



Book of the Month

Presented by ADL's Education Department

About the Book of the Month: This collection of featured books is from Books Matter: The Best Kid Lit on Bias, Diversity and Social Justice. The books teach about bias and prejudice, promote respect for diversity, encourage social action and reinforce themes addressed in education programs of [A World of Difference® Institute](#), ADL's international anti-bias education and diversity training provider. For educators, adult family members and other caregivers of children, reading the books listed on this site with your children and incorporating them into instruction are excellent ways to talk about these important concepts at home and in the classroom.

Binny's Diwali

Thrity Umrigar (Author), Nidhi Chanani (Illustrator)

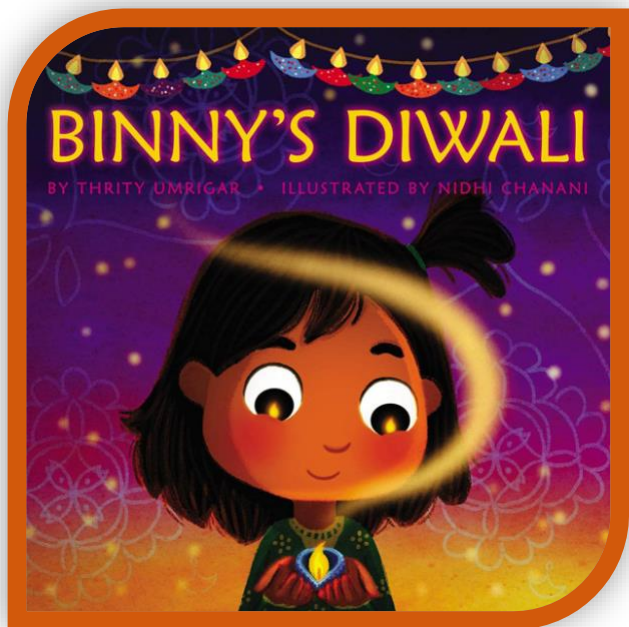
Binny wakes up happy but nervous. It is her day to share about Diwali, the Festival of Lights! She is excited to talk to her class about her favorite holiday. But she struggles to find the words. Taking a deep breath, she tells her classmates about the fireworks that burst like stars in the night sky, leaving streaks of gold and red and green. She shares with them delicious *pedas* and *jalebis*. And she shows them clay lamps, called *diyas*, which look so pretty that all the children ooh and aah. Includes detailed information about the Hindu festival of lights in the back.

ISBN: 978-1338364484

Publisher: Scholastic Press

Year Published: 2020

Age Range: 4–8



Book Themes

Diwali, People, Identity and Culture, Holidays, Family Activism, Diversity, Social Change

Key Words

Discuss and define these words with children prior to reading the book. Do not focus on students' retention of all the words; instead make sure they understand the words enough to follow the story and

remind children of the words' meanings as they come up in the book. You can also post the words and point out to students when they appear in the story. For definitions that are differentiated for young children, see ADL's [Education Glossary Terms](#).

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|---------------|--------------|-----------|-------------|
| ■ blank | ■ feast | ■ Hindu | ■ shy |
| ■ celebration | ■ festival | ■ magical | ■ sparklers |
| ■ decorated | ■ fidgeted | ■ nervous | ■ streamers |
| ■ Diwali | ■ Fireworks | ■ outfit | ■ utensils |
| ■ exchanged | ■ flickering | ■ sari | ■ victory |

Discussion Questions

Before reading the book aloud, ask some or all of these pre-reading questions:

- What and who do you see on the cover of the book?
- What is the title of the book and what do you think it means? Have you heard of Diwali?
- What do you think the book might be about?

As you read the book aloud, ask a few discussion questions periodically throughout reading to check for comprehension and keep the students engaged. Below are some sample questions that correlate to specific page numbers.

- What kinds of things do people buy for Diwali? (page 6)
- How many days does Diwali last? (page 16)
- If you look down from an airplane on Diwali, what would you see? (page 20)

After reading the book aloud, ask some or all the following discussion questions:

- What happens in the story?
- Why does Binny feel shy and scared at first to tell her classmates about Diwali? What helped her feel more comfortable?
- Have you ever felt shy or scared to share something about yourself, your culture or your identity? Can you say more about that?
- Have you ever talked with others the holidays that are important to you? What was that like?
- Binny says that Diwali marks the victory of "goodness and light?" What do you think that means?
- In the book, what are some examples of light that people who celebrate Diwali use?
- What did you learn about Diwali? Why do you think Diwali is Binny's favorite holiday?
- How do you think Binny felt after she taught her classmates about Diwali?
- What did you learn about Binny and her family's Indian culture from the book?
- Why is it helpful to learn about the culture of others?
- How did you feel when the book ended?
- Why do you think the author wrote this book?

Extension Activities

Below are activities for students that can extend learning from the book.

1. Explore Identity and Culture

Ask students: *What is culture?* Define the word culture as: the patterns of daily life that can be seen in language, arts, customs, holiday celebrations, food, religion, beliefs/values, communication style, music, clothing and more that a group of people share. Explain further that the parts of culture are often handed down from family or community members or from one generation to the next. They can also come from the place where the person's family and ancestors live or are from. Explain that culture also can include one's region of the country, whether you live in a city, suburban or rural setting, your family traditions including how you celebrate holidays, your religion, etc. Ask students: *What did you learn about Binny and her family's culture from the book? Were there aspects of daily life you saw in the book that are part of Indian or Hindu culture (e.g., language, food, holidays, traditions, etc.)?* After this discussion, ask students to share aspects of their own life that are important to them and their culture. Then have students create their own cultural webs. They can put their name in a circle in the middle of the web and then create other circles (or whatever shapes they like) around it, writing words or drawing pictures (especially for younger children) of the things about their identity and/or their culture that are important to them. They can then connect these pictures or words to their names and to the other circles that are related (e.g., if they record two or more different holidays, they can connect them to their name as well as each other). This activity can also be done by first having students talk with their family members about aspects of their culture and then bringing that information to school to include in their culture webs.

