



# Book of the Month

Presented by ADL's Education Division

**About the Book of the Month:** This collection of featured books is from our Recommended Multicultural and Anti-Bias Books for Children. 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 early childhood and elementary aged children, reading the books listed on this site with your children and incorporating them into instruction is an excellent way to talk about these important concepts in your classroom.

## Same Sun Here

Silas House (Author), Neela Vaswani (Author), Hilary Schenker (Illustrator)

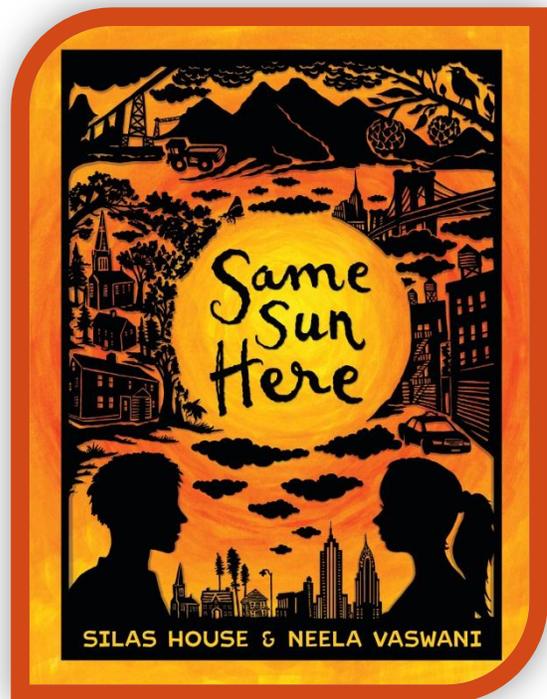
Meena and River have a lot in common: fathers forced to work away from home to make ends meet, grandmothers who mean the world to them and faithful dogs. But Meena is an Indian immigrant girl living in New York City's Chinatown, while River is Kentucky coal miner's son. As Meena's family studies for citizenship exams and River's town faces devastating mountaintop removal, this unlikely pair become pen pals, and when their camaraderie deepens, discover common ground in their disparate experiences. With honesty and humor and narrated in two voices, Meena and River bridge the miles between them, creating a friendship that inspires bravery and defeats cultural misconceptions.

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Grade Level: 4–7



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## Key Words

Discuss and define these words with children prior to reading the book and remind children of their meanings as they come up in the book. See ADL's [Glossary of Education Terms](#).

- activist
- generalization
- pen pal
- stereotype
- civil disobedience
- hillbilly
- perspective
- tenant

- controversial
- immigrants
- rent control
- terrorist
- defamation
- naturalization
- scimmages
- unconscious
- environment
- ominous
- serfdom

### Discussion Questions

If the students read the book in a small group or as a whole class, ask discussion questions throughout their reading in order to check comprehension and engage them on a deeper level. When students have finished the book, use these questions to guide a group discussion (you can choose some or all to ask):

- What were some of your first impressions of Meena and River? Did those impressions change over time?
- How did Meena and River first make a connection?
- Why did Meena's brother say that in America "being dark and foreign can get you in trouble?"
- How do Meena's and River's points of view on New York City life differ? Where do those perspectives come from and how do you know?
- Why do you think that Meena and River are so truthful and open with each other?
- Meena and River disagree about whether it was rude for River to stare at Dr. and Mrs. Patel. Why did they have different perspectives about it? As you were reading those pages, who did you agree with?
- Why did River get in trouble for talking about the mountaintop removal (MTR)?
- What do Meena and River have in common and in what ways are they different? Do they see the differences as positive, negative or neutral? How do you know?
- What stereotypes do Meena and River have about each other? How do they address those stereotypes?
- In one of her letters, Meena tells River a few of her Dad's stories from the catering business. Why do you think Meena shared those stories with River and what do they reveal about her?
- There are several places in the book where characters talk about standing up for what you believe in. What does Mamaw stand up for? What does she say about standing up for something? Is there something you have or would stand up for?
- Both River and Meena have grandmothers who are very special to them, even though Meena's grandmother is in India and River's lives with him in Kentucky. Why are their grandmothers so important in their lives?
- How do Meena and River deal with the differences and disagreements between them? How is this similar or different from how you deal with differences with classmates, friends and family?
- What is the source of Meena's anger about her grandmother's (Dadi) death? How does she deal with her anger and sadness?
- What happened at River's school to motivate him and his family to go to the rally concerning mountaintop removal? What happens there and how did you feel reading that scene?

