

Family Involvement Storybook Selections

The Bookcase offers descriptions of read-aloud storybooks with family involvement themes. Family involvement is defined broadly here as families engaging in activities at home, at school, or in the community, with the purpose of supporting children's school education or more general learning. The Bookcase currently focuses on children's picture books, both fiction and narrative nonfiction, written for children from about 4 to 8 years old. Only recent books are included, published through 2002.

Each entry includes the author, title, and publisher of the book, as well as a brief description of the story's plot and its major family involvement themes. All books are available only in hard cover in English unless otherwise noted by the symbols below. Inclusion on this list is not meant as an endorsement. We plan to expand the Bookcase by adding a collection of books that feature themes on family involvement among Latino families. If you have questions or suggestions of any additional titles to add to this list, please share your feedback by emailing fine@gse.harvard.edu.



Soft cover version available



Versión en español disponible (Spanish version available)

Compiled by Elaine Hou for the Family Involvement Storybook Corner
on the Harvard Family Research Project website

Access it online at:

www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/fine/resources/storybook/storybook.html



Harvard Family Research Project

© 2005 President and Fellows of Harvard College. All rights reserved.

If you would like to reprint or reproduce this publication email fine@gse.harvard.edu to request permission.

Harvard Family Research Project • Harvard Graduate School of Education • 3 Garden Street • Cambridge, MA • 02138
Website: www.hfrp.org • Email: hfrp@gse.harvard.edu • Tel: 617-495-9108 • Fax: 617-495-8594

Bloomberg, D. (1999). ***Sam and Gram and the first day of school***. Washington, DC: Magination Press.

Plot Summary: A young boy goes through his first day of kindergarten with apprehension about his new environment. Accompanied by memories of his grandmother throughout the day, the boy wishes he was at home. The grandmother picks him up at the end of the day and talks with him about his first day. She helps him to reflect on his experience and discover the excitement of meeting new friends and learning new things. When the boy talks to his mother on the phone about his first day, he shares his eagerness and anticipates a second exciting day.

Family Involvement Summary: With understanding and enthusiasm, the grandmother helps her grandson to process a new school experience. She reassures him that the transition will take time and that he will experience new adventures with his friends and teacher. The grandmother's support serves as a bridge between the child's home life and new school environment.



Brown, M. T. (2001). ***D.W.'s library card***. Boston: Little, Brown & Company.

Plot Summary: A young girl applies for her first library card with the help of the librarian and her older brother. Although she is worried about the process of filling out an application and the possibility of losing her card, her older brother helps her and reassures her that she can always get a new one.

Family Involvement Summary: The older brother provides informal support for his younger sister as she discovers the joys and responsibilities of having access to library books. The librarian helps the young girl develop a new sense of ownership and responsibility.



Bunting, E. (2002). ***Some frog***. San Diego: Voyager Books.

Plot Summary: A child waits for his father to come home and help him catch a frog for a school-wide frog-jumping contest. When the father does not show up, his mother steps in and helps him catch the winning frog. His grandfather warmly gives him advice on how to make his frog jump farther. Although the child still looks for his father's appearance at the contest, he slowly realizes that he is not coming back.

Family Involvement Summary: This story describes a child who adjusts to change and loss in the family with the support of his mother and grandfather. His mother and grandfather assume the father's role and continue to encourage the child's development and exploration of life and learning.



Carlson, N. L. (2002). ***Hooray for Grandparents' Day***. New York: Puffin.

Plot Summary: An elementary-school-age boy is disappointed that he has no grandparents to take to grandparents' day at school. His elderly neighbors have left for vacation and the day approaches quickly with no solution. The child talks with different members of the community who provide

empathy and support as they listen to the child talk about his feelings. At the end of the story, all the community members show up on grandparents' day and act as his family.

Family Involvement Summary: The community members offer a trusting relationship that enables a child to work through his feelings of disappointment. They also demonstrate their emotional support by visiting his school and stepping in as family. The story shows how a child's family can encompass different people who commit to meeting the child's needs.

Carlstrom, N. W. (1990). ***Grandpappy***. Boston: Little, Brown & Company.

