



TEACHING THROUGH BOOKS | PART 2

INCLUSIVITY

By Marilena Murgan

THEME: Inclusivity

GRADE LEVELS: High School
with adaptations for Middle School and Elementary

LEARNING FOCUS

Through this lesson plan, students will:

- Learn to recognize and appreciate diversity in their community;
- Understand the importance of inclusiveness and empathy;
- Develop critical thinking and self-reflection skills.

Identity: How can we understand, affirm, and express our own identities while appreciating and respecting the identities of others?

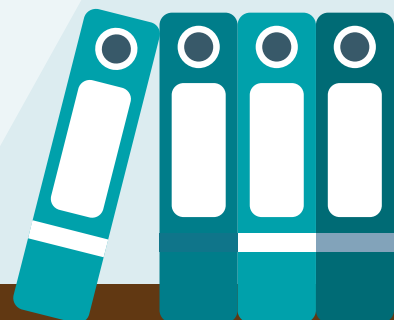
Skills: How might I explain the meaning of inclusivity as it relates to myself and those around me?

Intellectualism: How does this learning allow me to connect with and deepen my knowledge of the world? How does it help me develop empathy for others?

Criticality: In what ways does this lesson encourage me to challenge bias, inequities, and injustices in today's society? How could I use what I have learned to help make the world a better place?

Joy: How can we continue to celebrate the identities, cultures, and communities of those around us?

Note that these learning goals follow Gholdy Muhammad's Historically Responsive Literacy Framework, an equity framework for learning. Using this framework, goals are set to ensure that students are making deep connections and being introspective at the same time.



HIGH SCHOOL (9-12)

FEATURED BOOK

Weird Rules to Follow

By Kim Spencer
Orca Book Publishers, 2022



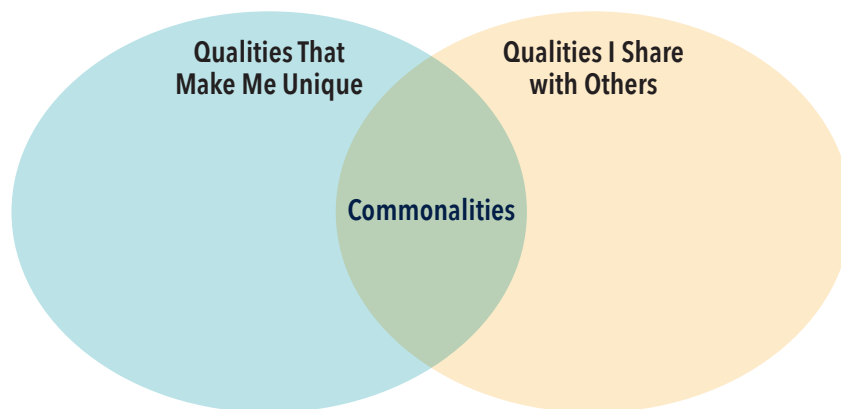
MINDS ON PROVOCATION

BACKGROUND:

Weird Rules to Follow by Kim Spencer is a coming-of-age novel set in the 1980s, focusing on the friendship between two young girls: Mia, who is Indigenous, and her best friend, Lara, who is white. The story is told through Mia's perspective as she navigates the complexities of growing up in a small town in British Columbia. The novel explores themes of identity, cultural differences, race, and belonging.

BEFORE READING:

Using a Venn diagram or a web graphic organizer, have students list qualities that make them unique on one side and qualities they share with others on the other. The overlapping section in the middle can highlight commonalities, helping students see how differences and similarities contribute to an inclusive environment.



Write the word “inclusivity” on the board and ask students what it means to them. Afterwards, explain that the concept of inclusivity is the practice of creating spaces where everyone feels valued, respected, and welcomed, regardless of their background, abilities, or experiences.

Follow up with a brief class discussion centred around these questions:

- Why is it important to include others, even if they are different from us?
- How do our words and actions show inclusivity in our school and community?

