

unique and united

QUICK SPARK: BOOKS TO START THE DISCUSSION



Why Unique & United?

The Students Rebuild Unique and United project invites young people to explore their identities, celebrate their differences, and use creative expression as a force for empathy, unity, and bold ideas capable of transforming communities.

Through this campaign, students will:

- Reflect on what makes them unique.
- Recognize shared humanity between individuals, cultures, and communities.
- Use creativity to spark dialogue, challenge assumptions, foster connection, and ignite bold ideas that can change the world.

About This Resource

These carefully selected books, organized by grade level, are great conversation starters for students to explore what makes each of us special and how our differences can bring us closer together. Whether through stories about identity, friendship, or community, these titles inspire empathy, inclusion, and the power of unity.



Elementary School

1. **The Name Jar, By Yangsook Choi | Ages 5–9**

When Unhei moves from Korea to the U.S., her classmates struggle to pronounce her name. This heartfelt story explores cultural identity, belonging, and the importance of honoring names and uniqueness.

2. **All Are Welcome, By Alexandra Penfold, illustrated by Suzanne Kaufman | Ages 4–8**

A warm, rhythmic celebration of diversity in a school community where children from all backgrounds, abilities, and traditions are included, accepted, and appreciated.

3. **Elmer, By David McKee | Ages 4–8**

Elmer the patchwork elephant tries to blend in with the gray elephants—but soon realizes that being different is what makes him special. A classic story about self-acceptance and celebrating differences.

4. **Just Ask! Be Different, Be Brave, Be You, By Sonia Sotomayor, illustrated by Rafael López | Ages 5–10**

Written by U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, this book introduces children with different abilities, encouraging readers to ask questions and appreciate each other's unique ways of being.

5. **What If We Were All the Same!, By C.M. Harris | Ages 5–9**

With vibrant illustrations, this book uses simple comparisons to show how boring the world would be if everything—and everyone—were the same. It promotes acceptance, diversity, and kindness.

Middle School

1. **Wonder, By R.J. Palacio | Ages 9–13**

Auggie Pullman, a boy with a facial difference, attends school for the first time. Told from multiple perspectives, this story explores kindness, acceptance, and the importance of seeing people for who they truly are.

2. **Inside Out and Back Again, By Thanhà Lai | Ages 10–13**

Told in free verse, this semi-autobiographical novel follows Hà, a Vietnamese girl who flees war-torn Vietnam and adjusts to life in the U.S. It powerfully explores cultural identity, immigration, and the challenges of feeling different.

3. **Front Desk, By Kelly Yang | Ages 10–14**

Mia Tang helps run a motel where her immigrant parents work. As she navigates racism, classism, and cultural differences, Mia learns to use her voice and stand up for others. A great story about inclusion, courage, and community.

4. **The Parker Inheritance, By Varian Johnson | Ages 10–13**

This mystery novel follows two Black middle schoolers uncovering a historical injustice in their town. It tackles themes of race, identity, and the importance of remembering and honoring others' stories.

5. **Starfish, By Lisa Fipps | Ages 10–14**

Ellie, a girl who's been bullied for her size, tells her story in verse. She learns to stand up for herself, accept her body, and push back against a world that tries to silence or shame her uniqueness.

High School

1. **What's Eating Gilbert Grape, By Peter Hedges | Ages 14–18**

Gilbert navigates caring for his disabled brother and grieving mother, he begins to discover that being different isn't something to escape—and that true community and connection come from embracing uniqueness in both others and himself.

2. **Out of My Mind, By Sharon M. Draper | Ages 12–16**

Melody has cerebral palsy and can't speak or walk—but she has a brilliant mind and a lot to say. This inspiring novel highlights inclusion, ability, and breaking down assumptions about people with disabilities.

3. **Stargirl, By Jerry Spinelli | Ages 13–17**

When a quirky, free-spirited new girl arrives at a conventional high school, she challenges what it means to be "normal." A timeless story about individuality, kindness, and the cost of standing out.

4. **A Mango-Shaped Space, By Wendy Mass | Ages 12–16**

Mia has synesthesia—she sees sounds, numbers, and letters in color—but hides it because she feels different. This novel gently explores neurological diversity and accepting the parts of ourselves that are unique.

5. **The House on Mango Street, By Sandra Cisneros | Ages 12–18**

Esperanza, a young Latina girl growing up in a Chicago neighborhood, explores her identity and dreams of a better life. Through vivid snapshots of her community, the book highlights themes of uniqueness, belonging, and the search for a place to call home.