Plot Summary: An elementary-school-age boy spends the summer with his grandfather exploring the natural habitat and exchanging personal stories. As they watch the stars in the night sky together, the grandfather encourages his grandson, "Be a light in a dark place. It's okay to be small yet shine in glory like the stars." The young boy goes home from the summer full of encouragement and wisdom from his grandfather.

Family Involvement Summary: One summer spent with his supportive grandfather becomes a source of strength and possibility to a young boy. The child also helps his grandfather remember his younger days and enjoy the power of memory. Through mentoring his grandson, the grandfather develops a sense of integrity and purpose in his later years.



Cheng, A. (2000). ***Grandfather counts***. New York: Lee & Low Books.

Plot Summary: A young biracial girl meets her grandfather from China for the first time when he visits the United States. She is apprehensive about their meeting because of age, language, and cultural differences. Over time, the girl makes a special connection with her grandfather and learns about her Chinese heritage.

Family Involvement Summary: This story portrays the importance of cultural and familial connections in families of mixed heritage. The young girl and her grandfather both demonstrate openness to one another and a willingness to work beyond generational, language, and cultural barriers. With their relationship, both granddaughter and grandfather learn more about the strengths of a mixed-heritage family.

Choi, S. N. (1993). ***Halmoni and the picnic***. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Plot Summary: A Korean American girl in elementary school is worried that her grandmother, a recent immigrant to the U.S., is lonely in a new country. The grandmother is embarrassed about her lack of English skills and finds it difficult to adjust to American culture. Through the encouragement of her friends and teacher, the girl invites her grandmother to chaperone a trip to the park. The grandmother joins the class for the day and gets to know her granddaughter's friends and teacher. She contributes special foods and traditions from Korean culture to the class picnic.

Family Involvement Summary: This book demonstrates how school is not only a separate sphere of development of a child's life, but also a place where connections take place every day among families, teachers, and community members. The teacher reaches out to her student's family by

inviting the grandmother to chaperone a school trip. She also demonstrates openness to diversity when she becomes the first person to try the grandmother's Korean dish, kimbap. Through a school-sponsored activity, the student finds that her peers and teacher appreciate her grandmother's culture. The grandmother feels more confident about being involved in her granddaughter's school activities and experiences the power of cultural exchange.



Cooper, M. (1998). ***Gettin' through Thursday***. New York: Lee & Low Books.

Plot Summary: Each week, an African American family headed by a single mother has to get through Thursday, the day before the mother receives her paycheck. The elementary-school-age child in the family makes the honor roll and hopes to celebrate with a party, but they are unable to pay for it until the coming Thursday. The mother praises her son's achievement and promises to celebrate. The family follows through with a celebration when Thursday comes around.

Family Involvement Summary: The story shows how a single mother in difficult economic circumstances firmly and consistently supports her child's academic achievement. The mother demonstrates strength and care for her children in face of a tough financial situation and sole responsibility for her family. The child learns to appreciate the promise of his mother's love and support as a stable force in his life.



Dooley, N. (2002). ***Everybody brings noodles***. Minneapolis, MN: Carolrhoda Books.

Plot Summary: During the summer, a girl in her preteens plans a community block party that involves the contribution of rich ethnic foods and cultural talents from her multicultural neighborhood ("a tour for your stomach around the world"). She visits each of her neighbors and collects diverse noodle dishes to bring to the party. At the end of the day, the entire community celebrates her efforts to bring everyone together.

Family Involvement Summary: The child acts as a connective agent between diverse neighbors in her community through coordinating the block party. Her community gives her special recognition for her work: "She is the one that got us talking with one another." While the child is disappointed that she does not have a talent to share in the talent show, she discovers her own gift of planning collaborative community experiences and helping others connect. This story celebrates rich variations of universal themes such as food and family.



Elliott, L. M. (2002). ***Hunter's best friend at school***. New York: Harper Collins Juvenile Books.

Plot Summary: Hunter makes a new friend in preschool who becomes a negative influence on his attitudes and behavior. His parents talk with him after school about his changing behavior and encourage him to sometimes develop values and beliefs apart from those of his peers. Hunter goes back to school with more confidence about his own decisions while remaining open to making friendships.

