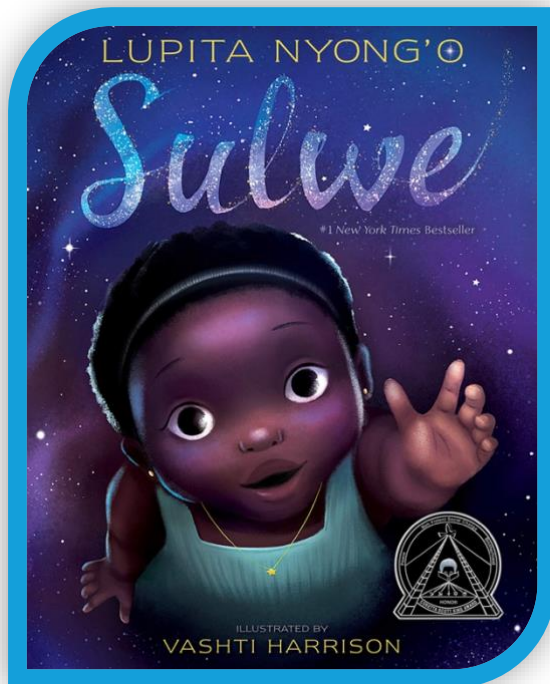




Book of the Month

Presented by ADL's Education Department

About the Book of the Month Parent/Family Discussion Guide: 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 parents, guardians and family members, reading the books listed on this site with your children and integrating the concepts into your interactions with them is an excellent way to help children grapple with and learn about these important principles.



Sulwe

Lupita Nyong'o (Author), Vashti Harrison (Illustrator)

ISBN: 978-1534425361

Publisher: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers

Year Published: 2019

Age Range: 4–8

Book Themes

Race and Racism, Colorism, Family, Identity, Standards of Beauty, Self-Esteem

About the Book

Sulwe has skin the color of midnight. She is darker than everyone in her family. She is darker than anyone in her school. Sulwe just wants to be beautiful and bright, like her mother and sister. Then a magical journey in the night sky opens her eyes and changes everything. This picture book creates a whimsical and poignant story to inspire children to see their own unique beauty.

Conversation Starters

Whether you read the book along with your child or your child reads it on their own and you discuss it later, use these open-ended questions to deepen the conversation. Remember not to judge their responses and to listen thoughtfully and engage in a give-and-take that helps them expand upon their understanding of the book and its themes.

- What happens in the book?

- How does Sulwe feel about her skin color? Why do you think she feels that way?
- What does Sulwe do about it?
- Have you ever felt that way about your skin color, or another aspect of how you look?
- What does Sulwe's mother do when Sulwe tells her how she feels?
- What is Sulwe's dream about? What did you learn from the dream about sisters Night and Day?
- How does Sulwe feel in the morning after the dream? How do you know?
- What do you think it means to feel "beautiful inside and out?"
- How did you feel when the book ended? What do you think will happen next?
- What do you think is the message of the book?

Talking Points

Below are some important considerations that will make this a learning opportunity for your child and your family.

1. Appearance, Bias and Ally Behavior

The book explores prejudice about skin color. In the book, we see Sulwe being called names, teased and excluded because of her skin color. Because of this, she starts to feel badly about who she is and specifically her dark skin complexion. With your child, define **prejudice** as:

Judging or having an idea about someone or a group of people before you actually know them. Prejudice is often directed toward people in a certain identity group (race, religion, gender, etc.).

Talk with your child about different kinds of prejudice including around race, religion, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation, appearance, etc. Ask your child if they have heard about, seen or experienced prejudice. Discuss how they felt when it happened and if they or anyone said or did anything to help. If not, ask what they wish someone did. Define **ally** as someone who helps or stands up for someone who is being bullied or the target of bias (or prejudice). Explain that when we see, hear or experience prejudice, we can act as an ally. Talk about times you have acted as an ally in your own life and ask them if they've ever acted as an ally. Discuss ways they can act as an ally in the future.

