Engage Students in Discussions on Bias and Bullying with Diverse Middle Grade Books

**Absolutely Almost.** Lisa Graff. (3 –6) Albie is bullied in school and thinks he’s a disappointment to his parents because of his learning differences. Albie, who is half Korean, has never been the smartest kid in his class or the tallest or the best at gym. He has a long list of the things he’s not very good at. But then Albie gets a new babysitter, Calista, who helps him figure out all of the things he is good at and how he can take pride in himself.

**After Tupac & D Foster.** Jacqueline Woodson. (5 – 9) The day D Foster enters Neeka and her best friend’s lives, the world opens up for them. Through her, the girls see another side of life. They share a passion for the rap music of Tupac Shakur. They also deal with discrimination directed at the gay brother of one of the girls.

**Alan Cole Doesn’t Dance.** Eric Bell. (5 – 7) Ever since Alan revealed he’s gay, Ron has been bullying him with relentless fury. Buoyed by the support of his friends Zack and Madison, Alan thinks he can withstand the bullying. Things come to a head when Alan’s father asks that he take June to a school dance. Never mind that Alan has two left feet, does not like girls, and might be developing feelings for a new boy at school.

**Also Known as Elvis.** James Howe. (4 – 7) Skeezie’s got the leather jacket of a tough guy, but a heart of gold. While stuck at home for the summer helping out his mom, he navigates first crushes and tough choices about family and friends. Final book in The Misfits series.

**Amina’s Voice.** Hena Khan. (4 – 7) A Pakistani-American Muslim girl struggles to stay true to her family’s vibrant culture while simultaneously blending in at school after tragedy strikes her community.
The Best Man. Richard Peck. (3 – 5) With humor and insight, Newbery Medalist, Richard Peck, follows a boy from elementary school to middle school navigating school and family dynamics. Starts with a wedding disaster and ends with a great one.

Booked. Kwame Alexander. (5 – 8) Soccer player, Nick learns the power of words as he wrestles with problems at home, stands up to a bully, and tries to impress the girl of his dreams. Follow-up to the Newbery-winning novel, The Crossover.

The Brave. James Bird. (4 – 7) Collin counts every letter spoken to him and is bullied relentlessly because of it. When he’s sent to the Fond du Lac reservation to live with the mother he’s never known, he finally finds a place that is warm, welcoming, and accepting of his condition.

Breakout. Kate Messner. (4 – 6) After two people breakout of prison, everyone in Wolf Creek is on edge, and fear brings out the worst in some people Nora has known her whole life. Told in letters, poems, text messages, news stories, and comics from the perspective of three girls—one black and two white. Issues of race and criminal justice are at the center of this accessible story.

Count Me In. Varsha Bajaj. (5 – 6) Indian-American Karina and her grandfather are assaulted because of how they look. After Karina posts a few photos related to the attack on social media, her post #CountMeIn What does an American look like? #WeBelong #IamAmerican goes viral and a diverse population begin to add their own photos.

Crash. Jerry Spinelli. (4 – 7) Seventh-grader John “Crash” Coogan has always been comfortable with his tough, aggressive behavior, until his relationship with an unusual Quaker boy and his grandfather’s stroke make him consider the meaning of friendship and the importance of family. Told from the bully’s point of view.

Eagle Song. Joseph Bruchac. (3 – 5) After moving to New York, the kids in Danny’s class tease him about being Native American—the thing that makes him most proud. Can he find the courage to stand up for himself?
Everything Sad Is Untrue: (a true story). Daniel Nayeri. (5 – 9) In Oklahoma, a boy named Khosrou (whom everyone calls "Daniel") stands, trying to tell a story to his class. His story. But no one believes a word he says. To them he is a dark-skinned, hairy-armed boy. But Khosrou’s stories, stretching back years, and decades, and centuries, are beautiful, and terrifying.

The Exact Location of Home. Kate Messner. (3 – 5) Zig’s dad canceled his last visit with no explanation. Zig and his mom struggle financially including becoming homeless. Zig sets out to find his dad with a GPS and clues around town.

