Reading List for Students in Elementary Grades (K-4)

This list of books provides a diverse selection of stories that will help you talk with younger students about important citizenship characteristics including fairness, justice, respect for self, others and property, accepting differences, rules, consequences, taking a stand, courage, pride, self-esteem, honesty, being leaders, being followers, peace and resolving conflicts, rights, freedom, being responsible, voting, being part of a community, the value of learning, problem-solving and many more. Any of these books will work well. Select stories and messages that resonate with you and that you are comfortable talking about with students. This will ensure the time spent with the students is engaging and educational!

**Spaghetti in a Hot Dog Bun: Having the Courage to Be Who You Are** by Maria Dismondy and illustrated by Kimberly Shaw-Peterson
How can Ralph be so mean? Lucy is one of a kind and Ralph loves to point that out. Lucy's defining moment comes when Ralph truly needs help. Because she knows what she stands for, Lucy has the courage to make a good choice. This charming story empowers children to always do the right thing and be proud of themselves, even when they are faced with someone as challenging as Ralph.

**Have You Filled a Bucket Today?** By Carol McCloud
Through simple prose and vivid illustrations, this heartwarming book encourages positive behavior as children see how rewarding it is to express daily kindness, appreciation, and love. Bucket-filling and dipping are effective metaphors for understanding the effects of our actions and words on the well-being of others and ourselves.

Who could imagine that a 32-page picture book teaching children the benefits of kindness through the metaphor or a bucket would take off and become one of the most effective character development programs offered to all ages. A bucket-filing school is a great place to learn. A bucket-filing family is a great place to grow up. A bucket-filling community is a great place to live. These are places where kindness, respect, fairness, other-centeredness, responsibility, and generosity are seen. Bucket-filling is easy. It doesn't cost any money. It doesn't take much time. It doesn't matter how young or old you are. Bucket-filling makes everyone feel good.

**Fill a Bucket** by Carol McCloud
This book is a prequel to the first bucket-filling book, Have You Filled a Bucket Today?. It helps younger children (preschool- 1st grade) see how other people fill their bucket and how they can fill buckets, too! The concept of a full bucket is an effective metaphor for a child's healthy self-concept and happiness, most often the result of the encouraging words and actions of parents and others who help a child know they are loved, valued, and capable.

**Martin's Big Words** by Doreen Rappaport
This picture-book biography is an excellent and accessible introduction for young readers to learn about one of the world's most influential leaders, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Doreen
Rappaport weaves the immortal words of Dr. King into a captivating narrative to tell the story of his life. With stunning art by acclaimed illustrator Bryan Collier, Martin’s Big Words is an unforgettable portrait of a man whose dream changed America—and the world—forever.

The Story of Ruby Bridges by Robert Coles and illustrated by George Ford
The year is 1960, and six-year-old Ruby Bridges and her family have recently moved from Mississippi to New Orleans in search of a better life. When a judge orders Ruby to attend first grade at William Frantz Elementary, an all-white school, Ruby must face angry mobs of parents who refuse to send their children to school with her. Told with Robert Coles’ powerful narrative and dramatically illustrated by George Ford, Ruby’s story of courage, faith, and hope is now available in this special 50th anniversary edition with an updated afterword!

Henry’s Freedom Box: A True Story from the Underground Railroad by Ellen Levine and illustrated by Kadir Nelson
A stirring, dramatic story of a slave who mails himself to freedom by a Jane Addams Peace Award-winning author and a Coretta Scott King Award-winning artist. Henry Brown doesn’t know how old he is. Nobody keeps records of slaves’ birthdays. All the time he dreams about freedom, but that dream seems farther away than ever when he is torn from his family and put to work in a warehouse. Henry grows up and marries, but he is again devastated when his family is sold at the slave market. Then one day, as he lifts a crate at the warehouse, he knows exactly what he must do: He will mail himself to the North. After an arduous journey in the crate, Henry finally has a birthday -- his first day of freedom.

