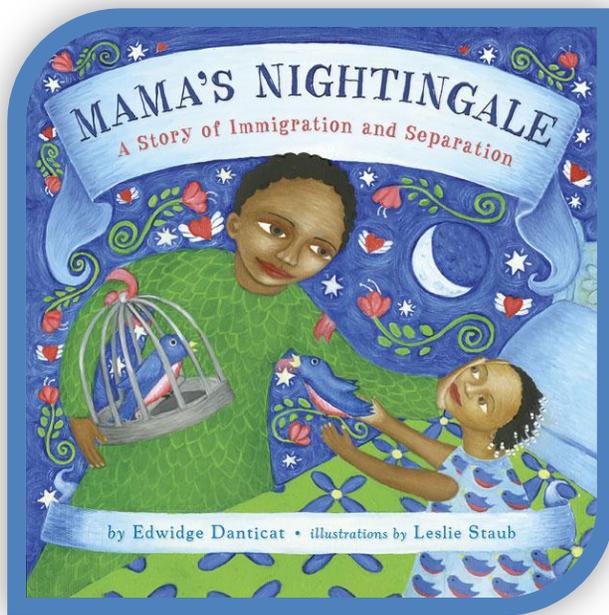




# Book of the Month

Presented by ADL's Education Division

**About the Book of the Month Parent/Family Discussion Guide:** 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 parents, guardians and family members, reading the books listed on this site with your children and integrating the concepts into your interactions with them is an excellent way to help children grapple with and learn about these important principles.



## Mama's Nightingale

Edwidge Danticat (Author) and Leslie Staub (Illustrator)

ISBN: 978-0525428091

Publisher: Dial Books for Young Readers

Year Published: 2015

Age Range: 6–10

## Book Themes

Immigration, Culture, Family, Advocacy

## About the Book

When Saya's mother is sent to an immigration detention center, Saya finds comfort in listening to her mother's warm greeting on their answering machine. To ease the distance between them, Mama begins sending Saya bedtime stories inspired by Haitian folklore on cassette tape. Moved by her mother's tales and her father's attempts to reunite their family, Saya writes a story of her own—one that just might bring her mother home for good.

## Conversation Starters

Whether you read the book aloud or children read it on their own and you discuss it later, use these open-ended questions to deepen the conversation. Remember not to judge their responses and to listen

thoughtfully and engage in a give-and-take that helps them expand upon their understanding of the book and its themes.

- What happened in the story?
- When her Mama first goes away, what does Saya miss the most about her Mama?
- What does it mean that Saya's Mama doesn't have "papers" and why can't she use Saya's papers (as Saya suggests)?
- How do you think Saya and her Papa feel when they never get letters back from the people they wrote to about Mama?
- What is it like when Saya visits her Mama in the correctional facility?
- What do you think about Saya's Mama having to be in prison while she waits to get her "papers?"
- What do you think Saya wrote in the letter?
- How did Saya's letter get her mother released from prison? Have you ever written a letter like that?
- What was your favorite part of the story and why?
- What was the message of the book?

### Talking Points

Below are some important considerations to highlight in order to make this a learning opportunity for your child and your family.

#### 1. The Power of Words

From the very beginning of the book and throughout the story, the power of words is a present theme. On the first page, Saya says what she misses most about her Mama is the sound of her voice and she listens to her Mama's greeting on their answering machine. There are references to storytelling in the book and Saya's Mama makes her audiotapes of bedtime stories. Her Papa uses words and letters to ask for help in releasing her mother from prison. And finally, Saya writes her story which eventually leads to her Mama being able to leave the correctional facility. Talk with your child about how they use their words to express their thoughts and feelings and to persuade or convince someone of something. This can be done verbally or in writing. Have a conversation with them about how writing the letters and stories was helpful to both Saya and her Papa in terms of self-expression. Also, Saya's words were so touching that the newspaper reporter printed her story and the judge agreed to release her Mama. Ask your child if they have ever written a letter or told a story that actually changed something in the world and reflect on your own experiences with doing that. If appropriate, write a letter or story together about something important.

#### 2. Identity and Culture

Saya and her family are Haitian and that means that her family is from Haiti, which is in the Caribbean. You can show your child where Haiti is on a map. Ask your child how they might have known from the story that the family is Haitian. As you read the book, ask about or point out those elements of culture in the book (e.g. references to food, language and stories). Talk with your child about the aspects of culture(s) that are important in your family. You can describe **culture** as parts of daily life that are seen in food, customs, holidays, music and more that a group of people share. Explain that these aspects of culture are often handed down from one generation to the next and

they are sometimes connected to the country where people's relatives originally came from, but don't have to be. Explain how you would define your family's culture(s), and identify what foods, holidays, customs, etc. are important to your family. You may also want to highlight other people in your life (your child's friends and family friends) who have similar or different cultures from your own. Stress that culture is part of who we are but not all of who we are. It's also important to underscore that those differences should not impact our ability to connect with each other across different cultures and that diversity can be and is a positive force.

