



## USING BOOK GROUPS TO EXPLORE FAMILY DIVERSITY

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These books could be used for book groups or literature circles to prompt discussions about different kinds of families:

**Ashes to Asheville.** Sarah Dooley. (5 – 6) After Mama Lacy's death, Fella was forced to move in with her grandmother while her sister, Zany stayed with Mama Shannon. One night, Zany shows up determined to fulfill Mama Lacy's dying wish: to have her ashes spread at the last place they were all happy as a family. So, the sisters take off on a wild road trip.

**The Best Man,** Richard Peck (3 – 5) With humor and insight, Newbery Medalist, Richard Peck, follows a boy from elementary school to middle school navigating school and family dynamics. Starts with a wedding disaster and ends with a great one.

**Counting by 7s,** Holly Goldberg Sloan (4 – 7) Willow struggles to connect with anyone other than her adoptive parents until they both die in an accident, leaving her alone. But Willow manages to push through her grief and find a diverse surrogate family.

**Dear Mr. Henshaw,** Beverly Cleary & Paul O. Zelinsky. (3 – 5) In his letters to his favorite author, 10-year-old Leigh reveals his problems coping with his parents' divorce, being the new boy in school and generally finding his own place in the world. A great model of releasing emotions through writing.

**The Exact Location of Home.** Kate Messner. (3 – 5) Zig's dad canceled his last visit with no explanation. As Zig and his mom struggle financially, Zig sets out to find his dad with a GPS and clues around town. Incorporates bullying, homelessness, incarceration and single parent homes.

**Feathers.** Jacqueline Woodson. (5 – 8) A new boy's arrival in sixth-grade helps Frannie recognize the barriers that separate people, and the importance of hope as a bridge. Frannie starts seeing a lot of things in a new light—her brother Sean's deafness, her mother's fear, the class bully's anger and her own desire for "the thing with feathers."

**Front Desk.** Kelly Yang. (4 –6) Mia Tang has a lot of secrets. She lives in a motel, not a big house. Every day, while her immigrant parents clean the rooms, ten-year-old Mia manages the front desk. Her parents hide immigrants. She wants to be a writer. But how can she when her mom thinks she should stick to math because English is not her first language?

**Ghost,** Jason Reynolds (4 – 8) Ghost can run fast, but can he run fast enough to get away from his past or does he have to figure out how to deal with it and his raw emotions – getting support from Coach. Ghost lives with his mom while his abusive dad is in jail.

**Gone Crazy in Alabama.** Rita Williams-Garcia. (4 – 6) The three sisters from *One Crazy Summer* and *P.S. Be Eleven* head to Alabama to visit their grandmother and great-grandmother for the summer. The book includes family history, family complications and family fun.

**Gracefully Grayson.** Ami Polonsky. (5 – 7) Grayson has been holding onto a secret for what seems like forever: "he" is a girl on the inside. Will new strength from an unexpected friendship and a caring teacher's wisdom be enough to help Grayson step into the spotlight she was born to inhabit?

**The Great Wall of Lucy Wu,** Wendy Wan Long Shang (3 – 6) A humorous and heart-warming story about split cultural identities, and the way life doesn't go as planned for sixth-grader Lucy Wu – especially when her great-aunt comes for an extended visit from China.

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**Half a World Away.** Cynthia Kadohata. (5 – 8) Jaden is adopted and considers himself an ‘epic fail.’ He believes that is why his family is traveling to Kazakhstan to adopt a new baby—to replace him. Instead Jaden discovers the transformative power of love.

**A Handful of Stars.** Cynthia Lord. (4 – 6) A powerful story that explores a friendship between a small-town girl in Maine and the daughter of migrant workers. It tackles themes of prejudice, friendship, loss and love.

**Home of the Brave.** Katherine Applegate (4 – 8) Kek, an African refugee, is confronted by many strange things at the Minneapolis home of his aunt and cousin, as well as in his fifth grade classroom, and longs for his missing mother, but finds comfort in the company of a cow and her owner.

**How Tia Lola Came to Visit Stay,** Julia Alvarez. (4 – 8) Ten-year-old Miguel is at first embarrassed by his colorful aunt, Tia Lola, from the Dominican Republic. Then he finds the fun in her lively music, exotic cooking, and vivid story-telling -- half believing that she has magical powers.

**The Louisiana Sky,** Kimberly Willis Holt. (4 – 7) Tiger has lived her whole life with her “slow” parents and Granny, who is the backbone of the family. An exploration of her struggle to accept her Granny’s death, her parents and the changing world.

**Love, Amalia / Con cariño, Amalia.** Alma Flor Ada and Gabriel M. Zubizarreta. (2 – 4) When Amalia’s best friend moves away, she turns to her grandmother for comfort. But when her grandmother dies, where can she turn? A story of the importance of family, heritage, and good food.

**The Misadventures of the Family Fletcher.** Dana Alison Levy. (3 – 5) From camping trips to scary tales told in the dark; from imaginary cheetahs to very real skunks—the Fletchers’ school year is anything but boring. Meet the Fletchers: four boys, two dads, and their new neighbor.

**One For The Murphys.** Lynda Mullaly Hunt. (5 – 8) When Carley becomes a foster child after she and her mom are beaten, she sees a family life she never thought existed. Despite her resistance, she starts to feel like she belongs. But then her mother wants her back and Carley has to decide where and how to live.

**The Perfect Place,** Teresa E. Harris (5 – 7) Treasure’s dad has disappeared and her mom sets out to track him down, leaving her and her sister with their eccentric Great-Aunt Grace in small-town Virginia. A story of adjustment and reconfigured families.

**The Popularity Papers: Book Four: The Rocky Road Trip of Lydia Goldblatt & Julie Graham-Chang,** Amy Ignatow. (4 – 6) While Julie’s two dads drive, best friends, Julie and Lydia, use their Powers of Observation to catalog the traditions and oddities of each new location they visit, but soon their attention turns to parents and family and negotiating sensitive family dynamics. Notebook style.

**Rules,** Cynthia Lord. (4 – 7) Catherine spent years trying to teach her autistic brother rules — such as “No toys in the fish tank.” Then she meets Jason, a paraplegic boy, and Kristi, the next-door friend she’s always wished for. It’s her own shocking behavior that turns everything upside down and forces her to ask: What is normal?

**The Stars Beneath Our Feet,** David Barclay Moore. (5 – 9) A boy tries to steer a safe path through the projects in Harlem in the wake of his brother’s death. Then Lolly’s mother’s girlfriend brings him a gift that will change everything: two enormous bags filled with Legos

**The Watson’s Go to Birmingham – 1963,** Christopher Paul Curtis. (4 – 7) Narrated by Kenny, 9, about his middle-class black family, the Weird Watsons of Flint, Michigan. When Kenny's brother gets to be too much trouble, they head South to Birmingham to visit Grandma to shape him up. And they happen to be in Birmingham when Grandma's church is blown up.