Freedom on the Menu: The Greensboro Sit-Ins by Carole Boston Weatherford and illustrated by Jerome Lagarrigue
There were signs all throughout town telling eight-year-old Connie where she could and could not go. But when Connie sees four young men take a stand for equal rights at a Woolworth’s lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina, she realizes that things may soon change. This event sparks a movement throughout her town and region. And while Connie is too young to march or give a speech, she helps her brother and sister make signs for the cause. Changes are coming to Connie’s town, but Connie just wants to sit at the lunch counter and eat a banana split like everyone else.

Freedom Summer by Deborah Wiles
John Henry swims better than anyone I know. He crawls like a catfish, blows bubbles like a swamp monster, but he doesn't swim in the town pool with me. He's not allowed.
Joe and John Henry are a lot alike. They both like shooting marbles, they both want to be firemen, and they both love to swim. But there's one important way they're different: Joe is white and John Henry is black, and in the South in 1964, that means John Henry isn't allowed to do everything his best friend is. Then a law is passed that forbids segregation and opens the town pool to everyone. Joe and John Henry are so excited they race each other there...only to discover that it takes more than a new law to change people's hearts.
The Name Jar by Yangsook Choi
The new kid in school needs a new name! Or does she? Being the new kid in school is hard enough, but what about when nobody can pronounce your name? Having just moved from Korea, Unhei is anxious that American kids will like her. So instead of introducing herself on the first day of school, she tells the class that she will choose a name by the following week. Her new classmates are fascinated by this no-name girl and decide to help out by filling a glass jar with names for her to pick from. But while Unhei practices being a Suzy, Laura, or Amanda, one of her classmates comes to her neighborhood and discovers her real name and its special meaning. On the day of her name choosing, the name jar has mysteriously disappeared. Encouraged by her new friends, Unhei chooses her own Korean name and helps everyone pronounce it—Yoon-Hey.

Tikki Tikki Tembo by Arlene Mosel
Three decades and more than one million copies later children still love hearing about the boy with the long name who fell down the well. Arlene Mosel and Blair Lent's classic re-creation of an ancient Chinese folktale has hooked legions of children, teachers, and parents, who return, generation after generation, to learn about the danger of having such an honorable name as Tikki tikki tembo-no sa rembo-chari bari ruchi-pip peri pembo.

I Hate English! by Ellen Levine
With unusual sympathy and humor, Levine presents the stages of learning the language of a new country.

The Wall by Eve Bunting
A young boy and his father visit the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

I Lost My Tooth in Africa by Penda Diakite
Coretta Scott King Honor author/artist Baba Wague Diakite and his 12-year-old daughter, Penda, create a charming, original adventure story about losing a first tooth while visiting family in Mali. More than anything, Amina wants to lose her loose tooth while visiting her family in Mali, West Africa. Only then can she put it under a gourd for the African tooth fairy, who will exchange it for two chickens! Happily this happens, and even better, the chickens lay eggs. But will the eggs hatch before it's time to return home to America?

Cheyenne Again by Eve Bunting
In the late 1880s, a Cheyenne boy named Young Bull is taken from his parents and sent to a boarding school to learn the white man's ways. "Young Bull's struggle to hold on to his heritage will touch children's sense of justice and lead to some interesting discussions and perhaps further research."

A Day's Work by Eve Bunting
Francisco, a young Mexican-American boy, helps his grandfather find work as a gardener, even though the old man cannot speak English and knows nothing about gardening.
**The Day it Snowed Tortillas** by Joe Hayes
Joe Hayes is one of America’s premier storytellers. He is especially recognized for his bilingual telling of stories from the Hispanic culture of northern New Mexico. Joe lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico and travels extensively throughout the United States, visiting schools and storytelling festivals.

Kids of all ages are always asking Joe Hayes, "How can it snow tortillas?" Well, now they’ll know where to find the answer—at long last, Joe’s signature book *The Day It Snowed Tortillas* is appearing in this new bilingual edition. *Bloomsbury Review* listed the original English-only edition as one of their fifteen all-time favorite children’s books. Storytellers have been telling these stories in the villages of New Mexico since the Spanish first came to the New World over four hundred years ago, but Joe always adds his own nuances for modern audiences. The tales are full of magic and fun. In the title story, for instance, a very clever woman saves her silly husband from a band of robbers. She makes the old man believe it snowed tortillas during the night! In another story, a young boy gladly gives up all of his wages for good advice. His parents think he is a fool, but the good advice leads to wealth and a royal marriage. The enchantment continues in story after story—a clever thief tricks a king for his kingdom and a prince finds his beloved in a house full of wicked step-sisters.

