

## **Kids Books Inspiring Empathy and Kindness**

by Denise Marchetti, Children's Librarian

Sharing books with young children is a meaningful experience that has many benefits, including supporting language, literacy, and social skills. There are a variety of picture books that provoke thought and discussion while encouraging children to develop an understanding of how others feel. These stories, through text and pictures, help to nurture empathy and inspire kindness.

In *I Am Human: A Book of Empathy* by Susan Verde, a young boy explores the many positive qualities of being human, as well as ones such as making mistakes, feeling sad, and hurting someone with words. It is when he chooses kindness, listening to others, and making amends that he feels most connected to others.

*First Grade Dropout* by Audrey Vernick is a book that readers of all ages can relate to as they remember their own embarrassing experiences. When a boy accidentally calls his teacher "Mommy," everyone laughs and he feels humiliated. This prompts him to recall when he wasn't very kind and laughed at someone else. Kids will enjoy a bit of humor as he contemplates trying magic, a time machine, and dropping out of school.

Several books explore the topic of recognizing unique qualities in others and accepting them for who they are, without judging them for their differences. *The Invisible Boy* by Trudy Ludwig is a story about Brian, a quiet boy who often feels overlooked by his teachers and classmates. A new student notices that he is kind and has artistic talent. He encourages others to see these qualities, and to include Brian in the group. Useful discussion questions are included.

*We're All Wonders* by R.J. Palacio is a picture book version of the popular middle grade novel, *Wonder*. It is told from the perspective of a young Auggie, who has a facial deformity. Although he looks different, Auggie enjoys all of the same things as the other kids, who sometimes stare, point, and laugh at him. He is comforted by the love of his mother and the companionship of his dog, Daisy, and is hopeful that "people can change the way they see." *Red: A Crayon's Story* by Michael Hall is a unique tale about a mislabeled crayon that is actually blue. He has a difficult time at school because his drawings are expected to be red, not blue. The other crayons say mean things and try to get him to change. Then he meets Berry, who sees and accepts who he really is. She helps him gain the confidence to declare that he is in fact blue, and the other crayons come to accept him as well.

The theme of reciprocating kindness that is shown by others can be found in a couple of heartwarming stories. *A Sick Day for Amos McGee* by Philip Stead is a Caldecott Medal-winning story about a zookeeper who spends quality time each day with his animal friends, forming a special relationship with each one. When Amos stays home because he is sick, the animals decide to return the favor by visiting him and cheering him up. In *A Hat for Mrs. Goldman: A Story About Knitting and Love* by Michelle Edwards, Sophia realizes that Mrs. Goldman has knitted a hat for everyone in the neighborhood except herself. Although Sophia is

not a very good knitter, she is determined to work hard and knit a hat for her elderly neighbor, making this her mitzvah (good deed, as Mrs. Goldman taught her).

Several books highlight the theme of understanding and even befriending those that we may disagree with or initially dislike. In *Adrian Simcox Does NOT Have A Horse* by Marcy Campbell, Chloe knows that Adrian is lying about having a pet horse, so she angrily tells the other kids. Then she visits his house and begins to see things from his perspective. *Otis and the Scarecrow* by Loren Long tells the story of a solitary scarecrow who always has a sour look on his face and Otis, a friendly tractor, who encourages the farm animals to include him in the fun. Once they attempt to befriend him, they are convinced that he begins to smile. In *One* by Kathryn Otoshi, Blue, a quiet color is being picked on by Red. The other colors know this is wrong, but don't do anything. Then One comes along, encouraging them to stand up to Red. "Sometimes it just takes One." They even invite Red to join in once he has changed.

Please visit or call the Wyckoff Rizzo Children's Library at 201-891-4866, x3 for suggestions on finding great reads for children of all ages, and ask us about joining one of our book clubs for children in grades 1-5.