



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 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.



Hearts Unbroken

Cynthia Leitich Smith (Author)

Age Range: 14 and up

Year Published: 2018

Book Themes

Indigenous/Native American People, Bullying/Cyberbullying, Bias, Identity, Visibility and Representation

About the Book

When Louise Wolfe's first real boyfriend mocks and disrespects Native people in front of her, she breaks things off. It's her senior year and she'd rather spend her time with her family and friends and work on the school newspaper. The editors pair her up with Joey Kairouz, the ambitious new photojournalist, and the paper's staff find themselves with a major story to cover: the school musical director's inclusive approach to casting *The Wizard of Oz* has been provoking backlash in their mostly white, middle-class Kansas town. Long-held prejudices are being laid bare and hostilities are spreading against teachers, parents, and students — especially the cast members at the center of the controversy. As tensions mount at school, so does a romance between Louise and Joey — but as she's learned, "dating while Native" can be difficult.

Conversation Starters

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

- What happens in the book? What are your biggest takeaways after reading it?
- What are some of your favorite, or the most impactful, or the most memorable parts or scenes in the book?
- What did you learn about Louise and her family's cultural and racial identity? What more do you want to know?
- How does Hughie feel when he gets the part of the Tin Man in *The Wizard of Oz*? How do his thoughts and feelings about this role and the musical change throughout the book? Why does he have a change of heart?
- What stereotypes, bias and injustice do Native American people in the book face? Have you ever seen, experienced or heard about examples like these and if so, where have you seen them show up?
- Why does the inclusivity of the school musical's casting become so controversial? What are the different perspectives and which point of view resonated most with you?
- Why does Louise feel it's important to talk with Joey about her Native identity? What happens when she tries to talk with him about it? Have you ever tried to talk with someone about your identity or about bias? What happened? Can you relate to Louise's experience?
- What is the author saying about inclusivity and representation, especially as it relates to the roles cast in their school musical *The Wizard of Oz*?
- How did you feel when the book ended? What do you think will happen next for Louise and her family?
- Why do you think the author titled the book *Hearts Unbroken*? What does the title mean to you?
- Why do you think the author wrote this book? What is her message?

Talking Points

Below are some important considerations to highlight in order to make this a learning opportunity for your child and your family.

1. Representation and Visibility

Talk with your child about how the themes of visibility and representation are woven throughout the book. Ask: *What does it mean to be visible and well represented?* Discuss how the book explores this theme through the roles that students play in the school's production of *The Wizard of Oz*. Ask your child how different characters in the book feel about some of the roles being played by students of color (i.e., Chelsea Weber is Black and plays Dorothy, A.J. Rodriguez is Latino and plays the Scarecrow, and Hughie, Louise's brother and who is Native American, plays the Tin Man). Some people in the town do not want and don't appreciate that some of the roles for the school play are going to be played by students of color. Others in the town feel that those students deserve those roles and that a diverse cast which is representative of the school and community is positive and a step in the right direction. Ask your child why they think this has become a controversial issue in the town, how the bias and injustice show up, and whether they have seen anything like this happen in their school or community. Then ask: *Do you see parts of your identity (race, ethnicity, religion, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, etc.) represented in media, books, art, apps, etc.?* Explain that we often see in schools, communities and society in general that some identity groups are well represented in the media and elsewhere and other identity groups are either not represented at all, or not represented or portrayed well, especially those in marginalized identity groups. Even when there is visibility, sometimes those portrayals are one-dimensional, stereotypical or negative. This can lead or contribute to a lack of understanding of and empathy for different people. It can contribute to our biases, both implicit and explicit. That makes it even more important to represent those groups. Talk with your child the extent to which they feel visible or represented or invisible and not well represented. Share your own experiences of feeling either well represented and visible or not, and how this makes you feel. Explore ways to be advocates for more and better representation, especially for marginalized groups and communities.

