



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.

Red, White, and Whole

Rajani LaRocca (Author)

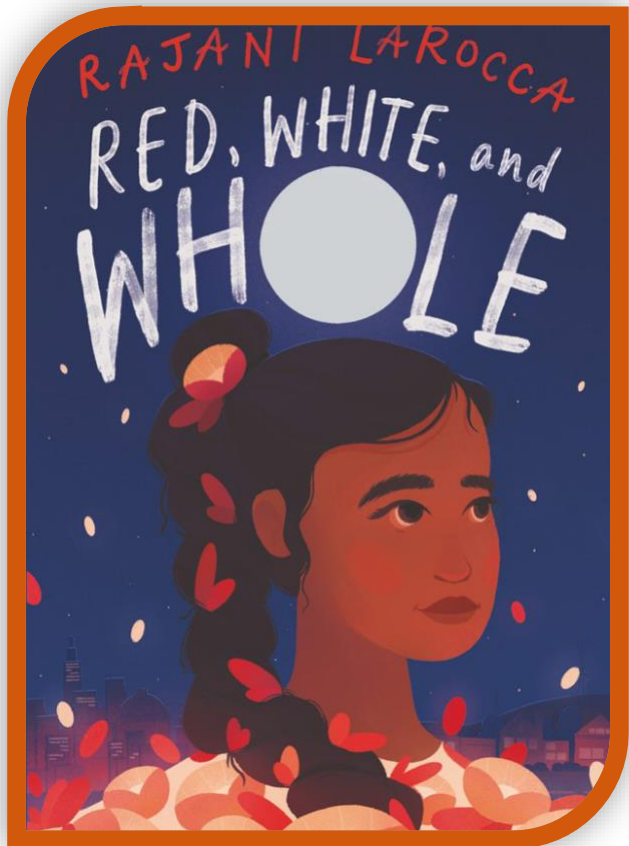
Reha feels torn between two worlds: school, where she's the only Indian American student, and home, with her family's traditions and holidays. But Reha's parents don't understand why she's conflicted—they only notice when Reha doesn't meet their strict expectations. Reha feels disconnected from her mother, or Amma, although their names are linked—Reha means “star” and Punam means “moon”—but they are a universe apart. Then Reha finds out that her Amma is sick. Really sick. Reha, who dreams of becoming a doctor even though she can't stomach the sight of blood, is determined to make her Amma well again. She'll be the perfect daughter if it means saving her Amma's life.

ISBN: 978-0063047426

Publisher: Quill Tree Books

Year Published: 2021

Age Range: 8-12



Book Themes

People, Identity, Culture, Living in Two Worlds, Similarities and Differences, Heroes, Friendship, Death

Key Words

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

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|-----------------|----------------|---------------|----------------|
| ■ aromatic | ■ dutiful | ■ mediocre | ■ reincarnated |
| ■ ancestors | ■ dwell | ■ metaphor | ■ struggling |
| ■ auspicious | ■ exhilaration | ■ mourning | ■ superstition |
| ■ awkward | ■ forfeit | ■ mundane | ■ tributary |
| ■ betrays | ■ freedom | ■ negotiate | ■ vanquished |
| ■ Ceaseless | ■ Headstrong | ■ Preoccupied | ■ Virtuous |
| ■ certification | ■ irritation | ■ prominent | ■ visa |
| ■ devoured | ■ jealous | ■ pungency | ■ vulnerable |
| ■ diagnosis | ■ kin | ■ refuge | ■ wistful |
| ■ disconnected | ■ luminous | ■ repel | |

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?
- What is Reha like when you first meet her, and how does she change and evolve throughout the story?
- The book starts off with Reha saying, "I have two lives. One that is Indian, one that is not." What do you think Reha means?
- How does Reha go on to explain the "two lives" and "two worlds" that she lives in? Can you relate to how Reha feels?
- What do you learn about Reha's life throughout the book that speaks to her "two lives" and "two worlds"?
- When Reha reflects on her best friend Rachel, she says, "Rachel doesn't care what anyone else thinks. I wish I could be more like her." Why do you think Reha says this? Have you ever felt this way? Please explain.
- When Reha describes the differences between her and Rachel, especially around foods they enjoy or are able to eat, how does this convey something about the importance of similarities and differences in friendship? Do you have experiences like this with a friend? Please explain.
- In the book, Reha reflects on the group of Indian friends of her family and that their marriages were arranged. She wonders if things would be different if they chose their partners. What were your thoughts while reading this part?