- After working on the school play, Meena notices that putting on a play is like two worlds: the world onstage and the world backstage. She reflects on feeling this way often. What does that mean? Do you ever feel that way?
- The 2008 Presidential election of Barack Obama is mentioned throughout the book by several characters. What is the significance of Obama's election to Meena, River and their family, friends and neighbors?
- What is the source of Meena's anger when her grandmother dies? How does she deal with her anger and sadness?
- At the end of the book, Meena is listening to someone playing the trumpet and reflects that the sound is a lot like life. What does Meena mean by that?
- What is the meaning of the title, *Same Sun Here*?
- How did you feel as the book ended?

### Extension Activities

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

#### 1. Write the Next Chapter of the Book

At the end of *Same Sun Here*, Meena and her family have to leave their apartment and River is about to come visit NYC because of his mountaintop removal activism. They are very excited to meet each other but the reader does not see what happens when they meet. Try to imagine the first time they see each other. What do they say to each other? How do they feel? What do they do in NYC? How do their family members react? Have students write another chapter of the book when Meena and River finally meet. In addition to a description, they should write dialogue that they imagine between Meena and River (similar to how the two characters used dialogue in their letters to each other).

#### 2. Reader's Response Essays

Have students write a reader's response essay about the book, using one of these three options:

- **Character Development:** Write an essay that focuses on one character from the book. The person can be Meena or River or one of the other main characters (Kiku, Mamaw, Mrs. Lau, etc.). In your essay, respond to the following questions: What do you most appreciate about the person and find most frustrating about the character? Describe at least three character traits of the person and include evidence and quotes from the book that illustrate these characteristics. Was there a pivotal scene in which the character has a realization about something or changes in some way? Why did you pick the character and what about her or him do you relate to?
- **Social Activism:** There are several places in the book where characters have to "stand up for what they believe in" and take action on something that is important to them. Write an essay that describes a scene in which a character takes a stand about something. Respond to the following questions: What was the issue or problem the person was standing up for? Why is that issue important to that character and what was his or her perspective on the issue? What did they do to take a stand? How did others respond? What was the outcome and what was learned in the process? How can you relate (or not) to what the person did?

- **Research on Citizenship Questions:** Throughout the book, Meena and her family are working on becoming U.S. citizens. They have to take a citizenship exam as part of the process. As a class, read through the potential questions on pages 276–279 that Meena has shared with River. Ask students what questions they are most interested in answering. Give each student 2–3 questions to answer. Their research should include the following steps: (1) ask their classmates what they know about the topic, (2) ask their parents/caregivers and other family members what they know about the topic, (3) conduct research to find out the answer to the question (4) write a paragraph (not just a one word answer) that answers the question and (5) present your findings in class. As an alternative, students can work together in pairs or small groups.

### 3. Set Up a Pen Pal Program

As a result of their pen pal relationship, Meena and River become great—and maybe lifelong—friends. Set up a pen pal program between your students and a class in another state or country. You can give your students the option of writing letters that go through the regular mail or use email. In the beginning, it will be helpful to give them specific topics to “discuss” with their pen pal and requirements about how often they should write. As the process continues and the relationships develop, you will not need to provide as much structure for the letter writing. Some resources to help you set up a pen pal program include: [Friendship Through Education](#), [Skype™ in the Classroom](#) and [Amazing Kids! Penpals Program](#).

## ADL Resources

The following are curriculum and resources on anti-bias education, activism and immigration and immigrants.

- [Recommended Multicultural and Anti-Bias Books for Children: Cultural and Religious Groups \(South Asian/South Asian-American\)](#)
- [Recommended Multicultural and Anti-Bias Books for Children: Biography \(Social Justice Activists\)](#)
- [Recommended Multicultural and Anti-Bias Books for Children: Cultural and Religious Groups \(Immigrants\)](#)
- [Recommended Multicultural and Anti-Bias Books for Children: Prejudice and Discrimination \(Anti-Immigrant\)](#)
- [Huddled Mass or Second Class? Challenging Anti-Immigrant Bias in the U.S.](#)
- [Anti-Bias Education Programs and Resources](#)
- [Anti-Bias Curriculum Resources](#)