



# How we evaluate our books

## Perspective: Who is centered in the story?

For the topic of incarceration, we chose to look at books with children whose parents were imprisoned. We wanted to make sure to focus on the range of feelings expressed by the child, both the good and the bad.

## Depth of Character

Books for this series should not depend on a single story being told, but should focus primarily on a broad story about what it means to be a human in the world. Milo is dealing with the entire experience of being a human, and is still able to reflect on how he uses stereotypes and can decide to make a change in his thinking. Instead of finding a book whose sole topic is incarceration, a story like this one allows parents and caregivers to gently and lovingly introduce these topics.

## Terminology

We are using the terms incarcerated and incarcerated person rather than prisoner or inmate to reflect our goal of using people-first language. People-first language aims to destigmatize people who may feel like their identity is inescapably tied up in their current or past situation.

## Author's Experience

When an author has a connection to the community and experiences they are writing about, it can help to center that community. When we make sure to focus on the stories of people who have experience with incarceration, we can feel confident that we are hearing a variety of authentic stories. In this case, the story of Milo closely mirrors the life experience of the illustrator Christian Robinson, and the book was a project where the author and illustrator worked closely together to express their story.

We use these guidelines not to exclude books which might not meet all these criteria, but to help us evaluate the quality of literature we are recommending and sharing. It also helps to keep us as librarians and parents abreast of changes in terminology and ideas about what justice is.



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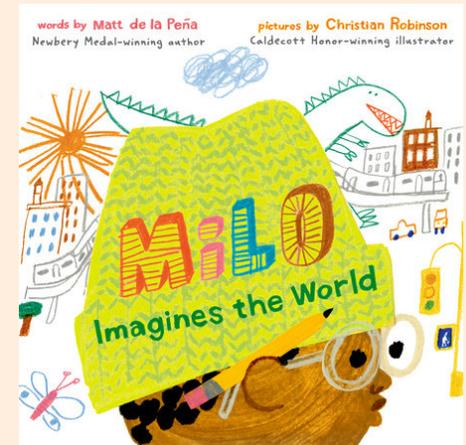
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# READING JUSTICE Family Book Club

## How do we talk about incarceration?

Incarceration refers to someone who has been imprisoned for being accused or convicted of a crime. For children, it can be scary to think about criminals and prisons. For some, the idea of prisons may help them feel a sense of safety and justice in the world. By using books about children with incarcerated parents, we can humanize people and allow children to add some nuance to their understanding of how the world works. Our goal for this book is to help us be aware of the harmful stereotypes we may hold about incarcerated people and their families.



## What are Prisoners' Rights?

A Prisoner's Rights perspective assumes that incarcerated people deserve the respect and care of any other person in our society, with rights that abide by our country's democratic principles. We want to create a society that looks at people for their wholeness, not for their current or past experience with incarceration. When we read books about children with incarcerated parents, we can recognize the need for families in these circumstances to have access to each other, to have a sense of community and care. Prisoner's Rights are human rights, and organizations that advocate for prisoners hope to gain fair sentencing, fair access to communication, and ways for prisoners and their families to be treated with respect.

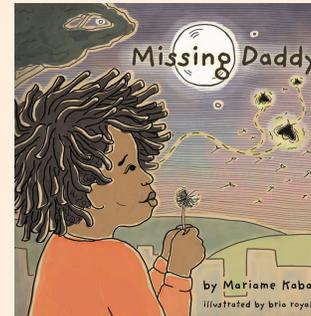


## Discussion Questions

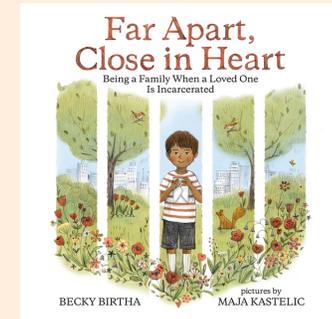
Watch the video on youtube and use these as family discussion starters  
<https://youtu.be/1UynCwIBi7A>

- Do you like to make up stories about people you see like Milo does? What kinds of things affect the stories you tell?
- Milo feels like a “shook-up soda”. What do you think that means? Have you ever felt that way? What are some ways you talk about how you feel?
- Since Milo’s sister is a “shook-up soda” too, how does that affect how she treats Milo? Is it easy to be patient and present with someone when you both have mixed-up loud feelings? Can you tell when people around you are having a hard time with their feelings?
- What does Milo notice about touch? How does his sister show she is sorry? How does he feel about his family hug? Does being hugged and touched help you feel alive and safe? Do you feel good and safe from certain ways of touch? Are there ways that you can talk to the people around you about when you need a hug or when you don’t need a hug?
- Ms. Adriel talked about race when she talked about this book. What do race and prison have to do with each other? What kinds of stories do we tell about race and prison that may or may not be true?
- How would you feel if you had a family member who was incarcerated? What would you do to help stay connected?

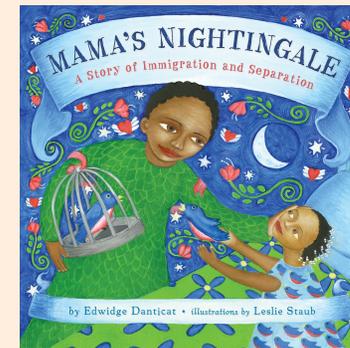
## Great Books: Reading Justice



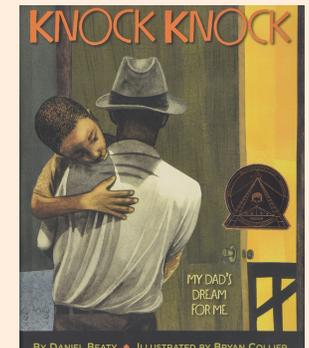
Missing Daddy  
E KABA



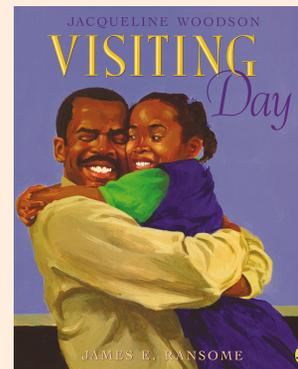
Far Apart, Close in Heart  
E BIRTHA



Mama's Nightingale  
E DANTICAT



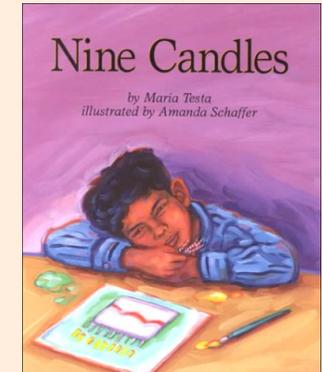
Knock Knock: My Dad's Dream for Me  
E BEATY



Visiting Day  
E WOODSON



Hazelnut Days  
E BOURDIER



Nine Candles  
E TESTA

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