

## WHY EXPLORE THE REFUGEE OR IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE WITH CHILDREN?

On a local level, our schools and neighborhoods become more compelling places to live when immigrants and refugees add the richness of their life experiences. On a national level, both untrue and unkind things are being said about immigrants. On a global level, 1% of the world's population (or 79.5 million people) have been forcibly displaced since 2019. 26 million of those displaced are under the age of 18. **How can we help our children explore these three things with truth and empathy?**

Can your children's Social Emotional Learning (SEL) help build a culture of welcoming and belonging, a place where cultural differences and similarities are celebrated? Children's books featuring the New Arrival and New American experience can grow the cultural competency and SEL of the entire family and classroom. Let's explore some books together...

## WE HAVE ALL BEEN NEW

We have all been new. We have all walked into a room or situation where we felt alone or different. While being new is a universal feeling, being new in America as an immigrant or refugee adds extra layers of challenge, unique to each person and situation.

We will be reading and exploring:

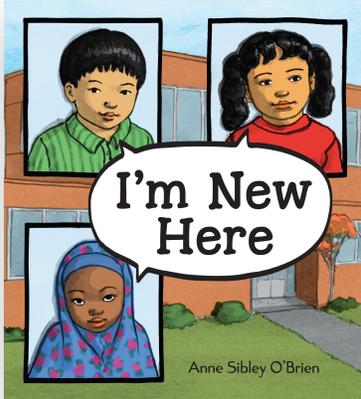
- What it means to be **NEW**
- What it looks like to be **WELCOMING** to new families in our communities
- How an environment of welcoming can help New Arrivals and New Americans build a crucial sense of **BELONGING**.

This exploration will be done with two interconnected, award-winning picture books by Anne Sibley O'Brien (Charlesbridge Publishing).

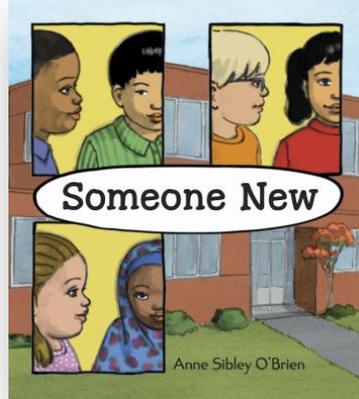


# Engaging Children in a Conversation on Welcoming & Belonging

## THE BOOKS



Available in Hardcover,  
Paperback, Audiobook,  
and eBook



Available in Hardcover,  
Audiobook, and eBook

## FINDING THE BOOKS

The books can be found at [Charlesbridge Publishing](https://www.charlesbridgepublishing.com/).

The multi-voice audiobooks (without or without the book included) can be found through [Live Oak Media](https://www.liveoakmedia.com/).

The eBook with a read aloud audio can be find at [Epic](https://www.epic.com/). This service is free to educators and available to families by subscription.

## READ ALOUD & READ TOGETHER

The two books have interwoven narratives. **I'm New Here** tells the story of how three resilient immigrant students (from Guatemala, Somalia, and Korea) strive to belong. **Someone New** tells the story of how three long-term students (two White, one African American) strive to make the immigrant students welcome. To explore the interplay of **belonging** and **welcoming** in the two stories, consider reading both books, but also looking at the books side by side.

There is a Readers Theater guide that creates a multiple-voice intertwined read aloud, inviting you to experience all the connections. Share the roles amongst your family or within a classroom or other group. You can find it at <http://bit.ly/INHReadersTheater>.

## START A CONVERSATION ABOUT THE CHARACTERS' EXPERIENCES & YOUR OWN

Here are some ideas for building a conversation around **I'm New Here** and **Someone New**. Here is a script you can use/adapt to guide a conversation with your child/ren.

### **On Being New:**

Most of us have been new at some point in our lives. Let's explore those experiences together.

Can you think of a time you were new? For, example, Have you ever...

- Joined a new club, class, or team where you did not know anyone?
- Started at a new school?
- Moved to a new place?
- Moved here from another country?

THINK & RESPOND: What did it feel like to be new? Did you have any worries? What were they? Let's make a list of these feelings.

### **On Feeling Different:**

In Guatemala, Somalia, and Korea, Maria, Fatimah, and Jin did not feel "different." Their ways of living were similar to those of the majority of people in their communities. But when they arrived in their new home, suddenly these ways of living were not typical of most people, so they were seen as different. What they encountered – from alphabets to vocabulary to ways of dress, food, and behavior – were different from what they were used to.

