

Beginning Chapter Books with Diverse Main Characters

[Melissa Taylor, Imagination Soup](#)

Princess Pink and the Land of Fake-Believe by Norah Z. Jones

This is a funny series that messes up familiar fairy tale stories. The cartoon-like illustrations and speech bubbles make it especially fun to read.

Little Shaq Takes a Chance by Shaquille O'Neal

Trying new things isn't what Little Shaq wants to do. Only when he does, he learns that they can be fun.

Allergic to Girls, School, and Other Scary Things by Lenore Look

Second grader, Alvin Ho, is afraid of everything, especially school. A school he's quiet but at home, he's Firecracker Man, superhero. While not the most compelling read, I like that the main character deals with fears like many of our kids do.

The Year of the . . . book series by Andrea Chang

Growing up is challenging and in the first novel, *The Year of the Book*, Anna turns to books for company while she learns how to make friendships in real life. The subsequent books in the series are just as realistic and well-written. I highly recommend them.

Emma Is On the Air Party Drama! by Ida Siegal (series)

Emma and her friends are excited for the costume contest -- but when Sophia's costume disappears mysteriously, the group investigates clues and interviews witnesses to discover what happened. Her group of friends finds news and shares it in video news reports.

Lulu and the Rabbit Next Door by Hilary McKay

This is one of my favorite early chapter books! Lulu and her cousin help their neighbor Arthur learn to love and care for his (neglected) rabbit. She doesn't want her neighbor to feel bad so she writes George the rabbit notes and gives him gifts from her pet rabbit named Thumper.

Sugar Plum Ballerinas by Whoopi Goldberg and Deborah Underwood, illustrated by Maryn Roos

First in the series of ballerina stories, this is about a 9-year old new girl, Alex, whose mom forces her to take ballet. Which she's terrible at. Friendships grow as Alex perseveres but will her stage fright end everything she's worked for?

Calvin Coconut by Graham Salisbury

This is a series of books about fourth-grader, Calvin, who lives in Hawaii. I include it here for the diversity but admit to not finding it all that enjoyable to read.

Max Loves Muñecas by Zetta Elliott

Muñecas is the word for dolls in Spanish. Max is fascinated by the dolls made in Señor Pepe's shop. Max learns the story of how Pepe grew up and learned to sew for dolls. It's a beautiful story and soon Max doesn't feel ashamed that he wants to work with his hands to make dolls anymore. I loved the writing as well as the realistic story of Pepe's life that could have easily been a story of desolation and homelessness.

Danger! Tiger Crossing #1 by Lin Oliver

When 10-year old Tiger and his friend, Luna, investigate an unusual neighbor woman's house, they discover a magical golden frame that transports them into famous paintings. They get stuck in a Henri Rousseau painting where they meet a boy who was trapped there 50 years prior. Will they be able to escape the painting before they're trapped forever?

Sherlock Sam and the Ghostly Moans in Fort Canning by A.J. Low

Set in Singapore, Sherlock Sam and his friends use their brains to solve mysteries. In this case, they're determined to discover the cause of the ghostly sounds from an abandoned military fort. Could it be a ghost? Their adventures are funny and exciting; this is a well-written chapter book in a new series. (See also: [Sherlock Sam and the Missing Heirloom in Katong](#).)

Lola Levine Is Not Mean by Monica Brown

Second grade soccer-loving Lola, daughter of a Peruvian mom and Jewish dad, is misunderstood. Her classmates think she's mean but really she's just a competitive person. When she accidentally hurts someone's ankle playing soccer, she feels terrible especially since her classmates say she's mean. But, things turn around for Lola when her class does science time with her brother's kindergarten class. Loved the diversity and the topic -- many kids will be able to relate to this charming story.

Three Tales of My Father's Dragon by Ruth Stiles Gannett

This is one of the classic adventure / fantasy stories for beginning readers. The first story is about a boy (now a father retelling the stories to his son) who rescues a dragon held hostage on a wild island.

Keena Ford and the Second Grade Mix-Up by Melissa Thomson

Written in journal form, we find that life for Keena, like most 2nd graders, is filled with challenges and life lessons.

