



Book of the Month

Presented by ADL's Education Department

About the Book of the Month: This collection of featured books is from Books Matter: The Best Kid Lit on Bias, Diversity and Social Justice. The books teach about bias and prejudice, promote respect for diversity, encourage social action and reinforce themes addressed in education programs of *A World of Difference® Institute*, ADL's international anti-bias education and diversity training provider. For educators, adult family members and other caregivers of children, reading the books listed on this site with your children and incorporating them into instruction are excellent ways to talk about these important concepts at home and in the classroom.

Hello, Universe

Erin Entrada Kelly (Author), Isabel Roxas (Illustrator)

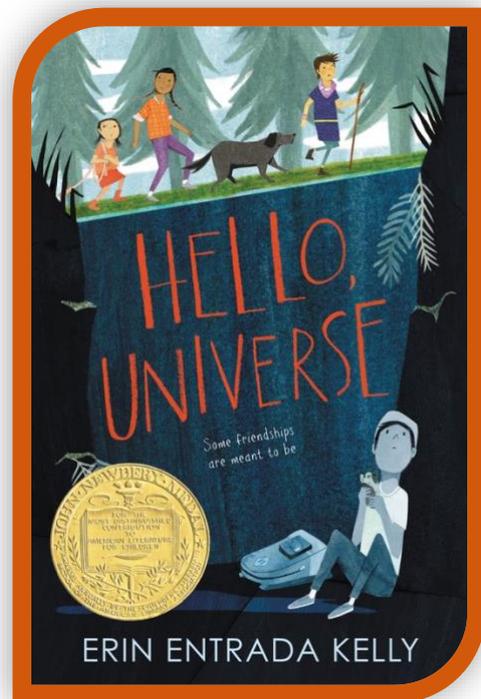
In one day, four lives weave together in unexpected ways. Virgil Salinas is shy and kindhearted and feels out of place in his crazy-about-sports family. Valencia Somerset, who is deaf, is smart, brave and secretly lonely, and she loves everything about nature. Kaori Tanaka is a self-proclaimed psychic, whose little sister, Gen, is always following her around. And Chet Bullens wishes the weird kids would just stop being so different so he can concentrate on basketball. They aren't friends, at least not until Chet pulls a prank that traps Virgil and his pet guinea pig at the bottom of a well. This disaster leads Kaori, Gen and Valencia on an epic quest to find missing Virgil. Through luck, smarts, bravery and a little help from the universe, a rescue is performed, bullying behavior is put in its place and friendship blooms.

ISBN: 978-0062414151

Publisher: Greenwillow Books

Year Published: 2017

Age Range: 8–12



Book Themes

Bias, Bullying, Identity and Culture, Friendship, People with Disabilities

Key Words

Discuss and define these words with students prior to reading the book and remind them of the meanings as they come up in the book. See ADL's [Education Glossary Terms](#).

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|--------------------------|----------------|--------------|------------------|
| ■ aligned | ■ demeanor | ■ hex | ■ misery |
| ■ alternate | ■ depression | ■ inevitable | ■ overprotective |
| ■ American Sign Language | ■ Detained | ■ Injustice | ■ premonition |
| ■ coincidence | ■ disabled | ■ invisible | ■ resentment |
| ■ confidential | ■ enigma | ■ judge | ■ sensitive |
| ■ debilitating | ■ fate | ■ kinship | ■ suffocate |
| ■ deaf | ■ hearing aids | ■ manipulate | ■ universe |
| ■ defective | ■ heritage | ■ mimic | |

Discussion Questions

If the students read the book in small groups or as a whole class, ask discussion questions throughout their reading in order to check comprehension and engage them on a deeper level. Some of these questions can also be used as writing prompts. When students have finished the book, choose from these questions to guide a group discussion:

- What is the book about?
- When you first looked at the book's title and cover, what did you think it might be about?
- When you initially meet Virgil, Valencia, Kaori and Chet, what do you think about them? How did these characters change and grow throughout the book?
- What is Virgil's relationship with Lola (his grandmother) like? What stories does Lola tell Virgil and what did they reveal about her, their Filipino culture and important truths about future events?
- What are the different ways in which each of the main characters (Virgil, Valencia, Kaori and Chet) relates to their parents/family members?
- What are the roles of animals in the book? Why do you think the author included pets and other animals as important connections to the main characters?
- What do you think is the meaning of Valencia's recurring nightmare (where she is standing in an open field surrounded by people and a girl says two words to her)?
- Why does Virgil's family call him "Turtle" and how does he feel about the nickname? Have you ever had a nickname that others gave to you and how do you feel about it?
- What does it mean that Kaori considers herself to have "second sight" (someone who can see into the future, has premonitions)? What does she do with those "powers" and how does she help people?
- What role does Chet play in the book? To whom does he direct his bullying behavior and what impact does it have on those characters?

