

## Literature that Connects to SEL and Academics

Some classroom teachers report that children can “talk-the-talk” in Open Circle meetings, but don’t always “walk-the-walk” when the meetings are over. What are some ways to encourage carryover of skills once students leave the Open Circle meetings?

One way to keep Open Circle concepts front and center throughout the day is to make explicit connections between social and emotional skills and academic learning. Sharing and discussing children’s literature presents an excellent opportunity to make these connections.

Historical fiction, for example, is a rich resource for promoting social, emotional, and academic learning. Both picture books and novels in this genre can provide insight into the emotional and social lives of characters who are living in a specific period of history. In *Pink and Say*, by Patricia Polacco, the concept of recognizing differences and embracing commonalities is a strong theme played out in the context of the American Civil War. *The Watsons Go to Birmingham*, by Christopher Paul Curtis, gives readers a first-hand look at life in the South during the racially charged early 1960’s. Open Circle concepts such as dealing with bullying, discrimination, and managing strong emotions are embedded in this powerful novel which is framed by the events leading up to the violence that erupted in Birmingham, Alabama in 1963.

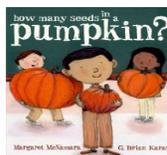
The following books are more examples of stories that connect to both academic and social and emotional concepts. Whether set against the backdrop of historical events, or tied to science or math concepts, these stories, and the process of

sharing and discussing them, encourage carryover of Open Circle skills.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For an extensive list of children’s literature grouped by Open Circle themes, see the Literature Connections section in the *Open Circle Curriculum* and in the Resources link at [www.open-circle.org](http://www.open-circle.org).

### RECOGNIZING DIFFERENCES, COOPERATION, PROBLEM SOLVING, RECOGNIZING FEELINGS, LEADERSHIP



***How Many Seeds in a Pumpkin?***  
by Margaret McNamara. Schwartz and Wade Books, 2007. Grades 2-3 Picture Book.

Class members cooperate with one another as they determine which pumpkin in their classroom has the most seeds. The results surprise Charlie, the smallest boy in the class. Charlie and his classmates discover that “small things can have a lot going on inside them.”

### RECOGNIZING DISCRIMINATION, LEADERSHIP



***Grandmama's Pride***, by Becky Birtha. Albert Whitman & Company, 2005. Grades 3-5 Picture Book.

Grandmama models strength and self-respect for her granddaughters, even as she endures the humiliation of the Jim Crow laws in the 1950’s. This story could prompt discussions about how people treat others, as well as provide background information about the history of civil rights in the United States.

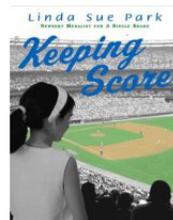
## RECOGNIZING DIFFERENCES AND DISCRIMINATION, WHAT PEOPLE HAVE IN COMMON, OVERCOMING OBSTACLES



*The Arrival*, by Shaun Tan. Arthur A. Levine Books, 2007. Grades 4-5 Picture Book.

This wordless picture book/graphic novel combines fantasy and abstract art to convey the disorientation, terror, and wonder that define the immigrant experience. This book is a powerful addition to a unit on the history of immigration in the United States. Students can share their interpretations of the illustrations, which communicate the range of emotions people feel when they try to adjust to a new culture. After experiencing this book, students may find it easier to empathize and connect with those classmates who are in the same situation as the main character.

## RECOGNIZING DIFFERENCES, WHAT PEOPLE HAVE IN COMMON, COOPERATION, RECOGNIZING FEELINGS, LEADERSHIP

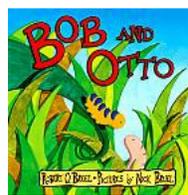


*Keeping Score*, by Linda Sue Park. Grade 5 Novel.

This story integrates several aspects of American life in the early 1950's, including baseball, and the Korean War. The main focus is the bond between Maggie Fortini, a Brooklyn Dodgers fan, and Jim, one of her father's firefighter colleagues.

Even though Jim is a Giant's fan, Maggie lets him teach her the correct way to score a baseball game. When Jim leaves to fight in the Korean War, Maggie and Jim correspond until letters from Korea suddenly stop. *Keeping Score* sheds light on some of the tragic consequences of war, and the transforming power of relationships.

## RECOGNIZING DIFFERENCES, FEELINGS, EMPATHY



*Bob and Otto*, by Robert O. Bruel. Roaring Brook Press, 2007. Grades K-1 Picture Book.

Bob, the worm, is heartbroken when he sees that his friend, Otto, the caterpillar, has turned into a butterfly. Ultimately, he learns that friendship can endure challenges, like change and differences. Like *Farfallina and Marcel*, by Holly Keller, *Bob and Otto* weaves together emotions, relationships, and science.