



AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Finding Connection Through Music and Book



As the world faced the COVID-19 pandemic, many families found themselves being brought together or forced to be apart. Everywhere, people were looking for ways to stay positively connected. The little boy in Magination Press' book, *Accordionly: Abuelo and Opa Make Music* by Michael Genhart PhD, shows great creativity and wisdom as he finds a way to help his grandfathers connect through music.

This essay from Dr. Genhart explores the way picture books and music can help children and grown-ups connect with others. It's a timely and timeless idea.

You can purchase the full book with 20% off and free domestic shipping [here](#). Enter code **MPKIDS20** at checkout.

Accordionly: Abuelo and Opa Make Music is the story of a boy who brings the two cultures of his family together through the music of the accordion—with the help of his two grandfathers, who do not speak each other's languages but do speak the universal language of music. Based on my own family and memories from my childhood, this book is a joyful celebration of family and how common threads connect us all.

More and more American families are multicultural, where different cultures come together to form a union of diverse languages, food, clothing, tradition, and ritual. Since children can sometimes feel like they are “not enough” of any one culture, it is important to offer them opportunities to celebrate the richness of all the cultures that make them unique. Children's books are in a special position to affirm a child's experience of being multicultural.

The concept of “mirrors and windows” in children's books highlights the many wonderful ways children can see the world, reflecting their own lives (mirrors) as well as introducing them to the lives of others that are not like themselves (windows). Similarly, the notion of “sliding doors” shows that stories for children can enable them to “walk into” other worlds. *Accordionly: Abuelo and Opa Make Music* is an example of how a children's book can show *all* children that the world is a diverse place—some child readers will see themselves in this story while others will be invited to meet a family different from their own.

WWW.APA.ORG/PUBS/MAGINATION/ACCORDIONLY-ABUELO-OPA-MAKE-MUSIC

Books where a child can identify with a main character in positive ways are tremendously powerful. They are doing some heavy lifting in that these books serve to bolster positive self-image and self-esteem. When kids see themselves in a book, in some cases for the first time, they can feel empowered, not alone, and not marginalized. In fact, children are likely to feel support, acceptance and love—important building blocks for positive development of self. Those children who are seeing a world unlike their own in books like *Accordionly: Abuelo and Opa Make Music* can confront any stereotypes or prejudices they may be holding, as well as begin to develop empathy and appreciation for diversity.

Spoken language, particularly reading books aloud to children, is a powerful mode of communication. In *Accordionly: Abuelo and Opa Make Music* the accordion is a central character that shows that music is another potent means of communicating. In this story the grandson uses his creativity to unite his family by inviting his grandfathers, who do not share a spoken language, to teach each other the music of their respective countries. Music becomes a bridge. In the end, a family formed by diverse cultures is brought together and celebrated—reminding us all to seek common connections and unity.

This Article's Author

Michael Genhart, PhD, is a licensed clinical psychologist in private practice in San Francisco. He is the acclaimed author of many picture books, including *Love is Love; I See You; Ouch! Moments; So Many Smarts!; Cake & I Scream!; Mac & Geeez!; Peanut Butter & Jellyous*, among other titles. He lives with his rainbow family in Marin County, California.