

Support for finding diverse texts

Reading recommendations
for primary schools from
Rumena Aktar



In association with

Lit in *COLOUR*

RUNNYMEDE



Reading for pleasure with diverse literature at its heart



“ I am a primary school librarian working in Birmingham. The area we serve is very diverse. Since taking up my post, I have made it my mission to find the books that will start the children at our school on their journey of reading for pleasure. After attending a librarian conference and an Open University Reading for Pleasure conference, I found the additional motivation I needed to ensure that reading for pleasure was pushed to the forefront of our school agenda with diverse literature at the heart of it.

I am also a reviewer for the Imagine Centre and presenter on Teacher Hug Book Club on Teacher Hug Radio. Writing reviews and discussing books on social media platforms and the radio has given me the opportunity to disseminate my knowledge of current children’s literature and encourage teachers, parents and children to pick up a book by a different author and read some of the great new literature that we have on offer to us now. ”

Rumena Aktar

Contents

Suitable for all ages	p 1-2
KS1	p 3-7
KS2	p 8-17



Starbird

By Sharon King-Chai



Genre: Traditional tale
Format: Picture book
Length: 32 pages
ISBN: 978-1509899579

Story summary

When the Moon King’s daughter is born, he catches the legendary Starbird as a gift for her. When the Princess grows up, she releases Starbird. Starbird flies away to search for a new home by day, hiding from the Moon King in the jungle, the ocean and the plains by night. When he finds the mountains, Starbird knows he’s home. But waking too early one morning, he is recaptured by the Moon King. Back in his cage, Starbird cannot sing or eat, and the Princess pleads with her father to release him. Finally, the Moon King himself opens the cage.

About the author and illustrator

Award-winning author and illustrator Sharon King-Chai was born in Australia to Chinese-Malaysian parents. She lives in London.

Language features

Traditional language and characters. Rich vocabulary such as *enchanted, legendary, perilous, fabled, omnipresent, flutter, befriended, swooped*. Descriptive noun phrases such as ‘cloak of dark’, ‘flutter of thanks’, ‘piercing gaze’. Adverbials of time (‘As the sun retired in deep dark shadow’) and manner (‘With hope and happiness in his song’).

Themes

Freedom; Home; Animals; Love; Sacrifice.

Cross-curricular links

Science (Living things and their habitats).

Suitable for

Years 1 to 6.

Use for

Shared reading KS1; Independent reading Lower KS2.

Diversity focus

This is a traditional tale from Chinese-Malaysian heritage.

Good to know

This is a longer picture book that can be appreciated in different ways.

Rumena’s recommendation

“ This fable about a caged songbird is a perfect accompaniment to any unit on traditional tales. There are so many themes that can be explored with this story, from how we show love, what ‘home’ means, the way we treat animals in captivity, to what it means to be a villain. The illustrations are stunning and provide plenty of opportunities for art projects alongside this class read. ”

Teaching ideas

- Use the following questions to check for understanding and to elicit inference and encourage a discussion of cause and effect. For younger readers, ask: Why does the Moon King capture Starbird? Why does Starbird become sick? Why does the Princess release Starbird? Why does the Moon King finally release Starbird? Is the Moon King a good or a bad person?
- For older readers, ask: How do different characters show love in the story? What journeys take place in this story? Is the Moon King a true villain? If not, why not? What features of a traditional tale can you find here?
- Use to support work on traditional tales. Depending on the age group you are working with, locate: opening phrases, the themes of good versus evil and love and kindness, a setting in the distant past, magical and stock characters, a journey, a happy ending.
- Use to support work on habitats in KS1. Use the text and illustrations to investigate the features and creatures of each area. Let the children create their own version of the story, replacing Starbird with a new animal that finds its home in the jungle (tree frog, parrot), the sea (turtle, penguin) or the savannah (cheetah, meerkat).
- Ask: What makes a place home? Is it the people, the things or the area?



Eyes That Kiss in the Corners

By Joanna Ho; illustrated by Dung Ho

Genre: Family story
Format: Picture book
Length: 32 pages
ISBN: 978-0062915627

Rumena's recommendation

“This gorgeous book celebrates the connections between us and our family. The lyrical prose is delightful and empowering. Every child I have read this to has been completely entranced by the breath-taking illustrations and the poetic language.”

Story summary

Some people have big blue eyes, but the narrator has eyes that ‘kiss in the corners and glow like warm tea’ – just like her mother, her grandmother and her little sister. In the story, she describes each relative in turn and explains how important they are to her. Finally, she describes herself, drawing confidence from her family and her cultural heritage.

About the author and illustrator

Joanna Ho is an American author born to Chinese-Taiwanese parents; Dung Ho is a Vietnamese illustrator and lives in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

Language features

Rich language including repetitive phrases (‘eyes that kiss in the corners and glow like warm tea’), similes (‘lashes like lace-trim on ballgowns’) and metaphors (‘I am her best present’); vocabulary linked to Chinese/Taiwanese culture and mythology such as *oolong*, *lychee*, *warriors*, *kingdoms*, *revolution*.

Themes

Family; Heritage; Identity; How we are different – how we are the same.

Cross-curricular links

Geography (Different Places), Art and design (Analyse creative works), PSHE (What makes me special).

Suitable for

Years 1 to 6.

Use for

Shared reading.

Diversity focus

This book celebrates Chinese-Taiwanese heritage and the differences between people.

Good to know

This book talks about physical differences and links the way we look with the way our mother looks.

Teaching ideas

- Use these questions to check for understanding: How does the main character feel about her eyes? What does she love about her mother? What does she love about her grandmother? How does she feel about her little sister? What makes her feel strong?
- Use as a whole school reading project for the theme *What makes me me?* Discuss identity and family. Ask the children to write about what makes them special, including making links to their cultural heritage, interests, family and friends.
- Use as a focus for an assembly on International Women’s Day to discuss the important women in the children’s lives.
- Use to investigate literary language at KS2. Locate similes, metaphors, repeated phrases and rich vocabulary in the story. Encourage the children to create their own version of the story using similes and metaphors to describe themselves and members of their family and specific topic words to make links to their life.
- Use to support work on traditional tales. Search for tales that correspond with the illustrations in the book. Use the illustrations as a springboard for the children’s own tales written in a tradition style.
- Use to enhance and enjoy new vocabulary. Sort any new vocabulary from the book into lists such as words from Chinese/Taiwanese heritage, powerful adjectives, interesting nouns and so on.