Wrap up the discussion by introducing students to the featured book and inviting them to consider how the story might explore the roles inclusivity can play in friendships, communities, and cultural understanding.

READ, PLAN, AND PRACTICE

DURING READING:

Students will engage in a **Jigsaw Activity** to read through *Weird Rules to Follow*. This cooperative learning method involves dividing the class into small groups, with each group focusing on a different section of the text and then sharing their learning with their peers. Here's how it works:

1 Divide the Book into Sections

To ensure manageable reading and discussion, break the novel into key sections that reflect important parts of the story. For example, you could divide the book based on:

- **Section 1:** Mia's introduction and background as an Indigenous girl growing up in a small town.
- **Section 2:** Mia and Lara's friendship and the cultural contrasts between them.
- **Section 3:** Instances of racism, prejudice, and "weird rules" that apply differently to Mia and Lara.
- **Section 4:** Mia's personal growth and increasing awareness of the societal "rules" around race and identity.
- **Section 5:** The evolution of their friendship as Mia becomes more conscious of her own identity and begins to question her place in the world.

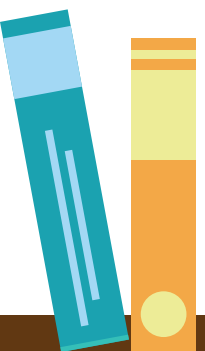
2 Create Expert Groups

Divide the students into expert groups, with each group assigned to one section of the book. Each group will focus on understanding their specific section and analyzing key themes, characters, and cultural issues.

3 Guiding Questions for Each Group

Provide each expert group with guiding questions to help focus the discussion on their section of the book. For example, questions could include:

- **Group 1 (Mia's introduction and background):** What is Mia's family like? How does her Indigenous heritage shape her experience in the town? How does the town view her family and their culture?
- **Group 2 (Mia and Lara's friendship):** How does Mia's friendship with Lara develop? How do their cultural differences become apparent in their relationship?



- **Group 3 (Racism and weird rules):** What are the “weird rules” that Mia starts to notice? How do these rules reflect the racial and cultural divisions in the town?
- **Group 4 (Mia’s growth and awareness):** How does Mia’s understanding of race and identity change as she grows older? How does she begin to question the social dynamics around her?
- **Group 5 (Friendship evolution):** How does Mia and Lara’s friendship evolve as they encounter more social and cultural differences? What does the novel suggest about friendships across cultural boundaries?

4 Expert Group Discussion

In their expert groups, students will:

- Read and analyze their assigned section.
- Discuss the guiding questions and other key elements from their part of the novel.
- Prepare a summary of their section, highlighting important plot points, character development, and themes.

5 Jigsaw Sharing

After the expert groups have completed their analysis, reorganize the class into new jigsaw groups where each group contains a representative from every expert group. The students will:

- Present their section to the rest of the jigsaw group.
- Share the insights and key themes they discussed in their expert group.
- Explain how their section contributes to the overall narrative, particularly regarding Mia’s experience with cultural identity and her relationship with Lara.

6 Whole Class Discussion

After the jigsaw groups have shared their findings, bring the class back together for a full-class discussion. You can guide the conversation with overarching questions such as:

- How do Mia’s experiences reflect broader issues of race and identity in the novel?
- What do the “weird rules” represent in terms of unspoken societal expectations?
- How does the novel explore the dynamics of friendship across cultural divides?
- How does Mia’s cultural background shape her sense of belonging in her community, and how does it differ from Lara’s experiences?
- How do Mia’s observations of race and identity shape her personal growth throughout the novel?

AFTER READING:

As a follow-up, students can individually write a reflective essay addressing questions such as:

- What did Mia’s journey teach you about cultural identity and societal rules?
- How did Mia and Lara’s friendship evolve as they became more aware of cultural and racial differences?



MAKE, TINKER, AND MODIFY

Students will work individually or in groups to complete one of the following creative projects. These activities are designed to help them reflect on the complexity of Mia's journey and the broader themes of the book, while simultaneously allowing them to express their interpretations in unique and personal ways.