Ruby and the Booker Boys #1: Brand New School, Brave New Ruby by Derrick Barnes,

illustrated by Vanessa Brantley Newton

Ruby, age 8, is the youngest of four kids. Her life is full of brothers, third grade, and a best friend named Theresa.

Nikki and Deja by Karen English, illustrated by Laura Freeman

This is a slice of life story about third grade friends who feel anger, jealousy, and meanness when a new girl arrives on their block.

MVP #1 The Gold Medal Mess by David A. Kelly, illustrated by Scott Brundage

It's almost time for Olympics field day at school but someone is threatening the activities. These friends decide to solve the mystery so the games can go on.

Jaden Toussaint, the Greatest Episode 1: The Quest for Screen Time by Marti Dumas

What kid doesn't want more screen time? Jaden has a plan for convincing his parents that he needs more time -- and he's going to use his big brain and his fellow kindergarteners to help. So happy to see a GOOD story with diversity!

Make Way for Dyamonde Daniel by Nikki Grimes illustrated by R. Gregory Christie

She's the new girl but Dyamonde is determined to make friends, even with the boy she calls "Rude Boy."

Little Dee and the Penguin by Christopher Baldwin

A group of seemingly random animals (penguin, dog, brown bear, polar bears, vulture) and the little girl, Dee are off on a world adventure. It's fun and silly with a big message about belonging.

West Meadow Detectives: The Case of the Snack Snatcher by Liam O'Donnell, illustrated by Aurelie Grand

Myron's new school isn't too bad because there's a mystery -- who is stealing the snacks every morning? He and his new friend, Hajrah, both in a special class for half the day, determine to get to the bottom of this mystery. I liked the diversity of students and though the story was well-paced and interesting.

Sofia Martinez My Vida Loca by Jacqueline Jules (series)

Perfecto! My Vida Loca is a warm-hearted beginning chapter book about the adventures of a spunky girl named Sopha -- from her singing (that annoys everyone except abuela) to a cooking mishap of arroz con leche that her familia helps her fix. I love the bright pink text that indicates the Spanish words (maybe 1 or 2 a page). Illustrations are fun, capturing the emotions and action perfectamente.

Little Rhino My New Team by Ryan Howard and Krystle Howard

You'll find the themes about making friends and dealing with bullies to be both realistic and helpful. Little Rhino joins a little league baseball team only to discover that the boy who bullies him is on his same team. His wise grandfather and daily lunch at the dinosaur table help Rhino and his shy friend gain new social skills and the confidence to deal with the bully.

The Buried Bones Mystery by Sharon M. Draper, illustrated by Jesse Joshua Watson

In this book, the group of best friends, aka. the Black Dinosaurs, find a box of bones that leads them to a mystery to solve.

Have Fun, Anna Hibiscus! by Atinuke

Anna Hibiscus lives in amazing Africa but in this story, she goes by herself to visit her Granny Canada in Canada where it's snowy and cold. Anna gets to wear warm clothes and eat new foods. She even gets comfortable with Granny Canada's dog and makes new friends. This is a delightful story of a sweet girl on an exciting new adventure.

Ellray Jakes Walks the Plank by Sally Warner, illustrated by Jamie Harper

I bet a lot of kids will relate to this story about Ellray and his little sister. Little sister overfeeds Ellray's class fish and kills it. Ellray takes the blame to protect his sister, after all family is family, and gets to help find a new class pet.

Freddie Ramos Takes Off (Zapato Power) by Jacqueline Jules and Miguel Benitez

Freddie's new shoes (zapatos) give him super speediness.

Dog Days by Karen English, illustrated by Laura Freeman

It's tough being the new kid at Carver Elementary. Gavin had lots of friends at his old school, but the kids here don't even know that he's pretty good at skateboarding, or how awesome he is at soccer. And

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when his classmate Richard comes over and the boys end up in trouble, not only does Gavin risk losing his one new friend, he has to take care of his great aunt Myrtle's horrible little dog as punishment.