Maisie's Scrapbook

By Samuel Narh; illustrated by Jo Loring-Fisher

Genre: Stories with familiar settings
Format: Picture book
Length: 32 pages
ISBN: 978-1911373582

Rumena's recommendation

“This book is perfect for Reception and KST. It is a book that will encourage children to recognise what makes each family and each individual within that family unique. It follows a repetitive pattern of ‘Mama says...’ And ‘Dada says...’ comparing and contrasting cultures and the differences between Mama and Dada and the things they do. This makes it an ideal book to encourage conversation and writing about family.”

Story summary

Each double page spread from *Maisie's Scrapbook* is a vignette from Maisie’s life as the seasons change from Spring to Winter. Through the year, she listens to her father’s stories, plays hide and seek with her mother, plants tomatoes and goes to the beach. We find out what her mother is like and what her father is like. Her parents come from different cultures – but they love her in the same way.

About the author and illustrator

Samuel Narh was born in Ghana and grew up listening to folktales from the African continent. He lives in Ohio. Jo Loring-Fisher is a British illustrator.

Language features

Simple sentences with rich vocabulary, such as *chandelier*, *relentless*, *hurls*, and specific cultural words such as *jollof rice*, *kente cloth* and *marimba*. Literary language includes similes and repeated phrases.

Themes

Family; How we are different – how we are the same; Identity; Seasons.

Cross-curricular links

PSHE (Who I am), Geography (Seasons).

Suitable for

EYFS, Year 1, Year 2.

Use for

Shared reading.

Diversity focus

Introduces the idea of cultural diversity within families: Maisie has a white mother, with European influences, and a Black father, with African influences.

Teaching ideas

- Use the following questions to check for understanding: How are Mama and Dada different? How are they the same? What does Maisie do with Mama? What does she do with Dada?
- Use to discuss identity and family and what makes us us. Make links to the children’s own lives by encouraging them to explore how family members are similar and how they are the same. Move on to explore who are the most important people in the children’s lives and what are the most important attributes of these people.
- Use to support a topic on the seasons. Locate indications of each season in the book and make links to the activities and festivals the children experience through the year. Organise for the children to create their own scrapbook for a year of their life. Encourage older children to use headings and labels.
- Use to support a unit on traditional tales. Locate images of Anansi in the illustrations and find and tell stories about him. Look at the constellations that Dada points out. Share stories about the stars.
- Look at the pictures Dada finds in the sky. Use the clouds or the constellations as a springboard for artwork or storytelling.



The Many Colors of Harpreet Singh

By Supriya Kelkar; illustrated by Alea Marley

Genre: Stories with familiar settings
Format: Picture book
Length: 32 pages
ISBN: 978-1454931843

RECEPTION-YEAR 2 (P1-3)

Rumena's recommendation

“ This heart-warming story will help children to consider what friendship means to them and what makes them happy or sad. Readers will be able to identify the different emotions that Harpreet Singh has and how these change as he goes through a new experience. ”

Story summary

Harpreet Singh (an Asian American Sikh boy) loves wearing different coloured clothes, choosing a different coloured patka to reflect his mood each morning. But when his family moves north, he begins to wear white every day because he wants to disappear. Only when he makes a new friend, does he start wearing colourful clothes again.

About the author and illustrator

Supriya Kelkar is an American author with Indian roots. Alea Marley is a British illustrator with Barbadian roots.

Language features

Rich vocabulary such as *cheer*, *bobbing*, *neon*, *muted*. Use of different colours and sizes of texts. Topic words including *patka*, *bhangra*. Information structured in groups of three.

Themes

Colours; Feelings; Moving house; Making New friends; The clothes we wear.

Cross-curricular links

Art and Design (Colours), PSHE (Friendship, new experiences), Religion (Sikhism), Understanding the world.

Suitable for

EYFS, Year 1, Year 2.

Use for

Shared reading.

Diversity focus

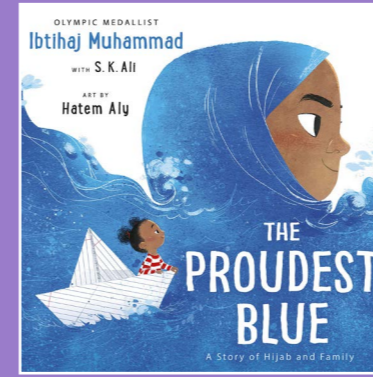
The Many Colors of Harpreet Singh features a boy who wears a patka. It is the colour of the patka that he chooses to wear – not the patka itself – that forms the focus of the story.

Good to know

Includes American English spellings such as *color*, *gray* and *Mom*.

Teaching ideas

- Use the following questions to check for understanding and to elicit answers about cause and effect: How is Harpreet's new home and new school different from his old home and school? Why does Harpreet wear blue at the airport? Why does he wear grey at the new house? Why is he wearing white on the field trip? What does it mean that Harpreet is wearing yellow at the end of the story?
- Talk about the different emotions that Harpreet has in the story, matching emotions to colours. Ask: What makes him happy? Why does he need courage when he moves? Use vocabulary from the story – such as *nervous* and *courage* – to make links between the story and children's own experiences. Help the children to make links between Harpreet's feelings and the friendships he has.
- Discuss the colours in the book. Use the words from the book (*bright*, *muted*, *neon*) to discuss different shades with older children. Create a word cloud for each colour using vocabulary from the book. Ask the children to add their own ideas and associations to each word cloud.
- Year 2: RE: Explore Sikhism and the Sikh tradition of wearing a turban or patka. Make links to any particular or special clothing that the children wear, including school uniform. Share the note about Sikhism at the end of the story.



The Proudest Blue

By Ibtihaj Muhammad and S. K. Ali; illustrated by Hatem Aly

Genre: Stories with familiar settings
Format: Picture book
Length: 32 pages
ISBN: 978-1783449729

YEAR 1-2 (P2-3)

Rumena's recommendation

“ This touching and beautifully illustrated book gently investigates the themes of identity, discrimination and bullying. In this story, Mama says: *Don't carry around the hurtful words that others say. Drop them. They are not yours to keep.* Every time I have read this book, I have had a great response from the children, and it has opened up many discussions around hijab and bullying, in particular. ”

Story summary

It is the first day back at school for sisters Faizah and Asiya. Faizah has new shoes and a new bag and Asiya is wearing a hijab for the first time. Faizah is excited about Asiya's hijab and thinks she looks like a princess, but she is confused and embarrassed when she hears mean remarks by bullies. Beautifully illustrated, with a colourful contrast between Asiya, confident in her blue hijab, and the faceless bullies who are only shown through their grey shadows on the ground.