**One Green Apple** by Eve Bunting
Farah feels alone, even when surrounded by her classmates. She listens and nods but doesn’t speak. It’s hard being the new kid in school, especially when you’re from another country and don’t know the language. Then, on a field trip to an apple orchard, Farah discovers there are lots of things that sound the same as they did at home, from dogs crunching their food to the ripple of friendly laughter. As she helps the class make apple cider, Farah connects with the other students and begins to feel that she belongs.

**The American Wei** by Marion Hess Pomeranc
An upbeat immigration story focuses on a Chinese American preschooler who is just as excited about his wobbly tooth as he is about his family’s part in the naturalization ceremony. On the way to the ceremony, Wei Fong loses his first tooth on the sidewalk outside the federal courthouse. What will he do about the tooth fairy? People from everywhere stop to help him find the tooth—people speaking French, Spanish, and Polish as well as English; people from Kenya and Trinidad and Europe. Then they all go into the building to take part in the solemn ritual that makes them citizens of the U.S. The playful, personal focus will draw kids into the story, and Pomeranc includes a note about naturalization for those who want to know more. The gouache and pencil illustrations capture the child’s viewpoint, including the hilarious double-page spread of Wei Fong spread-eagled on the sidewalk, nose pointed down, searching for that crucial tooth. The warm response from those around him is a lighthearted expression of the meaning of community and the pun of the title. It's the American way.

**We the Kids** written and illustrated by David Catrow
This unusual book provides a “kids’ language” translation of the United States Constitution’s Preamble along with a story designed to illustrate the meaning of that famous passage.
We Live Here Too! Kids Talk About Good Citizenship
Does it really matter if I throw my gum on the ground? The book’s character, Frank B. Wize, explains why you should care about the people and places in your community in this book on citizenship.

Vote! by Eileen Christelow
In a presidential election year, when selecting a new leader will be the focus of national attention, what could be more timely than an upbeat and informative introduction to voting? Choosing our own government is one of our most cherished rights. This book is the perfect guide to how our democracy works. Parties, voter registration, campaigns, rallies, debates, Election Day, even a recount . . . all are clearly presented in a graphic format as the story of a local election unfolds, with hilarious commentary by the candidates’ pets.

I Am a Good Citizen by Mary Ann Hoffman

My Grandma’s the Mayor by Marjorie White Pelligrino, illustrated by Kevin Hawkes
Young Annie learns about commitment to community by watching her grandmother in action.

Stone Soup by Marcia Brown
Three soldiers came marching down the road towards a French village. The peasants seeing them coming, suddenly became very busy, for soldiers are often hungry. So, all the food was hidden under mattresses or in barns. There followed a battle of wits, with the soldiers equal to the occasion. Stone soup? Why, of course, they could make a wonderful soup of stones...but, of course, one must add a carrot or two...some meat...so it went.

Library Lion by Michelle Knudsen, illustrated by Kevin Hawkes
When a lion comes to the library, the staff discovers there is no rule against lions in the library. Since there is a rule against roaring, however, the lion must be silent—until a special situation calls for that rule to be broken.

Lilly’s Purple Plastic Purse by Kevin Henkes
This book introduces the idea of consequences: Lilly is so enamored of her purse that she cannot stop playing with it, even when her teacher reminds her she is breaking a rule.

It’s Not My Fault! by Nancy Carlson
When he is called to the principal's office, George hurries to explain that other people were to blame for the many things that went wrong during the day, from his late arrival to the escape of some mice.

No Dessert Forever by George Ella Lyon, illustrated by Peter Catalanatto
When she is punished for something her brother did, the heroine of this book fantasizes about the rules she will make and the consequences she’ll establish when she is big and her parents are little. A fun way for students to practice evaluating rules and consequences.
Once Upon a Banana by Jennifer Armstrong, illustrated by David Small
This book has no text, but each page features a rule, beginning with “Please Put Litter in Its Place.” When this rule is broken, it sets off a chain of consequences that result in other rules being broken as well. A good stimulus for discussion of consequences.

