Mrs. Carlotti’s class is akin to many classrooms we have experienced, and it has a variety of student personalities. There is Nathan, who “uses his outside voice” indoors; Sophie, who “whines and complains when she doesn’t get her way”; and Brian, the “invisible” boy, who is physically present but overlooked by his classmates and teacher (Ludwig unpaged). Consequently, he is left out of being selected for school sports teams and invitations to birthday parties. On his own, however, his imagination leads him to draw and create storylines with dragons, aliens, pirates, and superheroes. Hopes of making a friend come when a new Korean boy, Justin, is introduced to the class. Justin also experiences being on the margins among classmates when he brings Korean barbecue beef, bulgogi, for lunch, and is mocked and laughed at for doing so. Brian then reaches out to Justin by drawing a picture of himself eating bulgogi, attached to the note: “Justin, I thought the bulgogi looked good. Brian.” This act of kindness begins a friendship between Brian and Justin, but it is interrupted when Emilio (another classmate) attempts to befriend Justin. Brian, again, fears exclusion, but Justin shows both Emilio and Brian how there is enough space for all of them to be friends.

_The Invisible Boy_ offers instructional opportunities to explore social and emotional issues that touch any classroom. Themes of kindness, consideration, and inclusion can be highlighted
when analyzing Justin and Brian's interactions. Included at the end of the book are questions for discussion, which highlight several events in the story and invite readers to consider and self-reflect on character's intentions, actions, and outcomes of behaviors. The artwork in this book carefully nuances Brian's social positioning by portraying his character in black and white, while the rest of the book is in color. Fleshlike hues are subtly added to his character in each interaction with Justin, until Brian is completely drawn in color at the end of story.

From a sociocultural standpoint, it is important to note that characters are racially positioned in this fictional text; these identities are not haphazard or accidental (Hymes). Brian, as a white boy, has been cast as an outsider or "other" for reasons that appear to be tied to his personality (e.g., shyness, athletic ability). Justin, as an Asian American boy, is also positioned as an outsider or "other," but it is linked to his ethnic, racial, and cultural identity (i.e., the mocking of bulgogi). In so doing, the storyline perpetuates notions of "otherness" by race/culture. Despite the bulgogi event, Justin somehow manages to gain enough social capital to be recruited for both sports and classwork endeavors, while Brian maintains his outsider status. This turn of events fails to acknowledge the historic and contemporary ways Asian Americans experience being "forever foreigners" in this country—an ongoing battle to be perceived as "real" Americans, regardless of citizenship (Tuan). Justin's bulgogi experience is consistent with the treatment of forever foreigners, but being able to shed such treatment is not. Shifting Justin out of his forever foreigner status within a day not only dismisses the difficulties most Asian Americans face all their lives, but also superficially portrays their experiences. If the author's intent was to create new and empowering roles for Asian Americans, one possibility would be to write Justin in a way in which he confronts, stands up, and informs his classmates about bulgogi, and in the process, create space for both Brian and himself.

*The Invisible Boy* can serve as a mentor text to engage readers in considering the social and emotional issues within educational spaces. Additionally, the book can be utilized for critical analyses of race in children's literature.

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**Works Cited**


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**About the Author**

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