About the authors and illustrator

Ibtihaj Muhammad was the first Muslim American to compete (and win a medal) in the Olympic Games wearing a hijab. She has had a Barbie doll – dressed in fencing clothes and wearing a hijab – created for her.

SK Ali is an American-Pakistani author. Hatem Aly is an Egyptian-born Canadian artist.

Language features

Straightforward language with similes to describe Asiya's hijab ('like the sky on a summer's day').

Themes

Self-respect and confidence; Bullying; Family bonds; Firsts.

Cross-curricular links

Religion (Islam), PSHE (What makes me special).

Suitable for

Whole school, Years 1 and 2.

Use for

Shared reading, whole school project, assembly.

Diversity focus

Asiya's hijab (and the feelings it generates in her sister) is the central focus of the story. Whilst Faizah admires her sister's hijab, she also has mixed feelings about the comments that bullies make and must learn how to react to them.

Good to know

Taunts about the hijab are given.

Teaching ideas

- Use the following questions to discuss the text and to elicit cause and effect in the story. How does Faizah feel about Asiya's hijab? Why does she whisper when she tells the girl in the queue about the hijab? Why does Faizah run to see Asiya at break? Why doesn't the illustrator give the bullies faces? What advice would you give to Faizah when she hears the mean words of the bullies? What does it mean to be different? Why is the story called *The Proudest Blue*?
- Use as the focus of an assembly or as a whole school text to discuss issues of identity, discrimination and bullying. Share Mama's words about bullies and about self-respect. Create a series of school posters on self-respect and celebrating difference.
- Investigate colours and what they make the children think of. Ask: What does the colour blue mean to you? Encourage the children to write further similes for the colour blue.
- Discuss the importance of the sister bond in this story. Encourage the children to think of the important people in their lives – both in their family and beyond.
- Ask: What does the hijab mean to Asiya? Find out more about the author and illustrator and what Islam has meant in their lives.
- Discuss important firsts that the children have experienced: first day at school going for a first sleepover and so on.



Sona Sharma Very Best Big Sister

By Chitra Soundar; illustrated by Jen Khatun

Genre: Realistic story
Format: Paperback
Length: 112 pages
ISBN: 978-1406391756

Story summary

Only child, and only grandchild, Sona is about to become a big sister. As the family prepare for the birth and for a naming ceremony party, Sona worries about no longer being special. She shares her thoughts with Elephant, her soft toy. On the day of the naming ceremony, Sona chooses the name and gives the baby her own precious naming day outfit to wear.

About the author and illustrator

Chitra Soundar was born in India and lives in Britain. Jen Khatun is a British illustrator with Bangladeshi heritage.

Rumena's recommendation

“ This book makes a perfect read aloud for children moving on from picture books and is also ideal for newly independent readers (with vocabulary support). It is a charming story, with lots of exploration of family dynamics. Hindu traditions are introduced, which can support learning about Hinduism. Readers will also relate to the feelings of jealousy and anxiety when big changes take place in a family. ”

Language features

Filled with cultural words linked to life in India (*auto-rickshaw, bullock, burfi, namakarna*) and words linked to Hinduism (*Ganesh, Krishna, pandal* as well as Hindu prayers). A glossary of words is provided. Includes noun phrases such as: ‘canopy of mango and guava trees’, ‘motorbike priest’, ‘the sparkliest person ever’. Metaphors for Sona and her sister as stars and fireflies.

Themes

Family; Hinduism; Responsibility; Change; Stars.

Cross-curricular links

Geography (Different places); RE (Hinduism); PSHE (Family, Change).

Suitable for

Years 1 to 3.

Use for

Shared reading, class reading.

Diversity focus

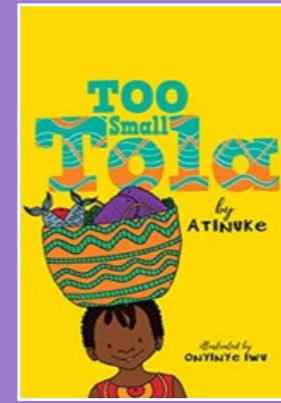
This story is set in a multi-generational family home in India. It is a contemporary story (with phones and video conferencing) that includes Hindu traditions and culture.

Good to know

The story includes a Hindu ceremony and prayers.

Teaching ideas

- Use these questions to check for understanding: Why is Sona nervous about becoming a big sister? Why doesn't she want the new baby to wear her old naming ceremony dress? Why does she finally decide to share the dress with the baby? How does the reader know how Sona feels?
- Encourage the children with younger siblings to describe how they felt before and after their sibling was born. Discuss other changes the children have experienced such as moving or starting school.
- Use the story to introduce Hinduism to the class. If appropriate, encourage children who have experienced a Hindu naming ceremony to share their experience.
- Use to find out about life in India. Find images of auto-rickshaws, burfi sweets and so on. Ask the children to discuss how Sona's life is similar and different to their own. Ask the children to write a non-fiction report about India using details from the story.
- Discuss the different feelings that Sona has in the book. Ask the children to complete sentences starting 'Sona felt worried when...' Repeat for emotions such as proud, sad, lonely, excited, interested.
- Use to practise techniques for reading unknown words.



Too Small Tola

By Atinuke; illustrated by Onyinye Iwu

Genre: Realistic story
Format: Paperback
Length: 96 pages
ISBN: 9781406388916

Story summary

Tola might be small, but she is strong, brave and clever. This book contains three separate stories about Tola and her family in Lagos, Nigeria. In the first, she shows how strong she is as she carries fruit and vegetables from the market for her grandmummy. In the second, she stands up to bullies and carries water from the standpipe when the water in the block of flats breaks. Finally, when her neighbour Mr Abdul breaks his leg, she and her brother travel to his clients to measure them for their new clothes.

About the author and illustrator

Atinuke was born and grew up in Nigeria. She lives in Wales. Onyinye Iwu was born in Italy to Nigerian parents. She lives in Britain.

Language features

Clear but exuberant language. Vocabulary linked to Nigerian culture.

Themes

Resilience; Family; Helping each other; Identity; Community; Personal strengths.

