



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.

Thunder Boy Jr.

Sherman Alexie (Author), Yuyi Morales (Illustrator)

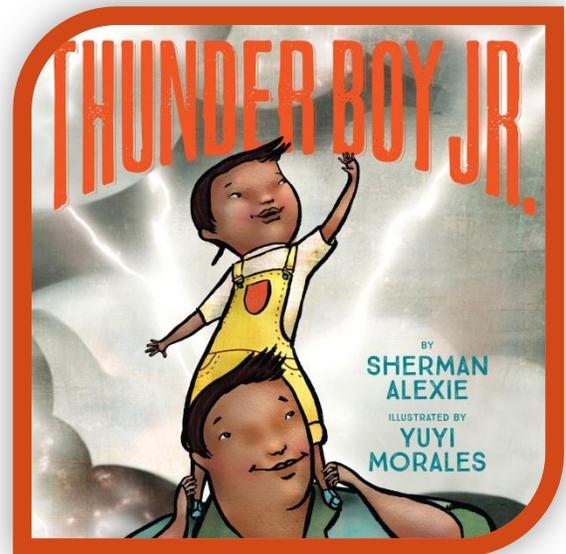
Thunder Boy Jr. is named after his dad, but he wants a name that's all his own. Just because people call his dad Big Thunder doesn't mean he wants to be Little Thunder. He wants a name that celebrates something cool he's done, like Touch the Clouds, Not Afraid of Ten Thousand Teeth or Full of Wonder. But just when Thunder Boy Jr. thinks all hope is lost, he and his dad pick the perfect name... a name that is sure to light up the sky.

ISBN: 978-0316013727

Publisher: Little Brown Books for Young Readers

Year Published: 2016

Age Range: 4–8



Book Themes

Names, Native American people, Family

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](#).

- celebrates
- fancy
- garage sale

- gravity
- lightening
- nickname
- normal
- orca
- Native American
- powwow
- secret
- storm
- thunder

Discussion Questions

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 did Thunder Boy's mom want to name him? (page 5)
- Why doesn't Thunder Boy like his name? (page 15)
- Why does Thunder Boy think he should be named Full of Wonder? (page 24)

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

- What happens in the story?
- How would you describe Thunder Boy's personality?
- Why does Thunder Boy think he is the only one with his name?
- What are Thunder Boy's reasons for not liking his name?
- Do you like your name? Why or why not?
- Why does Thunder Boy call his mother's and sister's names "normal?"
- What are some of the other names Thunder Boy comes up with that celebrate something about him?
- If you could name yourself, what would it be?
- Why doesn't Thunder Boy want his name to be like his dad's?
- Why does Thunder Boy say "My dad read my mind. My dad read my heart." What does he mean?
- Have you ever felt that someone read your mind or your heart? Please explain.
- Does Thunder Boy like his new name? How do you know?
- How did you feel when the book ended?
- What do you think was the message of the book?

[NOTE: When discussing Native American people and their names/naming ceremonies, teachers are sometimes interested in having students create their own Native American names. This trivializes Native American history and culture and also lacks the understanding and recognition that there are over 500 federally recognized Native American tribes/nations in the U.S., each with distinct cultural traditions, languages and naming practices within them. Unfortunately, in the book, the author does not specify

the nation/tribe to which the family identifies so it lacks that specificity and may convey the message that all tribes have the same naming traditions and ceremonies. To learn more, read Debbie Reese's [Towards a Common Understanding of Native Peoples in the U.S. \(or, Why Alexie's THUNDER BOY JR. Needs a Note to Readers\).](#)]

Extension Activities

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

1. Imagine and Draw/Write the Next Few Pages of the Book

Remind students about how the book ends by re-reading pages 29-33. Ask students: *What happens at the end of the book?* Elicit and explain that at the end of the book, Thunder Boy's Dad gives him a new name, a name of his own. Ask students: *What is the new name that Thunder Boy's dad gives him? How does Lightning feel about it? How do you know? What do you think will happen next? How will Lightning tell his family and friends about his new name?* Have students imagine what might happen if the book continues for a few more pages. Instruct them to take their ideas and write and draw the next scene or two as they imagine it, using the style of the illustrator as much as possible. When students are done, have them share their pages of the book with the rest of the class by posting them on the wall and doing a gallery walk. You can also invite parents/family members in for a whole class reading of the book and include the students' additional pages.