What If Everybody Did That? by Ellen Jaovernick, illustrated by Richard Hackney
This book illustrates the chaos that would occur if everyone broke the rules.

If Everybody Did by Jo Ann Stover
The hilarious and terrible consequences of everyone doing his own thing are portrayed by author/artist Jo Ann Stover in If Everybody Did. Children and adults alike will enjoy this precautionary tale with its concise rhyming text, and amusing illustrations.

Arnie and the Stolen Markers Written and illustrated by Nancy Carlson
After spending his allowance at Harvey's Toy Shop, Arnie steals a set of markers and suffers the consequences of his action.

Harold and the Purple Crayon by Crockett Johnson
One evening Harold decided to go for a walk in the moonlight. But there wasn't any moon, and Harold needed a moon for a walk in the moonlight. Fortunately, he had brought his purple crayon. So he drew a moon. He also needed something to walk on. So he drew a path... And thus begins one of the most imaginative and enchanting adventures in all of children's books. The creative concept behind this beloved story has intrigued children and kept them absorbed for generations, as page by page unfolds the dramatic and clever adventures of Harold and his purple crayon.

Those Shoes by Maribeth Boelts
All Jeremy wants is a pair of those shoes, the ones everyone at school seems to be wearing. Though Jeremy's grandma says they don’t have room for "want," just "need," when his old shoes fall apart at school, he is more determined than ever to have those shoes, even a thrift-shop pair that are much too small. But sore feet aren’t much fun, and Jeremy soon sees that the things he has — warm boots, a loving grandma, and the chance to help a friend — are worth more than the things he wants.

My Mouth Is a Volcano! By Julia Cook and illustrated by Carrie Hartman
All of Louis’ thoughts are very important to him. In fact, his thoughts are so important to him that when he has something to say, his words begin to wiggle, and then they do the jiggie, then his tongue pushes all of his important words up against his teeth and he erupts, or interrupts others. His mouth is a volcano! My Mouth Is A Volcano takes an empathetic approach to the habit of interrupting and teaches children a witty technique to capture their rambunctious thoughts and words for expression at an appropriate time. Told from Louis’” perspective, this story provides parents, teachers, and counselors with an entertaining way to teach children the value of respecting others by listening and waiting for their turn to speak.
The Juice Box Bully: Empowering Kids to Stand Up For Others by Bob Sornson, Maria Dismondy and illustrated by Kim Shaw
Have you ever seen a bully in action and done nothing about it? The kids at Pete's new school get involved, instead of being bystanders. When Pete begins to behave badly, his classmates teach him about "The Promise". Will Pete decide to shed his bullying habits and make "The Promise"?

The Mary Celeste: An Unsolved Mystery from History by Jane Yolen
The Mary Celeste was discovered adrift on the open sea by another ship in 1872 -- with no sign of captain or crew. What happened? Did the crew mutiny? Were they attacked by pirates? Caught in a storm? No one ever found out. Inside this book are the clues that were left behind and the theories of what people think happened aboard that ship. Become a detective, study the clues, and see if you can help solve this chilling mystery from history.

The Salem Witch Trials: An Unsolved Mystery from History by Jane Yolen
In 1692 Salem, Massachusetts, witnessed one of the saddest and most inexplicable chapters in American history. When a group of girls came down with a horrible, mysterious bout of illness, the town doctor looked in his medical books but failed to find a reasonable diagnosis. Pretty soon everyone in town was saying the same thing: The girls were ill because they were under a spell, the spell of witchcraft! And still, the question remains: Why did the hysteria occur? The townspeople had many things to worry about back then: smallpox, strife with the local Indians, a preacher demanding higher wages, and the division of land in the community. But did all of those problems justify a witch hunt?
Become a detective as you read this true story, study the clues, and try to understand the hysteria!