Cross-curricular links

Science (Different places).

Suitable for

Year 1 (as read-aloud) Year 2, 3 (Independent read)

Use for

Independent reading. Shared reading.

Diversity focus

This book also shows what modern, urban Nigeria is like and will give children an understanding of a different city. The story is set in Lagos – rather than non-specific 'Africa'. Tola's community includes Muslims and Christians.

Good to know

Specific references are made to the festivals of Easter and Eid. Lagos is shown to be in a country with significant poverty and infrastructure issues; grandmummy can't read.

Teaching ideas

- Use the following questions to improve the children's understanding and encourage inference. Ask: Does it matter that Tola is small? Why do Tola and grandmummy agree to buy so many things for other people? How do the people in Tola's community look after each other? How do the people in the community deal with the bullies at the standpipe? What would happen to Mr Abdul if Tola was not able to help him? Why is the rich lady rude to Tola when Tola measures her for her clothes? Why do people want new clothes for Eid and Easter?
- Use the book to talk about 'What makes me special'. Discuss the strengths that Tola has and whether these are more or less important than being tall. Support the children as they talk about their own strengths and what makes them special.
- Discuss the difference between Tola's life and the children's own experiences. Perhaps, contrast the story with the *Katie Morag* stories by Mairi Hedderwick. Use the story to support a unit on Nigeria.
- Encourage the children to write their own realistic story based around their own family.



Here to Stay

By Sufiya Ahmed;
illustrated by Jen Khatun

Genre: Realistic story
Format: Paperback
Length: 32 pages
ISBN: 978-1382007917



This gentle story about having an elderly relative come to live with a family plays with the idea of what an older person is like. Children will be able to relate to Mina as she struggles with her worries.

TreeTops Reflect is a series of emotionally powerful stories from Oxford Primary to make children think. Written by top children's authors to develop reading and comprehension skills, the books have appealing illustrations and cover a range of engaging themes. The series uses the power of storytelling to help children connect to diverse experiences.

Story summary

When Mina's grandfather comes to live with them, Mina is expecting him to need peace and quiet. She becomes confused and worried when grand-papa goes out and about, cooks, plays loud music and works in the garden. Eventually, grand-papa reassures her that he is fit and healthy and that, like her, he wants to have fun.

About the author

Sufiya Ahmed was born in India and grew up in Britain.

Language features

Straightforward language.

Themes

Family; Kindness; Worry; Aging.

Cross-curricular links

PSHE (Family). Relationships Education (Families and people who care for me; Respectful relationships).

Suitable for

Year 3 (Book Band 12 Brown; Oxford Level 11).

Use for

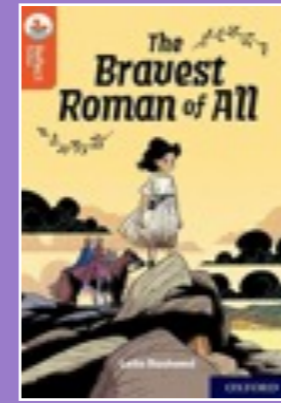
Independent reading.

Diversity focus

The main character is an Indian girl and the story is focussed on her family. The story also examines how stereotypes about the older generation can be unfair.

Teaching ideas

- Use these questions to check for understanding: Why does Mina's mother put Mina's soft toys in the attic? How does Mina feel about giving up her room for her grandfather? How do you know that Mina is kind? Why has Mina's grandfather come to live with them? Why is Mina worried when she sees her grandfather at the library?
- Use the book to support a topic on the family. Ask the children to compare Mina's family with their own. Compare with other stories the children may have read about a grandparent coming to live with them such as *Danny Chung Does Not Do Maths* by Maisie Chan.
- Invite older members of the community into school to share stories of their lives.
- Use to discuss worries and what we should do if we have a worry. Compare with *Ruby's Worry* by Tom Percival and discuss how Ruby and Mina finally overcome their worry by talking to someone. Ask the children to write a letter to Mina giving her advice.
- Use to discuss kindness. Discuss the ways that Mina is kind (she gives up her room, she is prepared to give up loud music, games and having her friends to play, she worries about grandfather's wellbeing). Discuss the different ways that the children can be kind in their everyday life.



The Bravest Roman of All

By Leila Rasheed;
illustrated by Fran Bueno

Genre: Historical fiction
Format: Paperback
Length: 56 pages
ISBN: 978-1382008006



This story of legendary Roman hero Cloelia will appeal to many children as well as to enthusiasts of Roman history. It is a good story to use to open up a discussion about whether other people's prejudices ever stop us achieving our potential.

TreeTops Reflect is a series of emotionally powerful stories from Oxford Primary to make children think. Written by top children's authors to develop reading and comprehension skills, the books have appealing illustrations and cover a range of engaging themes. The series uses the power of storytelling to help children connect to diverse experiences.

Story summary

Hundreds of years before the heyday of Rome, the small fortified town of Rome is under siege from the deposed Roman king Tarquin and his Etruscan ally, King Lars. As part of a peace treaty, 40 children are sent to the Etruscan camp as hostages. Cloelia helps the girls escape, but is sent back to the Etruscan camp by her father in disgrace to protect the peace treaty. However, King Lars is so impressed with her bravery, he releases all the hostages and agrees to leave Rome in peace. Cloelia returns to Rome riding King Lars' own horse.

About the author

Leila Rasheed is a British-Bangladeshi author who grew up in Libya. She now lives in Birmingham.

Language features

Straightforward language with similes ('coiled like a protective snake', 'like a scorpion, hiding in the rocks') and some interesting vocabulary (*scolding, gleaming, thwack*) and topic words (*Tiber, Etruscan, Horatio*).

Themes

Sex discrimination; Bravery; War.

Cross-curricular links

History (Ancient Rome). Relationships Education (Respectful relationships).

Suitable for

Year 3+ (Book Band Grey 13; Oxford Level 13).

Use for

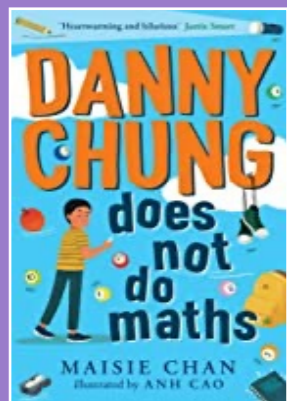
Independent reading

Diversity focus

The main character is a Roman girl who challenges the stereotypes of the time. The illustrations in this book show the Roman citizens to be ethnically diverse.

