

Build a Strong Classroom Community Using Literature



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The new school year brings together new communities. Strengthening these ties is one of the most important parts of going back to school. Teachers have countless ways to positively build their classroom community, but books provide a special catalyst for important discussions of how to treat others or what makes us all unique. Here is a short list of some of my favorite picture books for the start of a new school year and why they make excellent community builders.

A Fine, Fine School by Sharon Creech

This book is excellent at the beginning and/or the end of the year to get students and teachers in the right frame of mind about your own fine, fine school and all the learning you will be doing together.

Everybody Needs a Rock by Byrd Baylor

The illustrations in this book are peculiarly interesting and Baylor's Ten Rules for Finding a Rock speak to kids young and old. Build community around sharing individually chosen rocks for a class collection or use this whimsical tale as an introduction or capstone to any unit on geology.

Pinduli by Janell Cannon

We have all felt lonely and insecure from time to time. Use this book in your community to initiate discussions about fitting in or treating others with respect. It is beautifully illustrated, as are other books by this author of Stellaluna and Verdi.

Big Al by Andrew Clements

This simple tale illuminates how it feels to be different and what lengths we may go to fit in. The theme is instantly identifiable to even very young children.

Chrysanthemum by Kevin Henkes

Social interactions at school can be a particular source of stress for many children and the first thing anyone learns about us is our name. Talk about the uniqueness of names and what they mean to the development of self with this accessibly delightful story from a favorite author.

My Dog May be a Genius poems by Jack Prelutsky

This collection of [poetry](#) from Children's Poet Laureate Prelutsky is choc full of little gems like "I'm Glad I'm Me", "My family is Unconventional", "Because I Don't Like Lima Beans", and "I'm Not Afraid of Anything". Many of Prelutsky's poems are about the recognition of self and provide students with a fun way to identify with more complex ideas.

This is just a short list of books that I have used at the beginning of the year to nurture trust, friendship, and respect in my classroom community.