Faith Takes Flight. Julie Murphy. (6 – 9) Faith Herbert is a pretty regular teen except for the small matter of recently discovering she can fly…. When a TV show relocates to her town, she can’t believe it when the heroine takes a romantic interest in her. But her fandom-fueled daydreams aren’t enough to distract Faith from the fact that first animals, then people, have begun to vanish from the tow

Fatty Legs. Margaret-Olemaun Pokiak-Fenton. (4 – 7) Glimpse into the residential school experience in the far North as an Inuvialuit girl stands up to the bullies at the school. This tenth anniversary edition has important updates.

Feathers. Jacqueline Woodson. (5 – 8) A new boy’s arrival in sixth-grade helps Frannie recognize the barriers that separate people, and the importance of hope as a bridge. Frannie starts seeing a lot of things in a new light—her brother Sean’s deafness, her mother’s fear, the class bully’s anger and her own desire for “the thing with feathers.”

Felix Yz. Lisa Bunker. (5 – 8) When Felix Yz was three, he is accidentally fused with a fourth-dimensional being. Now he’s on the brink of a risky procedure that will free him. With an awkward crush on a boy at school, a gender fluid grandparent and a Bi mom, family, bullying and identity are woven into the story.

Free Lunch. Rex Ogle. (5 – 9) Based on his own experience as a poor kid in a wealthy school district, Rex vividly tells of his first semester of sixth grade as he tries to hide that he doesn’t have much money while classmates and a teacher take one look at him and decide he’s trouble. Life at home is punctuated by outbursts of violence. 2020 YALSA Excellence in Nonfiction Award.
Friend Me. Sheila M. Averbuch. (3 – 7) Roisin hasn't made a single friend since moving to the U.S.. In fact, she is falling apart under constant abuse from Zara, who torments her in person and on social media. Finally, Roisin bonds with Haley online. But, what happens when an online friend becomes a real-life nightmare?

Front Desk. Kelly Yang. (4 – 6) Mia Tang has a lot of secrets. She lives in a motel, not a big house. Every day, while her immigrant parents clean the rooms, ten-year-old Mia manages the front desk. Her parents hide immigrants. She wants to be a writer. But how can she when her mom thinks she should stick to math because English is not her first language? Winner of the Asian / Pacific American Award for Children's Literature.

Garvey's Choice. Nikki Grimes. (4 – 7) Since Garvey's father has always wanted him to be athletic, he has felt like a failure even though he’s kind, funny and smart. When he joins the chorus, he literally finds his voice. An emotional novel written in short verse about a young black boy choosing to be true to himself.

Genesis Begins Again. Alicia D. Williams. (4 – 8) There are ninety-six things Genesis hates about herself. She knows the exact number because she keeps a list. This sensitive and powerful novel tells the story of a thirteen-year-old who must overcome internalized racism and a verbally abusive family to learn to love herself.

George. Alex Gino. (5 – 6) When people look at George, they think they see a boy. But she knows she’s not a boy. She knows she’s a girl. George really wants to play Charlotte in Charlotte's Web. Will she be able to?

Ghost. Lu. Patina. Sunny. Jason Reynolds. (4 – 8) A series of books with four kids from very different backgrounds with personalities that are explosive when they clash. All are a part of an elite middle school track team that goes to the state championships. They all have a lot to lose, but they also have a lot to prove, not only to each other, but to themselves.

Ghost Boys. By Jewell Parker Rhodes. (5 – 9) Twelve-year-old Jerome is shot by a police officer. As a ghost, he observes the devastation that's been unleashed on his family and community. He meets another ghost, Emmett Till, a boy from a very different time but similar circumstances and he meets Sarah, the daughter of the police officer, who grapples with her father’s actions.
A Good Kind of Trouble. Lisa Moore Ramée. (3 – 7) Twelve-year-old Shayla is allergic to trouble. All she wants to do is to follow the rules. But in junior high, it’s like all the rules have changed. Now she’s suddenly questioning who her best friends are and some people at school are saying she’s not black enough. Wait, what?

