



Celebrating Identity & Diversity with Children's Literature: Exploring David Shannon's *A Bad Case of Stripes*

This resource guide was created by the Ladera Ranch Social Justice Committee to support families in talking and teaching about identity, diversity, and being proud of the things that make us who we are. For more information about LRSJC, email us at LaderaRanchSJC@gmail.com or visit us on the web at lrsjcommittee.weebly.com.

The central text for this month's discussion is *A Bad Case of Stripes* by David Shannon. In this award-winning children's book, we meet Camilla Cream, who loves lima beans. But, Camilla's friends don't like them, so she hides her love of lima beans in order to be just like everyone else. Then, one day, Camilla wakes up with an unusual problem: she has broken out in stripes, and couldn't be more different. The kids at school make fun of her stripes, and the more they tease her, the worse she feels. The worse she feels, the worse the stripes get. As Camilla and her family turn to unexpected sources to heal her stripes, Camilla learns the importance of being proud of who you are.

Key ideas:

- We are all unique, which means that we have things that make us different and special. Some of these things are visible on the outside, like how we look or what clothes we choose to wear, while others are internal (meaning that people don't know about them unless we tell them).
- Sometimes, people are afraid of people who are different than them, or feel embarrassed about the ways that they are different. Camilla Cream pretended not to like lima beans so the other kids wouldn't make fun of her. Trying to be just like everyone else made Camilla sick, and she didn't get well until she learned to be her true self.
- The kids at Camilla's school teased her for being different, and it hurt Camilla's feelings. What can you do to show people that you love and appreciate them just as they are? How can you stand up for people who are getting teased?
- By the end of the book, Camilla learns to be proud of the things that make her unique...including her love of lima beans. What makes you unique or special? Who helps you feel proud of who you are?

Activity 1: Book Discussion

After reading the story, lead children in a discussion of key ideas in the text, including:

- Why wouldn't Camilla eat lima beans?
- Why was Camilla relieved that she didn't have to go to school?
- How did Camilla feel when other students laughed at her?
- What were some of the things Camilla and her family did to try to get rid of the stripes?
- At the end of the book, Camilla gets some advice that helps her get rid of the stripes. What works?

Preschool extension: Listen to Laurie Berkner's song, "I really love to dance" ([video](#) | [lyrics](#)). What do you notice about similarities between the book and the song? What do you really love to do?

Curricular connections: For a complete, standards-aligned, lesson plan exploring character development and bullying in *A Bad Case of Stripes*, click [here](#).

Activity 2: Look at me!

We all have internal and external characteristics that make us unique. As a group, talk about some of the things that make you unique and special. You might think about things you like to do, what you like to eat, the languages you speak or the holidays you like to celebrate, the way you look, or other things that make you who you are. What characteristics or traits do the members of your family or classroom have in common? What makes you different from one another?

Next, create a mini-me that highlights your internal and external characteristics. When everyone has finished their mini-me, hang them in a shared space and examine the beautiful diversity of your community.

Deepening the discussion: Explore the types of identities and/or themes in your drawings. What surprised you? What can we do to honor, appreciate, and learn from the diversity of our community?

Extending the Conversations: Using Picture Books to Talk about Identity, Diversity, and Advocacy



In *A Bad Case of Stripes*, Camilla's love of lima beans is the characteristic that sets her apart from her friends...and they sometimes make fun of her for it. Camilla learns to stand up for who she is, but the book ends before we get to see how Camilla, her friends, and the adults around them work together to make a kinder world.

There are other children's books that grapple more directly with complex questions of identity, diversity, and advocacy. These books can be useful for young readers and older children alike, as they examine the ideas raised in the text and make connections to their own experiences. To find children's books related to diversity and social justice, visit your local library or use the resources below.

[6 Elements of Social Justice Education](#): This website features an annotated list of children's literature, organized around six key themes (self-love and knowledge, respect for others, exploring issues of social injustice, social movement and social change, raising awareness, and taking action).

[Multicultural Children's Book Day](#): This website features resources, instructional materials, and recommendations to help teachers and parents use children's books to promote respect and understanding among culturally, geographically, and experientially diverse communities.

Instructional resources:

[It's Okay to be Different: Teaching Diversity with Todd Parr \(Grades 1-2\)](#)

In this lesson, children read Todd Parr's picture book *It's Okay to be Different*, and work together to examine multiple aspects of personal diversity. At the end of the lesson, children create a class book celebrating the many things that make their class members unique.

[Using Picture Books to Explore Identity, Stereotyping and Discrimination \(Grades 6-8\)](#)

In this standards-aligned lesson, students examine questions of identity, discrimination, and advocacy in *I Can Hear the Sun* by Patricia Polacco, *The Woman Who Outshone the Sun* by Alejandro Cruz Martinez, and *The Secret Footprints* by Julia Alvarez.

[The Children's Picture Book Project \(Grades 9-12\)](#)

In this two week unit, high school students examine the characteristics of high quality children's literature before using technology to plan, write, illustrate, and produce their own children's book. While this unit doesn't explicitly focus on questions of identity, discrimination or advocacy, this project could easily be adapted to focus on creating books that address topics of bullying, social justice, and activism.

Other Recommended Resources:

The Anti-Defamation League's [Checklist for Assessing Children's Literature](#) offers suggestions for evaluating multiple aspects of children's books, including the ways they portray diverse people, ideas and perspectives.