Being different from the majority of people around you makes the experience of being new more challenging. The more different you feel, the harder it can be. Explore those experiences together.

THINK & RESPOND: Have you ever felt different from others around you? How did you feel different? Let's make a list of these feelings.

Look back at the book to see if you have shared the experience of any of the characters. Have you felt or been seen as "different" or had to learn to adjust to new ways, such as:

- New language
- New ways of doing things, acting
- Different dress
- Different skin color or features
- Different foods etc.

## Engaging Children in a Conversation on Welcoming & Belonging

### **New + Different = Feelings of Not Belonging:**

Being both new and different from those around you can make you feel like you do not belong.

When Maria, Fatimah, and Jin all arrived they were different in many ways from their classmates. Each had ways they did not feel like they belonged.

Look at Maria, Fatimah, and Jin's stories in the two books. Find one:

- Thing that made each of them seem different from their classmates
- Experience that made each of them feel like they did belong

THINK & RESPOND: Look for the Welcoming & Belonging Sheets (pages 10-12). There is one sheet for each of the friend pairs.

For one or more of the characters (Maria, Fatimah, and Jin), note their Challenges to Belonging.

### **On Belonging:**

NOTE: All immigrants, refugees, and asylees **belong** in this country legally and culturally. When we say "belong" we mean a person feeling that he or she is welcomed in the community and seen fully as a complex and contributing member of that community.

Immigrants accomplish amazing things. They learn new languages, they learn new ways to do things, they meet new people, and start new schools and new jobs. If that immigrant came as part of a family, they could be doing all these things PLUS helping a family member to do the same. When immigrants accomplish any of these things, they can feel more comfortable in their schools, jobs, or neighborhoods. These things can also help them feel like they belong in our communities.

[Watch a video](#) of author Anne Sibley O'Brien talking about the strengths of New Arrival children.

THINK & RESPOND: Look for the Welcoming & Belonging Sheets (pages 10-12). There is one sheet for each of the friend pairs.

What strengths and gifts did Maria, Fatimah, and/or Jin bring with them when they moved from their home countries? Write those Strengths down on the sheet.

Make notes on their Work Done to Belong.

## Engaging Children in a Conversation on Welcoming & Belonging

### **On Welcoming:**

Sometimes when someone arrives from another place, they are expected to do all the work of adjusting to the new place. At the beginning of the story, Maria, Fatimah, and Jin are mostly on their own, trying to learn a new language and culture. After a time (notice their clothing to see the passage of time), Jesse, Jason, and Emma figure out ways to reach out to and welcome them.

What is welcoming? Welcoming is being excited that someone new has come to your school or neighborhood. Welcoming is being curious about the new kid and where he or she came from. Welcoming is smiling, helping, asking questions, and doing all the things that start a friendship. If you know how to make friends, you know how to welcome.

THINK & RESPOND: Look for the Welcoming & Belonging Sheets (pages 10-12). There is one sheet for each of the friend pairs.

For one or more of the characters (Jesse, Jason, and Emma), note their Challenges to Welcoming.

What strengths and gifts did Jesse, Jason, and/or Emma bring to these new friendships? Write those Strengths down on the sheet.

Make notes on their Work Done to Welcome.

### **Meeting in the Middle:**

Look at the completed Welcoming & Belonging Sheets together. Notice the Welcome and Belong band down the middle. Discuss how it is not a dividing line between the friends, but a place where they meet. Each uses their strengths to face their challenges doing the work they need to do to reach a shared place of welcoming and belonging. Folding the paper at the center shared space of Belong and Welcome may help you see how both friends had strengths, challenges, and did work to get to their shared space.

## WORKING TOWARDS A SHARED SPACE OF

## WELCOMING & BELONGING: MOVEMENT GAME

As in the Welcoming and Belonging sheet, we want to discover together that the true work of a classroom and community takes work on both sides. A shared space of welcoming and belonging happens when steps are taken by the new arrival and the “already here” members of the community. This open-ended game allows readers to take actual steps on this journey.

## Engaging Children in a Conversation on Welcoming & Belonging

**Number of Players:** 2 or more.

**Field of Play:** Place a ribbon, tape, or string dividing your space. On one side of the line lay down the word *welcome* and on the other side lay down the word, *belong*. Have each word face away from the center line.