Gracefully Grayson. Ami Polonsky. (5 – 7) Grayson has been holding onto a secret for what seems like forever: "he" is a girl on the inside. Will new strength from an unexpected friendship and a caring teacher’s wisdom be enough to help Grayson step into the spotlight she was born to inhabit?

The Great Wall of Lucy Wu. Wendy Wan Long Shang. (3 – 6) A humorous and heartwarming story about split cultural identities, and the way life doesn’t go as planned for sixth-grader Lucy Wu – especially when her great-aunt comes for an extended visit from China.

A Handful of Stars. Cynthia Lord. (3 – 6) Explores a friendship between a small-town girl being raised by her grandparents and the daughter of migrant workers. Tackles themes of prejudice and friendship, loss and love.

Harbor Me. Jacqueline Woodson. (5 – 6) Six kids have to meet for a weekly chat—by themselves, with no adults to listen in. They discover it’s safe to talk about what’s bothering them—from Esteban’s father’s deportation and Haley’s father’s incarceration to Amari’s fears of racial profiling and Ashton’s adjustment to his changing family fortunes.

Hurricane Child. Kheryn Callender. (4 – 6) Feeling lonely and bullied daily with cruel remarks about her dark skin tone, Caroline finally befriends a new student, Kalinda. As Caroline develops a crush on Kalinda, they work together to find Caroline’s mother.

Indian No More. Charlene Willing Mcmanis. (4 – 7) After their tribe is “terminated” by the government, Regina’s father signs the family up for the Indian Relocation program and moves them to Los Angeles. Regina finds a whole new world. For the first time in her life, Regina comes face to face with the viciousness of racism.
Inside Out and Back Again. Thanhha Lai. (4 – 7) Hà has only known life in Saigon, but when the Vietnam War has reached her home, she is forced to flee, ending up in Alabama. One girl's year of change, dreams, grief, and healing as she journeys from one country to another, one life to the next.

Jelly Roll. Mere Joyce. (4 – 7) At school, Jenny is bullied by Grade A Jerk Austin Parks. When Jenny and Austin end up at a leadership camp together, Jenny thinks her week will be miserable. But when Jenny learns that Austin wants their group’s project to fail, she has to decide if she can risk standing up to him.

The Liberation of Gabriel King. K. L. Going. (4 – 5) In Georgia in 1976, Gabriel, a white boy, and Frita, an African American girl, overcome their fears of bullying and prejudice together as they enter 5th grade.

Lily and Dunkin. Donna Gephart. (5 – 8) As 8th grade begins both Lily and Dunkin are trying to establish new identities for themselves. Everyone sees Lily as Timothy, but she is ready for the real her to be known. Dunkin just moved to town and wants to leave his past behind.

Maybe He Just Likes You. Barbara Dee (4 – 8) For seventh-grader Mila, it starts with some boys giving her an unwanted hug. Then, boys don’t leave Mila alone. It doesn’t feel like flirting. Mila learns how to stand her ground as the book explores the subject of #MeToo for the middle grade audience.

The Misfits. James Howe. (6 – 9) Four friends try to survive seventh grade in the face of frequent taunts based on their weight, height, intelligence and sexual orientation/gender expression. The characters are not cast as victims, but as self-empowered agents of change. Also see: Totally Joe, Addie on the Inside, and Also Known as Elvis.

My Louisiana Sky. Kimberly Willis Holt. (4 – 6) Tiger Ann wants nothing more than to get out of her rural town—away from her mentally disabled mother, her “slow” father, and her classmates who tease her. But when she has a chance, she has to make hard decisions about her life and family.
**New Kid.** Jerry Craf. (5 – 7) Jordan’s parents enroll him in a prestigious private school known for its academics, where Jordan is one of the few kids of color in his entire grade. Jordan soon finds himself torn between two worlds—and not really fitting into either one.

