



Monthly Featured Book

Presented by ADL's Education Department

About the Monthly Featured Book: 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 Notebook Keeper: A Story of Kindness from the Border

Stephen Briseño (Author) Magdalena Mora (Illustrator)

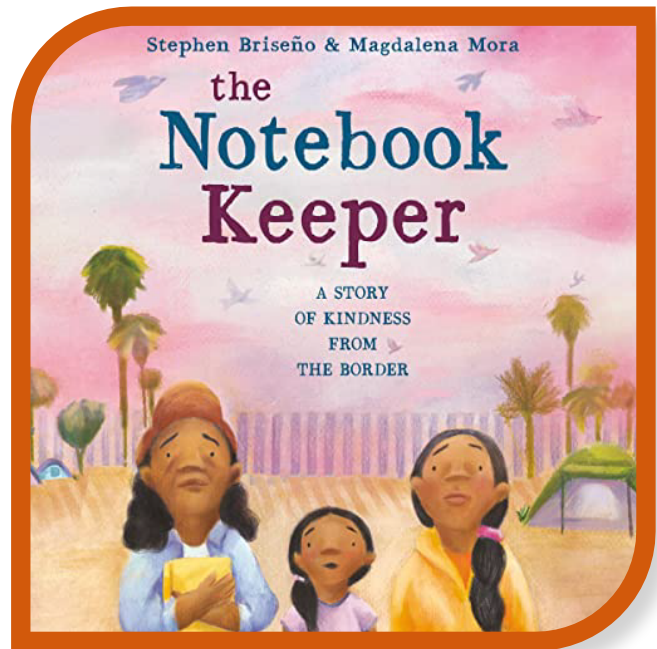
In this moving picture book, Noemi and Mamá flee their home in Mexico, and head for the U.S. border. There, they look for "The Notebook Keeper"— the person in charge of a ledger for those waiting to cross, and they add their names to the book. As the days turn into weeks, and hope dwindles, the little girl looks for empathy and kindness around her— and inside herself. One day, when the Notebook Keeper's own name is called to cross, Noemi and her Mamá are chosen, for the generosity in their hearts, to take her place.

ISBN: 978-0593307052

Publisher: Random House Studio

Year Published: 2022

Age Range: 4-8



Book Themes

Empathy, Kindness, People Who are Refugees, Asylum

Key Words

Discuss and define the words below with children prior to reading the book. Rather than focus on students' retention of all the words, make sure they understand the words enough to follow the story and remind students of the words' meanings as they come up in the book. You can also post the words and point out when they appear in the story. For definitions that are differentiated for young children, see ADL's [Education Glossary Terms](#).

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|-----------|--------------|--------------|-------------|
| ■ asylum | ■ crowd | ■ generosity | ■ refugee |
| ■ choice | ■ drenched | ■ greeted | ■ unsafe |
| ■ comfort | ■ encourages | ■ kindness | ■ volunteer |
| ■ country | ■ fading | ■ lonely | ■ worry |
| ■ cross | ■ faith | ■ patience | |

In addition, below are several Spanish words and phrases in the book and their definitions to share with students as you read the book.

- Abuelas: grandmothers
- Abuelos: grandfathers
- Buenos días, amigas: Good morning, friends.
- Chica: girl
- Mi vida: my life
- Muñeca: doll
- Nombres: names
- Números: numbers
- Tengan fe: have faith

Note to Teacher:

Before discussing this topic, it is important to consider that you may have students in your class whose family members or they themselves are immigrants, refugees or those who sought asylum to the U.S. Be prepared and sensitive to those students and be mindful as to how you discuss this in your classroom. Students who may not have shared this previously may disclose it during the lesson and that information should only come from the student themselves.

Discussion Questions

Before reading the book aloud, ask some or all of these pre-reading questions:

- Who do you see on the cover of the book? What do you think is happening?
- Who or what do you think the notebook keeper does?
- What do you think the book will be about?

As you read the book aloud, ask a few discussion questions periodically throughout reading to check for comprehension and keep the students engaged. Below are some sample questions that correlate to specific page numbers:

- What is the girl carrying with her? (Page 5)
- Why does Mamá worry? (Page 15)
- What will happen when Belinda's number is called? (Page 21)

After reading the book aloud, engage students in a discussion by asking some or all of the following discussion questions:

- What happens in the story?
- Why do you think Noemi and Mamá are leaving?
- What does Noemi take with her? Why do you think Noemi can only take what she can carry?
- What is a "border"? (*A border is the line or separation between two places, in this case, two countries.*) What happens when they arrive at the border? What do they see? How do they feel?
- Who is Belinda? What happens when they meet Belinda, who is known as the "notebook keeper?" What does the notebook keeper do? How does Belinda treat the people waiting in line?
- What is it like for Noemi and Mamá to wait for their number to be called?

