This paper provides an annotated bibliography of sets of multicultural, family-related literature and suggests ways that teachers may build a sense of personal and global community in their classrooms as cultural differences are read about, discussed, and celebrated. The paper first gives a rationale for studying nontraditional, multicultural families. The paper then presents a 57-item annotated bibliography of books published between 1967 and 1993, divided into sections on grandparents; elderly friends and extended family; dealing with death; homelessness; a new baby; divorce/absent parent; growing and changing; interracial families; and siblings. The paper also offers ideas for classroom discussions and activities that extend literature study. (RS)
American Families: Not Just Leave It To Beaver
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Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to provide an annotated bibliography of sets of multicultural, family-related literature and to suggest ways that teachers may build a sense of personal and global community in their classrooms as cultural differences are read about, discussed and celebrated. First, a rationale for studying nontraditional, multicultural families is given. Second, collections of multicultural literature sets in an annotated bibliography are listed. Third, ideas for classroom discussions and activities that extend literature study are offered.

Rationale: Books and units on families have long had an established place in the kindergarten and first grade curriculum in most elementary schools. However, the depth and breadth of experiences that children engage in are becoming less appropriate in the changing American culture. For example, in a typical classroom scenario, a first grade teacher gathers 20 students eager young children around her in the reading corner of a classroom. She shows the cover illustrations, reads the title, and asks the children to predict what will happen in the story before opening the book and beginning to read. During the reading, she pauses occasionally to ask children questions and encourage comments. In order to extend and enrich the children's thinking about families, at story's end, she directs the children back to their desks to draw a picture about the story. And in many classrooms all of the families in all of the stories read are of the traditional family structure: one father, one mother, and two siblings. Seldom do children in many classrooms have the opportunity to draw pictures of, or discuss families that reflect their own cultural heritage or nontraditional family structure.

These are important considerations in an ever changing society that continues to produce alternatives to the traditional family structure, the nuclear family is no longer the typical family. In fact, recent statistics suggest that only 26% of American families reflect the once traditional family structure. Elementary school aged children have a growing need to understand their own and other family structures. Teachers and school programs may become agents of social change which promote both educational and cultural diversity. For example, teachers' heightened
awareness of resources, methods, and strategies may offer an opportunity for personal renewal.

Explorations into family cultures as seen in children's and young adult literature may well result in children's increased tolerance, and understanding of varied household organizations, as well as acceptance of their own family structure. By visiting families in children's literature young children may explore and appreciate their own family history and learn about others. Children need to "see" themselves in stories to be validated as individuals, members of nontraditional families and full participants in valued, nonmainstream cultures. In addition, children need to understand that all families, in all cultures, have common experiences such as love, gaining and offering support, growing together, celebrating cultural events, dealing with disappointment, etc.

Annotated Bibliography:

- **Intergenerational Families**: We have included this literature set because in an aging America more and more grandparents and older adults from the community are becoming part of extended family units. By looking at the role of grandparents and older adults across cultures children may come to appreciate and understand the universals involved in the ageing process and the contributions of elderly relatives within dynamic family structures. As a result of engaging in talk and activities related to these books, some children may lose a fear of older people, or gain understanding about the daily lives of the elderly, or have opportunities to establish meaningful, new relationships with older people in the community.

**Grandparents**


Grandpa entertains his visiting grandchildren with songs and dances from his days in vaudeville.


A little girl and her abuela (grandmother) take a bus trip into New York. They imagine all the sights and sounds they will see and hear.

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African American Tanya can’t understand why spending a year to make a homemade quilt makes the quilt more special than one bought in a store until Grandma helps her appreciate family history and traditions.

A young Vietnamese girl remembers the emperor of her country by saving a lotus seed and carries it with her to America. The seed becomes a symbol of hope and new beginnings within a family over the years as the girl grows up and becomes a grandmother.

A young girl and her grandfather learn about each other through appreciating the music of his harmonica and the music of the insects and birds chirping in Georgia.

