

The Together Tree

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Synopsis: At his new school, quiet Rumi feels small and unwelcome, and a few kids bully him for being different and wearing bright shoes. He finds refuge beneath the old willow tree by the playground and builds his own world of hope and dreams of belonging. One day, when Rumi is made a target again, one of his classmates bravely steps in to defend him. In that moment of solidarity, Rumi's class finally realizes that all are welcome, and they create a space they can all play in--together.

Suggested Reading Date: September (Beginning of School Year); October 10 (World Inclusion Day)

Activity Descriptions:

- Makerspace: Create a space on the playground for kids to sit if they are looking for playmates, like a Buddy Bench. After the spot goes in, be sure to check on it at recess and invite kids there to play with you!
- Make signs with welcoming and inclusive phrases to hang in the classroom or hallway.
- Practice what to say if you see someone being unkind.
- As a class, brainstorm some words that encourage kind behavior (kindness, empathy, inclusion, etc.) Take sidewalk chalk out to the playground and write them in large block letters, and have kids work together to fill them in.

Related Websites:

- Author website: <https://aishasaeed.com/the-together-tree/>
- Interview with Aisha Saeed: <https://www.kidlitincolor.com/blog/interview-with-nyt-bestselling-author-aisha-saeed>
- A Guide to Using Books About Feelings and Emotions: https://d28hqpri8am2if.cloudfront.net/tagged_assets/21185790/9781534462960_cg_a%20guide%20to%20using%20books%20about%20feelings%20and%20emotions.pdf

Text to Text Connections:

- *The Arabic Quilt* by Aya Khalil
- *Each Kindness* by Jacqueline Woodson
- *I Walk With Vanessa* by Kerascoët
- *The Big Umbrella* by Amy June Bates
- *The Invisible Boy* by Trudy Ludwig
- *Tomorrow I'll Be Kind* by Jessica Hische
- *Every Little Kindness* by Marta Bartolj
- *One* by Kathryn Otoshi

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