Teaching ideas

- Use these questions to check for understanding: Why does Cloelia not want to be told she is 'brave – for a girl'? Why did the Roman leaders allow the Etruscan soldiers to take away their children? How was Cloelia able to escape? Why was Cloelia's father cross with her when she rescued all the girls from the Etruscan camp? Why did King Lars decide not to keep fighting for King Tarquin? Why did King Lars give Cloelia his horse?
- Use to support a topic on Romans. Investigate the bravery of Cloelia and Horatio further. Place the story of Cloelia on a timeline of Roman history.
- Discuss the stereotypes of boys and girls and how damaging and limiting these can be.
- Discuss the difference between being 'brave' and being 'reckless'.
- Use to support work on literary language. Locate all the similes in the book and encourage the children to create more of their own.
- Cloelia was one of the only Roman women to be shown riding in a Roman statue. Investigate the statues in your local area and discuss who has been chosen to be celebrated in this way. Are there any statues of named women? Are there any statues of people from an ethnic minority?



Danny Chung Does Not Do Maths

By Maisie Chan

Genre: Realistic fiction
Format: Paperback
Length: 288 pages
ISBN: 978-1800780019

Story summary

Danny Chan is horrified when his grandmother (Nai Nai) moves from China to live in the top bunk in his bedroom. When the Easter holidays arrive, Danny is told he must spend every day with his grandmother. He leaves her at the Bingo Hall where she makes friends and win prizes, but Danny's parents are furious with him. Meanwhile, Danny has fallen out with his best friend and cannot think of a topic for his maths project. As they bond, Nai Nai helps Danny create an amazing maths project that combines her maths skills and his art skills. When Nai Nai finds the cruel cartoons Danny has drawn of her, Nai Nai runs away. Danny makes up with Ravi and together they find Nai Nai and help her get to the Bingo competition.

About the author

Maisie Chan is a British Chinese author who lives in Glasgow. She grew up in a foster home in a busy council house in Birmingham.

Language features

Straightforward language with specific topic words (*ha goa dumpling*), Chinese words (*Hao, hao, hao chi*) and other interesting vocabulary (*scouring, viral, cyborg, despicable*).

Themes

Family; Honesty; Friendship; Money versus Love; Duty; Courage.

Cross-curricular links

Maths.

Suitable for

Years 3 to 6.

Use for

Whole class reader; independent reading.

Diversity focus

Danny Chung is first generation British. His parents have moved from China and run a Chinese takeaway. Danny's best friend is British Indian, and the owner of the shop is a married gay Polish man. Danny battles with the difference between British and traditional Chinese values and culture.

Teaching ideas

- Use these questions to check for understanding: Why does Danny's father not like Danny's art? Why does Carter invite Danny to play in the park? How do Danny and Nai Nai become close? How is Nai Nai brave? What lessons does Danny learn in this story? How is Auntie Yee a bully? Which character in the book do you feel most sorry for? Why is the story called *Danny Chung Does Not Do Maths*?
- Recreate Danny's maths project on the Fibonacci sequence and maths in nature.
- Use to support a topic on Chinese New Year. Explore Chinese legends (particularly about dragons), Chinese food and find out what Chinese animal the children in the class were born under.
- Use to support a PSHE topic on 'What makes me me?' Discuss the different aspects of Danny's character: his Chinese heritage, his British heritage, his family, his friends, his drawing.
- Read alongside *Llama Out Loud*, by Annabelle Sami. Use to inspire the children to write their own funny story – or cartoon strip – about a character who comes to stay. How will the visitor be different and difficult? What funny situation will arise? How will the main character learn to appreciate visitor? What lessons will the main character learn?

YEAR 3–6 (P4–7)

Rumena's recommendation

“This book is a humorous family story that is written in a chatty manner. It will help children to appreciate the importance of family. I feel the plot and the humour of this story is best suited to lower Key Stage 2 as it is not too challenging. However, as the main protagonist is 11, this book could easily be read and enjoyed by older children too. I think this could be used well as a class reader as it is a relatively short book. And the language is simple enough for independent reading too. Themes of racism and finding oneself run throughout the story. I particularly like the way it challenges stereotypes and have found that the story is relatable to children of many different cultural heritages. The pictures throughout the book, break the text up nicely for disinterested readers. ”



Llama Out Loud

By Annabelle Sami

Genre: Comic fiction, School/Family story, Fantasy story
Format: Paperback
Length: 248 pages
ISBN: 978-1405296001

Story summary

Yasmin (skilled checkers player and elective mute) lives in a very noisy house that includes two older brothers who continually prank her and a mother who always shouts. After she makes a birthday wish to be able to stand up for herself, a rude, loud talking toy llama comes to live with her. Levi the Llama creates havoc for Yasmin and soon she is in trouble at home and at school and has been barred from the old people's checkers tournament. When she finally reaches rock bottom, she manages to stand up for herself and even have the courage to speak.

About the author

Annabelle Sami is a British writer of Pakistani heritage.

Language features

Straight forward exuberant style with some interesting vocabulary such as *perplexed, pesky, livid, dodging*. Includes a handful of comic strips. Yasmin's mother speaks in capitals with no break between words.

Themes

Family; Self-respect; Friendship; Courage.

Cross-curricular links

PSHE (Resilience, Being me, Family); Geography (City life).

Suitable for

Years 3 to 6.

Use for

Class read; Independent read.

Diversity focus

The story is set in a Pakistani multi-generational house in the multi-cultural Whitechapel area of London. Yasmin has a grandmother in Pakistan.

Teaching ideas

- Use these questions to check for understanding: Why don't Yasmin's parents listen to her? Does Levi make Yasmin's life better or worse? Why won't Yasmin talk? Is Levi right when he says that Yasmin should not be friends with old people? How is Ezra a good friend to Yasmin? Do you need to be loud to be heard?
- Use for PSHE to discuss families. Ask the children to compare their family with Yasmin's family. Talk about the children's position in the family and how that makes them feel.
- Use to discuss location. Look at images of the story's location, Brick Lane, and find the description of it in Chapter 1.
- Use as a springboard for the children writing their own funny story. What destructive magical creature could create comic chaos? What flawed characters will help to make the story funny?
- Use to discuss confidence – who has it and how we can develop it in ourselves. Discuss whether confidence is the same as being talkative. Ask the children to write a letter to Yasmin, giving her advice.
- Use as the focus for a debate. Ask: Is Levi a good guardian llama?

