

A Spark of Belonging: How One Story Can Change the World



Imagine a child, wide-eyed, filled with hope, yet quietly wondering if the magic they see in books, on screens, and in holiday traditions has room for them. Imagine the ache of opening storybook after storybook, only to find that the heroes never look like them, their culture is invisible, and their family's traditions are nowhere to be found.

This is not just imagination; it is the lived reality for millions of children worldwide. Children who, in the formative years of their lives, are told without words that they are excluded from the story of joy, tradition, and belonging.

As a former Hollywood children's talent agent, and now, a children's book author, I've seen firsthand what happens when children are empowered to shine, and what happens when they are overlooked. My debut children's Christmas storybook, *Kam and Santa's Global Adventure*, was born out of a simple yet powerful conviction: every child deserves to see themselves in the magic of Christmas.

But this book is not just a festive story. It is the foundation of a movement, a movement rooted in love, cultural understanding, and the belief that stories can reshape how children see themselves and how the world sees them.

Children are incredibly perceptive. When they don't see themselves reflected in books, classrooms, or celebrations, they feel it. It communicates, often silently but deeply, that they don't belong, or that their culture isn't part of the world's story. This leads to isolation, lowered self-esteem, and even resentment.

In today's polarized climate, this exclusion carries even greater risks. Families and schools are grappling with division, cultural misunderstanding, and the erosion of empathy. Teachers and librarians are begging for tools that reflect the diverse faces in their classrooms. They know what the research shows: children who feel represented are more engaged, more confident, and more connected to their peers.

And yet, the holiday publishing market, still leans heavily on the same narrow depictions of Christmas, missing the opportunity to create connections across cultures.

Kam and Santa's Global Adventure was written as both a mirror and a bridge. A mirror so children can finally see themselves in the joy of the season. A bridge so they can travel alongside Kam and Santa, learning about traditions from Australia to South Africa, from Jamaica to India, from Mexico to Germany.

In each country, Santa transforms into the cultural version of himself: Father Christmas, Sinterklaas, Shengdan Laoren, Babbo Natale, and more. Kam, the young protagonist, learns that though the names, foods, and customs may differ, the heartbeat of Christmas—love, kindness, generosity is universal.

This is the wisdom I believe we must share with the masses: that our differences are not dividers, but doorways. When children grow up seeing that their culture matters, and that other cultures matter too, they carry empathy into adulthood. They become leaders who listen, innovators who include, and citizens who heal rather than divide.

Imagine if schools and libraries across the world had resources like this book woven into their multicultural curricula. Imagine if families could share these stories together at home, expanding their children's worldview while strengthening their traditions. Imagine the ripple effect; children who feel valued grow into adults who value others.

The biggest lesson here is simple but profound: belonging is the soil in which empathy grows. And empathy is the foundation of peace.

We can no longer afford to see inclusive storytelling as optional. It is essential to create the next generation of leaders, peacemakers, and visionaries.

So how do we move this vision into action?

1. **For Educators and Librarians:** Adopt resources that reflect the diversity in your classrooms. Use stories like *Kam and Santa's Global Adventure* as springboards for cultural exploration, empathy-building exercises, and social-emotional learning.
2. **For Parents:** Introduce your children to books that celebrate both their identity and the identities of others. Read together, discuss traditions, and model curiosity instead of judgment.
3. **For Communities and Institutions:** Recognize that inclusive stories are more than entertainment; they are tools for building bridges in divided times. Support initiatives that scale these ideas globally.
4. **For Individuals:** Practice the habit of asking, "Who is missing from this story?" Whether in media, workplaces, or schools, train your mindset to look for inclusion.

The change begins when we adopt a universal mindset of love, caring, and curiosity; one small spark that grows into a fire of transformation.

After reading this chapter, I ask you to take one powerful step: **commit to putting inclusive stories in the hands of children.** Whether you are a parent, educator, leader, or philanthropist, your choice to share wisdom through stories can ignite a movement.

Because when a child opens a book and sees themselves in the magic of the holiday season, the message is clear: *you belong, you are loved, and your story matters.*

As I reflect on my journey, from the U.S. Army, to guiding young Hollywood talent, to writing stories for children, I see one thread woven through it all: the belief that every child deserves to shine.

To the reader of this chapter, I offer my deepest gratitude. You are the carriers of wisdom, the builders of bridges, the ones who will decide whether the next generation grows up divided or united.

I leave you with the words of Nelson Mandela:

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

Stories are education. Stories are weapons of peace. And together, by changing the stories we tell, we can change the world itself.