



# Book of the Month

Presented by ADL's Education Division

**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.

## Mama's Nightingale

Edwidge Danticat (Author) and Leslie Staub (Illustrator)

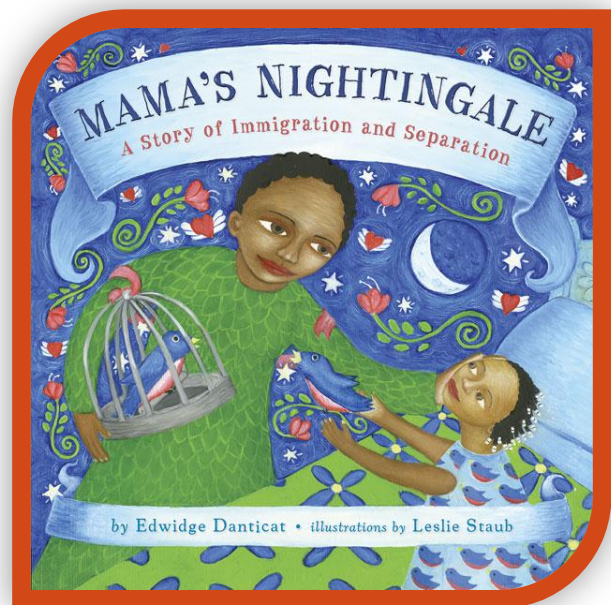
When Saya's mother is sent to an immigration detention center, Saya finds comfort in listening to her mother's warm greeting on their answering machine. To ease the distance between them, Mama begins sending Saya bedtime stories inspired by Haitian folklore on cassette tape. Moved by her mother's tales and her father's attempts to reunite their family, Saya writes a story of her own—one that just might bring her mother home for good.

ISBN: 978-0525428091

Publisher: Dial Books for Young Readers

Year Published: 2015

Age Range: 6–10



## Book Themes

Immigration, Culture, Family, Advocacy

## Key Words

Discuss and define these words with children prior to reading the book. Do not focus on students' retention of all the words; instead make sure they understand the words enough to follow the story and remind children of their meanings as they come up in the book. You can also post the words and point out to students when they appear in the story. See also ADL's [Definitions Related to Bias, Injustice and Bullying for Elementary Age Children](#).

- answering machine
- cassette
- congresswoman
- guard

- immigration
- judge
- nickname
- soursop
- interview
- mayor
- reporters
- tape recorder
- jail
- nightingale
- separation

### Discussion Questions

**[Note to Teacher:** This book is about a girl whose Mama is an undocumented immigrant and is in a correctional facility. Be aware that you may have students in your class who are immigrants, are undocumented or have someone in their family who is. As you discuss the book, be sensitive and thoughtful about how you discuss the topic.]

Before reading the book aloud, ask pre-reading questions:

- What is the title of the book?
- Who and what do you see on the cover of the book?
- What do you think the book might be about?

As you read the book aloud, ask a few discussion questions periodically throughout the reading to check comprehension and keep the students engaged:

- What is Saya's Mama's nickname for her and what does it mean? (page 6)
- Why do you think Saya wants to write a letter to her Mama? (page 17)
- How did Saya feel when the judge said her Mama could come home? (page 23)

After reading the book aloud, ask some or all of the following discussion questions:

- What happened in the story?
- When Saya's Mama first went away, what did Saya miss the most?
- Why is Saya's Mama in Sunshine Correctional?
- What does it mean that Mama doesn't have "papers" and why can't she use Saya's papers, as she suggests?
- Why does Papa write letters to the judges, mayor and congresswoman?
- How do you think Saya and Papa feel when no one writes back?
- What is it like for Saya when she visits Mama at Sunshine Correctional?
- How do you think she feels and how do you think Mama feels?
- How does Saya feel when she has to leave? How do you know?
- Because Saya misses her Mama's voice so much, what do they provide for Saya so she can hear her voice?
- How does the author use metaphors throughout the book? (You may need to define metaphor for your students: one example is "the stories are as sad as melted ice cream")?

- Why do you think Papa seems angry when Saya asks when Mama is coming home?
- What do you think Saya wrote in her story about her Mama?
- Have you ever written a letter or story about something important as Saya did?
- Why do you think the newspaper reporter wanted to print Saya's letter in the newspaper?
- How did Saya feel when she heard about her story being printed in the newspaper?
- What decision did the judge make and how do you think Saya and Papa felt when she told them?
- What was your favorite part of the book and why?
- What did you notice in the book that showed aspects of the family's Haitian culture?
- When Saya says, "I like that it is our words that brought us together again," what does she mean?
- What do you think was the message of the book?

### Extension Activities

Below are activities that you can do with children in order to extend the learning from the book.