### 3. Immigration

The themes of immigration and Mama's "undocumented" status loom large in the book. Read the "Author's Note" on pages 28–29 about how the author's family was impacted by immigration and how her parents' undocumented status separated her family during her childhood. If your child doesn't know what immigration is, explain that it is the process of coming into a non-native or foreign country to live and that people immigrate to the United States from all over the world. Explain that in the book, Saya's Mama is considered an "undocumented immigrant" and being undocumented refers to people who are foreign-born people who come to the United States without the legal papers to do so and who often have fled their home countries because of extreme poverty, danger or wanting to be with their families in the U.S. Some enter the country legally as tourists, students or temporary workers and become undocumented when their papers expire. Many have lived in the U.S. for a long time, have families here (as Saya's Mama did) and feel like citizens. You can also discuss the fact that Saya's Mama was in a prison for undocumented immigrants and that many people get put in prisons or deported because of their undocumented status. It is important to talk about how sometimes people stereotype immigrants, have misconceptions about immigrants or they are the targets of bias and discrimination; you may want to share some of the information in [Myths and Facts about Immigrants and Immigration](#) as appropriate.

### Other Books You May Like

*Book Title* by Author, URL

*From North to South/Del Norte al Sure* by Rene Colato Lainez, [www.adl.org/education-outreach/books-matter/books/from-north-to-south.html](http://www.adl.org/education-outreach/books-matter/books/from-north-to-south.html)

*Gaby Lost and Found* by Angela Cervantes, [www.adl.org/education-outreach/books-matter/books/gaby-lost-and-found.html](http://www.adl.org/education-outreach/books-matter/books/gaby-lost-and-found.html)

*Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote* by Duncan Tonatiuh, [www.adl.org/education-outreach/books-matter/books/pancho-rabbit-and-the-coyote.html](http://www.adl.org/education-outreach/books-matter/books/pancho-rabbit-and-the-coyote.html)

*Same Sun Here* by Silas House and Neela Vaswani, [www.adl.org/education-outreach/books-matter/books/same-sun-here.html](http://www.adl.org/education-outreach/books-matter/books/same-sun-here.html)

## ADL Additional Resources

The following are curriculum and resources on diversity, culture and immigration.

### Curriculum Resources

"Huddled Mass or Second Class?: Challenging Anti-Immigrant Bias in the U.S.," *Curriculum Connections*, [http://archive.adl.org/education/curriculum\\_connections/spring\\_2009/](http://archive.adl.org/education/curriculum_connections/spring_2009/).

"What is the Dream Act and Who are the Dreamers?," *Current Events Classroom*, [www.adl.org/education-outreach/lesson-plans/c/what-is-the-dream-act.html](http://www.adl.org/education-outreach/lesson-plans/c/what-is-the-dream-act.html).

"Who Am I?: Identity Poems," *Current Events Classroom*, [www.adl.org/education-outreach/lessonplans/c/who-am-i-identity-poems.html](http://www.adl.org/education-outreach/lessonplans/c/who-am-i-identity-poems.html).

"Who are the Children at Our Border?," *Current Events Classroom*, [www.adl.org/educationoutreach/lesson-plans/c/who-are-the-children-at-our-border.html](http://www.adl.org/educationoutreach/lesson-plans/c/who-are-the-children-at-our-border.html).

### Print Material

How Can I Help Children Appreciate Diversity?

[www.adl.org/assets/pdf/education-outreach/How-Can-I-Help-Children-Appreciate-Diversity.pdf](http://www.adl.org/assets/pdf/education-outreach/How-Can-I-Help-Children-Appreciate-Diversity.pdf)

This resource from The 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.

### Websites

Anti-Bias Education

[www.adl.org/education-outreach/anti-bias-education](http://www.adl.org/education-outreach/anti-bias-education)

Provides training program offerings for pre-K through 12th grade school communities—educators, administrators, youth and families—which focus on the development of an inclusive culture and respectful school climate by addressing issues of bias and bullying.

Parent, Family and Caregiver Resources

[www.adl.org/education-outreach/anti-bias-education/c/parent-family-and-caregivers.html](http://www.adl.org/education-outreach/anti-bias-education/c/parent-family-and-caregivers.html)

Strategies, tips, guiding principles and resources to help parents, family members and caregivers impart values and principles to the children in their lives.

Myths and Facts about Immigrants and Immigration

[www.adl.org/civil-rights/immigration/c/immigration-myths-and-facts.html](http://www.adl.org/civil-rights/immigration/c/immigration-myths-and-facts.html)

Includes several myths about immigrants and immigration and the facts based on research and statistical information.

Table Talk: Family Conversations about Current Events

[www.adl.org/education-outreach/anti-bias-education/c/table-talk-family-conversations.html](http://www.adl.org/education-outreach/anti-bias-education/c/table-talk-family-conversations.html)

Table Talk provides parents and family members with the tools they need to engage their families in conversations about important news stories and other timely discussions about societal and world events. Each guide includes a topic summary, questions to start the conversation and dig deeper, ideas for taking action and additional resources.

### Definitions Related to Bias, Injustice and Bullying

[www.adl.org/education-outreach/curriculum-resources/c/definitions-related-to-bias-injustice-bullying.html](http://www.adl.org/education-outreach/curriculum-resources/c/definitions-related-to-bias-injustice-bullying.html)

A listing of terms and definitions relating to bias, diversity, bullying and social justice concepts written for elementary-age children.

### Children's Books

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

People, Identity and Culture: Immigrants, [www.adl.org/education-outreach/books-matter/people-books.html?subpeople=immigrants](http://www.adl.org/education-outreach/books-matter/people-books.html?subpeople=immigrants)

People, Identity and Culture, [www.adl.org/education-outreach/books-matter/people-identity-culture.html](http://www.adl.org/education-outreach/books-matter/people-identity-culture.html)