- What does Valencia mean when she says, “Meanness always shows on people’s faces.” Have you ever seen meanness on people’s faces?
- What do you learn about Chet when you see his interactions with his Dad?
- Chet says that his Dad tells him that respect comes in two flavors: fear or admiration. Do you agree or disagree, and why?
- Who is “Alternate Virgil” and how is he different from Virgil? Do you have an “alternate” personality?
- How are Virgil and Valencia connected, even though they have never talked to each other?
- How is Valencia treated by some people because she is deaf? How does she feel about that?
- What are the “how-tos” that Valencia developed and why are they important to her?
- What happened with Valencia’s friendship with Roberta and how did it impact Valencia?
- What happens in the woods to Virgil and what role do each of the characters play in what happens?
- How are each of the characters impacted by what happens to Virgil and the rescue?
- When Virgil is stuck in the well, he discovers his inner “Bayani” (hero) when facing the “Pah” (the monster bird). What does being brave mean to you?
- When Virgil is in the well, who is the voice talking to him and helping him feel brave? Have you ever had an experience like that?
- What makes Kaori think that Virgil is in danger? Do you ever have a feeling about something and it turns out to be true?
- When Ruby says, “There are many different ways to be strong. And being a warrior has nothing to do with size,” what does she mean? When have you felt strong in non-physical ways?
- What character(s) in the book do you most identify with and why?
- What parts or passages of the book were most meaningful or important to you? Why?
- Why do you think the book is called Hello, Universe?
- Why do you think the author ended the book with someone texting Valencia a single word, “hello?”
- How did you feel when the book ended?
- What are the overall themes and messages of the book?

Extension Activities

Below are activities that you can do with students in order to extend the learning from the book.

1. Reader’s Response and Writing Activities

Write the Next Chapter of the Book: Have students consider what might happen next in the book and then write an additional chapter of how they think it could continue. Remind students how the book ends by asking the following questions: *Who do you think is texting Valencia to say “hello?” What happens with Valencia and Kaori’s business? How does Chet interact with Virgil after Virgil stands up to him?* Have students write the next chapter of the book as they imagine it, beginning with the text that Valencia receives.

Video Diary of a Character: Have students select a main character from the book such as Valencia, Virgil, Kaori, Gen, Chet or Lola (Virgil's grandmother). Then have them construct a video diary from that person's point of view. They should first write some notes about the person which could include background about the person, who they are in the story, something important about their identity, the other characters to whom they relate, the role they play in bullying or allyship, how they change/grow and some of their thoughts and feelings about the main events in the book. Students should also include at least 3–5 specific reactions that character has to the day-to-day events and other activities that take place in the book. You may choose to have students engage in conferencing with a partner about their character in order to get some of their ideas out. They should then create an outline and "script" of what they are going to say and then record their video diary on a phone or other recording device in which they "act" or pretend that they are the person. They can use props, signs and different locations for their recording. After all students have presented their video diaries to the class, discuss the process of creating the video diary and the similarities and differences between the main characters.

Learn about the Author: Have students learn as much as they can about the author, Erin Entrada Kelly. They can do this by looking at her [website](#), checking her social media postings (e.g., Twitter, Instagram) and conducting other online research. First, as a class, discuss possible things they want to know about her such as where she grew up, her inspiration for writing the book, her cultural background and its relevance to the book, other books she has written, interests and hobbies, family life, relevant quotes, etc. They can also reach out to the author (through her website) and ask questions. The research can culminate in a simulated interview with the author (where the student plays the author and a classmate asks questions), an essay, PowerPoint presentation or artistic representation of the author that includes relevant details.

2. Identity-Based Bullying

Talk with students about the role of bullying and how it is addressed in the book. Elicit a definition of **bullying** as follows:

When a person or a group behaves in ways—on purpose and over and over—that make someone feel hurt, afraid or embarrassed.

(**Note:** This definition is for elementary students. For older students, use the definition in our [Glossary](#).)

Reiterate that bullying is not just mean behavior that happens once; it is behavior that takes place over and over. Ask students: What is identity? Elicit/explain a definition of identity as "the qualities, beliefs, and characteristics that make a particular person or group different from others." (You can provide an example using yourself such as "My identity includes being Latina, a woman and Catholic.") Explain that **identity-based bullying** is bullying that is related to the targeted person's identity such as race, gender, religion, disability, etc. Ask students to explain the different ways that Chet engaged in bullying directed at Virgil and Valencia. Have students then turn and talk with someone sitting next to them and share about a time that they witnessed, heard about or personally experienced bullying based on an aspect of identity. They should share (1) what happened, (2) how they felt and (3) what they or someone else did or what they wish they or someone else did about it. When they are finished talking in pairs, ask a few students to share their examples with the class. You can also have students write these up as personal essays for homework.

