

FAMILY MEDIA/BOOKS

Books for Tough Times

Great stories to help kids of all ages cope and thrive in uncertain times

BY GEMMA ALEXANDER (/AUTHOR/GEMMA-ALEXANDER) |

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PHOTO: Credit: Jerry Wang, Unsplash

As parents, we try to create stability and security for our kids. But in a year like 2020, the best we can do is teach our kids to cope with change and uncertainty. Fortunately, we don't have to do it on our own. There are lots of great books that help kids understand some of the circumstances we're facing this year, as well as books to help kids cope with the anxiety those circumstances produce. We've worked with the Seattle Public Library's children's librarians to come up with a few recommendations.

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Picture-book picks

[“Isn't It Scary?” by Vernon Hamilton \(https://www.amazon.com/Isn't-Scary-Vernon-Hamilton/dp/1480889164?ie=UTF8&tag=parentmap-20\)](https://www.amazon.com/Isn't-Scary-Vernon-Hamilton/dp/1480889164?ie=UTF8&tag=parentmap-20)

“Isn't It Scary?” features an African American family exploring the natural environment. When a rabbit dives down a scary-looking hole, the mother helps her two children connect the natural habitats of animals with the comfort and security of their own home and family.

[“After the Fall \(How Humpty Dumpty Got Back Up Again\)” by Dan Santat \(https://www.amazon.com/After-Fall-Humpty-Dumpty-Again/dp/1626726825/?ie=UTF8&tag=parentmap-20\)](https://www.amazon.com/After-Fall-Humpty-Dumpty-Again/dp/1626726825/?ie=UTF8&tag=parentmap-20)

Dan Santat, author and illustrator of the beloved picture book “The Adventures of Beekle: The Unimaginary Friend (<https://www.amazon.com/Adventures-Beekle-Unimaginary-Friend/dp/0316199982?ie=UTF8&tag=parentmap-20>),” gives the Humpty Dumpty tale a new twist. In “After the Fall,” the famous egg has to get back up again to face his



recently acquired fear of heights in order to return to his favorite pastime of bird-watching.

[“Why Is Everyone Wearing a Mask?” by Debbie Qiu, translated by Eduardo Ochoa \(https://www.amazon.com/POR-TODOS-USAN-M%C3%81SCARA-English-Spanish/dp/B089M61R1K?ie=UTF8&tag=parentmap-20\)](https://www.amazon.com/POR-TODOS-USAN-M%C3%81SCARA-English-Spanish/dp/B089M61R1K?ie=UTF8&tag=parentmap-20)

This bilingual (English/Spanish) picture book playfully explains why masks are helpful instead of scary, and encourages kids to become mask-wearing superheroes themselves.

[“Germs Are Not for Sharing” by Elizabeth Verdick, illustrated by Marieka Heinlen \(https://www.amazon.com/Germs-Sharing-Ages-Best-Behavior/dp/1575421976?ie=UTF8&tag=parentmap-20\)](https://www.amazon.com/Germs-Sharing-Ages-Best-Behavior/dp/1575421976?ie=UTF8&tag=parentmap-20)

This pre-pandemic picture book introduces little kids to the basic how-tos of hygiene that are instrumental in stopping the spread of germs. It covers healthy precautions such as coughing into an elbow, handwashing and the proper disposal of tissues.

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[“The Don’t Worry Book” by Todd Parr \(https://www.amazon.com/Dont-Worry-Book-Todd-Parr/dp/0316506680?ie=UTF8&tag=parentmap-20\)](https://www.amazon.com/Dont-Worry-Book-Todd-Parr/dp/0316506680?ie=UTF8&tag=parentmap-20)

Even when this picture book’s illustrations depict frightened faces, its bright colors create a cheery, uplifting impression in this book about dealing with things that make kids worry. “The Don’t Worry Book” doesn’t actually admonish kids for worrying about scary news or first days of school, but rather, it suggests ways to find comfort and joy despite one’s fears.

Middle-grade picks

[“A Doctor Like Papa” by Natalie Kinsey-Warnock, illustrated by James Bernardin \(https://www.amazon.com/Doctor-Like-Papa-Natalie-Kinsey-Warnock/dp/0060293195?ie=UTF8&tag=parentmap-20\)](https://www.amazon.com/Doctor-Like-Papa-Natalie-Kinsey-Warnock/dp/0060293195?ie=UTF8&tag=parentmap-20)

Girls living in rural Vermont in the year 1918 are not encouraged to become doctors. But when the influenza epidemic hits Margaret’s community, she must use what she has learned from watching her doctor father practice medicine to protect herself and others. Set against the backdrop of a remote war, this story features strong family ties, the validation of a girl’s dream and young people discovering agency in their response to the challenges posed by the epidemic.

