



# 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.

## Hearts Unbroken

Cynthia Leitich Smith (Author)

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.

ISBN: 978-0763681142  
 Publisher: Candlewick  
 Year Published: 2018  
 Age Range: 14 and up



## Book Themes

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

## 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 [Education Glossary Terms](#).

- |                 |                |                      |                    |
|-----------------|----------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| ■ apocalyptic   | ■ dismissive   | ■ oblivious          | ■ spewed           |
| ■ bias          | ■ formidable   | ■ objectionable      | ■ tribal community |
| ■ bigotry       | ■ Immigrants   | ■ racially motivated | ■ vandalism        |
| ■ color         | ■ Immune       | ■ residual           | ■ vulnerable       |
| ■ conscious     | ■ inclusive    | ■ sanctimonious      | ■ white default    |
| ■ condescending | ■ Influential  | ■ slur               |                    |
| ■ conscience    | ■ insidious    | ■ solidarity         |                    |
| ■ demographics  | ■ Islamophobia | ■ sovereignty        |                    |

## 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 happens in the book?
- When you first meet some of the characters (Louise, Hughie, Joey, Cam) what are they like? How are they different by the end of the story? What causes these characters to change and evolve throughout the story?
- Why does Louise end her relationship with Cam?
- When Cam says to Louise, "It's not like you're *Indian* Indian," what does he mean? How do you think that makes Louise feel?
- What do you learn about Louise and her family's cultural and racial identity as Native American and citizens of the Muscogee Creek Nation? What more do you want to learn?
- What examples of bias, discrimination and oppression are faced by characters in the book? In those situations, what did others act as allies to confront or challenge the bias?
- How did the different characters in the book view the diversity of the casting in the school musical *The Wizard of Oz*? What is their point of view, and why do you think they have that opinion?
- Why did the inclusivity of the casting become a controversial issue in their school community?
- Has anything like that ever happened in our school or community? Please explain.
- Louise and Hughie's mom talks with them about the difference between "color blind" and "color conscious." What does she say about that and what does that distinction mean to you? Can you share an example of "color blind" vs. "color conscious?"

[Note: Talk with students about the phrase "color blind." Explain that there are people who are actually color blind, which affects their ability to read certain signs and distinguish between colors. "Color blind" is used here to refer to people who "do not see or notice race" or not acknowledge that differences exist. This is a problematic concept because we all notice differences and if you don't acknowledge differences, then you don't acknowledge the bias that often accompanies those differences. Even though we use "color blind" in the question here because that's how it is used in the book, it's preferable to use different words or phrases to describe not seeing, acknowledging or noticing race.]

- In terms of identity and bias, what do Joey and Louise have in common? In what ways are they different? What causes the miscommunications in their relationship?
- 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 does Hughie learn about L. Frank Baum, the author of *The Wizard of Oz*, and how did that influence his decision to quit the school play? What might you have done if you were in Hughie's position?
- How do you feel when the students of color in the school play receive anonymous notes in their mailboxes that say, "There is no place like home. Go back to where you came from." What do the families do? What do you think should have happened?

- When Louise tries to talk with Joey about her Indigenous identity, what happens? Why does Louise want to have this conversation with Joey? How does Joey hear what Louise is saying? What are the ways that Louise tries to convey what she wants to say to Joey?
- How does the way we communicate (and sometimes miscommunicate) impact our ability to talk about important issues like identity, diversity and bias? Can you relate to this and if so, how?
- What happens when Louise and her family's home gets vandalized? How do they feel and what do they do?
- Why do you think the author wrote in the plotline of a big storm/tornado at the end of the book? What do you think the storm symbolizes? In literature, a symbol is when something (a word, object, event, etc.) in the story represents something else (such as ideas, emotions, characters' experiences, etc.).
- What is the author's message in this book? What are some of the central themes of the book? How did those themes get conveyed throughout the book?
- What are some of your favorite, most memorable or the most impactful scenes from the book and why?
- How did you feel when the book ends? What do you think might happen next, if the story were to continue?
- Why do you think the book is called *Hearts Unbroken*?
- If you are going to recommend this book to someone, how would you summarize its main message and takeaways?

## Extension Activities

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

### 1. Reader's Response: Writing Activities

- **What is home?** There are several references to "home" in the book. Elicit from students some of those references: the important line in *The Wizard of Oz*, "there's no place like home," the offensive notes left at the students of color's homes that said "go back to where you came from," and Louise's opinion article ("Welcome Home to East Hannesburg High" on p. 255-257) in which she addresses the bias and hate. Focus in on Louise's opinion article, reading it aloud and then asking students: *What is Louise saying in her article? What is Louise conveying about home, diversity, inclusion and bias? Can you relate to what Louise feels and expresses in that article? How so? What is your biggest takeaway from Louise's article?* Engage in a brief discussion about what home means to them in relation to feeling included, being part of a diverse community, having a sense of belonging and the role of bias in that community and how people address it. Then have students write their responses to Louise's article and the related themes (diversity, visibility, representation, belonging, bias/bullying). They can write their responses in the form of a poem/spoken word, essay, short story, speech or letter.
- **Diary Entries of a Character:** Have students select one of the main characters of the book: Louise ("Lou"), Joey, Hughie, Shelby, Karishma, Cam, Daniel, Louise's mom, Mrs. Ney. 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 wishes and hopes? 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.

