

# BOOKNOTES

EDUCATORS GUIDE

## embracing one's cultures: a guide

### Grades 3 up

*All-of-a-Kind Family* by Sydney Taylor

*Maya Running* by Anjali Banerjee

*Fresh Girl* by Jaira Placide

*The Shadows of Ghadames* by Joëlle Stolz

*Macaroni Boy* by Katherine Ayres

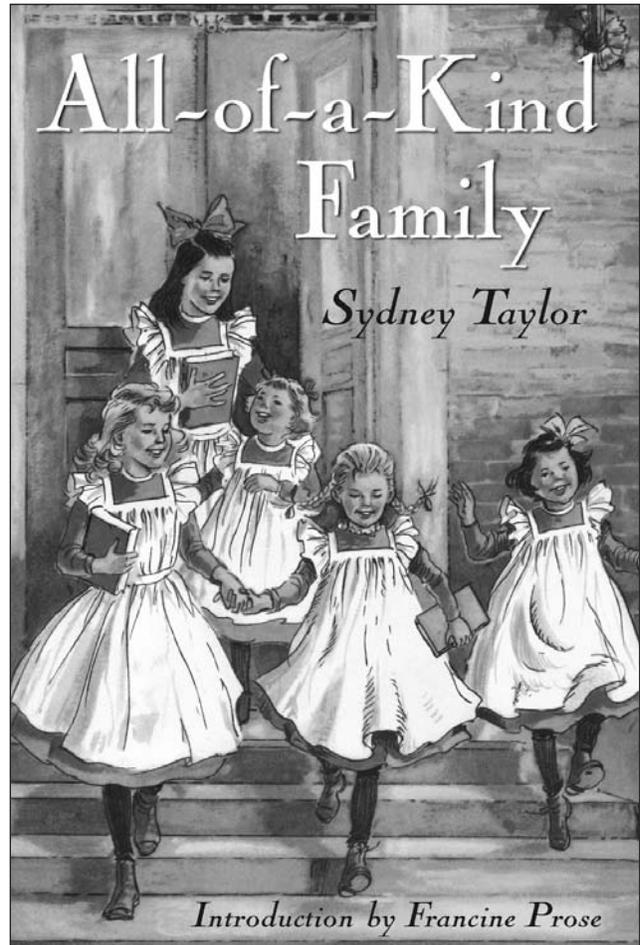
*Half and Half* by Lensey Namioka

*Bindi Babes* by Narinder Dhani

*See You Down the Road* by Kim Ablon Whitney

Visualize the varied cultures in American society today: descendents of Vietnamese refugees; foreign and native-born children of Latin American parents seeking to break the bonds of poverty; Muslim youth from devout Middle Eastern families; descendents of early 1900s immigrants from Ireland, Italy, and other European countries; sons and daughters of research scientists, scholars, and engineers from all over the globe. Every race, nationality, and religion contributes to the photograph of "Our American Family."

But instead of embracing the richness of America's unique crossroads of cultures, schools often become a battleground where students from diverse backgrounds fight to belong. Prejudice stemming from negative stereotypes and ignorance leads to students being harassed and teased about the clothes



**All-of-a-Kind Family**  
0-385-73295-3 • Delacorte Press  
**NEW EDITION!**

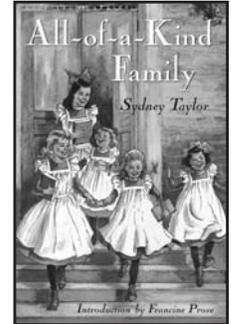
they wear, the food they eat, and the way they speak, which robs those targeted of the pride they should be able to express in their own ethnicity.

The books in this educators guide include literature that encompasses many of the cultures students may encounter in their school, and can help students define and embrace their own culture as well as the cultures of others. These books focus on themes of acceptance, cultural pride, and a sense of heritage that must be fostered in all of our students if our schools, and ultimately our society, can hope to be productive, successful, and united.

