance at a protest march.

**Age level:** Preschoolers and Kindergarteners

**Talking Tip:** Talk with your child about the moments in their daily life when they raise their hands up. For a fun project, take photos of the times during the day when your child raises their hands. Review and talk about the photos at the end of the day with your child. If you are able to, get the photos printed and create a book with your child.

**Teaching Tip:** Use this board book to focus on [sense of self](#), [relationships](#), and [vocabulary](#).



## [Hermanito](#)

written by Dr. Khalid White and Isela Garcia White, LCSW, and illustrated by Adua Hernandez

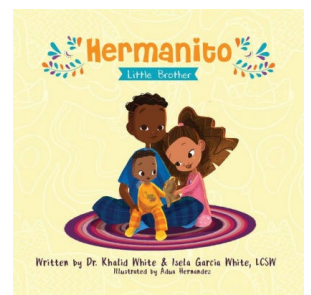
Follow Mateo and Amaya as they laugh, share, and play with their little brother, Santiago. *Hermanito* teaches children the values of teamwork, responsibility, and love in an environment filled with positive imagery from an Afro-Latinx family. The story is told in both English and in Spanish for bilingual readers and language learners.

**Age level:** Preschoolers and Kindergarteners

**Talking Tip:** Does your child have a sibling? Talk with your child about their experiences and how it compares with the experiences of Mateo, Amaya, and Santiago. Whose experience is closest to that of your child?

If your child does not have a sibling, identify a friend or relative who might have a sibling-like relationship with your child. Talk about your child's relationship with this person. How does it compare to Mateo and Amaya's relationship with Santiago?

**Teaching Tip:** Use this book to focus on [sense of self](#), [relationships](#), and [vocabulary](#).



*This book is bilingual in English and Spanish*

## [I am Every Good Thing](#)

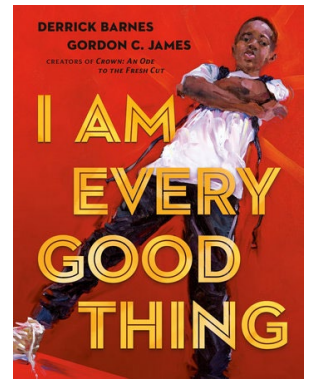
written by Derrick Barnes and illustrated by Gordon C. James

All children need to know that they are good, strong, and resilient. They need to see themselves depicted in a positive light, especially when they may be receiving mixed messages in the media. *I am Every Good Thing* by Derrick Barnes and Gordon C. James tells children exactly that. With various examples taken from real life, this book is part love letter to and part affirmation for today's young Black child.

**Age level:** Preschoolers and Early Elementary

**Talking Tip:** The children in this book enjoy various experiences like skating, playing basketball, and playing in the snow. Do you or your child enjoy any of these activities like the ones in the book? Ask them about what kinds of activities they enjoy and which activities from the book would they like to try.

**Teaching Tip:** Use this book to focus on [sense of self](#), [vocabulary](#) and [social interaction](#).



## [If You Look Up to the Sky](#)

written by Angela Dalton and illustrated by Margarita Sikorskaia

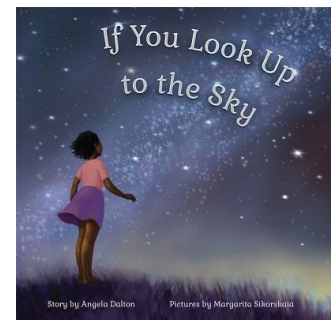
Narrated by a grandmother to her grandchild, *If You Look Up to the Sky* is a story of evergreen, forever love and the ways in which the sky (and nature) can offer support at different times. As the grandmother says to her grandchild, a full moon can guide you, a storm will excite you, and a big, blue sky will inspire you to believe anything is possible. And there's never any need to be afraid...if you look up to the sky.

**Age level:** Preschoolers and Kindergarteners

**Talking Tip:** One of the pieces of advice the grandmother gives is “If you look up to the sky and it is filled with stars, name one after each of your accomplishments.” Talk to your child about the word “accomplishment.” Tell your child about some of your accomplishments no matter how big or small. Ask your child what their accomplishments are or what they hope to accomplish (maybe it's learning how to swim, reading a book on their own, learning to write their name or count to 5, etc.).