- **Pitch “feature” stories for your school and community:** Remind students that an important plotline in the book is the student newspaper *The Hive*, for which Louise and Joey are assigned as “Feature” editors and reporters. Elicit/explain that “Feature” stories are usually longer pieces of writing than a typical “news” story and that they cover a topic or issue in greater depth. A feature can also be an ongoing story, like the bullying feature ongoing series that Louise writes. If your school has a school newspaper, look at it together and identify the “feature” and “news” stories or do that with a community or local newspaper. Then, brainstorm “feature” stories that students would be interested in that are connected to your school or community. Engage students in brainstorming feature story ideas by doing this as a class or having them brainstorm in small groups and then share and record those with the whole class. Then have students identify one feature that they might want to write. Similar to how Louise and Joey had to “pitch” those stories to their editor, have students pitch their story to you or the class. Elicit/explain that a story pitch is a succinct way of explaining what your story is about, what makes it right for the particular person or publication and why it will be of interest to your audience. Have students write an outline if they want to pitch their feature verbally or write a letter if they want to pitch their story in writing.

## 2. Native American People, Identity and Culture

Elicit and explain that the main character, Louise Wolfe, and her family are Native American/Indigenous and are citizens of the Muscogee Creek Nation. Explain to students that there are **574 federally recognized Native American Nations** (also known as tribes, bands, communities, etc.) in the U.S. and **about 167 tribal languages currently spoken**. Share that the culture of different nations/tribes such as naming traditions and ceremonies, languages, beliefs, ways of life, traditions, tribal history, folktales, etc. varies widely. Elicit/explain that being Indigenous is an aspect of Louise and her family's race and culture. Ask: *What is culture?* 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.” Explain that these parts of culture are often handed down from family members or from one generation to the next. They can also come from the country where the person's family/ancestors came from or the tribe or nation for those who are Native American. Explain that culture also can include one's region of the country, whether you live in a city, suburban or rural setting, one's family traditions including how you celebrate holidays, your religion, etc. Ask students: *What did you learn about Louise and her family's Indigenous (and Muscogee Creek Nation) culture?* Elicit from students some examples such as Mvskoke language, holidays, food, clothing, family relationships, etc. that are part of Louise and her family's Indigenous culture.

Talk with students about another aspect of Indigenous identity that the book explores, which is the bias and racism directed at Native American/Indigenous people. Ask students: *What examples of bias and racism did Louise and her family face?* Elicit some examples from the group of bias, discrimination or oppression faced by Indigenous people in the book (e.g., stereotypes, slurs, offensive Native mascots and Halloween costumes, what Hughie learned about the author of *The Wizard of Oz*, “go back to where you came from” notes and vandalism at the students of color's homes). You can also explore with students the long history of bias and oppression against Native American people (e.g., colonization, genocide, torture, Indian Removal Act, Indian residential schools) and the different ways that bias manifests currently (e.g., invisibility and stereotypes in the media, criminal justice disparities, job discrimination, using Native American mascots in sports). If time allows, have students work in small groups to conduct research about the history of Native American people and the bias and injustice they have faced.

### 3. Identity and Representation

In the book, one of the themes is about visibility and representation, and the lack thereof. This topic of representation takes center stage as the book explores the roles students play in the school's production of *The Wizard of Oz*. 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. These roles include Chelsea Weber, a Black girl who plays Dorothy, A.J. Rodriguez who is Latino and plays the Scarecrow, and Hughie, who is Louise's brother and Native American, who plays the Tin Man. Others 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 students: *How is the theme of visibility and representation central to the book's message? What are your thoughts about how this becomes a controversial issue, with people on both sides? Have you ever been in a situation like this?* 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 deficiency contributes 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. Ask students: *In your own life, to what extent have you felt visible or represented (in media, art, books, games, apps, etc.) or invisible and not well represented?* Have students talk in small groups and address one or more of these questions in those groups. Come back together and have students share some of what was discussed in their small groups.

## ADL Resources

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

### Curriculum Resources

Identity and Diversity in My Generation <https://www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/identity-and-diversity-in-my-generation>

Indian/Native American Boarding Schools: Their History, Harm and Impact <https://www.adl.org/resources/lesson-plan/indiannative-american-boarding-schools-their-history-harm-and-impact>

Lewis and Clark: The Unheard Voices <https://www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/lewis-and-clark>

Should Washington's NFL Team Change Their Name? <https://www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/should-washingtons-nfl-team-change-their-name>

### Websites

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

Bullying and Cyberbullying Prevention Strategies and Resources <https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/bullying-and-cyberbullying-prevention-strategies>

Native American Heritage Month <https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/native-american-heritage-month>

Sports, Mascots and Bias <https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/table-talk/sports-mascots-and-bias>

## Children's Books

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

Children's Books about Bullying/Cyberbullying <https://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?f%5B0%5D=topic%3A7238>

Children's Books about Indigenous/Native American People <https://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?f%5B0%5D=topic%3A1630>