YEAR 3–6 (P 4–7)

Rumena's recommendation

“This book is absolutely hilarious and has had a really positive response from our Year 4 classes. We noticed children who were less interested in reading were particularly fond of this story. It provides lots of witty dialogue between engagingly diverse characters of different ages and ethnicity.

Many children will be able to relate to the feeling of being lost and overwhelmed in a larger-than-life family, and the serious theme of confidence is at the centre of this comic story. Introverted readers in particular will respond to this, but it is guaranteed to have the whole class laughing. This is definitely one that will be enjoyed by a range of readers from Years 3 to 6. I recommend it as a class read but it will also be perfect to keep disinterested readers reading independently. ”



The Lion Above the Door

By Onjali Q. Raúf

Genre: School story
Format: Paperback
Length: 320 pages
ISBN: 978-0062915627

YEAR 4 + (P5 +)

Rumena's recommendation

“This book is an important one to open up discussions about identity and heritage. As with all of Onjali Q. Raúf's books, this one also provides a mystery element and a bit of adventure as the protagonists investigate forgotten war heroes associated with their families. This book can link in with World War topics, or be read in the Autumn term to link in with Remembrance Day.

Themes of standing up for what's right, dealing with bullies and facing discrimination all run strong throughout the text. The voice of the protagonist and humour through his observations, makes it a great read aloud or class read. It is a book that will open up many discussions around identity and heritage too. As an adult, it had me considering how we present topics to our children and what more we can do to ensure children of all backgrounds can relate to and identify with what we are teaching. ”

Story summary

On a class trip, Leo Kai Lim (a British boy with Singaporean parents) finds a plaque to a soldier with exactly the same name as his. During a topic on World War II, Leo and his friend Sangeeta (a British girl with Indian Sikh parents) start to investigate who the soldier was. Throughout the story, Leo is bullied until the coolest girl in the class, Olivia (mixed race with a father from Ghana), starts to defend him. Leo finally discovers his own personal link to Leo Kai Lim and the stories of other forgotten heroes who fought in World War II.

About the author

Onjali Q. Raúf is a Bangladeshi Muslim who lives in Britain.

Language features

Straightforward language with a first-person narrator. Vocabulary for clothes from Singapore (*baju kurung, topi hat*) and India (*lehenga, choli*).

Themes

Racism; Family; Heritage; Bravery; World War II; Friendship; History.

Cross-curricular links

History (World War II), RE (Different cultures), PSHE (Racism, Family, Bullying)

Suitable for

Years 4+.

Use for

Shared reading.

Diversity focus

The heritage of the main character and the racism he experiences is a main focus of the story.

Teaching ideas

- Use these questions to check for understanding: Why doesn't Leo's father stand up to the bullies at the beginning of the story? What did you learn from reading this story? Which characters in the story are brave and how? What punishment, if any, did Toby receive in the end? Why did Olivia hide her race at the beginning of the story? Why did she reveal it at the end? How might the class be changed by the events in the story? How are parents important in this story?
- Use to discuss bullying. Ask the children to write a letter to Toby explaining what is wrong with his behaviour.
- Use to support work on World War II or Remembrance Day. Read the biographies of the war heroes in the back of the book. Locate the countries they came from and speculate on the dangers they faced. Create your own class display board to match the one in the book.
- Use the notes at the back of the book to talk about prejudice and racism. Read and discuss Onjali Q. Raúf's description of prejudice. Locate incidence of prejudice and racism in the book and suggest ways to counter it.
- Use the notes at the back to talk about bravery and the heroes in the children's own lives. Discuss how the children feel they are brave, or would like to be brave.



Amari and the Night Brothers

By B. B. Alston

Genre: Fantasy story
Format: Paperback
Length: 383 pages
ISBN: 978-1405298193

YEAR 4+ (P5+)

Rumena's recommendation

“This is a book that can be read with Year 4 upwards. A magical world within our own is where Amari finds herself when she tries to discover the whereabouts of her missing brother. It's a fantasy story and will work well alongside topics related to fantasy creatures and magical storytelling. This book has been really popular with fans of Harry Potter and Percy Jackson.

The story also explores the issues of racism and discrimination and has readers considering what barriers are in place for people of colour/working class children and how they can overcome them. For Year 4 it works as a great read aloud. For older children it will be a very much-loved independent read. ”

Story summary

Amari Peters' brother has been missing for six months. One day a message from her brother leads Amari to attend a summer school at the Bureau of Supernatural Affairs. Here she shares a room with a weredragon and discovers that she is a magician – a rare and illegal magical gift. After a life of being looked down on for being poor and Black, Amari finds that being poor and a magician isn't any easier. With the help of another secret magician, Amari passes the tests to become a Junior Agent and finally solves all the puzzles that lead her to her brother.

About the author

B. B. Alston is a Black American writer. He was planning to become a doctor before entering a competition to write a book.

Awards

Best book for young readers: Waterstones Book Awards 2020.

Language features

Vocabulary linked magic such as *supernatural, crystal, Bureau, leprechaun, omen, double talkers, oath*. Other complex language; *jurisdiction, lobby, ballad, mantle*. Descriptive and imaginative language.

Themes

Magic and wonder; Courage; Racism and prejudice; Loyalty; Opportunities,

Cross-curricular links

PSHE (Racism; What makes me me); Computing (Programming).

Suitable for

Years 4+.

Use for

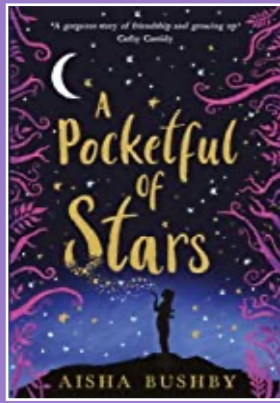
Class read-aloud; independent reading.

Diversity focus

Amari Peters is Black and from a poor inner-city. She suffers from racism at her private school.