#### 1. Act Out Your Favorite Scene

Select a favorite scene from the book and have the students act it out, either working as a whole class or in small groups, depending on the scene and the amount of people needed. First brainstorm the different parts of the book or scenes that students like (e.g. when Saya listens to her Mama's voice on the answering machine, when Saya and Papa visit Mama in the correctional facility, when Saya writes her letter, when the reporter interviews Saya, etc.). Ask students to think about what might have happened right before and after that scene and act those parts out as well. If possible, write dialogue for what the main characters and others might say or use the actual dialogue from the book. You may also want to assign different scenes to small groups of students and then act the whole book out as a play.

#### 2. Letter Writing about What's Important to Us

Ask students: *Why did Saya want to write a letter to her Mama? Why do you think the letter had the impact it had? Have you ever felt strongly about something and then wrote a letter or story to express yourself?* Have students think for a few minutes about something that is very important to them, something they want to change in some way, something that they think is unfair or unjust either in their own life, their school, their community or the world. Brainstorm a list of ideas that they come up with and then have each student select a topic they care about and write a persuasive letter about it (to their parents, school, their mayor, the President, etc.). Have students then read their letters aloud and consider sending the letters to the appropriate people.

#### 3. Learn More about Immigration

Engage students in a discussion about immigration. First, read the "Author's Note" on pages 28–29. Then, ask students: *What is immigration?* Define **immigration** as the process of coming into a non-native or foreign country to live. Read additional stories about immigration aloud as suggested below and find out what students know and don't know about immigration. Have students do a research project, investigating one country in particular with large groups of immigrants coming to the United States (e.g. Mexico, India, China, El Salvador, etc.) and in a research report, share

information about the country, why people are immigrating to the United States and what life is like for them here.

The topic of being undocumented is a big part of the book; therefore, share information with students about undocumented immigrants. Explain that in the book, *Saya's Mama* is considered an "undocumented immigrant." People who are undocumented are foreign-born people who come to the United States without the legal papers to do so and who often have fled their home countries because of extreme poverty, danger or wanting to be with their families in the U.S., a high percentage of whom live with their U.S. born children. Some enter the country legally as tourists, students or temporary workers and become undocumented when their papers expire. Many have lived in the U.S. for a long time, have families here (as *Saya's Mama* did) and feel like citizens. Explain that approximately 11.3 million undocumented immigrants live in the United States, which has been a stable number for the past five years. To learn more, you could read aloud some [Dreamers' \(DREAM Act\) Stories](#).

## ADL Resources

The following are curriculum and resources on immigration and culture.

### Curriculum Resources

"Huddled Mass or Second Class?: Challenging Anti-Immigrant Bias in the U.S.," *Curriculum Connections*, [http://archive.adl.org/education/curriculum\\_connections/spring\\_2009/](http://archive.adl.org/education/curriculum_connections/spring_2009/).

"What is the Dream Act and Who are the Dreamers?," *Current Events Classroom*, [www.adl.org/education-outreach/lesson-plans/c/what-is-the-dream-act.html](http://www.adl.org/education-outreach/lesson-plans/c/what-is-the-dream-act.html).

"Who Am I?: Identity Poems," *Current Events Classroom*, [www.adl.org/education-outreach/lessonplans/c/who-am-i-identity-poems.html](http://www.adl.org/education-outreach/lessonplans/c/who-am-i-identity-poems.html).

"Who are the Children at Our Border?," *Current Events Classroom*, [www.adl.org/educationoutreach/lesson-plans/c/who-are-the-children-at-our-border.html](http://www.adl.org/educationoutreach/lesson-plans/c/who-are-the-children-at-our-border.html).

### Websites

#### Anti-Bias Education

[www.adl.org/education-outreach/anti-bias-education](http://www.adl.org/education-outreach/anti-bias-education)

Provides training program offerings for pre-K through 12th grade school communities—educators, administrators, youth and families—which focus on the development of an inclusive culture and respectful school climate by addressing issues of bias and bullying.

#### Myths and Facts about Immigrants and Immigration

[www.adl.org/civil-rights/immigration/c/immigration-myths-and-facts.html](http://www.adl.org/civil-rights/immigration/c/immigration-myths-and-facts.html)

Includes several myths about immigrants and immigration and the facts based on research and statistical information.

### Children's Books

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

Anti-Immigrant Bias, [www.adl.org/education-outreach/books-matter/general-books.html?generalsub=anti-immigrant](http://www.adl.org/education-outreach/books-matter/general-books.html?generalsub=anti-immigrant)

People, Identity and Culture: Black, African-American and Caribbean People, [www.adl.org/education-outreach/books-matter/people-books.html?subpeople=black-african-american-caribbean](http://www.adl.org/education-outreach/books-matter/people-books.html?subpeople=black-african-american-caribbean)

People, Identity and Culture: Immigrants, [www.adl.org/education-outreach/books-matter/people-books.html?subpeople=immigrants](http://www.adl.org/education-outreach/books-matter/people-books.html?subpeople=immigrants)