

RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS FOUNDATION



Book List

The following titles offer an opportunity to explore kindness concepts and social and emotional learning with children from pre-school through high school. Many of the books below have received national awards, and all have been positively evaluated and reviewed in professional journals. Not every book is the right choice for every child, of course. As parents and educators, you will have the best sense of which among the recommended books are the best matches for the children in your families, classrooms, or communities.

PRE-SCHOOL ~ KINDERGARDEN



All in a Day

(Cynthia Rylant. Illus. by Nikki McClure)

2009. Abrams. ISBN: 9780810983212. PreS–Gr. 1.

With poetic language and cut-paper illustrations, this picture book folds in messages of appreciation and gratitude as it follows a farm boy through a day of caring for animals and plants.

All the World

(Liz Garton Scanlon. Illus. by Marla Frazee)

2009. Simon & Schuster/Beach Lane. ISBN: 9781416985808. PreS–Gr. 1.

Set during a beautiful summer day, this Caldecott Honor Book celebrates a child's sense of interconnectedness with people, nature, and the wider world.

A Ball for Daisy

(Chris Raschka)

2011. Random House/Schwartz & Wade. ISBN: 978037585861. PreS–K.

Masterful, wordless artwork captures a small dog's roller coaster of emotions as she loses a beloved toy and then, unexpectedly, gains both a new toy and a new friend in this multi-award-winning title.

Be a Friend

(Salina Yoon)

2016. Bloomsbury. ISBN: 9781619639515. PreS–K.

A young boy, whose unusual way of communicating leaves him feeling lonely at school, finds an understanding new friend in this quiet story of discovering commonalities and accepting differences.

Beautiful Hands

(Kathryn Otoshi and Bret Baumgarten)

2015. Blue Dot. ISBN: 9780990799306. PreS–Gr. 1.

This picture book about the positive impact of everyday acts will help start discussions about what peace, faith, hope, and dreams mean to kids. Pair this with previous titles from creator Otoshi: One (2008), Zero (2010), and Two (2014).

Because Amelia Smiled

(David Ezra Stein)

2012. Candlewick. ISBN: 9780763641696. PreS–Gr. 1.

In this story about global interconnectedness and the impact of small gestures, a girl's smile has positive repercussions around the world.



Bully

(Laura Vaccaro Seeger)

2013. Roaring Brook/Neal Porter. ISBN: 9781596436305. PreS–Gr. 2.
Clever, graphic artwork illustrates this story about a name-calling bull who discovers friendship when he drops his bullying act.

Cookies: Bite-Size Life Lessons

(Amy Krouse Rosenthal. Illus. by Jane Dyer)

2006. HarperCollins. ISBN: 9780060580810. PreS–Gr. 1.

Cookies form the child-friendly, appealing framework for this picture book that creatively introduces concepts such as cooperation and patience. Follow this with the author's companion titles: One Smart Cookie and Sugar Cookies.

Dee Dee and Me

(Amy Schwartz)

2013. Holiday House. ISBN: 9780823425242. PreS–Gr. 1.

A little sister grows tired of being bossed around by her older sister and finds a new, assertive voice in this pitch-perfect offering that captures authentic, everyday sibling squabbles and reconciliations.

Fox's Garden

(Princesse Camcam)

2014. Enchanted Lion. ISBN: 9781592701674. PreS–Gr. 1.

Dynamic, cut-paper illustrations tell this wordless story of a boy and a fox who exchange kind offerings.

How to Heal a Broken Wing

(Bob Graham)

2008. Candlewick. ISBN: 9780763639037. PreS–Gr. 1.

In a crowded, rushing city, a boy finds an injured bird and nurses it back to health with his mother's help.

If You Plant a Seed

(Kadir Nelson)

2015. HarperCollins/Balzer+Bray. ISBN: 9780062298898. PreS–Gr. 1.

Diverse animals discover the rewards of cooperation as they plant a garden together in this richly illustrated story.

