



Book of the Month

Presented by ADL's Education Division

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.

The Blossoming Universe of Violet Diamond

Brenda Woods (Author)

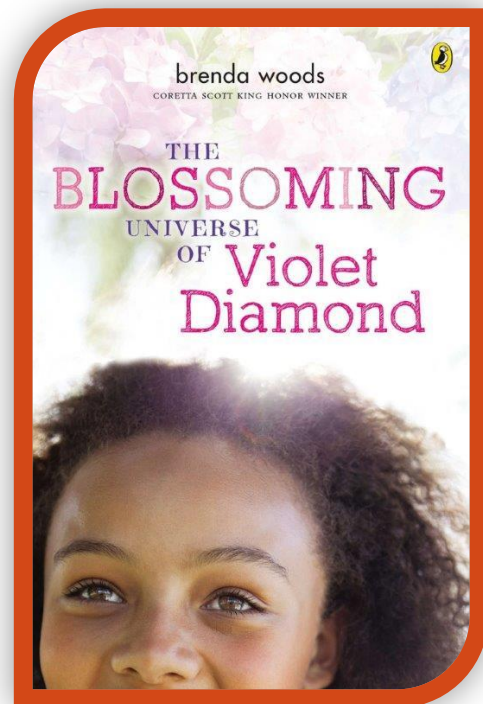
Violet is smart, funny and biracial. But her African American father died before she was born and she has grown up with just her white mother and white older sister. She attends a white school and lives in a mostly white town. Now that she's eleven, Violet is determined to learn more about her African American heritage. She seeks out her grandmother, a famous Afrocentric artist. And as Violet reclaims her lost heritage, her confidence in herself grows and she starts to blossom into her whole, wonderful self.

ISBN: 978-0147514301

Publisher: Puffin Books

Year Published: 2015

Age Range: 8–12



Book Themes

Identity, Race, Racial pride, Family, Self-esteem

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 [Glossary of Education Terms](#).

- Afrocentric
- bewildered
- biracial
- bohemian

- cemetery
- evolution
- reconcile
- tenacious
- complexion
- frivolous
- serendipity
- Tuskegee Airmen
- convoluted
- optimistic
- soul food
- unconventional
- decisive
- paramedic
- subconscious
- valedictorian
- embarrassing
- psychologist
- Swahili

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?
- How would you describe Violet's personality and how does she change throughout the book?
- Why do you think Violet wants a cat so badly and what does the stray cat she adopts symbolize?
- What are some of the similarities and differences between Violet and her sister Daisy that Violet describes?
- When she describes herself as a "single fallen brown leaf atop a blanket of white snow," what does Violet mean?
- Why do some people not perceive Violet as related to her mother or sister? How do you think you might feel if someone didn't think you were related to your family members?
- How does Violet feel about living in a mostly white town like Moon Lake?
- When Violet started to do online research about the African American side of her family—specifically her Grandmother Roxanne—what did she notice right away?
- Why do you think it was so important to Violet that she knows about that side of her family?
- When Violet and her best friend Athena talk about Violet's being the only black girl in class, how does Violet feel about that? Have you ever experienced something similar?
- Why do you think, as Violet explained to her mom, that she would prefer to live in a big city when she grows up?
- What was it like when Violet first met her Grandmother? What different feelings do you think each of them had?
- What did Gam mean when she said, "I suppose when you don't know about the other part of your family, it feels like there's something missing. Like all of the pieces of the puzzle aren't there." Have you ever felt like this?
- How did Violet come up with the name "Bibi" for her grandmother and why was that meaningful?
- How are Bibi's neighborhood and life different than Violet's neighborhood and life in general?
- What were some of the experiences that Violet and Bibi had together in Los Angeles? How do you think they both felt during the visit?

- What did Violet learn about the other side of her family? What did she learn about herself?
- Do you think Violet felt like she “belonged” when she was with her father’s side of her family? How do you know?
- Why do you think Violet feels (as she thinks to herself): “To white people, I’m half black. To black people, I’m half white.”
- What did Bibi’s diamond ring (that was missing one diamond) symbolize?
- Violet and Bibi have several conversations about race and racism. What are their points of view? What are your thoughts about their perspectives?
- How did Violet save Bibi’s life?
- How did all of the Diamonds (both sides of her family) get along when they met?
- Towards the end of the book, Violet thinks to herself: “Nothing has really changed except me.” What does she mean by this?
- How did you feel when the book ended?
- What is the overall theme and message of the book?

Extension Activities

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

1. My Identity: Pieces of the Puzzle

In the book, Gam says to Violet: “I suppose when you don’t know about the other part of your family, it feels like there’s something missing. Like all of the pieces of the puzzle aren’t there.” Ask students what they think Gam means by this and explore how Violet’s visit with the other side of her family helps her feel like all the pieces are there. Ask students: *What is identity?* Come to a definition of **identity** as the qualities and beliefs that make a particular person or group different from others. Explain that identity can include: race, gender, culture, religion, sexual orientation, family structure, nationality, heritage, appearance, etc. and that many things shape a person’s identity and who they are. Engage students in a brainstorming session to explore specific aspects of identity such as Asian, Jewish, biracial, deaf, Mexican, etc.