Next time you look up at the sky, ask your child to name the stars after some of their accomplishments. Have your child draw a picture of the night sky and help them label the stars!

**Teaching Tip:** Use this book to focus on [vocabulary](#).



## [My People](#)

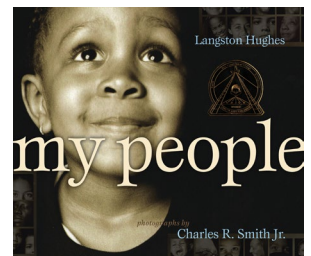
written by Langston Hughes and photographed by Charles R. Smith

In this brilliantly photographed book, Charles R. Smith, Jr. pairs Langston Hughes' poem, “My People,” with sepia-colored portraits of Black children and families. Langston Hughes helped to usher in the Harlem Renaissance and was one of the most influential Black writers in the 1920s. The relevance of his work endures through his poetry, which celebrates Blackness and elevates the Black experience. This book is particularly appropriate for young children because of its large, clear text and the joyful faces of Smith's resplendent portraits.

**Age level:** Preschoolers and Kindergarteners

**Talking Tip:** Talk to your child about how the faces in this book are like the words in the poem. They may not know that eyes can twinkle like stars until you tell them. Can your child smile with twinkling eyes? Can they make their faces beam like the sun? Study the faces in this book with your child and talk about the feelings you see. Unpacking symbolism and metaphoric language with children while they are young will help with reading comprehension in later grades.

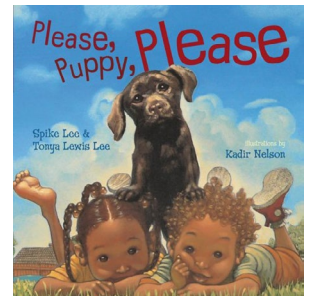
**Teaching Tip:** Use this book to introduce children to [sense of self](#), [print awareness](#), and [vocabulary](#).



## [Please, Puppy, Please](#)

written by Spike Lee and Tonya Lewis and illustrated by Kadir Nelson

A modern classic by influential Black storytellers Spike Lee, Tonya Lewis Lee, and Kadir Nelson, *Please, Puppy, Please* is an adorable tale about the uncomplicated, boisterous love between children and their first pets. Featuring realistic, gorgeous illustrations of two children and their dog, the innocence, beauty, and unbridled joy of childhood is revealed through the sparse text and expressions.



**Age level:** Infants and Toddlers

**Talking Tip:** Did you have any pets while you were growing up? Talk to your child about the differences in caring for various creatures, and tell them stories about your own childhood experiences with pets.

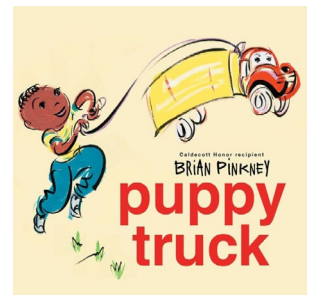
Ask your child: *If you got to choose a new pet, what kind of animal would you want? Why?*

**Teaching Tip:** Use this book to introduce children to [sense of self](#), [relationships](#), and [print awareness](#).

## [Puppy Truck](#)

written and illustrated by Brian Pinkney

Brian Pinkney has been creating children's books since the 1980s. In that time, he has won multiple honors and awards, including the prestigious Coretta Scott King Award for Black authors and illustrators who "demonstrate an appreciation of African American culture and universal human values." In this book, Pinkney brings imagination to life with vibrant illustrations of a child playing with their truck. With sparse text, and lots of fun, this is a perfect book for young children.



**Age level:** Preschoolers and Kindergarteners

**Talking Tip:** The child in this book pretends that their truck is a puppy. Does your child like to pretend?

Ask your child what they like to pretend about. Ask if they like to pretend their toys are other things like the boy in the book. Ask what things they like to pretend their toys are.

**Teaching Tip:** Use this book to introduce children to [sense of self](#), [print awareness](#), and [phonological awareness](#).

## [Saturday](#)

written and illustrated by Oge Mora

Ava and her mother cherish their Saturdays. On Saturdays, they usually do lots of wonderful things together. But on this particular Saturday, it seems as though one thing after another interferes with their plans. Ava's mom is determined to make sure that their day isn't ruined but, as the disappointments pile up, she begins to despair. Thankfully, Ava is there to remind her of why Saturdays are really so special. Togetherness is what makes Saturday the best day of the week. Author and illustrator Oge Mora does a beautiful job of capturing the essence of what a child really needs from their parent: quality time and love.