Joseph Had a Little Overcoat

(Simms Taback)

1999. Viking. ISBN: 9780670878550. PreS–Gr. 2.

Detailed, textured collages illustrate this Caldecott Medal-winner about a man who reuses fabric from an overcoat to create many new things. A colorful story about finding hidden value in what might have been discarded.

Kindness Is Cooler, Mrs. Ruler

(Margery Cuyler. Illus. by Sachiko Yoshikawa)

2007. Simon & Schuster. ISBN: 978-0689873447. PreS–Gr. 1.

Counting exercises add another layer of fun to this lively picture book about a kindergarten class that performs 100 acts of kindness.

Little Ducks Go

(Emily Arnold McCully)

2014. Holiday House. ISBN: 9780823429417. PreS–K.

A great choice for early readers, this title folds themes of generosity and cooperation into a suspenseful story about a mother duck who is separated from her brave ducklings before they're all rescued.

Ten Little Fingers and Ten Little Toes

(Mem Fox. Illus. by Helen Oxenbury)

2008. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. ISBN: 9780152060572. PreS–K.

This playful, rhyming, celebration of babies around the world conveys the gentle, joyous reminder that each child belongs to the whole human family.

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EARLY ELEMENTARY



Albert the Fix-it Man

(Janet Lord. Illus. by Julie Paschkis)

2008. Peachtree. ISBN: 9781561454334. PreS–Gr. 2.

Albert, the “fix-it man” in the neighborhood, receives care and kindness from those he’s helped in this community story illustrated in a folk-art style

Before Morning

(Joyce Sidman. Illus. by Beth Krommes)

2016. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. ISBN: 9780547979175. PreS–Gr. 2.

Striking scratchboard artwork illustrates this poetic picture book about a city slowed down by snowfall—and an unexpected day of togetherness for a family.

A Chair for My Mother

(Vera Williams)

1982. HarperCollins. ISBN: 9780688009151. K–Gr. 3.

In this classic family story, a young girl, her mother, and her grandmother save money in a glass jar to buy a chair after their furniture is lost in a fire.

The Chicken-Chasing Queen of Lamar County

(Janice Harrington. Illus. by Shelley Jackson)

2007. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. ISBN: 9780374312510. PreS–Gr. 2.

Chicken-chasing seems like irresistible fun to a young girl until she begins to understand her effect on the barnyard hens. Colloquial poetry and collage artwork mix in this terrific read-aloud.

Destiny's Gift

(Natasha Anastasia Tarpley. Illus. by Adjoa J. Burrowes)

2004. Lee & Low. ISBN: 9781600606441. PreS–Gr. 2.

When her beloved neighborhood children's bookstore faces possible closure due to rising rents, Destiny and her parents help organize the community to save it.

Don't Say a Word, Mamá / No Digas Nada, Mamá

(Joe Hayes. Illus. by Esau Andrade Valencia)

2013. Cinco Puntos. ISBN: 9781935955290. PreS–Gr. 2.

Two sisters create humorous mix-ups and misunderstandings when they exchange secret gifts in this warm, humorous family story.

Each Kindness

(Jacqueline Woodson. Illus. by E. B. Lewis)

2012. Penguin/Nancy Paulsen. ISBN: 9780399246524. K–Gr. 3.

This award-winning title is told from an unusual viewpoint—that of a young bully who regrets her unkindness and reflects on how she might have behaved differently.

Elmer and the Hippos

(David McKee)

2010. Lerner. ISBN: 9780761364429. K–Gr. 2.

When a group of elephants doesn't want to share their watering hole with newly arrived hippos, Elmer the elephant demonstrates how to be an upstander, rather than a bystander, as he helps to speak out and resolve the conflict.

Estela's Swap

(Alexis O'Neill. Illus. by Enrique O. Sanchez)

2002. Lee & Low. ISBN: 9781600602535. K–Gr. 3.

A girl exercises problem-solving, cooperation, and more when she admires a beautiful skirt at a vibrant swap market.

The Gardener

(Sarah Stewart. Illus. by David Small)

1997. Farrar. ISBN: 9780374325176. K–Gr. 3.

When hard times hit her family, a young girl is sent to stay with her taciturn uncle. In letters, she describes how her love of gardening brings joy to both her new home and her whole community.

