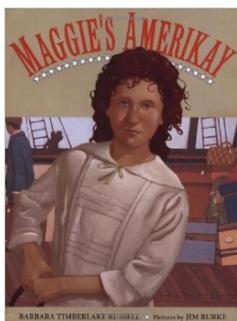


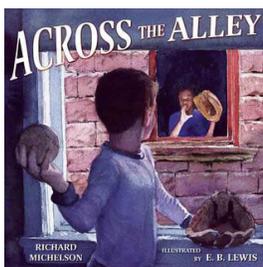
## Dimensions of Difference and Similarity in Literature

An important step in building positive relationships at school is to recognize and respect differences in others. The following books describe characters who appreciate cultural or physical differences and develop friendships built on valuing their differences as well as their common values and experiences.



***Maggie's Amerikay*** by Barbara Timberlake Russell (picture book, 40 pages) Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006. Grades 3-5. Open Circle Themes: Recognizing Differences, Including One Another, Recognizing Discrimination, Speaking Up, Positive Self-Talk

In 1898, members of different cultural groups merged in New Orleans, Louisiana, hoping to find freedom and opportunity. In this setting, Maggie McCrary, daughter of Irish immigrants, encounters Nathan, a young African-American boy who loves to play music. Their friendship grows, but only after they overcome mutual distrust passed on to them by their families. Nathan and Maggie's friendship deepens as they learn about challenges and hopes for the future that they and their families have in common. (Readers might want to make connections between *Maggie's Amerikay* and *Mrs. Katz and Tush*, by Patricia Polacco.)



***Across the Alley*** by Richard Michelson (picture book, 32 pages) Putnam Juvenile Books, 2006. Grades 1-3. Open Circle Themes: Recognizing Differences, Including One Another, Recognizing Discrimination

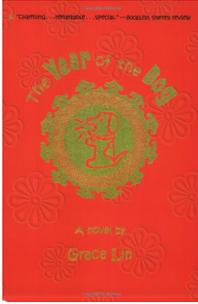
Even though Willie and Abe are pals who live in adjacent apartment buildings, they must keep their

friendship a secret. Because of negative attitudes among different racial and cultural backgrounds in the mid-1940's, Willie, who is African-American, and Abe, who is Jewish, are only able to stealthily talk to each other at night through their bedroom windows across the alley. They spend their evenings sharing stories and teaching each other their special skills: Willie teaches Abe to pitch a baseball, and Abe teaches Willie to play the violin. Eventually, the boys' family members let go of deep-rooted prejudice and support their children's unique talents, as well as their friendship.



***Rules*** by Cynthia Lord (fiction, 208 pages) Scholastic Inc., 2006. (Newbery Honor Book) Grades 4-5. Open Circle Themes: Speaking Up, Recognizing Differences, Group Membership, Dealing with Teasing, Leadership, Nonverbal Communication

One of the ways that Catherine tries to help her younger brother, who has autism, is to remind him of important social rules such as "Say 'thank you' when someone gives you a present." Catherine often feels torn between her brother's world and the world of her peers. As much as she loves her brother, Catherine worries that David's differences will make her friends uncomfortable when they are around him. Life takes a dramatic turn when Catherine befriends Jason, who is confined to a wheelchair and communicates through picture cards. As her relationship with Jason becomes more important to her, Catherine finds a way to merge her two worlds with confidence and courage.



***The Year of the Dog*** by Grace Lin (fiction, 134 pages) Little, Brown and Company, 2006. Grades 3-5.  
Open Circle Themes: Recognizing Differences, Group Membership, Positive Self-Talk, Problem Solving, What Students Have in Common

Pacy is like most elementary school students her age; among other characteristics, she hopes for a good grade on her science project and she wonders what the school cafeteria will offer for lunch. However, unlike most of her classmates, she is only one of three students of Asian descent at the school. As she celebrates the Chinese New

Year with her Taiwanese-American family, she learns that “The Year of the Dog” means finding both true friendship and one’s true role in life. She decides to focus on both goals during the year. From that point on, all of her actions, whether she is trying out for a role in the school play or helping her family prepare for an Asian Red Egg party to celebrate the birth of a new baby, Pacy moves between two cultures with a respect for the traditions of both. Author Grace Lin states that she wrote this book because “it was the book I wished I had when I was growing up—a book that had me in it.” Lin wrote the *The Year of the Dog* because she wanted children to have a book that addresses differences in a real and upbeat way.