Next, have students individually create a list of the aspects of their own identity that are most important to them, coming up with a list of between 3–8 items. They will then create a puzzle about the different parts of their identity by taking photos of themselves (or use ones they already have), printing them onto 8 ½ x 11 paper and copying onto cardstock paper or mounting on construction paper. Then they will cut the photo of themselves into the amount of pieces based on how many identity characteristics they have on their lists. When the photo is cut into puzzle pieces, students will write one aspect of their identity on each puzzle piece. They will then each present their puzzle pieces to the class, explaining who they are as a whole and symbolically taping the puzzle pieces together. After presenting, engage students in a discussion about identity.

2. Reading Response Writing Activities

- **Write the next chapter of the book:** Have students discuss what might happen next in the book and write an additional chapter. Remind students how the book ends and ask the following questions: *What do you think happens when Bibi spends time at the mountain cabin with Violet*

and her family? What do you think it's like for Violet when she goes back to school after her summer of getting to know her father's side of the family? They will write the next chapter of the book, either beginning with the next day, August in the mountain cabin or back at school after summer vacation.

- **Diary Entry of Character:** Have students write diary entries for one of the main characters: Violet, Bibi, Justine (Violet's mom), Daisy, Athena, Gam, Poppy or Ahmed. After selecting their characters, students will write 5–8 diary entries that the character might have kept before, during or after the book's events. Remind students that the character's thoughts and feelings are very important in a diary as well as their reaction to the day-to-day events and other activities that take place throughout the book. You may choose to have students engage in pre-writing discussions with a partner about their character in order to get some of their ideas out. After they have completed the assignment, have them share their diary entries with the class and consider creating an online collection of all the diary entries.
- **Book Review or Book Talk:** Have students write a book review of *The Blossoming Universe of Violet Diamond*. The elements of a book review should include: (1) title, author, genre and theme; (2) personal reflections about the book—how it made you feel, what you learned and your thoughts about it; (3) plot summary—describe what happened without giving away spoilers; (4) people/characters you loved or disliked and (5) why it is worth reading or not. Consider sharing the reviews on a class blog, using GoodReads for online reviews. In addition, they can do a “book talk” with their class in which they discuss the elements of their book review based on the categories above or read it aloud and answer questions.

3. Poems about Family: Metaphors

Violet describes herself as a “single fallen brown leaf atop a blanket of white snow.” Ask: *What does this mean? Why does Violet feel this way?* Then ask: *What is a metaphor?* Elicit and explain that a **metaphor** is a word or phrase for one thing that is used to refer to another thing in order to show or suggest that they are similar. Inspired by Violet's description, ask students to think about and brainstorm some metaphors they might use to describe themselves and/or their families. After group brainstorming, have students write a metaphor that relate to their family or themselves and if time permits, turn them into poems they write and illustrate (April is National Poetry Month).

ADL Resources

The following are curriculum and resources on identity and race.

Curriculum Resources

“10 Ideas for Teaching Black History Month,” *Current Events Classroom*, www.adl.org/education-outreach/lesson-plans/c/10-ideas-for-teaching-black-history.html.

“Dolls Are Us,” *Current Events Classroom*, www.adl.org/education-outreach/lesson-plans/c/dolls-are-us.html.

“Role Models and Stereotypes: Misty Copeland's Story,” *Current Events Classroom*, www.adl.org/education-outreach/lesson-plans/c/role-models-and-stereotypes.html.

“Who Am I? Identity Poems,” *Current Events Classroom*, www.adl.org/education-outreach/lesson-plans/c/who-am-i-identity-poems.html.

Websites

Anti-Bias Education

www.adl.org/education-outreach/anti-bias-education

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.

Black History Month Resources

www.adl.org/education-outreach/early-childhood

A listing of PreK-12 curriculum and other resources to bring the themes of Black History Month to the classroom during February and throughout the year.

Creating an Anti-Bias Learning Environment

www.adl.org/education-outreach/early-childhood/c/the-question-corner.html

Provides tips for the classroom educator to create an anti-bias learning environment.

Race Talk: Engaging Young People in Conversations about Race

www.adl.org/education-outreach/early-childhood/c/the-question-corner.html

Provides strategies and advice for talking with young people about race and racism.

Children's Books

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

People, Identity and Culture: Biracial and Multiracial, www.adl.org/education-outreach/books-matter/people-books.html?subpeople=biracialmultiracial

People, Identity and Culture: Black, African-American and Caribbean-American People, www.adl.org/education-outreach/books-matter/people-books.html?subpeople=black-african-american-caribbean

Race and Racism, www.adl.org/education-outreach/books-matter/race-racism.html

Racial Pride, www.adl.org/education-outreach/books-matter/race-books.html?subrace=racial-pride