**Players on the Field:** Divide the group in half, in two lines facing each other, about ten steps apart. One group is New Arrivals (NA) on the *belong* side, one is the Already Here (AH) community on the *welcome* side.

**Goal:** To meet on the line in the middle in a shared space of welcoming and belonging.

**Play:** Take turns thinking of challenges each group – New Arrivals (NA) and Already Here (AH) – face. If needed, use the completed Welcoming & Belonging Sheets to call out challenges.

Players can take a step towards the center when they name a “step” to meet that challenge.

To increase the level of thought and play, consider calling out either areas of the school or areas of learning for players to respond to. What challenges exist and what steps can be taken in/at the Classroom, Recess, Gym, Hallway, Lunch, Before School, After School, and/or Language, Reading & Writing, Art, Other Subjects, and Outside of School/In Our Community?”

**Game (Never) Over:** Just like the work of maintaining a friendship is never “done,” the work of *welcoming* and *belonging* is also ongoing. Players meeting in the middle can elbow bump or high five for “game over” knowing that they can apply what they have learned to all future relationships.

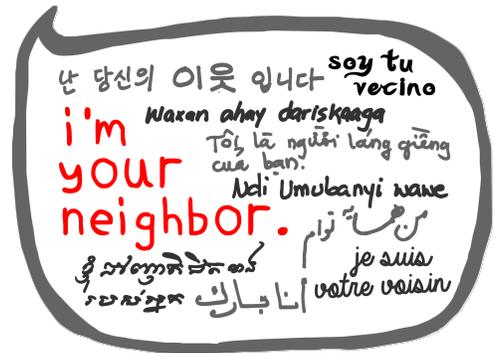
## DRAW YOUR WELCOMING & BELONGING

Using everything you have explored about your own experience, write and draw one thing you could do *welcome* or to feel like you *belong*.

[Watch a video](#) of these activities being done with a group of 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> graders.

## WELCOME IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

The phrase, “I’m your neighbor” is one you could say to anyone in your neighborhood. Whether you are new or have been in the neighborhood a long time, the phrase will make a connection and maybe even start a friendship. The non-profit that author Anne Sibley O’Brien co-founded is called [I’m Your Neighbor Books](#). The program finds different ways to celebrate the lives of New Arrivals and New Americans through sharing children’s books like **I’m New Here** and **Someone New**. Like the phrase, the books also form a connection and might even form a friendship.



If you want to say those words in your neighborhood, consider saying it in one or many languages. Print out the speech bubble (page 13), cut it out, and write “I’m your neighbor” in a language you know or in a language that is new to you. You might want to choose languages that you know are spoken in your community. To help you get started, Anne Sibley O’Brien’s immigrant neighbors hand wrote the phrase in their first language. Look for the multilingual “I’m Your Neighbor” offerings (pages 14-16).

Tape the speech bubble where your neighbor can see. It could, for example, appear in your window, on a telephone pole, or neighborhood message board. If there is someone new in your neighborhood, leave it in their mailbox with a note. If you go to a restaurant where the owners or staff might speak another language, leave them a thank you note on the back of your cut-out “I’m your neighbor.”

## CREATE A CULTURE OF WELCOMING & BELONGING

If the content of this discussion and the companion engagement projects matter to you, there are ways that you can keep the conversation going.

### Find More Books to Read Together

Visit [I’m Your Neighbor Books](#) to look for more books set in the communities you are curious about. If your school or library does not have

## Engaging Children in a Conversation on Welcoming & Belonging

them, request that they purchase them to show your town that books depicting our New Arrival and New American communities are important.

### Reserve a Welcoming Library

**I'm New Here** and **Someone New** are part of a traveling library of New Arrival and New American picture books with embedded discussion questions. The [Welcoming Library](#) may be able to visit your community for a month to transform the conversation on immigration.

### Shop Local

Chances are there are small markets in your town or city that stock foods for particular cultural communities. Visit, explore, and buy from these shops. Look for other immigrant-led businesses to bring your children to.