Teaching ideas

- Use these questions to check for understanding: Why is everyone at the Bureau of Supernatural Affairs frightened of magicians? Why can't Elsie turn into a dragon? Do Dylan and Amari work well as a team? What is Lara's worst fear? Why does Dylan attack Moreau at the end? Was Amari right to push Emily Grant at the beginning? Was she justified in throwing spaghetti at Lara?
- Investigate the different magical creatures (such as Bigfoot and leprechauns) mentioned in the story. Find out about the legends behind each creature and the countries they come from.
- Discuss the setting of the Bureau of Supernatural Affairs. Locate the different elements (the lifts, the different departments, the different teachers) that build up the setting. Ask the children create their own version of the Bureau and describe a new student arriving at it.
- Compare the different forms of prejudice that Amari suffers from – racism at school, anti-magician prejudice at the Bureau and prejudice because she is poor in both. Discuss the different ways in which Amari has to be brave and strong.
- Use Amari and Dylan's first task as the basis for creating and programming a computer game.
- Investigate the themes of Courage, Opportunities and Prejudice are explored in this story.



A Pocketful of Stars

By Aisha Bushby

Genre: Fiction – fantasy
Format: Paperback
Length: 256 pages
ISBN: 978-1405293198

YEAR 5–6 (P6–7)

Rumena's recommendation

“This book about loss and friendship is written in such a magical way that it had me absolutely hooked. This would make a great read aloud for years 5 and 6.

It is one of my favourite reads ever because of the way it transports you into the main character's dreams; it really has you knowing and caring for her inner most thoughts. It also allows the reader to develop an understanding of the impact that family breakdowns and loss have on a child. It is perfect for discussing character development and the complexity of relationships.

The main character's interest in gaming is key to the plot, which will appeal to children who have an interest in gaming. But there is also a magical feel to the storytelling that makes it appealing to those who enjoy reading that genre. ”

Teaching ideas

- Use these questions to check for understanding: Did the book have a happy or a sad ending? What lessons has Safiya learned by the end of the book? Why does it take so long for Safiya to stop being friends with Elle? How is the theme of acceptance important here? How does Safiya find the confidence to forgive herself and choose better friends? Why is Safiya ready to say goodbye to her mother at the end?
- Compare the waking narrative with the computer game/dream narrative. Contrast the adjectives used to create settings. Tease out what other aspects create the dream-like nature of the game narrative. Discuss the difference between the narrative in a computer game and the narrative in a book. Challenge the children to write a story based around a computer game where the main character needs to solve puzzles or carry out missions.
- Use to support PSHE work on friendships. Discuss what makes a good friend and friendship. Discuss strategies for moving on from a difficult friendship.

Story summary

A week after Safiya has last seen her mother – storming out after a row – Safiya's mother has a stroke that leaves her in a coma. Over the next few weeks, Safiya visits her mother's childhood in her dreams. In these dreams Safiya learns about her mother's hopes and dreams and sees the connections to herself. In her waking life, she starts to question her friendship with her best friend and forms a new friendship with girls previously bullied by her own group.

Each dream leads Safiya to seek an object back in her mother's flat, believing that this will help her mother to recover. By the time she understands that her mother is going to die anyway, she has worked out that it is herself that she is saving.

About the author

Aisha Busby was born in Bahrain.

Language features

Straightforward with first-person child narrator. Interesting vocabulary, for example *crescendo*, *mirage*. Distinct styles used for the narrative in the waking and the dreaming worlds.

Themes

Fairy tales; Family; Bereavement; Bullying; Friendship; Self-esteem.

Cross-curricular links

Geography (Different places), Computing (Analysing problems), PSHE (What makes me special, Friendship, Bullying, Cyberbullying).

Suitable for

Years 5 and 6.

Use for

Shared reading.

Diversity focus

The main character has a British father and a Kuwaiti mother. The dream sections take place in Kuwait. Although Safiya is bullied, it is not linked to her heritage.

Good to know

Safiya's mother dies at the end, which might make this book unsuitable for some children.



When Life Gives You Mangoes

By Kereen Getten

Genre: Realistic fiction/mystery/fantasy
Format: Paperback
Length: 224 pages
ISBN: 9781782692645

YEAR 5–6 (P6–7)

Rumena's recommendation

“This relatively short book would be an ideal class read. Clara, the protagonist, is an intriguing character with a mysterious past. Her story will keep everyone guessing and the build-up of intrigue and suspense will keep readers hooked. The Jamaican setting is vividly described and succeeds in being simultaneously realistic and magical.

The themes of loss and grief run strongly in the story, with Clara's wit and humour providing a relief from the heavy themes. The plot twist is one of the best I've seen written for this age group and it will send readers back to the beginning again. ”

Story summary

Clara cannot remember what happened last summer. She only knows that she has fallen out with her best friend Gaynah. As Clara makes friends with a new girl, Rudy, Gaynah follows her scowling. One day, Rudy and Clara to break into the mansion of her estranged Uncle Eldorath. When Clara becomes trapped at Eldorath's house during a tropical storm, he helps her to realise that Gaynah is a ghost and to remember the accident that killed her. After the storm, Eldorath is welcomed back into the village and Clara learns to forgive herself.

About the author

Kereen Getten was born and grew up in Jamaica. She lives in Britain.

Language features

Straightforward language. First person narrator.

Themes

Family; Loss; Guilt; Prejudice; Imagination; Responsibility.

Cross-curricular links

Geography (Different places); PSHE (Friendship, Loss)

Suitable for

Years 5 and 6.

Used for

Shared reading, independent reading.

Diversity focus

This story is set in Jamaica and all the characters are Black. There is a passing description of life as a Black child in Britain.

Good to know

In this story, the Christian leaders are shown to be short sighted and unkind. Pastor Brown, in particular, damages the community with his accusations.

The mystery at the centre of the story revolves around the drowning of a child and therefore might not be suitable for all children.

Teaching ideas

- Use these questions to check for understanding: Why doesn't Clara remember the accident? Why isn't Uncle Eldorath welcome in the village? How is the storm important in the story? Clara says: 'This town is full of things no one wants to talk about'. How many secrets does Clara discover in this story? Which characters are important in Clara's recovery? Does Gaynor bully Clara in the story?
- Use the vivid descriptions of Uncle Eldorath's mansion to inspire the children to write their own descriptions of a forgotten mansion filled with unusual objects. What adventures will children who discover the house have?
- Use to discuss friendship and how friendships can be repaired after an argument, and how they change as we get older.
- Use to link to a study of a different place. Find images of Lucea, Jamaica, and the surrounding area and Fort Charlotte, which Rudy and Clara visit. Compare Rudy's childhood in Britain with Clara's childhood in Jamaica.
- Use to discuss the damaging nature of rumours. Set the children to writing their own story about rumours and prejudice.