- 1 **Friendship Timeline:** Students will create a visual timeline that traces the evolution of Mia and Lara's friendship throughout the novel, highlighting key moments where cultural or racial differences affected their relationship. The timeline can include illustrations, quotes, or symbolic representations of significant events (e.g. a shift in Mia and Lara's friendship, moments of tension, cultural misunderstandings). Students should also include a written reflection explaining how each moment contributes to the broader themes of identity and belonging in the novel.
- 2 **"Weird Rules" Collage:** Students will design a collage representing the "weird rules" Mia experiences, focusing on unspoken societal norms related to race and culture. Magazine cutouts, drawings, photos, and other visual elements can be used to depict the contrasting rules that apply to Mia and Lara. The collage should also include short descriptions or quotes from the novel that highlight these differences. Along with the collage, students can write a brief analysis discussing how these "rules" reveal systemic racism and inequality in the town.
- 3 **Journal:** Students will write a series of journal entries from Mia's perspective, reflecting on key events in the novel and how they impacted her understanding of her identity and friendship with Lara. Students can choose three or more major events from the novel. Their journals should explore Mia's evolving thoughts on race, cultural differences, and societal rules, and how these shape her relationships with others.
- 4 **Short Film or Video Diary:** Students will make a short film or video diary that captures one of the themes of the book, such as identity, friendship, or cultural misunderstanding. The film could depict scenes from the novel, or it may be a modern reimagining of the story's events in today's context. Students can use voiceovers, re-enactments, or digital storytelling tools to bring the themes to life. In a written or spoken reflection accompanying the video, they should explain how the scenes they chose represent the main ideas of the novel and what messages they aim to communicate.
- 5 **Sequel or Epilogue:** Students will come up with a short sequel or epilogue that imagines what happens to Mia and Lara after the events of the book. They may choose to speculate about how Mia's sense of identity evolves as she grows older and how her friendship with Lara changes over time. Students' writing should explore how the characters deal with cultural challenges and societal "rules" in the future. In an accompanying reflection, students should discuss how they imagine Mia's journey continuing and how the novel's themes influenced their writing choices.
- 6 **Podcast or Talk Show:** Working in groups of 2-4, students will record a podcast episode or talk show where they discuss the key themes of *Weird Rules to Follow*, as well as analyze Mia's experiences and societal expectations. The podcast could feature interviews with "Mia" and "Lara" or a discussion panel where group members debate the impact of race, culture, and friendship in the novel. Students could also compare Mia's experiences to

real-world issues faced by Indigenous communities. Along with the recording, each group member should submit their own summary of the talk show/podcast's key points and how they relate to the themes of the book.

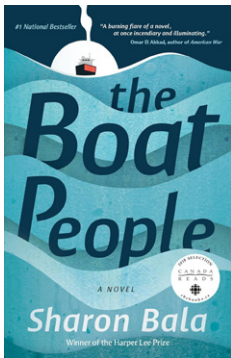
- 7 **Interactive Map of the Town:** Students will create an interactive map of the small town where Mia and Lara live, highlighting key locations from the book and their significance to the story. The map should include annotations for each location, explaining its importance to the plot or character development, and how it contributes to the themes of cultural difference and belonging in the novel. Students may make a digital map using tools like Google Maps or create a hand-drawn map with accompanying descriptions.

REFLECT AND CONNECT

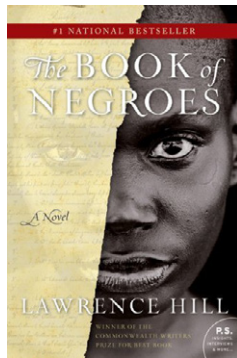
Individually, students will reflect on the following statements:

- I learned that...
- I developed...
- I experienced...
- Now I can...