The Golden Rule

(Ilene Cooper. Illus. by Gabi Swiatkowska)

2007. Abrams. ISBN: 9780810909601. K–Gr. 3.

While on a walk, a boy and his grandfather discuss the simple, profound idea of treating others as one would like to be treated—a way of living that crosses cultures and religions.

Invisible Boy

(Trudy Ludwig. Illus. by Patrice Barton)

2013. Knopf. ISBN: 9781582464503. PreS–Gr. 2.

Inventive illustrations that move from gray tones to full, bright color capture a boy's loneliness and then joy when he finds friendship among his classmates.

The Kindness Quilt

(Nancy Elizabeth Wallace)

2006. Two Lions. ISBN: 9780761453130. PreS–Gr. 2.

When her teacher assigns a "Kindness Project," Minna isn't sure what to do until she decides to make a quilt that illustrates small acts of kindness.

Last Stop on Market Street

(Matt de la Peña. Illus. by Christian Robinson)

2015. Putnam. ISBN: 9780399257742. PreS–Gr. 2.

A boy and his grandmother take a bus ride that reflects that vibrant diversity of their community in this Caldecott Medal winner.

Mouse & Lion

(Rand Burkert. Illus. by Nancy Burkert)

2011. Scholastic/Michael Di Capua. ISBN: 9780545101479. PreS–Gr. 2.

This retelling of a familiar Aesop's fable of courage and kindness features exquisitely detailed illustrations of animals of the African Savanna.

A Sick Day for Amos McGee

(Philip C. Stead. Illus. by Erin E. Stead)

2010. Roaring Brook/Neal Porter. ISBN: 9781596434028. PreS–Gr. 2.

An exceptionally big-hearted zookeeper finds his role reversed after he falls ill and is cared for by his beloved animals. A Caldecott Medal winner.

The Song of Delphine

(Kenneth Kraeger)

2015. Candlewick. ISBN: 9780763670016. PreS–Gr. 2.

In a fictional African kingdom, a young orphan and a princess create a bond based on shared appreciation and kindness.

The Teddy Bear

(David McPhail)

2002. Holt. ISBN: 9780805078824. PreS–Gr. 2.

A teddy bear becomes a homeless man's companion after a boy loses it. When the boy spots his former toy on a bench, he's thrilled, but he realizes that the bear belongs with its new owner.

The Three Questions

(Jon Muth)

2002. Scholastic. ISBN: 9780439199964. PreS–Gr. 3.

Big questions—"What is the right thing to do?" "What is the right time to do things?"—are explored in a beautifully illustrated, child-friendly story of a boy conversing with animal friends.

Those Shoes

(Maribeth Boelts. Illus. by Noah Z. Jones)

2007. Candlewick. ISBN: 9780763642846. K–Gr. 3.

A boy yearns for sneakers that his family can't afford, but he eventually finds new, unanticipated rewards in this non-didactic story.

What Does It Mean to Be Kind?

(Rana DiOrio. Illus. by Stéphane Jorisch)

2015. Little Pickle. ISBN: 9781939775092. PreS–Gr. 2.

After a young girl helps a new student feel welcome, kindness spreads throughout a community, one act at a time.

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MIDDLE GRADE



Absolutely Almost (Lisa Graff)

2014. Philomel. ISBN: 9780399164057. Gr. 4–6.

A young boy with learning challenges navigates a new school with help from a new sitter and others in this heartfelt novel.

All Alone in the Universe (Lynne Rae Perkins)

1999. Greenwillow. ISBN: 9780380733026. Gr. 5–8.

When her best friend starts spending time with another girl, Glenna feels alone, but she finds support from caring adults who help her realize that her life is her own to shape.

As Brave as You (Jason Reynolds)

2016. Atheneum/Caitlyn Dlouhy. ISBN: 9781481415903. Gr. 5–8.

An inquisitive young boy and his older brother find deeper family understanding when they leave their Brooklyn home for a summer in Virginia with their grandmother and grandfather, who is blind.

