

QUICK GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

SELECTING AND USING CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE CHILDREN'S BOOKS IN LANGUAGES OTHER THAN ENGLISH



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Use this Quick Guide to find, select, evaluate, and use books to support language and literacy development in the home languages of young children.

Children who are dual language learners (DLLs) with a strong base in their home language are more apt to be ready for school and to learn English well. Reading books in a child's home language is a simple strategy that families and education staff can use to prepare children to be successful readers. Early childhood programs should have a large and varied selection of books in each of the children's languages. These books can then be made available to the children and their families, as well as to the bilingual and dual language learning families and volunteers who may visit the setting to read, talk, and play with the children.

WHY ARE BOOKS IN A CHILD'S HOME LANGUAGE IMPORTANT?

Sharing books with adults helps children develop essential language and literacy skills, such as: vocabulary, listening comprehension, and phonological awareness. Children also learn that print carries meaning, represents oral speech, and that strings of letters (or characters) represent words. All these skills are essential to a child becoming a successful reader.

Having books in children's home languages allows them to learn, discuss, and refine the concepts found in the books and make connections to their prior knowledge in their home language. Home language books provide children with information they need to keep learning new and more difficult concepts while they are also developing their new English skills.

Using a variety of kinds of books, including storybooks, picture books, books of songs and rhymes, and non-fiction topics enables children to learn many different kinds of information and ideas. Culturally accurate books (not just translations of English books) that respectfully represent the families' cultures with characters, objects, and themes support children to develop a strong, positive self-image. Seeing pictures of people who look like them and familiar objects supports children's cultural identity and builds self-esteem.

Books in home languages are a vital part of every early childhood learning environment.



POINTS TO CONSIDER WHEN SELECTING BOOKS FOR YOUR PROGRAM

Look for books that represent the languages and cultures of the children in your program. For example, books in Spanish about making tortillas over the open fire do not represent all children who speak Spanish; likewise, the experience and the Spanish vocabulary in this story would not reflect the experiences of a child from Puerto Rico.

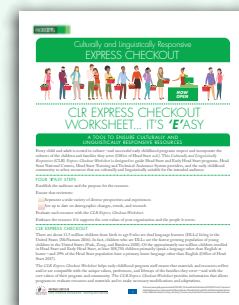
- Be sure the content and illustrations provide authentic representations of the culture. When the story takes place in modern times, characters should dress and talk as people in that culture dress and talk today. If the story takes place in the past, make sure dress and customs are accurate.
- Avoid books with illustrations or storylines that reinforce stereotypes that make certain groups seem foolish or disrespected.
- Form a committee of bilingual staff, families, and volunteers to advise staff on selecting and evaluating books in languages they do not read or cultures other than their own.
- Use the *Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Express Checkout Worksheet* found on the ECLKC to evaluate books and other print materials.
- Have a person who speaks the language and is familiar with the culture review and screen out books with scary or inappropriate stories, books that have been poorly translated, or books that are culturally inaccurate, before using them with children.
- Keep in mind that a child may not understand a dialect different from his or her own; therefore, a book in one dialect may not be fully understood by a child who speaks a different dialect. For example, a child whose family speaks Cajun French may not fully understand a book written for children who speak Haitian French.
- It's optimal to have books originally written in the families' languages and cultures. When these are not available, translations of books from other languages and cultures may be used; for example, many American books are now translated into Spanish.
- Find additional Guides on selecting culturally and linguistically appropriate books in the Planned Language Approach: Book Knowledge and Print Concepts page on the [ECLKC](#).

SHARING BOOKS WITH FAMILIES

Support each family's role as preservers of their home language by providing them access to books that represent their culture and are written in their home language. This gives them opportunities to practice and build their home language skills.

- Work with families to select and provide a lending library of books and materials that families can use to expand their efforts to build their children's home language and literacy skills at home.
- Have wordless books that include pictures of familiar objects and people who look like members of the family. Share with families the idea that using wordless books allows them to tell their own stories about the pictures.
- Expand on literacy experiences that families are already doing with their children to develop their home language. Suggest additional ways that they can use books and tell stories; for example, acting out a story with dolls or through pantomime.
- Work with families to identify community sources for books in their home language, such as libraries, ethnic markets, and cultural organizations.
- Offer a workshop or family fun night for families to learn ways to create their own books when few or no books are readily available in their home language.
- Provide space and other support so small groups of families who speak the same language can talk about books, stories, and other literacy experiences that they can do with their children at home.

For more information about choosing culturally and linguistically appropriate materials, use the Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Express Checkout Worksheet found on the [ECLKC](#) website.



HOW TO USE BOOKS IN LANGUAGES THAT ARE UNFAMILIAR TO YOU

Invite family members or volunteers to read the home language books and discuss them with the children in small groups.

- Offer training to help family members and volunteers learn more about discussing books using *dialogic reading* techniques. Also find strategies for reading to infants and toddlers on [ECLKC](#).
- Learn a few key words in the book to highlight the content, and use questions, props, and pictures to enhance your communication about the content with the children.
- Learn words in the children's home languages by practicing with books that have familiar stories.
- Bilingual books—those with English words and one or more other languages—can be very helpful. Children learn best when the adult reads a book fully in one language at one time and the other language at another time.



IDEAS FOR FINDING BOOKS IN MULTIPLE LANGUAGES

Partner with your public library (they are part of the community and serve the same families as your program). They often have funding sources and catalogues that are not available to other organizations. If the library does not have books in multiple languages, talk to them about the need for books in the home languages of children in the community.

- Ask families for the names of stories and books they heard as a child or are familiar traditional stories.
- Ask colleagues to bring age and culturally appropriate books back from their travels.
- Contact cultural organizations and clubs in your own and neighboring communities and on the Internet for book sources.
- Create books with pictures of the children's environments, families, and favorite things, and ask families or volunteers to write the words in the home languages.
- Ask families or volunteers to write down simple traditional poems and songs in their home language and teach them to the staff and children. Invite preschool children to draw illustrations and post on the wall or bind into a book.
- Shop for books at ethnic markets and museum shops.
- Trade books with other programs in your community.
- Search for U.S. and international websites, catalogues, and publishers that offer books in many different languages; some have books that can be printed for free.



RESOURCES FOR BOOKS IN WORLD LANGUAGES

Below are some resources for children's books in many world languages that are available via the Internet. Use this Quick Guide to determine if individual books are appropriate for the children in your program. This list is not intended to endorse purchases from particular vendors.

EAST WEST DISCOVERY PRESS

Books for toddlers, preschoolers, and school-age children

<http://eastwestdiscovery.com/>

INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Books for infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and school-age children

<http://www.internationalchildbook.com/>

INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S DIGITAL LIBRARY

Free digital library of books from around the world for preschoolers, school-age children, and young teens

<http://en.childrenslibrary.org/>

LANGUAGE LIZARD

Books for infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and school-age children

<http://www.languagelizard.com/>

LEE & LOW BOOKS

Bilingual and Spanish language books for preschoolers and early school-age children

<https://www.leeandlow.com/>

MORNING CIRCLE MEDIA

Print and e-books for older toddlers, preschoolers, and school-age children

<http://morningcirclemedia.com/>

OYATE

Books for infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and older children in various American Indian/Alaska Native languages

<http://oyate.org/>

STAR BRIGHT BOOKS

Books for infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and school-age children

<https://starbrightbooks.com/index.php>

WELCOMING SCHOOLS

List of Spanish and bilingual Spanish/English books for preschoolers and school-age school children

<https://www.welcomingschools.org/pages/libros-para-ninos-bilingual-books-or-spanish-editions/>