Sadie and her grandfather go for a special early morning walk every other Sunday.

In this story about a young African American girl, readers are invited to find out how grandmother helps Grace resolve a problem. Even though Grace is a natural actress (evidenced by the fact that she roleplays being Joan of Arc or Anasi the Spider), her classmates suggest that she can’t possibly take the role of Peter Pan in the school play because she is female and African American.

A young African-American child thinks about joyous times with a grandfather by imagining growing old with him.

Journey and his sister, Cat, have to live with their grandparents the summer their mother leaves them. Journey’s time is one of introspection and discovery, as he searches the photographs his grandfather takes in order to know about his past.
Saikai, Kimiko (1990). *Sachiko Means Happiness*. Children's Book Press. When grandmother suffers from Alzheimer's, Sachiko learns to understand that even though grandmother doesn't recognize her the love they share will remain.


Rylant, Cynthia (1992). *When I Was Young in the Mountains*. New York: E. P. Dutton. A child from Appalachia recalls fondly the warm and memorable summers she spent with her grandparents when she was growing up. Illustrations filled with country and Americana artifacts add to her narrative.


Walter, Mildred Pitts (199?). *Justin And The Best Biscuits In The World*. Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Books. Justin's grandfather helps him learn to gain self-confidence and to appreciate his heritage during a visit to grandfather's ranch.

Elderly Friends & Extended Family

Young Anne's opinion and relationship with Mrs. Simpson, the "old lady in a wheelchair," expands when she catches a glimpse of Mrs. Simpson's yo-yo.

A young boy helps an elderly friend rediscover her memories through sharing his artifacts.

This cross cultural book demonstrates the mutual love and support that can be shared by people who see beyond color, age and religious boundaries in an extended family.

Two sisters remember their visits with Great-aunt May who had books everywhere, wrote many letters, and had, she claimed, "a gracious plenty."

• Families in Transition: We have included this literature set because many American families are in transition. By looking at the topics of death, homelessness, birth of a new baby, and divorce, children may discover commonalities and differences when faced with similar problems. As a result of engaging in talk and activities related to these books, some children may have opportunities to talk about losing a loved family member, recognizing a growing social concern of homeless families, dealing with the birth of a new sibling, or even grappling with the difficult issue of divorce.

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Dealing with Death

Mattie wants to buy her mother a gold pin for mother's day after her father dies. Losing her best babysitting job doesn't help, but Mattie does not give up.

A Chinese-American girl helps plan her grandfather's funeral and comes to understand why her mother says, "When someone is very old and has lived a good life, he is happy to go."

Annie tries to stem the passage of time when the Old One must finish weaving her last Navajo rug and go to Mother Earth. Slowly, she learns about life's cycles and changes that are inevitable.

Emma's beloved Aunt Sue has cancer and comes to live with her and her family. Aunt Sue and Emma's relationship grows as they prepare a quilt of the seasons. As Aunt Sue's condition worsens, Emma knows she will have to finish the quilt alone.

Summer has lived with Aunt May and Uncle Ob since she was six. When Aunt May dies, Summer and Uncle Ob must find strength together.

A young girl learns to cope with the illness and then death of her favorite aunt by learning to give love to others.

Homelessness

A young boy and his father survive, with the help of other homeless friends, in an urban airport. Watching a trapped bird escape to freedom--flying away home--gives them hope.
When Clay’s mother disappears, he begins to live on the street. Luckily, he is befriended by Buddy and Calvin, two street people who become his family.

Black and white photographs illustrate Erik’s days and nights. In a straightforward, nonsentimental manner, Erik’s life is described, from sleeping in a crowded shelter, to participating in family decisions.

Life on the street is difficult but a rose brightens everyone’s day.

**New Baby**

A little boy who’s about to become a big brother learns to work through his feelings of anger and to look forward to the arrival of a new baby.

Even though Kevin is not enthralled with his baby sister when she comes home from the hospital, he begins to mellow as he learns the responsibilities--and the benefits--of being a big brother.