- Have you ever had to wait a long time for something? What was that like? How did you feel?
- What happens when people's numbers are called? Where do they go next?
- When Noemi says, "I wonder how Belinda can keep her smile. I feel mine fading every day," what does she mean? Have you ever felt that way?
- Why do you think Noemi gives her doll away to a younger child?
- What happens when Noemi and Mamá become the notebook keepers? How do they treat those who are waiting?
- How did you feel when the book ended?
- What do you think will happen next?
- What do you think is the message in the book? What do you think the author wants us to learn by reading this book?

Extension Activities

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

1. Continue the Book: Draw and Write a Few Pages

After reading the book aloud, re-read the last few pages when Belinda's number gets called and she gets ready to leave, asking Noemi and Mamá to be the next notebook keepers. Ask students: *What do you think it means when Noemi says, "Mamá and I will encourage, remind and comfort, like Belinda did." Can you picture in your mind how they will do this? How much longer will they wait? What will happen when their number gets called? Do you think they will get through to the U.S. or will they have to return to Mexico?* Invite students to write and draw a new page or two of the book, starting with where the book leaves off. Have students think about how they think the book might continue; you can brainstorm this as a class before they work on their new page(s). Explain to students that they will create those by writing a few sentences and illustrating the page. You may also choose to let students work in pairs to create the new page(s). When finished, have students share their new pages with each other and consider inviting parents/family members in to see their new pages and learn more about the book.

2. Learning about People Who are Refugees and those Seeking Asylum

Engage students in a discussion about what it means to leave your home country because it is unsafe, and then try to move to a new, safer country. First, read aloud or summarize the Author's Note on page 32. Then ask students: *What happened with Noemi and Mamá? Why did they leave their home country and try to move to the U.S.? What do you think they are hoping to find and do in their new country?* Remind them or re-read the first page when Mamá says to Noemi, "Now Papá is gone. The streets are unsafe. We are leaving, too." Explain that there are people all over the world who have to leave their country because it is unsafe or dangerous (because of war, violence, being mistreated, natural disaster, etc.). They are called "refugees." When Noemi and Mamá arrive at the border between Mexico (where they are from) and the U.S. (where they are going), that's when they have to wait to seek asylum. That's where they meet Belinda, the notebook keeper, who keeps track of the order in which the refugees will meet with U.S. officials. "Asylum" is a kind of protection that lets someone stay in a country instead of being "deported" (sent back) to a country where they are afraid for their safety. In this case, Noemi and Mamá are seeking asylum in the U.S. For older students, engage them in doing a research project about other places in the world where there are people seeking asylum. You can use UNHCR's resource [Teaching about Refugees](#), which has many helpful and age-appropriate resources. Be mindful that this topic may be distressing for children and be sensitive to their emotional needs while discussing the topic.

3. Helping Others and Empathy

Ask students: *Who is Belinda?* How does she treat other people? Remind students that in the book, we see that Belinda, the notebook keeper, is very helpful to those waiting in line. She tells them not to worry and encourages them to think about how they will cross the border soon. She tells them to be patient and to have faith. When Noemi and Mamá become the next notebook keepers, Noemi says, "Mamá and I will encourage, remind, and comfort, like Belinda did." Ask students: *What is Belinda like? What personality qualities does she have that make her a good notebook keeper?* Share the word "empathy" with students and elicit/explain that it means being able to imagine and understand the feelings and experiences of another person or people. When we have empathy, we try hard to understand what another person is feeling or experiencing, especially when they are having strong feelings. In the book, many of the people at the border are scared, worried and sad. Belinda is showing empathy, which helps them get through the difficult times. Share a time in your own life when you were empathic and ask students to think of a time when they had empathy for another person or when another person showed empathy for them. Invite students to share that story/situation in writing or share verbally with the class or in small groups.

ADL Resources

The following are curriculum and other educational resources on empathy and the immigrant and refugee experience.

Curriculum Resources

Huddled Mass or Second Class?: Challenging Anti-Immigrant Bias in the U.S. (Grades 3–5 lesson), <https://www.adl.org/resources/lesson-plan/huddled-mass-or-second-class-challenging-anti-immigrant-bias-us>

We Were Strangers Too: Learning about Refugees through Art, <https://www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/we-were-strangers-too-learning-about-refugees-through-art>

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

Websites

6 Ways to be an Ally, <https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/6-ways-to-be-an-ally-en-espanol>

Education Resources on Immigration, Immigrants and Anti-Immigrant Bias, <https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/education-resources-on-immigration-immigrants-and-anti>

Eight Facts about Immigrants and Immigration, <https://www.adl.org/resources/fact-sheet/eight-facts-about-immigrants-and-immigration-english-and-espanol>

Children's Books

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

Children's Books about Immigrants and Immigration, <https://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?f%5B0%5D=topic%3A1629>

Children's Books about People Who are Latinx, <https://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?f%5B0%5D=topic%3A1621>