2. People, Identity and Culture

Talk with your child about how Louise and her family identify in terms of race and culture. Elicit/explain that they identify as Native American/Indigenous and also as citizens of the Muscogee Creek Nation. Talk with your child about what “culture” means. You can define culture as: “The patterns of daily life learned consciously and unconsciously by a group of people. These patterns can be seen in language, governing practices, arts, customs, holiday celebrations, food, religion, relationships, family roles, communication style, clothing, etc.” These aspects of culture are often (but now always) handed down from one generation to another through relatives and ancestors. They can also come from the country where the person’s family/ancestors came from, the region of the country, whether you live in a city, suburban or rural setting, the tribe of nation for those who are Native American, one’s family traditions including how you celebrate holidays, your religion, etc. Talk with your child about the aspects of race, ethnicity and culture that are important in your family. Explain how you would define your family’s culture(s), and together identify what aspects of culture are important to your family. Your family may connect with more than one culture or may not have a strong cultural identity, and that can also be discussed. Talk with your child about what they know and don’t know about their culture, what they may have learned about their culture from you and others, what more they want to know and how they can learn more.

3. Native American Heritage Month

Sometimes people wonder why we commemorate a group of people during a specific month or whether doing so is counter-productive to inclusivity. Talk with your child about Native American/Indigenous Heritage Month which takes every year in November. Native American/Indigenous Heritage Month is an annual commemoration of the history, achievements and contributions of Indigenous people in the U.S. Explain that the reason a month is dedicated to honoring Indigenous people, history and culture is because sometimes when history is discussed and taught, Indigenous people are not included due to bias, discrimination and exclusion. This is similar to the reasons we honor other themed months like Women’s History and Black History Month. Elicit and explain that Hearts Unbroken focuses on a Native American family and includes important information about their history and culture as well as the bias they face in school, community and society. Make sure to emphasize this is just one story about one Indigenous family and while there are similarities within identity groups, there are also many differences. You can also discuss why stereotypes, bias and oppression are harmful to Indigenous people and to society in general. Talk about the importance of challenging stereotypes and bias by reading or watching many different stories. You can also explore the extent to which there is a Native American community in your town or region, and if there are institutions (like cultural societies or museums) explore whether there are any events happening for Native American/Indigenous Heritage Month in November or throughout the year. Make sure to point out the importance of integrating this focus and these stories throughout the year—not just in November—as they are an integral part of U.S. history.

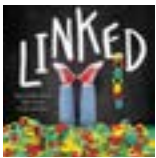
Other Books You Might Like



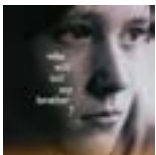
I Remember: Poems and Pictures of Heritage <https://www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/childrens-literature/i-remember-poems-and-pictures-of-heritage>



If I Ever Get Out of Here <https://www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/childrens-literature/if-i-ever-get-out-of-here>



Linked <https://www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/childrens-literature/linked>



Who Will Tell My Brother? <https://www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/childrens-literature/who-will-tell-my-brother>

ADL Additional Resources

The following are curriculum and other resources on Native American people and culture, identity and representation and allyship.

- 10 Ways Youth Can Engage in Activism <https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/10-ways-youth-can-engage-in-activism>
- Be an Ally: Six Simple Ways <https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/be-an-ally-six-simple-ways>
- Children's Books about Native American People, Identity and Culture <https://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?f%5B0%5D=topic%3A1630>
- Children's Books about Bias, Discrimination and Hate <https://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?f%5B0%5D=topic%3A1582>
- Diversity in Media and Why Visibility Matters (Table Talk) <https://www.adl.org/resources/tools-and-strategies/diversity-media-and-why-visibility-matters>
- Native American Heritage Month <https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/native-american-heritage-month>
- Pyramid of Hate Student Mini-lesson <https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/The-Pyramid-of-Hate-Student-Edition-web/story.html>
- Table Talk: Family Conversations about Current Events <https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/table-talk>