Peter is helped to come to grips with the arrival of a new baby when he is asked to give up his favorite chair. He is happy when he understands that he has outgrown his chair and is ready for a new one.

Parents lovingly prepare in their own way for their first-born child. Father makes a hand-hewn cradle, and mother crafts a quilt intended to become part of the child’s treasures.

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Divorce/Absent Parent

Hessie spends the summer with her father and his new wife and changes her mind about her stepmother.

A little girl is faced with, and learns to adapt to, the joint custody agreement her parents have after their divorce.

Leigh Botts' poignant letters to author Henshaw reveal his hopes, dreams, fears, sense of humor, and the reality of being a child grappling with divorce and change.

Katy likes things the way they are, and she is not looking forward to her mother's upcoming marriage to Ben. Katy's mother lets her invite her whole class to the wedding, serves chocolate cake, and reassures her that they will still find special time together.

Genny believes that she and her brother Larry, home from the army, can keep her parents together. When they can't, the four children in this African-American family must come to some new understandings about love and support.

The voice of a young girl is heard in this story of divorce and separation.

The relationship between Jake and his stepfather, a macho cowboy, is enhanced by Jake's persistence in wanting to help his stepfather and be accepted.

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A little girl who loves animals is surprised when she is allowed to keep a stray dog, and because of this discovers a kindred spirit in her new stepmother.

Mitzi and her step-grandmother, Nana Potts, are prepared to dislike one another. But those preconceived notions begin to disappear while Mitzi' mother is on her honeymoon and Mitzi stays with Nana.

A young boy who’s never met his father, describes what his father would be like and imagines the times they would spend together.

**Family Relationships:** We have included this literature set because relationships in families are worthy of discussion and children's consideration. By looking at the complex roles of family members and their relationships, children will have the opportunity to consider how families grow and change, how sibling relationships are often tumultuous, and how families don't all look the same. As a result of engaging in talk and activities related to these books, some children may gain new insights into their own dynamic family relationships, appreciate diverse families, and be better able to cope with their unique family situations.

**Growing and Changing**

A humorous, honest look at the upheaval experienced in one family when mother decides to return to teaching school.
A little girl learns to deal with her father's absence for a year by writing him a letter of all the things she and her family encounter while he's away at work. The unique split illustrations show images of father's world as a merchant marine, and the little girl's world in a traditional neighborhood.

  Two Asian sisters help their mommy go to bed one night when she is very tired.

The usually warm and friendly relationship between a father and his children, Bweela and Javaka, is disrupted occasionally when he becomes "a monster," reacting to their mishaps. Humorous illustrations belie the seriousness of the father's irritation, however, and the children admit that he is a monster "only sometimes."

**Interracial Families**

- Adoff, Arnold (1971). *Black is Brown is Tan*.
  This story of a racially-mixed family is lovingly told through common, everyday events.

  A young girl whose American father courted her Japanese mother when he was a young Naval recruit humorously reveals why her family sometimes eats with chopsticks and sometimes with a knife and fork.

**Siblings**

A story of the relationships between siblings told from the perspective of each. Opens the doors for many discussions in the classroom about taking different perspectives, exploring two sides of the same story, etc.

Christina Katerina has had it with her brother, John, and with her parents. When she is punished for something John has done, she decides to quit the family.


This collection of family-themed poems includes titles such as *My Baby Brother*, *Four Generations*, *The Little Sister Store*, and *Shy*.


Alec’s frustrations with his little brother, Stevie, are dissipated only momentarily when he makes Stevie disappear. It seems as if Stevie had never been born, and the whole family has changed.


During a Christmas family get together, Maria tries on her mother’s wedding ring while making tamales. The fun begins when Maria realizes she lost the wedding ring while mixing the tamales.


Jeremy has trouble helping mom out by feeding the baby.


Alex is tired of his older brother, Andrew, pushing him around. While trying to teach Andrew a lesson, Alex learns to be himself.