### Support Welcoming

There are both local and global ways to help refugees and immigrants. You could, for example:

- Raise funds for the [International Rescue Committee](#) (IRC) , a non-profit that assists refugees around the world. Many families and classrooms like to donate a [Year in School](#) for a refugee child.
- Start or support a [Welcoming Week](#) activity in your community.
- [Find regional organizations](#) serving New Arrivals and ask about opportunities to help. Maybe you could collect household items for new families, write them welcoming notes, offer to walk or drive kids to school, take a family shopping, or any other thing that might be needed.

## MORE VOICES, OWN VOICES

Anne Sibley O'Brien wrote these books in consultation with the staff of the Portland Public School's Multilingual & Multicultural Center (Maine). That staff, most of whom are immigrants and/or work with New Arrival families, helped shape and vet the new arrival experience portrayed in the books. To deepen your understanding of the experience of children from Guatemala, Somalia, and Korea, consider pairing Anne's books with the titles below. Knowing more about your classmates' and neighbors' experiences through books can help you have a stronger relationship with them. An asterisk indicates an Own Voices book or a book written and/or illustrated by someone from within the culture portrayed.

## Engaging Children in a Conversation on Welcoming & Belonging

### Guatemalan American Books:

- **Two White Rabbits** by Jairo Buitrago & illustrated by Rafael Yockteng (Groundwood Books)\* Ages 6+, Also Available in Spanish
- **Somos como las nubes / We Are Like the Clouds** by Jorge Argueta & illustrated by Alfonso Ruano (Groundwood Books)\* Ages 7+, Bilingual

### Somali American Books:

- **My Friend Jamal** by Anna McQuinn & illustrated by Ben Frey (Annick Press) Ages 6+
- **When the Stars Are Scattered** by Victoria Jamieson and Omar Mohamed (Random House)\* Ages 11+

### Korean American Picture Books:

- **A Piece Of Home** by Jeri Watts & illustrated By Hyewon Yum (Candlewick Press) \* Ages 6+
- **Here I Am** by Patti Kim (Capstone)\* Ages 6+, Wordless

Curious about more? [I'm Your Neighbor Books](#) allows you to browse children's books by community represented.

## SHARE WITH US

We are always curious about ways people have had this conversation. Would you share pictures or thoughts with I'm Your Neighbor Books?

**Twitter:** @imyrneighborbks

**Instagram:** @imyourneighborbooks

**Facebook:** ImYourNeighborBooks

**Email:** [info@imyourneighborbooks.org](mailto:info@imyourneighborbooks.org)

**Hashtags:** #ImNewHere #ImYourNeighborBooks #WelcomingAndBelonging

Maria's Strengths:

Maria's Challenges to Belonging:

Work Done to Belong:

BELONG  
WELCOME

Work Done to Welcome:

Jesse's Challenges to Welcoming:

Jesse's Strengths:

Jin's Strengths:

Jin's Challenges to Belonging:

Work Done to Belong:

BELONG  
WELCOME

Work Done to Welcome:

Jason's Challenges to Welcoming:

Jason's Strengths:

Fatimah's Strengths:

Fatimah's Challenges to Belonging:

Work Done to Belong:

BELONG  
WELCOME

Work Done to Welcome:

Emma's Challenges to Welcoming:

Emma's Strengths:

Use this speech bubble to say "I'm Your Neighbor"  
in your first language or a language of your neighbors.

*Inspired by a book from [ImYourNeighborBooks.org](http://ImYourNeighborBooks.org)*

Cut it out and display it in your neighborhood or use as a greeting card for a new neighbor.

Saying "I'm Your Neighbor" in...

An giran pery

Acholi

أنا أكون أحد جيرانك

Arabic

ខ្ញុំជាជនជាតិដទៃម្នាក់  
នៅជុំវិញខ្ញុំ

Khmer

Saying "I'm Your Neighbor" in...

Ndi Umubanyi wawe

Kirundi

난 당신의 이웃입니다

Korean

Waxan ahay dariskaaga

Somali

Soy tu vecino

Spanish

This activity was produced by I'm Your Neighbor Books for the picture books **I'm New Here** and **Someone New** by Anne Sibley O'Brien (Charlesbridge Publishing). #ImNewHere

Saying "I'm Your Neighbor" in...

Tôi là người láng giềng  
của bạn. Vietnamese

Je suis  
votre voisin

French

من  
همسایه توام

Farsi

This activity was produced by I'm Your Neighbor Books for the picture books **I'm New Here** and **Someone New** by Anne Sibley O'Brien (Charlesbridge Publishing). #ImNewHere