- There's a scene where Sunny and Reha are listening, singing, and dancing to pop music and at the same time, her parents are downstairs watching "grainy old black-and-white Hindi films." What do you think the author is saying by sharing this moment?
- Despite enjoying and feeling connected to her relatives in India when she visits, in what ways does Reha feel like an outsider in India as well as in the U.S.?
- When Reha wants to go to the school dance, why is she hesitant to ask her parents? What are her parents' reactions?
- Reha writes her mother an aerogramme (a letter sent via airmail) that she never sends. What is Reha trying to convey in the letter? Why do you think Reha decides not to send the aerogramme? Have you ever written a letter you didn't send? Why did you make this decision?
- What happens when Reha finds out her mother has leukemia? How does Reha feel?
- How do Pete and Reha talk about what being a hero means? Why is it especially brave of Reha to get a blood test to see if she's a match for her mother's bone marrow?
- When Reha discovers that Pete has problems of his own, she reflects, "And I realize we are friends, both living two lives, both rushing over rapids in separate boats." What do you think this means? How are they both living two lives? What are the rapids and what are the boats?
- When Reha and her family and friends have a "puja" (ceremonial worship) in their home to honor Amma, why does Reha say "And all the pieces of my life, the streams that seemed to separate, have flowed together?" What does that mean? What are the streams? What does the flowing together symbolize?
- When you read the aerogramme that Reha's mother wrote to Reha before she died, what thoughts and feelings came up for you? What was your biggest takeaway from reading the letter? How does Reha feel after reading it?
- How did you feel when the book ended? What do you think will happen next?
- Why do you think the author chose to write the novel in verse (a novel told through poetry)?
- Why do you think the book is called *Red, White, and Whole*?
- What is the overall message of the book?

Extension Activities

Below are activities for students that can extend learning from the book.

1. Reader's Response Writing Activities

What does it mean to be "between two worlds?": In the book, we see Reha reflect on "being between two worlds," feeling "split in two" and "No matter where I go, America or India, I don't quite fit." Elicit examples from the book where Reha talks about this (e.g., her Indian family and friends vs. her life at school, what her parents want her to future to be vs. what she wants it to be, their life in the U.S. vs. most of her family's life in India). Then ask students: Have you ever felt "between two worlds?" Have you ever felt "split in two?" Invite students to turn and talk with someone sitting near them and respond to some/all of the following questions: What are the two worlds? What do each of the worlds represent to you? What does it feel like in each world? What does it feel like to be between two worlds? What was challenging about it? Have you ever experienced your two worlds brought together and if so, what was that experience like? After discussing in pairs, have students write an

essay (with an accompanying image, if they want) that either explores Reha's experiences of being between two worlds or their own experiences of being between two worlds that they discussed with their partners. After writing, have students share with the class.

Diary Entries of a Character: Have students select one of the central characters of the book: Reha, Amma (Reha's mom), Reha's dad, Sunny, Rachel, Pete, or Prema Auntie. Then have students write a collection of diary entries for the chosen character, writing 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 day-to-day events and other activities that take place throughout the book. Invite students to focus on their character's perspective. *How do they observe the events of the story? What assumptions do they make about other characters they interact with? What thoughts might they have that they wouldn't want to share with others, but share in their diary? What are their hopes and dreams? What are their fears?* You may choose to have students engage in prewriting discussions with a partner about their character in order to get their ideas out. After students have completed the diary entries, have them share their writing with the class and consider creating an online collection of all the diary entries.