Family Involvement Summary: Hunter's parents have supportive socio-emotional dialogue with their son who is experiencing a new world of peer pressure at school. They provide a safe and open place at home in which they help their child address conflicts between the influence of peers and his own emerging sense of self. The story demonstrates how a child can internalize supportive dialogue from the home and carry it into his or her school experiences.

Elwin, R. (2000). *Asha's mums*. Toronto: Women's Press.

Plot Summary: A young girl with lesbian parents is told that she cannot have two mothers when they co-sign her permission slip for a school trip. Although some of the other children at school do not accept her family structure, the young girl insists that her brother and two mothers are a real family. The girl's mothers come to school and communicate with her teacher about their family structure. At the end, the girl goes on the trip while the teacher affirms to her classmates that families can take many shapes and forms.

Family Involvement Summary: This story focuses on the experiences of families headed by same-sex couples. The young girl demonstrates a strong sense of family in the midst of a lack of understanding from her teacher and peers. Her mothers demonstrate initiative in approaching the teacher to share their family structure. This communication serves as a support for the young girl, whose family experience is now represented at school.



Finchler, J. (2000). *Testing Miss Malarkey*. New York: Walker & Company.

Plot Summary: Teachers and parents in this story experience immense stress as they try to work together and prepare their children for standardized tests. The children do not fully understand all the reasons for this stress, marveling at how one test can have such a profound impact on the adult figures in their lives.

Family Involvement Summary: This story tells of a group of teachers and parents who mean well for their children but become preoccupied with testing and forget the meaning behind learning.



Gorbachev, V. (2000). *Peter's picture*. New York: North-South Books.

Plot Summary: An elementary-school-age child draws a picture that is misunderstood by his teacher and various community members. After much disappointment over the misinterpretation of his art by important adult figures, the child returns home and finds the support of his parents who both understand and affirm the uniqueness of his work.

Family Involvement Summary: The parents demonstrate support for their son's creative expressions through constructive dialogue. While his teacher and community members do not take his work seriously, the parents understand their child's meaning. The story presents possibilities for teachers and parents to communicate about a child's artistic abilities and work together to empower young voices.



Hearn, D. D. (1999). ***Dad's dinosaur day***. New York: Aladdin Library.

Plot Summary: Mickey's father turns into a dinosaur and accompanies him to school, where he plays with the other children, eats pizza, and engages in numerous other fun activities. Although his father eventually turns back into a human, his mother undergoes a magical transformation the next day.

Family Involvement Summary: Within the context of a child's creative imagination, the father experiences a school day with his son and enjoys each activity in his new identity. The story draws on the wishes of both father and son to experience school life together. It also demonstrates the creativity with which children and parents can imagine this involvement.



Henkes, K. (1993). ***Owen***. New York: Greenwillow Books.

Plot Summary: A young child's neighbors suggest to his parents drastic and developmentally inappropriate ways for him to let go of his safety blanket. Both the child and his parents become anxious over the various forms of advice—until the parents come up with the best and most creative solution to help their son let go of his blanket.

Family Involvement Summary: The parents discuss child development issues with members of their community. They receive advice and must judge whether it is developmentally appropriate for their child. The parents find that they themselves have creative resources to help their son deal with transitional anxieties in a developmentally sensitive way.



Henkes, K. (1996). ***Lilly's purple plastic purse***. New York: Greenwillow Books.

Plot Summary: When Lilly's toy purse becomes a distraction in school, her teacher takes it away, to her dismay. Lilly writes an angry note to her teacher, only to return home regretting her actions. Her parents reassure her that she can still mend her relationship with her teacher. They write a special note to him to accompany Lilly's reconciliatory card and cookies. The teacher is encouraged by the peace offering and helps Lilly to understand that everyone can learn from his or her mistakes, allowing her to feel better about herself.

Family Involvement Summary: Lilly's parents take the initiative to contact her teacher through a written note that promotes positive teacher–student relationships. They also encourage Lilly to take conciliatory actions. She achieves a new sense of self-acceptance and understanding of relationships through the reinforcing messages from her parents and teacher.