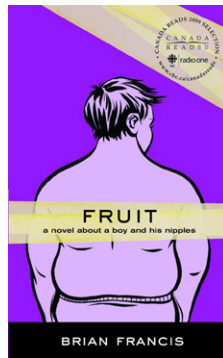
ADDITIONAL CANADIAN BOOKS TO SUPPORT THIS THEME



The Boat People
by Sharon Bala (McClelland & Stewart, 2018)



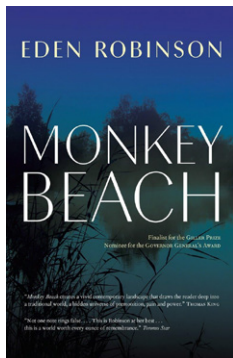
The Book of Negroes
by Lawrence Hill (HarperCollins, 2007)



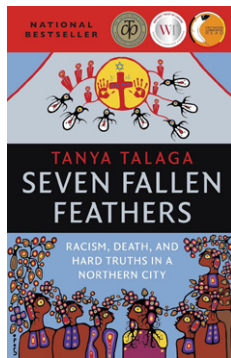
Fruit: A novel about a boy and his nipples
by Brian Francis (ECW Press, 2004)



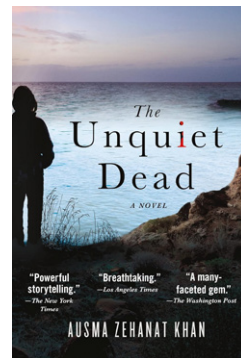
The Marrow Thieves
by Cherie Dimaline (DCB, 2017)



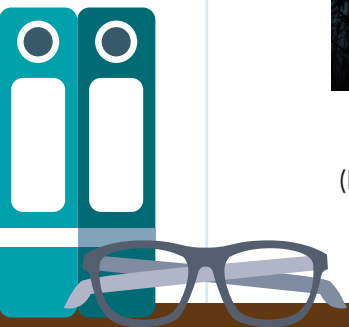
Monkey Beach
by Eden Robinson (Knopf Canada, 2000)



Seven Fallen Feathers: Racism, Death, and Hard Truths in a Northern City
by Tanya Talaga (House of Anansi Press, 2017)



The Unquiet Dead
by Ausma Zehanat Khan (Minotaur Books, 2015)

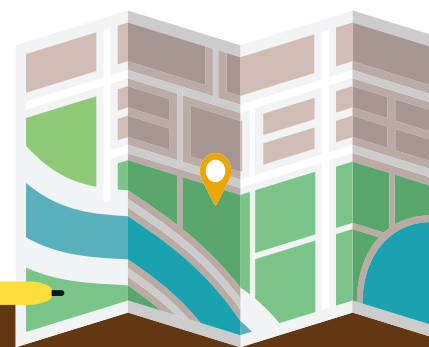


ADAPTATIONS FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL (4-8)

Weird Rules to Follow is also suitable for a middle school audience, and the activities can be easily adapted. Below is a list of sample projects that make the themes of friendship, identity, and cultural understanding accessible to younger students through hands-on and visual methods. These projects encourage students to think critically about how Mia and Lara's relationship grows and changes, and how their identities shape their experiences. Each activity is also designed to help students celebrate diversity and respect for others, while reflecting on how to navigate differences in a positive way.



- 1 **Character Diary:** Students write diary entries from the perspective of either Mia or Lara, capturing their thoughts and feelings at key moments in the story. The diary entries could reflect on important events like Mia's experiences at school, her cultural identity struggles, or a misunderstanding between her and Lara. Students can also explore how the characters feel about their friendship, their families, and their community. Younger students can be provided with prompts, such as "How does Mia feel about the different rules she has to follow?" or "What might Lara think about the differences between her and Mia?" Encourage creativity and empathy in the diary entries.
- 2 **Community Map:** Provide students with a basic map of Mia and Lara's town and have them add drawings, labels, and short descriptions to point out important locations mentioned in the book and how these places shape the characters' experiences. Students can illustrate or label the places with descriptions of what happens there and how they impact the characters' friendship and lives. Encourage students to also think about how the setting affects Mia and Lara's experiences with cultural and societal differences.
- 3 **Visual Timeline:** Provide students with a blank timeline template and encourage them to focus on important friendship milestones or moments of cultural discovery for Mia and Lara. The timeline could include events like their playdates, arguments, cultural celebrations, or school experiences. Each event should be illustrated or described with short captions. This project helps students visually track the growth and challenges in the characters' relationship.
- 4 **Character Comparison Venn Diagram:** Students create a Venn diagram comparing and contrasting Mia and Lara, focusing on their personalities, backgrounds, and experiences. In one circle, students list things that make Mia unique. In the other, they list aspects of Lara's life. In the middle, they write what the two girls have in common, such as their love of fun and curiosity about each other's lives. Guide students to focus on both cultural differences and shared human experiences to help them understand how friendships can bridge cultural divides.