3. What are my “How-Tos?”

Remind students that in the book, Valencia has what she calls the “how-tos,” (see page 143), which are ways she needs others to talk so she can understand what they are saying. Valencia is deaf, which means she isn't able to hear and she uses lip reading (looking at the movement of lips, face and tongue) to understand what others are saying. Valencia's how-tos are: (1) face me, (2) don't cover your mouth and (2) speak clearly. Ask students: *Why do you think these are Valencia's how-tos?* Explain that these how-tos are what Valencia needs to communicate so she can read people's lips when they speak. Explain to students that while Valencia needs these because she is deaf, all people need things to help them communicate better. Ask students: *What do you need to have people understand what you're saying and to be understood by others? What are your how-tos?* Brainstorm a list of possible how-tos and record them on the board/smart board or chart paper. Examples might include: don't interrupt me, keep your body still, use words I know, be calm, sit down, etc. Have students identify three how-tos for themselves and then have them create a small poster that includes their how-tos with a small illustration or symbol next to each one.

ADL Resources

The following are curriculum and resources on bullying, being an ally and identity.

Curriculum Resources

Cyberbullying: Understanding and Addressing Online Cruelty, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/cyberbullying-understanding-and-addressing-online-cruelty.

Identity-Based Bullying, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/identity-based-bullying.

Who Am I? Identity Poems, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/who-am-i-identity-poems.

Words That Heal: Using Children's Literature to Address Bullying, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/words-that-heal-using-childrens-literature-to-address.

Print Material

Suggested Language for People with Disabilities
www.adl.org/media/4738/download

Provides suggested wording and language when referring to people with disabilities.

Websites

Anti-Bias Education
www.adl.org/what-we-do/promote-respect/anti-bias

Provides training program offerings for pre-K through 12th grade school communities—educators, administrators, youth and families—which focus on the development of an inclusive culture and respectful school climate by addressing issues of bias and bullying.

Be An Ally: Six Simple Ways
www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/be-an-ally-six-simple-ways

Some simple things a student can do to be an ally to targets of name-calling and bullying.

Bullying and Cyberbullying Prevention Strategies and Resources

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/bullying-and-cyberbullying-prevention-strategies

Provides a collection of ADL resources on bullying and cyberbullying for educators, administrators, students and families and caregivers.

National Bullying Prevention Month

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/national-bullying-prevention-month

Here are some resources to help students be motivated and empowered to act as allies and help contribute to creating a positive “ally culture” at their schools.

Safe and Inclusive Schools for All

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/safe-and-inclusive-schools-for-all

Provides information about how to promote a safe, respectful and inclusive school community.

Table Talk: Family Conversations about Current Events

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/table-talk

Provides the tools parents and family members need to engage their families in conversations about important news stories and other timely discussions about societal and world events. Includes discussion guides containing a topic summary, questions to start the conversation and dig deeper, ideas for taking action and additional resources. See [Table Talk: What Bullying Is and Is Not](#).

Children's Books

Below are links to lists of recommended anti-bias and multicultural books for the indicated category.

Bullying Awareness & Prevention, [www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?childrens-lit-select-all-2=1&tid\[165\]=165&tid\[166\]=166&tid\[167\]=167&tid\[168\]=168&tid\[169\]=169](http://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?childrens-lit-select-all-2=1&tid[165]=165&tid[166]=166&tid[167]=167&tid[168]=168&tid[169]=169)

People, Identity & Culture, [www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?childrens-lit-select-all-7=1&tid\[201\]=201&tid\[202\]=202&tid\[203\]=203&tid\[204\]=204&tid\[205\]=205&tid\[206\]=206&tid\[207\]=207&tid\[208\]=208&tid\[209\]=209&tid\[210\]=210&tid\[211\]=211&tid\[212\]=212&tid\[213\]=213&tid\[214\]=214&tid\[215\]=215](http://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?childrens-lit-select-all-7=1&tid[201]=201&tid[202]=202&tid[203]=203&tid[204]=204&tid[205]=205&tid[206]=206&tid[207]=207&tid[208]=208&tid[209]=209&tid[210]=210&tid[211]=211&tid[212]=212&tid[213]=213&tid[214]=214&tid[215]=215)