2. My Name

Ask students: *What is the book about?* Elicit that the book is about a boy's name, how he is named by his parents and how he feels about his name. Ask students: *How does Thunder Boy feel about his name and why? How do you feel about your name? What do you like and what don't you like about it?* Explain to students that people's names are often very important to them and that people name their children what they do for a variety of reasons including: family tradition, ancestors, culture, religion, meaning of the name, a favorite book or movie character, nickname, etc. Explain something about the origin of your name or ask a student who may know the origin of their name. Then have students turn and talk with a partner about what they know about their names. After doing that, distribute a mini KWL Chart (see below) or have them make their own chart. The KWL Chart shows what they know, what they want to know and what they learned. Have students record what they already know (in the first box) about their name, which could simply be what their name is and nothing else or it can include other information. Next, have students talk with their partner about what they want to know about their name and what questions they have. Then have them share their questions with the whole class to give students more ideas. After that, have students write 4–5 questions they have about their name, what they want to know in the "What I Want to Know" box. Finally, have them research more about their name by going home and asking their parents/family members and doing Internet research about their name (i.e. meaning, popularity, etc.). This will culminate in a short essay they will write about their name, which can also be read aloud in class and recorded.

KWL Chart

What I K now	What I W ant to Know	What I L earned

3. Learn more about Native American People and Culture

Explain to students that in the book, Big Thunder and his family are Native American people. The book does not identify with which nation/people the family identifies; explain to students that there are 562 federally recognized Native American nations (also known as tribes, bands, communities, etc.) in the U.S. and about 180 tribal languages currently spoken. Explain that the culture of different nations (naming traditions/ceremonies, languages, beliefs, ways of life, traditions, tribal history, folktales, etc.) varies widely. Explain that in many Native American or indigenous cultures, there are multiple naming ceremonies. The name the child receives at birth may be a nickname or a name that the child will carry until his true name is discovered as she or he develops their gifts. This name would change with adulthood and a person can have several names during their lifetime. You can also explore the different ways that prejudice and discrimination manifest themselves currently against Native Americans including the perpetuation of stereotypes in the media (books, movies, TV shows, etc.) and using Native American mascots in sports. If time permits, have students work in small groups to have each group learn more about a different Native American nation/people. (As of 2000, the largest nations in the U.S. by population were Navajo, Cherokee, Choctaw, Sioux, Chippewa, Apache, Lumbee, Blackfeet, Iroquois, and Pueblo.). For more information, see the following websites: [National Congress of American Indians](#), [Native Americans in the United States](#) (New World Encyclopedia) and [Everything You Wanted to Know About Indians But Were Afraid to Ask](#) (which includes some information about naming ceremonies).

ADL Resources

The following are curriculum and other educational resources on identity and Native American people and culture.

Curriculum Resources

“Lewis and Clark: The Unheard Voices,” *Curriculum Connections*, www.adl.org/education-outreach/lesson-plans/c/lewis-and-clark.html.

“Should Washington’s NFL Team Change Their Name?,” *Current Events Classroom*, www.adl.org/education-outreach/lesson-plans/c/should-washingtons-nfl-team-change-their-name.html

“Who Am I? Identity Poems,” *Current Events Classroom*, www.adl.org/education-outreach/lessonplans/c/who-am-i-identity-poems.html

Websites

Anti-Bias Education

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.

Creating an Anti-Bias Learning Environment

www.adl.org/education-outreach/curriculum-resources/c/creating-an-anti-bias-learning-environment.html

Provides tips for the classroom educator to create an anti-bias learning environment.

Do’s and Don’ts with Special Diversity Events

www.adl.org/education-outreach/curriculum-resources/c/dos-and-donts-with-special.html

A list of do's and don'ts to assist you in hosting a diversity event, such as significant holidays and local and national events, in your school or community in a meaningful and inclusive way.

Children's Books

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

People, Identity and Culture: Native American and Indigenous People, www.adl.org/education-outreach/books-matter/people-books.html?subpeople=native-american-and-indigenous-people
People, Identity and Culture, www.adl.org/education-outreach/books-matter/people-identity-culture.html