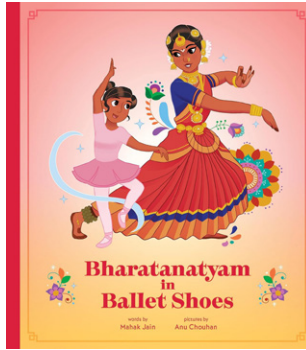


- 5 **Button Jar:** Since buttons are a meaningful object in Mia's life, students will create their own button jar, filling it with different coloured or drawn buttons that represent important memories, experiences, or values that Mia and Lara learn throughout the book. Help students understand the symbolism of the buttons by relating them to their own personal experiences.

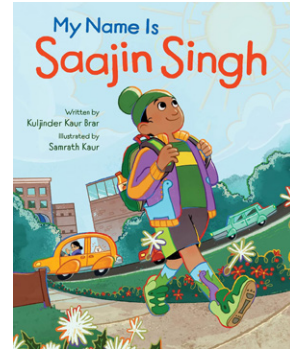
MORE CANADIAN BOOKS FOR GRADES 4-8



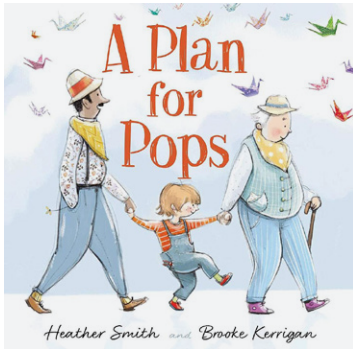
Beatrice and Croc Harry
by Lawrence Hill
(HarperCollins, 2022)



Bharatanatyam in Ballet Shoes
by Mahak Jain, illustrated by Anu
Chouhan (Annick Press, 2022)



My Name Is Saajin Singh by
Kuljinder Kaur Brar, illustrated by
Samrath Kaur (Annick Press, 2022)



A Plan for Pops by Heather Smith,
illustrated by Brooke Kerrigan (Orca
Book Publishers, 2019)



Sorry for Your Loss
by Joanne Levy (Orca
Book Publishers, 2021)



The Words We Share
by Jack Wong (Annick
Press, 2023)



ADAPTATIONS FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL (K-3)

FEATURED BOOK

My Soca Birthday Party: With Jollof Rice and Steel Pans

By Yolanda T. Marshall, illustrated by Subi Bosa
Chalkboard Publishing, 2020



By framing inclusivity as something joyful and natural, connected to celebrations and shared experiences, students can begin to understand its importance in their everyday lives. *My Soca Birthday Party* provides a rich, relatable narrative for these discussions.

BEFORE READING:

Explain to students that “inclusivity” means making sure everyone feels welcome, loved, and respected, no matter how they look, where they’re from, or what they believe.

Ask students the following questions to spark curiosity and initiate an interactive discussion:

- Have you ever invited friends to a birthday party?
- How do you feel when everyone gets to join in the fun?
- Why is it important to include everyone?