# questions for group discussion

## All-of-a-Kind Family Sydney Taylor

As a Jewish family living in a predominantly Jewish area in early twentieth-century New York City, five sisters—ranging in age from four to twelve—enjoy life with their parents and share great adventures.



Grades: 3–7 • 0-385-73295-3  
Delacorte Press

1. Set in 1912, life in this story seems much simpler than it is today. What are some of the differences? How have the changes in our society affected family life? How has life for a Jewish family changed?
2. When Sarah loses her library book, her mother makes Sarah tell the librarian what happened and offer to pay for the book out of her allowance. Why doesn't her mother go with her? What does this teach Sarah about responsibility?
3. Mama uses inventive ways to teach her daughters responsibility and to help motivate them to do chores they would rather not do. What are some of the things Mama does? How will these lessons help her daughters?



Grades: 7 up • 0-385-74656-3  
Wendy Lamb Books

## Maya Running Anjali Banerjee

Maya was born in India and grew up in Canada. Sometimes she's not sure where she fits in. Meanwhile, she falls in love with the cutest boy in school and becomes jealous when her gorgeous cousin, Pinky, comes to visit from India. She asks the god Ganesh to solve her problems, but his interference brings big surprises.

1. Pinky tells Maya, "Brian has a narrow mind. Don't let his words affect how you feel." (p. 81) Why is this solid advice? What do narrow-minded people miss in life? What factors have contributed to Brian's narrow-mindedness?
2. Ganesh tells Maya, "When I remove obstacles, I am removing illusions, helping you see the truth." (p. 101) What illusions does Ganesh remove from Maya's life? What truth does she see?

## Fresh Girl Jaira Placide

In the midst of a bloody coup, fourteen-year-old Mardi flees Haiti to meet her parents in Brooklyn. She struggles to fit into American culture and tries to overcome the brutal memories of being raped.



Grades: 7 Up • 0-440-23764-5  
Laurel-Leaf

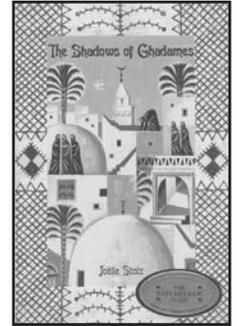
1. Mardi writes in her journal, "Maybe teasing me somehow proves how American they are—or how Haitian I am." (p. 33) What conclusions does Mardi draw at the end of the book? How does she make peace with herself and her classmates?
2. Mardi's mother says, "Never give people an opportunity to soak your name in the same tub they do their dirty laundry." (p. 93) What does she mean by this? How does it apply to Mardi's life and the secret she carries?
3. Mardi tries to alleviate the pain of her past by hurting herself, both physically and emotionally. How is she finally able to conquer the pain and resume her life? What role does Uncle Perrin play in helping her?



## **The Shadows of Ghadames** Joëlle Stolz

**At the end of the nineteenth century, women in Libya live a cloistered life in their homes and on the rooftops where they are not allowed to talk to men. As Malika approaches that stage of her life, a stranger comes to her home and challenges her views toward the traditional way of life.**

1. Malika has been taught her place in the society in which she lives, but she does not seem satisfied with her lot in life. She longs to travel with her father and to have an education like her brother. What are her feelings toward her culture? How does she come to terms with her desires and the traditions of her people?
2. Abdelkarim tells Malika, “I learned several things while I was in hiding on your rooftop. For example, that the world of women is not as stupid as I thought” (p. 102) What did he observe and hear that led him to this conclusion?
3. Malika’s father is more open-minded than most men in his culture. What are some of the traditions he is willing to relinquish? Why?