**Nowhere Boy.** Katherine Marsh. (4 – 6) Ahmed is struggling to get by on his own Brussels after fleeing Aleppo. Then he meets Max, American boy from Washington, D.C who is lonely and homesick. Together, they defy the odds, learning from each other what it means to be brave and how hope can change your destiny.

**The Other Boy.** M. G. Hennessey. (5 – 9) Shane, a transgender boy, has moved to a new school where people only know him as a boy. He loves playing baseball and hanging out with his best friend. But an older boy undermines Shane’s privacy. Show’s Shane’s range of emotions from anxiety to happiness and courage. Discusses hormone treatments.

**The Pants Project.** Cat Clarke. (3 – 6) Liv knows he was always meant to be a boy but he hasn’t told anyone—not even his moms yet. His new school has a terrible dress code, he can’t even wear pants. Only skirts. The only way for Liv to get what he wants is to go after it himself. But this isn’t just a mission to change the policy—it’s a mission to change his life.

**The Parker Inheritance.** Varian Johnson. (3 – 6) Candice discovers a mysterious letter that describes an injustice that happened decades ago. Along with Brandon, a quiet and often bullied boy, she begins to decipher the clues with a story that leads them deep into their South Carolina town’s history—a history full of ugly deeds, forgotten heroes, and one great love. Includes LGBT characters.

**The Popularity Code.** Stephanie Faris. (4 – 7) Faith Taylor is popular by association. When a new website called SlamBook targets her school’s popular kids, Faith discovers her own page She finds herself obsessing over the comments—some good, some not so good. Faith starts posting negative comments. But when her comments go too far, she realizes she must figure out a way to make things right before it’s too late.

**A Place at the Table.** Saadia Faruqi. (5 – 7) With themes of food, friendship, family and what it means to belong, the book features sixth graders Sara, a Pakistani American, and Elizabeth, a white, Jewish girl taking a South Asian cooking class taught by Sara’s mom. In this context racism, financial insecurity, and mental illness are explored.
The Popularity Papers: Book Two: The Long-Distance Dispatch Between Lydia Goldblatt and Julie Graham-Chang. Amy Ignatow. (4 – 6) Julie and Lydia are in different schools, each dealing with what it means to be popular and with bullying. Graphic novel. Second in a series of seven books.

Prairie Lotus. Linda Sue Park. (5 – 7) A multilayered book about a mixed race girl determined to fit in and realize her dreams in a small town during the westward expansion. Hanna’s adjustment to her new surroundings, which primarily means negotiating the townspeople’s almost unanimous prejudice against Asians, is at the heart of the story.

Real Friends. Shannon Hale. (4 – 7) Shannon needs to decide whether being part of The Group is worth it even if that means bullying others. A graphic novel memoir about relational aggression and the power of finding true friends. The sequel Best Friends looks at the challenges of keeping a circle of friends, and the anxiety of standing up to bullies.

Return to Sender. Julia Alvarez. (4 – 7) After Tyler’s father is injured in a tractor accident, his family hires migrant Mexican workers to help save their Vermont farm. Can Tyler and Mari find a way to be friends despite their differences? Full of hope, but no easy answers.

The Revealers. Doug Wilhelm. (5 – 7) At Parkland Middle School, three bullied seventh graders start an e-mail forum to publicize their experiences. Many other kids come forward with similar troubles. It’s clear that the problem at their school is larger than anyone knew. In one email, a student tells his troubles of being called gay.

Rick. Alex Gino. (4 – 7) Rick’s never questioned much. He’s gone along with his best friend, Jeff, even when Jeff’s acted like a bully and a jerk. But now Rick’s gotten to middle school, and new doors are opening. One of them leads to the school’s Rainbow Spectrum club, where kids of many genders and identities congregate.