[“Ways to Make Sunshine” by Renée Watson, illustrated by Nina Mata \(https://www.amazon.com/Ways-Make-Sunshine-Ryan-Novel/dp/1547606657?ie=UTF8&tag=parentmap-20\)](https://www.amazon.com/Ways-Make-Sunshine-Ryan-Novel/dp/1547606657?ie=UTF8&tag=parentmap-20)

Aside from the usual fourth-grade troubles of fitting in and a bothersome big brother, Ryan Hart has a lot to deal with. After her father loses his job, her family is forced to sell their second car and move into a smaller house. But this irrepressible Ramona-like heroine has a talent for making sunshine out of setbacks.



[“For Every One” by Jason Reynolds \(https://www.amazon.com/Every-One-Jason-Reynolds/dp/148148625X?ie=UTF8&tag=parentmap-20\)](https://www.amazon.com/Every-One-Jason-Reynolds/dp/148148625X?ie=UTF8&tag=parentmap-20)

Jason Reynolds’ novels depict young people – especially African American boys – finding the courage to face overwhelming challenges. This book, which is written in verse and is not a novel, reminds readers that no matter how many times a dreamer is defeated, it’s still okay –

and even necessary – to keep dreaming.

“Science Comics: Plagues – The Microscopic Battlefield” by Falynn Koch (<https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/162672752X?ie=UTF8&tag=parentmap-20>)

With its graphic novel format, “Plagues” makes epidemiology accessible to elementary school students. Kids will meet the germs behind history’s worst diseases and learn about the mechanisms of infections and immunity, as well as the incredible technology that helps humans resist and treat infectious diseases.

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“1919: The Year That Changed America” by Martin W. Sandler (<https://www.amazon.com/1919-Year-That-Changed-America/dp/1681198010?ie=UTF8&tag=parentmap-20>)

Few people alive can remember a year as chaotic and challenging as 2020, and it will probably define our kids’ generation. But it’s not the first time the world, or even America, has faced so much all at once. Martin W. Sandler’s nonfiction book introduces tweens and young teens to an earlier America grappling with some very familiar issues: racism-fueled violence, an epidemic, war abroad and widespread protests.

More great reads

If you’re looking for more kids’ books for these uncertain times, check out librarian-recommended books about [anxiety and mindfulness](https://seattle.bibliocommons.com/list/share/421358163_chi_ab/1712748149_young_readers_anxiety_uncertainty_amp_mindfulness) (https://seattle.bibliocommons.com/list/share/421358163_chi_ab/1712748149_young_readers_anxiety_uncertainty_amp_mindfulness) for young readers and tweens and young adults (https://seattle.bibliocommons.com/list/share/421358163_chi_ab/1712754239_middle_grade_amp_young_adult_uncertainty_amp_mindfulness).

Brand-new titles include [“Don’t Stand So Close to Me](https://www.orcabook.com/Dont-Stand-So-Close-to-Me-P4845.aspx) (<https://www.orcabook.com/Dont-Stand-So-Close-to-Me-P4845.aspx>)” by Eric Walters, a novel for tweens about a young girl whose

parents are essential workers during the current pandemic; and “[The Whatifs](https://www.simonandschuster.com/books/The-Whatifs/Emily-Kilgore/9781499810295)” (<https://www.simonandschuster.com/books/The-Whatifs/Emily-Kilgore/9781499810295>) by Emily Kilgore (illustrated by Zoe Persico), a picture book about a girl who faces her worries in advance of an important piano recital.

For reading specific to the pandemic, try Book Riot’s list of [six free e-books](https://bookriot.com/free-childrens-books-about-coronavirus/) (<https://bookriot.com/free-childrens-books-about-coronavirus/>) on the coronavirus or the New York City Library’s collection of free e-books (<https://nycdoe.libguides.com/COVID-19ebooks/free>) about COVID-19. If you’re looking for books to help understand protests and institutional racism, try some of the books from The Seattle Times’ list of books for kids and teens about [race, racism and police violence](https://www.seattletimes.com/entertainment/books/books-for-kids-and-teens-about-race-racism-and-police-violence/) (<https://www.seattletimes.com/entertainment/books/books-for-kids-and-teens-about-race-racism-and-police-violence/>).

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Seattle-based freelance writer Gemma Alexander focuses on the intersection of parenting and the arts. When she's not writing for "ParentMap," she blogs at gemmadeealexander.com (https://gemmadeealexander.com/) and tweets at @gemmadeetweet.

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