Hest, A. (1999). ***Off to school, baby duck***. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press.

Plot Summary: A young duck is getting ready to go to her first day of kindergarten. She is apprehensive and full of worries about being apart from her family in a new environment. Her grandfather talks with her gently and encourages her to discover new experiences and adventures. Reassured by her grandfather's support, she goes to school with a new sense of confidence.

Family Involvement Summary: The grandfather encourages his young grandchild in her transition to school. Through kind and gentle words, he encourages her to embrace the new challenges and experiences awaiting her at school. This home dialogue gives the child courage to try new things and smoothly transition into school.

Johnson, D. (1999). *My mom is my show and tell*. New York: Marshall Cavendish.

Plot Summary: An African American boy feels embarrassed about bringing his mother to his elementary school class for career day and gives her advice on how to act in school. The mother is excited to be a part of her child's school event and treats her son's anxieties with sensitivity and lighthearted, affectionate humor. At the end of the story, the child realizes that his classmates like his mother and that he can be proud of bringing her to school. Readers discover that his mother is a teacher and join the child in his realization that she "is the best teacher and best mother in the whole world."

Family Involvement Summary: Children may fear that an encounter between their family and school lives will be negative and embarrassing. This story reveals the importance of a parent's sensitivity to a child's fears and steadfast commitment to being involved in school activities. It also demonstrates how school programs can invite parents to share their careers and roles as parents in the classroom.



Lin, G. (2001). *The ugly vegetables*. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge Publishing.

Plot Summary: A young Chinese American girl wishes that her mother would grow vegetables and plant flowers similar to those of her neighbors. However, her mother plants Chinese vegetables with distinct colors, textures, and sizes. When the young girl complains and feels embarrassed about the vegetables, her mother thinks of a creative way to help her daughter appreciate Chinese culture. She makes a delicious vegetable soup that draws in all the neighbors with its rich and warm smell. When she sees how much her neighbors love the soup, the girl feels proud of her mother's vegetables and the richness of her culture.

Family Involvement Summary: The mother in this story demonstrates resourcefulness and creativity when she cooks the tantalizing soup and invites all the neighbors over for a taste. With patience and understanding, she helps her daughter appreciate her cultural heritage.



McDonald, M. (1995). *Insects are my life*. New York: Orchard Books.

Plot Summary: A young girl loves to collect and learn about insects. Her mother disapproves of the hobby as insignificant and inappropriate for a girl. When the girl conflicts with a peer who makes fun of her passion for insects, the teacher punishes the girl without recognizing her academic interests. Regardless of this experience and her mother's disapproval, the girl maintains her enthusiasm and aspires to become an entomologist.

Family Involvement Summary: This story suggests the difficulties that can arise when children's interests and hobbies are not congruent with their parents' wishes for their children. This story also

illustrates that teachers need to reach out to children through individual interests and find ways to help them pursue those interests in positive ways.



Mills, C. (2000). ***Gus and Grandpa and show-and-tell***. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Plot Summary: A young boy struggles to find something meaningful to share with his classmates and teacher on show-and-tell day. He decides to bring his grandfather instead of an object after realizing how important his grandfather is to him. His grandfather accompanies him to school and experiences show-and-tell day with his grandson.

Family Involvement Summary: This story follows a child who connects what is meaningful in his life and what he can share with his peers and teacher in school. It demonstrates intergenerational involvement made possible by a child who thinks creatively. The grandfather nurtures his grandson's learning and is responsive to the child's request for school involvement.



Mora, P. (1997). ***Tomás and the library lady***. New York: Knopf Books for Young Readers.

Plot Summary: Tomás, a Mexican American child of migrant workers, travels around the country with his parents and his grandfather. While he explores his new environment during the summer, he decides to visit the nearby public library. During his visit, he is encouraged by the librarian to read and explore his imagination through books. Tomás goes home and tells all the stories to his family, bringing the words to life. One day, his grandfather visits the library and meets the librarian. The librarian, who has learned a few Spanish words from Tomás, speaks to the grandfather in his native language, to his delight.