Roanoke: The Lost Colony – An Unsolved Mystery from History by Heidi E. Y. Stemple
In 1587 John White was chosen by Sir Walter Raleigh to lead a new colony at Roanoke off the Atlantic coast. After bringing many men, women, and children to the new land, White went back to England to gather supplies for the long winter. But when he finally returned to the fort almost three years later, he found that all of the colonists had vanished. The only signs of life left were the letters CRO carved into a tree and the word CROATOAN carved into one of the fort's posts. Some people think that the Spanish army captured the colonists; some people think that the local native people murdered them; others think that the colonists went off to live with the native people and start a new life. Still others think that the colonists tried to sail home to England and were lost at sea. No one knows for sure.
Become a detective as you read this true story, study the clues, and try to figure out the fate of the lost colony of Roanoke.

Big Egg by Molly Coxe
One morning Hen wakes up and finds a gigantic egg in her nest. Whose egg can it be? Here's a hint, Hen—it doesn't belong to that wily Fox!
Argus by Michelle Knudsen
From the author of the best-selling Library Lion comes a funny, heartfelt new picture book about embracing the unusual, green scales and all. Sally’s class is doing a science project, and Mrs. Henshaw is handing out eggs for hatching. "Mine looks different," says Sally. When Sally’s egg cracks, what emerges is something green and scaly with big yellow eyes. Argus isn’t like the other chicks: he isn’t small and fuzzy, and he doesn’t like seeds and bugs. He’d rather eat other chicks (or children, as he grows even bigger). Watching the other kids playing with their identical chicks, Sally wonders, would she be better off without Argus? With sly humor and a subtle tug at the heartstrings, Michelle Knudsen hatches a story about learning not just to tolerate, but to love what is different, while Andréa Wesson’s endearing illustrations bring the tale to life with quirky details and offbeat charm.

Where the Wild Things Are by Maurice Sendak
(Amazon review) Maurice Sendak’s classic picture book has become one of the most highly acclaimed and best-loved children’s books of all time. Where the Wild Things Are is one of those truly rare books that can be enjoyed equally by a child and a grown-up. If you disagree, then it’s been too long since you’ve attended a wild rumpus. Max dons his wolf suit in pursuit of some mischief and gets sent to bed without supper. Fortuitously, a forest grows in his room, allowing his wild rampage to continue unimpared. Sendak’s color illustrations (perhaps his finest) are beautiful, and each turn of the page brings the discovery of a new wonder. The wild things--with their mismatched parts and giant eyes--manage somehow to be scary-looking without ever really being scary; at times they're downright hilarious. Sendak's defiantly run-on sentences--one of his trademarks--lend the perfect touch of stream of consciousness to the tale, which floats between the land of dreams and a child's imagination.

The Island of the Skog by Steven Kellogg
To escape the dangers of urban life, Jenny and her friends sail away to an island, only to be faced with a new problem--its single inhabitant--the Skog.

The Story of Ferdinand by Munro Leaf
(Amazon review) Published more than 50 years ago (and one of the bestselling children's books of all time), this simple story of peace and contentment has withstood the test of many generations. Ferdinand is a little bull who much prefers sitting quietly under a cork tree--just smelling the flowers--to jumping around, snorting, and butting heads with other bulls. This cow is no coward--he simply has his pacifist priorities clear. As Ferdinand grows big and strong, his temperament remains mellow, until the day he meets with the wrong end of a bee. In a show of bovine irony, the one day Ferdinand is most definitely not sitting quietly under the cork tree (due to a frightful sting), is the selfsame day that five men come to choose the "biggest, fastest, roughest bull" for the bullfights in Madrid. Ferdinand's day in the arena gives readers not only an education in the historical tradition of bullfighting, but also a lesson in nonviolent tranquility.

The Lion and the Mouse by Gail Herman
Little Mouse. Big Lion. Big, big trouble. Who will save the mouse? Who will save the lion?" This simple retelling of the classic Aesop fable will be a treat for kids and their parents as an
adventurous mouse proves that even small creatures are capable of great deeds--like rescuing the King of the Jungle.

**Feathers and Fools** by Mem Fox and Nicholas Wilton
Long ago and far away, in a rambling garden beside a clear blue lake, two flocks of birds began to fear each other because of their differences. The fear grew, and soon the birds became enemies, hoarding great quantities of weapons to protect themselves--until panic struck and the chance for peace seemed lost forever.