Grades: 3–7 • 0-385-73104-3  
Delacorte Press



Grades: 3–7 • 0-440-41884-4  
Yearling

## **Macaroni Boy** Katherine Ayres

**Mike Costa enlists his best friend to confront his enemy. But when Mike begins noticing dead rats, hobos in the street dying, and the serious deterioration of his senile grandfather’s health, his focus shifts to discovering the source of the illness and the death that surrounds his community during the Great Depression.**

1. Andy dislikes Mike and his family, even though he gives no justification for his feelings. Why does Andy dislike Mike and his family so intensely? Why does Andy dislike the other boys in Mike’s neighborhood?
2. After Mike and Andy have their final conversation, Andy reaffirms to Mike that they are still enemies, but Mike asks himself, “If only one side stayed enemies, did the battles have to go on?” (p. 176) What has Mike learned about friendship from his experience?

## **Half and Half** Lensey Namioka

**Being half Chinese and half Scottish has never been a problem for Fiona until the annual folk festival where she must make a choice between dancing the Highland Reel or appearing with her father as the heroine of one of his children’s books.**

1. Fiona asks her mom, “Why do grown-ups always have to sort people into boxes anyway?” (p. 4) No one can easily answer the question, so Fiona has to answer it for herself. How does she determine the answer to her question?
2. While local reporters claim Seattle is ethnically diverse, and Fiona sits at a lunch table with students of varying ethnic cultures, she often feels as if she doesn’t belong. Why is she confused about her place among her family and friends?
3. Fiona discovers that people, family included, see what they want to see in a person, and that they judge a person based on appearance. How is this true for every character in the book?



Grades: 3–7 • 0-440-41890-9  
Yearling

## Bindi Babes Narinder Dhani



A year after the death of their mother, three Indian sisters—Geena, Amber, and Jazz—are living in England, when their Auntie unexpectedly is invited by their father from India to help take care of them. To stop her from interfering in their lives, the girls do their best to find her a husband.



Grades: 3-7 • 0-440-42019-9  
Yearling

1. When Auntie arrives to take care of the girls, she introduces the customs and traditions of India. What are the cultural traditions she expects the sisters to uphold? How do the sisters foil Auntie's plans to control their lives? How do their lives change as a result of Auntie's interference?
2. The sisters must cope with important social issues that teenagers of any cultural background would face. How does their Indian heritage influence the way they handle people and situations? (Find out more about the family in *Bhangra Babes* and *Bollywood Babes*.)



Grades: 7 Up • 0-440-23809-9  
Laurel-Leaf

## See You Down the Road Kim Ablon Whitney

Bridget's family are Travelers, moving across the country in trailers and supporting themselves through con jobs and stealing. But Bridget is tired of her family's lifestyle which leads to conflict with her family and friends.

1. Even though Bridget and her family constantly risk being thrown into jail for the way they earn money, Bridget feels her life is boring and predictable. (p. 32) Why does she feel this way? How could she make her life less predictable?
2. Big Jim tells Jimmy and Patrick that acting out of pride instead of smarts gets people in trouble. How is this true for the major characters in the book? How could they have handled the situations with "smarts"?

## internet resources

### Taking It Global

[understanding.takingitglobal.org/diversity](http://understanding.takingitglobal.org/diversity)  
Discusses cultural diversity in America.

### American Civil Liberties Union:

#### Immigrant Rights

[www.aclu.org/ImmigrantsRights/ImmigrantsRightsMain.cfm](http://www.aclu.org/ImmigrantsRights/ImmigrantsRightsMain.cfm)

The official Web page.

### The American Immigrants Home Page

[bergen.org/AAST/Projects/Immigration/](http://bergen.org/AAST/Projects/Immigration/)  
Helpful information for and about immigrants.

### Federation for American Immigration Reform

[www.fairus.org/ImmigrationIssueCenters/ImmigrationIssueCenters.cfm?ID=1272&c=17](http://www.fairus.org/ImmigrationIssueCenters/ImmigrationIssueCenters.cfm?ID=1272&c=17)  
Immigrant reform movement and its affect on public schools.

### Cultural Diversity—

#### a CCSD research program

[www.ccsd.ca/subsites/cd/docs/iy/lifestyl.htm](http://www.ccsd.ca/subsites/cd/docs/iy/lifestyl.htm)  
Lifestyle patterns of immigrant youth.

## on the web

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