**Suggested Discussion and Response Activities**

Many of the following topics for discussion or suggested activities will be appropriate for any of the books in the literature sets. However, within each category we list relevant possibilities and highlight at least one book-related activity.

- **Reader’s Theater** This activity consists of turning a storybook into a script that will be read by children. It is not intended to be a play, but rather an exploration of dialogue through voice interpretation.

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Children may help prepare the text for reading, or the teacher may prepare the script and highlight different parts. *Wilfred Gordon McDonald Patridge* is appropriate for Reader's Theater because the story is full of dialogue involving many characters. One child may serve as narrator, reading the nondialogue, descriptive story parts. Another child may read Wilfred's words and yet others the parts of Wilfred's many elderly friends.

- **Cross Story Voices**  
  This activity consists of comparing voices of similar characters across many stories. For example, the voices of grandparents from many stories may be shared, discussed, and recorded. Children may select relevant dialogue from stories within literature sets and then take turns reading and discussing the selections. Children may represent the character's voice by displaying the book cover or a self-made illustration and sharing the selected passages. For example, sage advice of elderly friends or grandparents can be heard when children read quotes or excerpts from *Amazing Grace*, "You can be anything you want, Grace, if you put your mind to it." *Loop the Loop*, "Live life to the fullest." And *William's Doll*, "He needs it [the doll] . . . to hug and to cradle and to take to the park so that when he's a father, like you, he'll know how to take care of his baby and feed him and love him and bring him the things he wants, like a doll, so that he can practice being a father."

- **Letters**  
  This activity consists of writing letters. Writing letters in response to literature helps children find and express their own voices. Letters could be written to: a grandparent after reading *When I Am Old With You* to continue speculation about the things one can do with an older person, when they are together in the future; an elderly friend or a person in an old folks home about their special memories after reading *Wilfred Gordon McDonald Patridge*; or an absent family member, updating them on their current activities, after reading *Dear Daddy*. Another way to use letter writing is to invite children to give advice to a story character. For example, in *Jeremy Isn't Hungry*, Jeremy has difficulty feeding his little baby brother. What advice could children write to help Jeremy solve his problem.

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• **Oral histories:** This activity consists of oral history/timeline parents/grandparents/elderly. *How My Parents Learned To Eat*, children may interview their parents about how they met and married. *Eric Is Homeless* offers an everyday depiction of Eric's family life. Children could write and orate their daily family activities.

• **Portrait Gallery** This activity consists of children drawing portraits of story characters or family members. Teachers may mat, frame and/or display different collections of children's artistic images of families in portrait (hallway) galleries.

• **Artifacts** - This activity consists of sharing artifacts that are relevant to stories and then inviting children to share artifacts that are relevant in their own lives. In *Before I Was Born*, a baby quilt may be shared to represent the anticipation parents feel on the arrival of a new baby. Children may bring in personal artifacts such as: photographs, baby blankets, baby bracelets, etc. *When I Was Young In the Mountains* lends itself to artifact inquiry in that many objects (e.g., kitchen implements, farm tools, general store items) may represent the main character's lives.

• **POV Writing** Learning to see events from two points of view is a sophisticated task. Many children's books invite children to see life from more than one perspective. After hearing, *The Pain and the Great One*, children may write about how the main characters differed in their unique perspectives. They may also write about an incident that occurred at home from the point of view of an involved sibling. After hearing a poem from *Fathers, Mothers, Sisters, Brothers*, children can write from the point of view of one poem's family member to another.

• **Map study** - This activity consists of tracing family journeys on a map. After reading *Grandfather's Journey*, children can map the route grandfather took from Japan to California, across the United States, and back to Japan. A classroom World Wall can be flagged with story titles after literature is shared from a particular city, state, region or country.

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Family Tree  This activity consists of inviting children to represent their traditional or nontraditional families in diverse family tree structures. Some children may have family trees that have two trunks and many branches that illustrate mixed family structure and rich family histories. This activity would work well after children have listened to books about step parents and half brothers and sisters.

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