Get to Know the Author: Explain to students that they will get to know Rajani LaRocca, the author of the *Red, White, and Whole*. First, read aloud (or have students read silently) the "Author's Note" on pages 211-213. Then, together brainstorm a list of questions students have about the author and what more they want to know about her, including where she grew up, her inspiration for writing the book, aspects of her identity and its relevance to the book, other books they wrote, their interests and hobbies, family life, relevant quotes, etc. Possible sources for their research can include: (1) the author's [website](#), (2) their social media posts on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook (3) articles written about *Red, White, and Whole*, (4) interviews with the author like [this written one](#) or [this audio interview](#) and (5) and other online or print research. The final culminating project of their research may include one of the following ideas: an extended "author bio" page, a timeline of their life, or a video (or audio) simulated interview between the author and a journalist (one student plays the author and another plays the interviewer).

2. Our Heroes

Remind students that in the book, Reha describes what she and Pete think about what makes a hero. On page 81, read aloud what she says about this:

Together, we decide that a hero:

Is brave, but not without fear.

Because if you fear nothing, how can you be brave?

Says what they believe is right.

Because if you cannot say what you believe in, how much do you believe in it?

Works to make the world better.

Because doing something is even more important than talking about it.

Acts out of love for others.

Because caring for other people is the biggest difference between a hero and a villain.

After reading aloud that passage, ask students: *What are your thoughts? Do you agree or disagree? Please explain.* Would you add or remove anything from her description? Based on this discussion, have students jot down some names of people they would consider heroes. Explain that heroes can be alive or dead, known or unknown, famous or ordinary/regular people and they can even be fictional characters in a movie, TV show or book. After having students jot down some names, ask some students to share a name and why they are a hero. (You can also choose to share a hero of

yours to model this.) Then have students choose one hero to focus on. Have them explore why they are a hero and the extent to which they fit into the Reha and Pete's concept of a hero. Have them do more research about the person. Finally, have them share what they learned in a culmination project that could be an art project about the person (portrait or collage), a speech or obituary about the person, or an essay.

3. People, Identity and Culture

Ask students: *What is culture?* Define the word **culture** as the patterns of daily life that can be seen in language, arts, customs, holiday celebrations, food, religion, beliefs/values, communication style, music, clothing and more that a group of people share. Explain further that the parts of culture are often handed down from family or community members or from one generation to the next. They can also come from the place where the person's family and ancestors live or are from. Explain that culture also can include one's region of the country, whether you live in a city, suburban or rural setting, your family traditions including how you celebrate holidays, your religion, other identity categories etc. Ask students: *What did you learn about Reha and her family's culture from the book? Were there aspects of daily life you saw in the book that are part of her and her family's Indian and Hindu culture (e.g., language, food, holidays, traditions, family relationships, values, expectations, beliefs, stories, etc.)?* After this discussion, ask students to share aspects of their own culture(s) that are important to them. Then have students create cultural flags or banners that represent their culture(s). They can include words, images, phrases, stories, photos, etc. that help to make up the things about their identity and/or their culture that are important to them. This activity can also be done by first having students talk with their family members about aspects of their culture and then bringing that information to school to include in their culture flags or banners.

ADL Resources

The following are curriculum and educational resources on people, identity and culture, people who are AAPI (Asian American Pacific Islander), and acting as an ally.

Curriculum Resources

Diverse Books Matter, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/diverse-books-matter.

Emojis and Me, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/emojis-and-me.

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.

Websites

6 Ways to Be an Ally

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/6-ways-to-be-an-ally-en-espanol

Some simple things a student can do to be an ally to targets of name-calling and bullying. (Also in Spanish.)

Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) Heritage Month Resources

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/asian-american-pacific-islander-aapi-heritage-month

A collection of resources to use in school, communities and at home to help teach and commemorate the culture, traditions and history of Asian American and Pacific Islander people in the United States.

The Power of Poetry to Teach about Identity, Bias and Social Justice

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/the-power-of-poetry-to-teach-about-identity-bias-and.

A collection of lesson plans and children's literature that use the reading and writing of poetry to teach about identity, diversity, bias and social justice.

Children's Books

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

People, Identity & Culture: Immigrants, [www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?tid\[207\]=207](http://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?tid[207]=207)

People, Identity & Culture: Asian/Asian-American/South Asian/South-Asian American/Pacific Islander, [www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?tid\[203\]=203](http://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?tid[203]=203)