2. Skin Complexion and Colorism

Read aloud the "Author's Note" in the back of the book on page 45. If you can, watch this video together: [Lupita Nyong'o shares powerful story behind new children's book, 'Sulwe.'](#) Talk with your child about why Lupita Nyong'o, a famous actress, wrote the book. Explain that as a child, Lupita experiences "colorism." Ask them if they know or can guess what **colorism** is and explain that it is prejudice about skin color that says lighter skin is better than darker skin. You can discuss how this message about skin color/complexion gets conveyed through the media, toys, books, family and friends; point out specific examples of how this happens. You can also talk about the impact of colorism including teasing, bullying, bias, exclusion, feeling bad about oneself, etc. Talk with your child about whether they have ever heard of this kind of prejudice, seen examples of it or experienced it themselves. Explain that Lupita Nyong'o got teased and excluded as a child about her dark skin. Over time, she came to see herself and others with dark skin as beautiful.

Note: See the [Educator Discussion Guide](#) for more information about colorism.

3. Self-Acceptance and Pride

One strong message in the book is about self-acceptance, self-love and pride. Point out and re-read the last sentence of the book: "Sulwe felt beautiful inside and out." Ask your child what they think that sentence means, especially given Sulwe's feelings about herself and her skin color that are expressed at the beginning of the book. Emphasize that we are all unique in many aspects of our identity, including our physical characteristics, as well as other aspects of identity (race, ethnicity, gender/gender identity, religion, sexual orientation, etc.). It is important that we understand and accept others who are both similar and different than us. Equally important is that we love and accept ourselves for who we are. If we don't accept ourselves, as Sulwe did not at the beginning of the book, that can lead to feelings of sadness and isolation and will be harmful to our self-esteem. Talk with your child about different aspects of their identity and affirm that all of them make them who they are and are wonderful and beautiful. This is something that should be expressed to them in an ongoing way so they develop positive self-esteem and are able to be their best selves.

Other Books You May Like



All the Colors We Are by Katie Kissinger, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/childrens-literature/all-the-colors-we-are-todos-los-colores-de-nuestra

Firebird by Misty Copeland, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/childrens-literature/firebird

I Love My Hair! by Natasha Anastasia Tarpley, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/childrens-literature/i-love-my-hair

The Colors of Us by Karen Katz, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/childrens-literature/the-colors-of-us

ADL Additional Resources

The following are curriculum and resources on race, racism, identity and diversity.

Curriculum Resources

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.)

Black History Month

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/black-history-month

Since 1976, every U.S. president has officially designated the month of February as Black History Month. Here are some lesson plans and resources to help you teach about Black history in your classroom and at home.

Race Talk: Engaging Young People in Conversations about Race and Racism

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/race-talk-engaging-young-people-in-conversations-about

As a society, public conversations about race and racism have increased in volume and intensity. Here are some suggestions and strategies for having classroom conversations with young people about these issues.

Parent, Family and Caregiver Resources

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/parent-family-and-caregiver-resources

Strategies, tips, guiding principles and resources to help parents, family members and caregivers impart values and principles to the children in their lives.

The Question Corner: Early Childhood FAQs

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/question-corner

A collection of answers to frequently asked questions about anti-bias issues faced by early childhood professionals and family members interested in promoting respect for diversity among young children. See [How Should I Respond When Children Notice Differences in Others?](#)

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 [Why We Need Diverse Books](#).

Children's Books

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

People, Identity and Culture: Biracial/Multicultural, Black, African American, Caribbean, [www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?tid\[204\]=204&tid\[205\]=205&tid\[207\]=207&tid\[0\]=215&page=1](http://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?tid[204]=204&tid[205]=205&tid[207]=207&tid[0]=215&page=1)

Race & Racism, [www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?childrens-lit-select-all-8=1&tid\[217\]=217&tid\[218\]=218&tid\[219\]=219&tid\[220\]=220&tid\[221\]=221](http://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?childrens-lit-select-all-8=1&tid[217]=217&tid[218]=218&tid[219]=219&tid[220]=220&tid[221]=221)