**Age level:** Preschoolers

**Talking Tip:** Ava and her mom love to picnic at the park together and get their hair done. Ask your child about what their favorite activities they enjoy doing with you. How are they the same or different to what Ava and her mom like to do?

Ava's and her mom both take a deep breath when they are feeling disappointed. This helps them to regulate their emotions. Ask your child if they also take deep breaths when they feel this way. If they don't, ask them what they can do instead. Talk to your child about the benefit of taking a deep breath when things don't go as planned. And practice when you need to!

**Teaching Tip:** Use this book to introduce children to [relationships](#) and [self-regulation](#).

## [Your Name is a Song](#)

written by Jamilah Thompkins-Bigelow and illustrated by Luisa Uribe

Kora Jalimuso's teacher and classmates can't pronounce her name: they balk, struggle, and still fail to say her name right. Kora is dejected, vowing never to return to school, but Ummi, her mother, teaches her how to sing her name as well as other African, Asian, Black-American, Latinx, and Middle Eastern names. This helps others say Kora Jalimuso's name and for Kora Jalimuso herself, discovering the musicality of her name is an empowering experience. Written by Jamilah Thompkins-Bigelow, an exciting new voice in children's literature, *Your Name is a Song* is a must-read for any child (or grownup) who is committed to life in a multicultural world.



**Age level:** Preschoolers and Kindergarteners

**Talking Tip:** Talk to your child about their name. Is it easy for many people to pronounce or difficult like in Kora Jalimuso's experience? Ask your child how their experience with their name is different or similar to Kora's and how that feels.

**Teaching Tip:** Use this book to introduce children to [sense of self](#), [relationships](#), and new [vocabulary](#).



# Teaching Tips Glossary

## Kindergarten Readiness Skill

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### Definition

#### **Critical Thinking**

The ability to use information and skills in a variety of ways to solve problems prepares children to handle complex tasks in academic areas including math, science, and reading. We can foster this skill by encouraging children to answer questions and make predictions as we read together.

#### **Early Mathematics**

A foundation in early math prepares children for “math thinking” and for later academic success. Early Math includes number sense, classifications and patterning, measurement, mathematical reasoning, and geometry (shapes). A good “math storybook” will include elements of these foundations. Counting together, pointing out numbers in print, identifying shapes, and using relational language (bigger, smaller, close, far) are all ways to develop a child’s early math skills while sharing a book together.

#### **Phonological Awareness**

A child’s ability to recognize the prosody or “music” of a language and to notice, think about, and manipulate the individual sounds in words is an important early literacy skill. Rhyming books and songs are great tools for developing this skill and laying the groundwork for “sounding words out” when learning to read.

#### **Print Awareness**

Before they can begin the process of learning to read, young children must become comfortable with holding and handling books and identifying letters and words in print. When we focus children’s attention on the printed words we are reading, they begin to recognize that those symbols have sounds and meanings. Asking children to help turn pages and hold a book is also a great way to foster print awareness and build confidence.

#### **Relationships**

Children need to build healthy attachments to parents, caregivers, and close friends. This includes understanding how to respect and keep boundaries, as well as express care and love for others.

#### **Self-Regulation**

Read alouds that engage children in structured movement games and verbal participation help develop the ability to manage impulses and ignore distractions without stifling creativity or motivation. The better a child can stay calmly focused and alert, the better they will be at handling more complex tasks and working cooperatively with others.

#### **Sense of Self**

When children are aware of their own thoughts and feelings, they are better able to communicate their needs and ideas to other people. A deeper understanding of themselves supports children in recognizing the emotions and perspectives of others and allows for empathy. A strong sense of self gives children confidence in their ability to acquire new knowledge and skills, which builds their enthusiasm and motivation for learning.

#### **Social Interactions**

In order to be a thriving member of society, children must learn how to form healthy relationships with others, including familiar adults and peers. Knowing how to interact socially supports children in learning how to function within a group through cooperation and responsibility.

#### **Vocabulary**

Young children are developmentally equipped with an incredible memory for learning new words. The more words they hear at this age, the more they will begin to develop broader vocabularies. A strong vocabulary allows children to express themselves more accurately and improves reading comprehension.