DURING READING:

As you read through the book, highlight how Anne and her family create a warm and welcoming atmosphere for everyone at the party. Ask students:

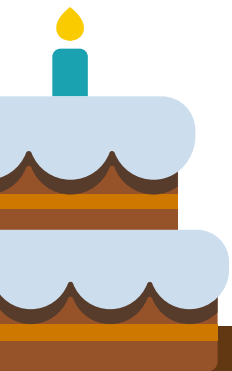
- What are some ways the characters show kindness and inclusivity?
- Who are the different people at the party, and how do they celebrate together?

Pause to discuss the cultural foods, music, and traditions in the story. Ask students what they notice about the food and music at the party. Why do they think it’s important to share and celebrate different cultures?

AFTER READING:

Hold a class discussion around the following questions:

- How do you think the guests at Anne’s party felt?
- What are ways we can make our classroom feel like Anne’s party, where everyone is included?



"OUR INCLUSIVE PARTY" ACTIVITY:

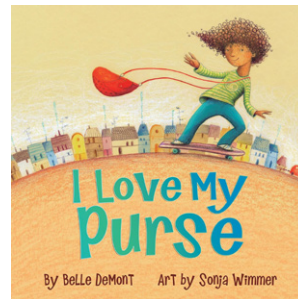
Have students draw or write about a party where everyone feels welcome. Encourage them to think about food, music, and games that celebrate different cultures or interests.

CLASSROOM INCLUSIVITY CHART:

Work together to create a list of ways to include others in everyday activities, like playing on the playground or inviting a new friend to join a group.

ADDITIONAL BOOKS FOR GRADES K-3

Harley the Hero
by Peggy Collins
(Pajama Press, 2021)



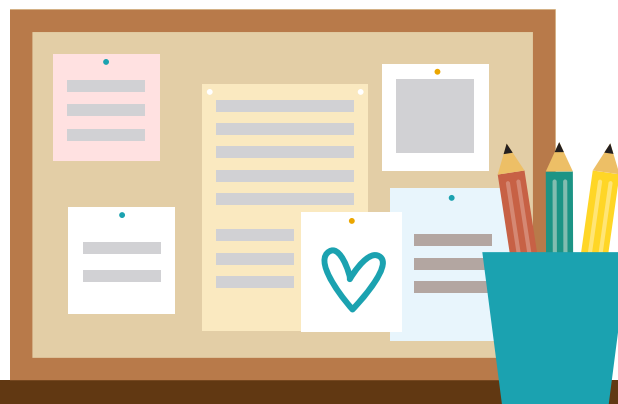
I Love My Purse by Belle DeMont, illustrated by Sonja Wimmer (Annick Press, 2017)



My Fade Is Fresh by Shauntay Grant, illustrated by Kitt Thomas (Penguin Workshop, 2022)



When We Are Kind
by Monique Gray Smith,
illustrated by Nicole Neidhardt
(Orca Book Publishers, 2020)



MORE RESOURCES

These non-fiction texts offer valuable perspectives on diversity, equity, and inclusion, and can help foster empathy and understanding in the classroom and beyond:

- *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: Teaching and Learning for Justice in a Changing World* edited by Django Paris and H. Samy Alim (Teachers College Press, 2017)
- *Educators on Diversity, Social Justice, and Schooling: A Reader* edited by Sonya E. Singer and Mary Jane Harkins (Canadian Scholars, 2018)
- [*Exploring Equity and Inclusion in Canadian and Quebecois Contexts*](#) by Radamis Zaky and Yeroseo Aris Kusiele Somda
- *Inclusion in Action: Practical Strategies to Modify Your Curriculum* by Nicole Eredics (Brookes Publishing, 2018)
- *One Without the Other: Stories of Unity Through Diversity and Inclusion* by Shelley Moore (Portage & Main Press, 2016)
- *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice, Fourth Edition* edited by Maurianne Adams et al. (Routledge, 2022)



MARILENA MURGAN is an educator with more than 20 years of experience in various subject areas across all grade levels. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Physics and Chemistry, a Bachelor of Education, and a Master of Education in Curriculum Studies.

Marilena's main goal as an educator is to make school fun and to include all students in the journey of learning!