Family Involvement Summary: This book tells the story of a migrant worker family that provides stable support for a child's learning despite mobility and frequent economic hardships. The family's enthusiasm toward Tomás' stories demonstrates the strengths of a family whose lifestyle is typically framed as problematic for academic success. The story portrays the power of oral storytelling as a form of family literacy. It also affirms a child's ability to connect his or her family to the community.

Perry, M. (2001). ***Daniel's ride***. San Francisco: Free Will Press.

Plot Summary: In a Latino family, the older teenage brother promises to give his prized car to his younger, elementary-school-age brother if he works hard in school and perseveres towards high school graduation and college. This promise gives the younger child the strength and determination to do his best in school and in life.

Family Involvement Summary: The older brother motivates his younger brother to succeed in school through the promise of a treasured possession, modeling a positive attitude toward education and high expectations for achievement. This story shows the power of mentorship between an older and a younger sibling and the resiliency of children growing up as minorities in the United States.



Polacco, P. (1992). ***Mrs. Katz and Tush***. New York: Bantam Books.

Plot Summary: An African American child's parents bring him to visit Mrs. Katz, an elderly Jewish woman in the neighborhood. With the encouragement of his parents, the child continues to visit Mrs. Katz after school on his own. Over time, they develop a close friendship and talk about common historical experiences between Blacks and Jews. Their relationship carries on throughout the child's development into a young man.

Family Involvement Summary: The parents demonstrate a commitment to their son's learning experiences beyond the classroom by helping him make an intergenerational and cross-cultural connection with a neighbor. The child spends his after school time learning the importance of sharing cultural experiences and listening to the wise and valuable voices of the elderly community. As he grows up, the child integrates this connection into his life experience and eventually passes it on to his own children, who grow up hearing Mrs. Katz' stories long after she has passed away.

Polacco, P. (2001). ***Mr. Lincoln's way***. New York: Philomel Books.

Plot Summary: An African American elementary school teacher reaches out to a troubled White student who makes racial slurs and is a loner at school. The teacher notices the student's interest in birds and helps him discover the meaning of diversity through his interests. While the student's father is racist, his grandfather models respect and appreciation for diversity. The teacher invites the grandfather to school and helps the student reconnect with a positive role model in his family.

Family Involvement Summary: This story demonstrates the powerful role of teachers in helping troubled children. The teacher creatively enters the student's world and creates a parallel learning experience involving the diversity found in birds and the diversity found in people. He also connects the student with his grandfather, reestablishing a relationship that helps the boy appreciate racial diversity.

Pulver, R. (1992). ***Nobody's mother is in the second grade***. New York: Dial Books for Young Readers.

Plot Summary: A mother spends a day in her daughter's second grade classroom disguised as a plant. The teacher plays along for the day while the child makes her own connections between the nature of plants and the parallel nurturing, protection, and growth that her mother provides for her. At the end of the day, the teacher invites the parent to visit again without a disguise.

Family Involvement Summary: The story creatively demonstrates a mother's sincere interest and involvement in her daughter's school experience through a literal and figurative symbol of nurturing. As the mother and teacher connect with one another in the classroom, they both provide opportunities for the child to realize connections between the classroom subject matter and family relationships. The teacher welcomes the mother's involvement in the future as a valuable resource for enriching the child's learning and social development.

Reiser, L. (1999). ***Earthdance***. New York: Greenwillow Books.

Plot Summary: A mother who is an astronaut takes a trip into space while her daughter simultaneously plays the part of the Earth in a school dance. The mother returns to Earth from her mission and arrives just in time for the end of her daughter's performance.

Family Involvement Summary: A mother connects with her daughter's school experiences through their parallel journeys and eventual reunion at the end. This story demonstrates how parents can become involved through connecting their careers to their child's school experiences.

Rylant, C. (2002). *The ticky-tacky doll*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Children's Books.

Plot Summary: A grandmother gives her granddaughter a doll, and the child carries it with her wherever she goes. The grandmother also helps the child eventually let go of the doll as a transitional object when the child begins school. Through her relationship with her grandmother, the child finds security as she transitions into a new period of development.