Ruby in the Sky. Jeanne Zulick Ferruolo. (3 – 5) 12-year-old Ruby Moon does not want her new classmates to ask about her parents. She wants to keep to herself but Ahmad, a Syrian refugee, decides he’s her new best friend and Ruby befriends a recluse named Abigail. As ugly rumors begin to swirl around the people Ruby loves, she must make a choice: break her silence, or risk losing everything that’s come to mean so much to her.
Save Me a Seat. Sarah Weeks. (3 – 7) Joe's lived in the same town all his life while Ravi’s family just moved to America from India. Joe and Ravi don't think they have anything in common -- but soon enough they have a common enemy (the biggest bully in their class) and a common mission: to take control of their lives over the course of a single crazy week.

The Secret Sheriff of Sixth Grade. Jordan Sonnenblick. (4 – 7)
In sixth grade, bad things can happen to good kids. Bullies will find your weakness and teachers will say you did something wrong. Maverick with a strong sense of self and a sense of humor wants to change all that . . . even if that's a hard thing to do, especially when his own home life is falling apart.

The Skin I'm In. Sharon G Flake. (5 – 7) Maleeka suffers every day from the taunts. If they're not getting at her about her homemade clothes or her good grades, it's about her dark, black skin. But the new teacher's attitude surprises Maleeka. Miss Saunders loves the skin she’s in. Can Maleeka learn to do the same?

Sophie Washington: The Snitch. Tonya Duncan Ellis. (3 – 5) There's nothing worse than being a tattletale… at least that’ what 10-year-old Sophie thinks until she runs into Lanie, a new girl at school. Then a classmate gets seriously injured and Sophie needs to make a decision: fight back, or snitch? (Book 2 of 11 Sophie Washington books)

The Stars Beneath Our Feet. David Barclay Moore. (5 – 9) A boy tries to steer a safe path through the projects in Harlem in the wake of his brother’s death. Then Lolly’s mother’s girlfriend brings him a gift that will change everything: two enormous bags filled with Legos.

Sugar and Ice. Kate Messner. (3 –5) For Claire Boucher, life is all about skating on the frozen cow pond until a Russian skating coach offers her a scholarship to train in Lake Placid. Tossed into a world of mean girls on ice, can she find the strength to stand up to the people who want to see her fail and the courage to decide which dream she wants to follow?

Totally Joe. James Howe. (6 – 9) Joe navigates middle school while questioning gender expectations and traditional roles as he realizes he is gay. He has supportive family and friends while dealing with name-calling and controversy. One of four in The Misfits series.
Violet in Bloom: A Flower Power Book. Lauren Myracle. (4 – 6) In a single, eventful week each girl makes discoveries about herself and others. Includes blog posts, IMs, and video scripts. Touches on topics of friendship, dealing with fears, family, feeling powerful and bullying. One of the girls has two moms. Sequel to Luv Ya Bunches.

Wishtree. Katherine Applegate. (3 – 7) Trees can't tell jokes, but they can certainly tell stories.... After a Muslim girl and her family move in, an oak tree and a crow help two children and their neighbors embrace their differences and handle bullying and hate speech.

Wonder / La Lección de August. R.J. Palacio. (5 – 7) Auggie was born with a facial deformity that prevented him from going to a mainstream school until 5th grade. Told from multiple perspectives that highlight different struggles with empathy and acceptance. English and Spanish editions.

Wringer. Jerry Spinelli. (5 – 7) As Palmer comes of age, he must either accept the violence of being a “wringer” at his town’s annual Pigeon Day or find the courage to oppose it. Can spark discussion concerning the perils of peer pressure.

You Go First. Erin Entrada Kelly. (3 – 6) On the surface, Charlotte’s and Ben’s lives seem vastly different. Over the course of a week, only by an online Scrabble game, their lives will intersect in unexpected ways. An exploration of family, bullying and the ever-complicated world of middle school friendships. Written by the winner of the Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature.

Zenobia July. Lisa Bunker. (5 – 9) Zenobia July is starting a new life in Maine with her aunts. People used to tell her she was a boy; now she’s able to live openly as the girl she always knew she was. When someone anonymously posts hateful memes on her school’s website, Zenobia knows she’s the one with the hacking skills to solve the mystery.