The Birchbark House (Louise Erdrich)

1999. HarperCollins. ISBN: 9780786814541. Gr. 4–8.

Daily life for Omakayas, a young Ojibwa child in the mid-nineteenth century, includes doing chores and caring for beloved pets in this start to an award-winning series of historical novels.

Hoot (Carl Hiaasen)

2002. Knopf. ISBN: 9780375821813. Gr. 5–8.

A 12-year-old newcomer to his South Florida neighborhood becomes an animal activist when he joins with other kids to save an owl habitat in this Newbery Honor Book.

Inside Out & Back Again (Tanhha Lai)

2011. HarperCollins. ISBN: 9780061962783. Gr. 4–8.

Based on the author's experiences, this award-winning novel follows a Vietnamese refugee's adjustment to life in Alabama, where she's bullied at school and finds help from a caring teacher.

Just Grace (Cherise Mericle Harper)

2007. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. ISBN: 9780618646425. Gr. 2–4.

In this first title in a winning series, a third-grader's well-intentioned plans go awry as she tries to help a neighbor and solve a mystery.



Lend a Hand

(John Frank. Illus. by London Ladd)

2014. Lee & Low. ISBN: 9781600609701. Gr. 3–6.

In everyday words, the 14 poems in this accessible, illustrated title show young people engaged in acts of caring and kindness.

Non-Random Acts of Kindness

(Lauren Myracle)

2014. Dutton. ISBN: 9780525422662. Gr. 2–4.

This entry in the Life of Ty series follows the seven-year-old through a week in which he tries to complete a classroom assignment to perform acts of kindness.

The Misfits

(James Howe)

2001. Atheneum. ISBN: 9780689839559. Gr. 5–8.

A seventh-grader and three “outsider” friends challenge their classmates and teachers to rethink class elections in this warm friendship story about inclusivity and speaking up.

The One and Only Ivan

(Katherine Applegate. Illus. by Patricia Castelao)

2012. HarperCollins. ISBN: 9780061992254. Gr. 3–6.

This Newbery Medal–winner tells a story of life-changing friendship, humane treatment of animals, and the power of art—all from a gorilla’s perspective.

Out of My Mind

(Sharon Draper)

2010. Atheneum. ISBN: 9781416971702. Gr. 5–8.

A special computer and keyboard allow a young girl with cerebral palsy to communicate with the world in a new way in this sensitive, affecting novel.

The Promise

(Nicola Davies. Illus. by Laura Carlin)

2014. Candlewick. ISBN: 9780763666330. Gr. 2–4.

In this picture book for older readers, a young thief in a gritty city fulfills a promise to plant acorns she finds in a stolen purse, and a community develops around the growing trees.

Pictures of Hollis Wood

(Patricia Reilly Giff)

Random House/Wendy Lamb. ISBN: 9780385326551. Gr. 5–7.

Hollis, a 12-year-old who has been through many foster homes, slowly begins to open up and discover her voice and talents when she’s placed with a new caregiver.

Raymie Nightingale

(Kate DiCamillo)

2016. Candlewick. ISBN: 9780763681173. Gr. 4–7.

Three girls, each navigating her own heartbreak, form a fierce, unlikely friendship over the course of a summer in this moving novel.

Rules

(Cynthia Lord)

2006. Scholastic. ISBN: 9780439443821. Gr. 4–7.

A 12-year-old girl creates “rules” to help her brother, who has autism, navigate life in this novel that acknowledges the complicated feelings of growing up with a differently abled sibling.

Wonder

(R. J. Palacio)

2012. Knopf. ISBN: 9780375869020. Gr. 5–8.

This enormously popular title, about a boy with profound “facial anomalies” who starts attending a new school, upends ideas of “normal,” right up to its powerfully uplifting ending.

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YOUNG ADULT



The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian

(Sherman Alexie. Illus. by Ellen Fornay)

2007. Little, Brown. ISBN: 9780316013680. Gr. 7–10.

This semi-autobiographical novel follows 14-year-old Junior from the Spokane Indian reservation, where he's grown up, to a private school where he hopes to get a better education.