Family Involvement Summary: The grandmother demonstrates support for her granddaughter's development by providing both a transitional object and a sense of security to help the child let go of the object. The story portrays a stable and secure relationship with a grandparent that enables a child to explore new transitions and experiences in her development and begin school.



Udry, J. M. (1966). *What Mary Jo shared*. New York: Scholastic.

Plot Summary: An African American girl in elementary school has difficulty finding something to contribute during her classroom sharing time. With the help of her family, the girl finds something special and meaningful to share with her class—stories of her father's childhood.

Family Involvement Summary: The young girl shows creativity when she offers stories from her father's childhood. She overcomes her shyness and finds a voice to share events from the lives of the people who are most important to her. The girl's connection to her father demonstrates the strength of a father–daughter relationship and the value it has to young children.



Wells, R. (1999). *Yoko*. New York: Gallimard.

Plot Summary: A Japanese American child brings sushi for lunch and is met by her peers' taunting and laughing because it is so different from the usual sandwich. In response to her students' lack of appreciation for cultural differences, the child's teacher creates an International Food Day and invites parents to make a dish from their own culture and have their children bring it to school. No one eats the child's sushi, which her mother has worked hard to make for the school event. The child is sad and disappointed until she finds a classmate who tries her sushi and enjoys it very much. The story concludes with their idea to open a restaurant that serves food from both of their cultures.

Family Involvement Summary: The teacher plans a school event that attempts to bridge and celebrate cultural differences within her classroom by involving parents. She writes a letter to parents, inviting them to prepare dishes that the children can bring to school and share during

International Food Day. Many of the parents get involved, and the children are sent to school with an array of ethnic foods.



Wells, R. (2001). *Yoko and friends school days: Mama, don't go!* New York: Hyperion Books.

Plot Summary: A kindergartner goes to her first day of school and has a difficult time separating from her mother. The mother stays in class for the day and accompanies her in different school activities. As part of a creative plan to celebrate the mother's birthday, the teacher encourages the child to ask her mother to leave temporarily. When the mother returns later that day and is welcomed by a birthday party, she affirms her daughter's role in helping to create the celebration. The child realizes how much fun she can have at school and still be connected to her family.

Family Involvement Summary: Although the mother and teacher never directly communicate in the story, they work together to ease a child's transition to school. Both adults allow the child to take responsibility, such as asking the mother to leave the classroom. They give the child a sense of control during a time when she may feel confused and assure her that home and school life will be connected.



Wild, M. (2000). *Tom goes to kindergarten*. Morton Grove, IL: Albert Whitman & Company.

Plot Summary: The parents of a child beginning kindergarten experience separation anxiety while the child confidently explores new school experiences. To help his parents feel more at ease with his transition to school, the child incorporates lessons from school into his play at home.

Family Involvement Summary: This story portrays a shift in dynamics by telling the story of parents who have a more difficult time transitioning to school than their child does. The child becomes an active agent to connect his parents with his school. Through activities that integrate school lessons with home play, the parents can share their son's experiences and ease their separation anxiety.



Williams, V. B. (1982). *A chair for my mother*. New York: Greenwillow Books.

Plot Summary: An extended family saves enough money to buy a chair after a devastating fire destroys all their furniture. The young girl, her mother, and her grandmother work hard to create a new beginning for their family. The family's community also supports them by contributing different pieces of furniture.

Family Involvement Summary: This story celebrates the strength of women across generations. The women overcome difficult circumstances through the power of family love, hard work, and community support. The young girl learns to appreciate family as a place of refuge and stability in the face of difficult economic circumstances.

Wyse, L., & Goldman, M. R. (1998). ***How to take your grandmother to the museum***. New York: Workman Publishing Company (in association with the American Museum of Natural History).

Plot Summary: A young girl and her grandmother take a day trip to a museum. The grandmother encourages her granddaughter to lead her through different exhibits and share her insights and stories concerning the works of art. The child is excited to act as a teacher for her grandmother.

Family Involvement Summary: Intergenerational learning takes place in a museum, where family members can support their children's learning and appreciation of history and the arts. The grandmother empowers her granddaughter's learning by giving her an opportunity to teach an older family member. Through her grandmother's support and openness to learning, the child interacts and invests in art appreciation in a new way.