Boy, Everywhere

By A.M. Dassu

Genre: Realistic fiction
Format: Paperback
Length: 288 pages
ISBN: 9781910646649

YEAR 6 (P7)

Rumena's recommendation

“This is a hard-hitting book for younger readers, but an important one. As the refugee crisis deepens, I believe children should be exposed to these issues before going to secondary school and learn to challenge the stereotypes around immigration and refugees. Very few books can offer the realism that *Boy, Everywhere* provides, and it will serve to highlight the plight of thousands of children worldwide and help to develop children's empathy and understanding. I do still recommend caution around this book and would not advise it to be offered to all children to read independently at this age. It is best placed as a class reader where the issues can be discussed with an adult.”

Story summary

When the civil war arrives in Damascus, Sami's father decides they must leave. With only the clothes they stand up in, Sami's family escape. Traveling by small boat, lorry and plane, they are smuggled into the UK where they claim asylum. Here they move from a British detention centre, to the house of a relative, to a homeless shelter before finally getting a home of their own. As the journey progresses, the family becomes worn down and broken and Sami discovers what is really important – not his Air Jordans, but family, friendship, security and a place to call home.

About the author

A.M. Dassu is a British author of Asian heritage.

Awards

Little Rebels Award 2021, Calderdale Book of the Year 2021.

Language features

First-person narration that captures a 13-year-old's voice. Words linked to Syrian culture: *tabbouleh*, *kibbeh*, *baba ghanoush* (glossary provided).

Themes

War; Refugees; Fear; Family; Prejudice.

Cross-curricular links

Geography (Different places); History (World history).

Suitable for

Year 6 (with support).

Use for

Class reading.

Diversity focus

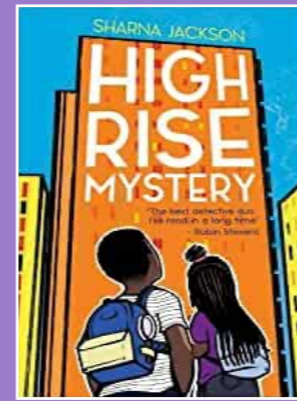
The main character is a Syrian boy and the story starts in Syria. When he arrives in Britain, Sami experiences racism, including amongst British Asians.

Good to know

Boy, Everywhere will need to be a supported read for most children. Events in the book include a migrant boat with children capsizing, a bomb at a shopping mall, people smugglers, homelessness and overt racism.

Teaching ideas

- Use these questions to check for understanding: Why did Sami's family leave Syria? How was Sami's life in Britain different from his life in Syria? Was Sami right to ask his family to look after Aadam? Why does Sami's father hit him when they are in the flat in Istanbul? How is Hassan's opinion of Sami wrong? How is Sami brave? What does Sami learn over the course of the story? Is Sami lucky or unlucky?
- Use to talk about refugees and displacement, exploring different reasons people leave their home country. Organise a charity fundraiser for Syrian refugees. Use Hassan's reaction to Sami to discuss prejudice. Plot Sami's journey on a map.
- Use to compare with other journey stories including adventure stories, refugee stories (such as *The Silver Sword* by Ian Serraillier) and migration stories (such as *Windrush Child*, by Benjamin Zephaniah).
- Ask: What would you take with you if you had to leave home in a hurry? Discuss what is important to Sami at the beginning (shoes, computer games) and the end (his grandfather's ring, a way of talking to his friends).
- Use to develop a discussion about friendship. Discuss the importance to Sami of his friendships.



High Rise Mystery

By Sharna Jackson

Genre: Fiction – mystery story
Format: Paperback
Length: 352 pages
ISBN: 978-1999642518

YEAR 6 + (P7 +)

Rumena's recommendation

“This book has a great mystery plot with a diverse range of characters. It is ideal for a Year 6 class and, with short chapters, would make a great read aloud. Equally, it would work well in guided reading lessons to discuss plot and character development. It provides perfect representation for working class and inner-city children. And with two very intelligent and feisty female protagonists too, it is a refreshing take on mystery stories. The mystery itself is gripping and well-plotted and many children will enjoy the grown-up feel of a murder story. The mystery element provides plenty of writing and role play opportunities, including news reports and suspect identification.”

Story summary

When sisters and amateur detectives Nik and Norva find the body of their art teacher, they start investigating his murder. Unfortunately, the last time Hugo was seen alive, it was rowing publicly with their father. Interviewing the other residents of their tower block they finally solve the case. The story is filled with exuberant characters from different walks of life and cultures.

About the author

Sharna Jackson is a Black British author and museum curator.

Awards

Best book for young readers: Waterstones Book Awards 2020.

Language features

Written in the voice of a street-wise 11-year-old. The text includes bulleted lists, texts, emails, charts, to do lists, idioms and expressions ('the price of fish', 'kissed her teeth'), different accents ('You wanna clue me in or nah') and rich vocabulary such as, *putrid*, *engulfed*, *garbled*.

Themes

Community; Family; Education.

Cross-curricular links

Art and design (Know about great artists), Geography (Cities of the United Kingdom).

Suitable for

Year 6+.

Use for

Shared reading; Independent reading.

Diversity focus

The main characters are Black British sisters. Their mixed community includes a range of races and cultures.

Good to know

This story is a murder mystery, which might not be suitable for all children. The story is set in a poor area and many of the Black people in the book are poor. The estate where the story is set is run down.

Teaching ideas

- Use these questions to check for understanding: What are the different strengths of Nik and Norva? How do they work as a team? On a second reading, what clues might you find? How important is community to the plot?
- Use the story to examine formal and informal language. Compare the way Nik writes as a narrator with the way she talks. Compare the standard English used by the police officers with colloquial and playful language of the teenager George.
- Use to investigate the different ways that information is conveyed in the text: charts, texts, lists, dialogue, email and so on. Discuss the purpose and merits of each.
- Use to practise non-fiction report writing. Ask the children to write May Burton's newspaper report on the events in Cloud News.
- Use to investigate how the author creates distinct characters and a defined setting. Compare and contrast with the settings and characters in *Murder Most Unladylike*, by Robin Stevens.
- Use as a focus of debate. Discuss how different characters (the residents, the police, Hugo Knightly-Webb, the reporter) feel about the estate. Organise for the children to formally argue for or against the statement: *The Tri Estate is a good place to live*.

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