Note: As you are doing this or other activities about holidays, keep in mind and acknowledge that not all children celebrate holidays as part of their religious or cultural traditions and religion may not be an important part of their identity and as a result, they do not celebrate holidays.

2. Connect with the Author

Engage students in a process to learn more about the author, Thrity Umrigar. Read aloud the short blurb about her on the book jacket. Explain to students that they will spend some time learning more about Thrity Umrigar. First, as a class, discuss and brainstorm what students want to know about the author such as: where she grew up, why she wrote the book, parts of her identity and how they connect to the book, other books she's written, her interests and hobbies, family life, relevant quotes, etc. Possible sources for their research can include: (1) Thrity Umrigar's website (<http://umrigar.com/>), (2) her social media posts on Twitter and Facebook, (3) articles she has written like this one on [What Diwali Means To Me](#), and interviews with her like [this one](#). The culmination of their research may include one of the following project ideas: an extended "author bio" contact page, a drawing/portrait of Thrity Umrigar with a short blurb about her, or a class presentation about her.

3. Learn about Diwali and Create Your Own Light

Read aloud pages 30-31 that explain more about Diwali, including "The Five Days of Diwali." Ask students again what they learned about Diwali from the book and record their responses on the board/smart board. Explain that Diwali is known as the "festival of lights," which marks the victory of good over evil or "light over darkness." Diwali is a national holiday in India. Even though it is part of the Hindu religion, it is celebrated by people of different religions all across India and celebrated by people who are Indian all over the world. If you want to learn and study more about Diwali, you can explore other books and these online resources: [National Geographic](#), [BBC](#), [Britannica Kids](#) and [Fact Monster](#). To focus on the theme of light, ask students: *Where do you see different kinds of light*

shown and discussed in the book? What are some other examples of things that make light? What holidays focus on light? Brainstorm examples, including candles, lamps, lights, sparklers, glitter, lightbulbs, fire, campfire, Holiday lights (Chanukah, Christmas, Kwanzaa, etc.), fireworks, the sun, flashlights, lantern, cellphones, etc. After you make this list, have students create a picture or story about their own favorite way of making light, using one or more of the examples. Provide drawing and other art materials and have students decide which kind(s) of light they will focus on. Have them make their creations and then write a short essay (or a list of words, for younger children) that answers the question, "What Light Means to Me." When completed, have students share their work with the class and consider inviting families to class to be part of the sharing.

ADL Resources

The following are curriculum and educational resources on people, identity and culture, holidays and observances.

Curriculum Resources

Diverse Books Matter, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/diverse-books-matter.

Dolls Are Us, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/dolls-are-us.

Who Am I? Identity Poems, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/who-am-i-identity-poems.

Websites

Calendar of Observances

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/calendar-of-observances

Use this calendar of observances to increase your awareness and sensitivity about religious holidays, observances as well as ethnic and cultural festivities that may affect students, colleagues and neighbors in your community.

Considerations for Inclusive Holidays and Observances

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/considerations-for-inclusive-holidays-and-observances

Holiday celebrations are an excellent opportunity to provide a window into a culture or understand more about a group of people. Here are some important considerations when planning holiday observances in your classroom or school.

The Question Corner: Early Childhood FAQs

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/question-corner

A collection of answers to frequently asked questions about anti-bias issues faced by early childhood professionals and family members interested in promoting respect for diversity among young children. See [How Can "Looking at Lights" Promote Respect Among Children For Various Holidays, Celebrations and Traditions?](#)

Winter Holidays: December Dilemma or Teaching Opportunity?

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/winter-holidays-december-dilemma-or-teaching-opportunity

December can be a fun and festive time of year, or it can make some students feel excluded and marginalized if not approached with respect and care. This resource provides considerations for school officials to ensure inclusivity and not give students the impression that one set of holidays or beliefs is more important or more acceptable than others.

Children's Books

Below are links to lists of recommended anti-bias and multicultural books for the indicated category.

People, Identity & Culture, [www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?childrens-lit-select-all-7=1&tid\[201\]=201&tid\[202\]=202&tid\[203\]=203&tid\[204\]=204&tid\[205\]=205&tid\[206\]=206&tid\[207\]=207&tid\[208\]=208&tid\[209\]=209&tid\[210\]=210&tid\[211\]=211&tid\[212\]=212&tid\[213\]=213&tid\[214\]=214&tid\[215\]=215](http://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?childrens-lit-select-all-7=1&tid[201]=201&tid[202]=202&tid[203]=203&tid[204]=204&tid[205]=205&tid[206]=206&tid[207]=207&tid[208]=208&tid[209]=209&tid[210]=210&tid[211]=211&tid[212]=212&tid[213]=213&tid[214]=214&tid[215]=215)

People, Identity & Culture: Asian/Asian-American/South Asian/South-Asian American/Pacific Islander, [www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?tid\[203\]=203](http://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?tid[203]=203)