The Arrival

(Shaun Tan)

2007. Scholastic/Arthur A. Levine. ISBN: 9780439895293. Gr. 6–12.

In this remarkable, nearly wordless illustrated book for older readers, Tan tells the story of an immigrant's flight from a war-torn land to a safer country, where he begins to adjust to a completely new, sometimes fantastical culture.

The Book Thief

(Markus Zusak)

2006. Knopf. ISBN: 9780375931000. Gr. 10–12.

A young girl in Nazi Germany finds escapism and solace in books and as well as an unlikely group of new friends in this multi-award-winning novel.

Counting by 7s.

(Holly Goldberg Sloan)

2013. Dial. ISBN: 9780803738553. Gr. 7–10.

After her parents' death, Willow finds a family of supportive friends who are quirky and idiosyncratic as she is in this novel about resilience, community, and kids (and adults) who don't fit neatly into categories.

Does My Head Look Big in This?

(Randa Abdel-Fattah)

2007. Scholastic. ISBN: 9780439922333. Gr. 7–10.

Funny and moving, this novel focuses on an Australian-born contemporary muslim teen who faces cultural prejudice and discrimination, as well as her traditional parents' views.

The Fault in Our Stars

(John Green)

2012. Dutton. ISBN: 9780525478812. Gr. 9–12.

Two teen cancer survivors meet and fall in love in this bestselling, deeply affecting novel that touches on the largest questions of meaning, human connection, and the wonders of life.

The First Part Last (Angela Johnson)

2003. Simon & Schuster. ISBN: 9780689849220. Gr. 7–12.

A 16-year-old boy becomes a loving single father in this beautifully written, multi-award-winning novel.

I'll Give You the Sun (Jandy Nelson)

2014. Dial. ISBN: 9780803734968. Gr. 10–12.

Artistic twins cope with family tragedy as they try to forge their own identities in this award-winning novel for older teens.

Kira-Kira (Cynthia Kadohata)

2004. Atheneum. ISBN: 9780689856396. Gr. 6–12.

In the 1950s, a Japanese American girl in a small Georgia town tries to live out the lessons she's learned from her beloved sister, who is terminally ill.

The Land (Mildred Taylor)

2001. Puffin. ISBN: 9781101997567. Gr. 7–12.

This companion to the classic novel Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry shows the brutal historical realities of the Reconstruction era in a nuanced family story about strength, hope, and unexpected human kindness.

A Long Walk to Water (Linda Sue Park)

2010. Clarion. ISBN: 9780547251271. Gr. 6–9.

Based on true events, this dramatic survival story tells of a Sudanese boy's escape from brutal rebel warfare to his eventual reunion with his family in America and then, finally, a return to Sudan, where he builds a much-needed well. A young Sudanese girl's viewpoint adds more insight.

Marcelo in the Real World (Francisco X. Stork)

2009. Scholastic/Arthur A. Levine. ISBN: 9780545054744. Gr. 9–12.

A boy who falls on the high-functioning end of the autism spectrum faces an ethical challenge when he stumbles across revealing evidence at his summer job at a law firm.

Paperboy (Vince Vawter)

2013. Delacorte. ISBN: 9780385742443. Gr. 6–9.

During a hot summer in 1959 Memphis, a boy with a stutter faces his fear of meeting new people when he takes over a friend's paper route and finds his world greatly expanded.

Sorta Like a Rock Star (Matthew Quick)

2010. Little, Brown. ISBN: 9780316043533. Gr. 9–12.

Despite a tough life of uncertain housing with her alcoholic mom, 17-year-old Amber remains a self-proclaimed "princess of hope" as she cares for her rescue dog and grows deeply involved with her community.

The Wednesday Wars Gary Schmidt

Clarion. 2007. ISBN: 9780618724833. Gr. 6–9.

During Wednesday afternoons, a seventh-grader in the 1960s discovers both the timeless wisdom of Shakespeare and unexpected help from a teacher in this coming-of-age story about overcoming interior and exterior obstacles.

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