

The logo for 'the MAY BOOK project' is enclosed in a square frame with a red top and left border and a purple bottom and right border. The word 'the' is in a small, lowercase, orange font. 'MAY' is in a large, pink, uppercase font. 'BOOK' is in a large, orange, uppercase font. 'project' is in a smaller, lowercase, orange font. A small purple square with a white sunburst icon is located at the bottom left corner of the frame.

the
MAY
BOOK
project

In celebration of Asian American Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander (AANHPI) Heritage Month, The Very Asian Foundation, in partnership with We Need Diverse Books, launches [The May Book Project](#) to help schools and libraries build and maintain robust Asian American youth literature collections.

For Immediate Release

- *Releases vetted national book list in awareness campaign*
- *Supports students who were dismissed when asking for Asian American material*
- *Gives expert guidance on how to create and maintain inclusive libraries*
- *Encourages communities to donate a book for their libraries or share the book list*
- *Celebrates schools and libraries who are participating in various ways*
- *Honors platinum sponsor Asutra for funding 2,500 books for at-need libraries*
- *Asks for applications from at-need libraries who need donated books*
- *Quotes from all stakeholders for your media coverage*

To celebrate AANHPI Heritage Month, [The Very Asian Foundation](#) and [We Need Diverse Books](#) are partnering to bring a national awareness campaign inspired by St. Louis high schoolers who created an Asian American booklist in 2021 and were ignored by their schools. Many of these students reported struggling with [mental health during the pandemic](#) – a shared feeling of being invisible at school while facing rising anti-Asian discrimination in their own neighborhoods.

“Members of my organization, [Asian American Civics Scholars](#), decided to email a bunch of schools in the St. Louis area in hopes that they would increase their AAPI literature availability,” said Ananya S., a high school junior. “However, we found the response severely underwhelming. We found little to no support from schools.”

Click [here](#) to watch student perspectives

Trailblazer Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop tells us it is crucial that readers see both reflections of their lives as well as windows into the lives of others. These students simply wanted more access to more books.

In response to student requests, the May Book Project coalition created a high-quality Asian American [booklist](#) for all readers. The scholars and educators who created the list have decades of teaching and research experience.

“We are very excited to partner with the Very Asian Foundation and We Need Diverse Books on this important project on behalf of young readers,” says Sarah Park Dahlen, associate professor in the School of Information Sciences at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

The Project looked to the existing [APALA](#) (Asian/Pacific American Librarians Association) [Rubric to Evaluate Asian American and Pacific Islander Youth Literature](#) and also worked with APALA to create a [toolkit](#) on how to create or maintain inclusive libraries. Since this list is created by Asian Americans, the coalition encourages readers to check out books by Indigenous Hawaiian and Pasifika creators, such as by following the [Little Pasifika Readers](#) Instagram account, [Bess Press](#), and [Kamehameha Publishing](#).

This effort is about access to more Asian American literature in libraries, schools, and homes. The extensive and intentional list gives schools, educators, librarians, and caregivers many choices to select what books work for their audiences.

“We Need Diverse Books is thrilled to partner on this vital initiative, especially as anti-Asian discrimination increases nationwide,” said Caroline Richmond, Executive Director of We Need Diverse Books. “Here at WNDB, we believe that books can teach empathy, and that they can be a powerful tool to combat prejudice. More than ever, we need to create inclusive libraries and bookshelves that celebrate Asian American experiences.”

The coalition hopes this framework empowers schools and libraries to make intentional decisions about their book purchases and gives reason to celebrate great work already being done.

“We are asking communities to celebrate the richness of Asian American literature by supporting their libraries with the distribution of the book list and the purchase of more materials,” said Soogi Hong, Executive Director of the Very Asian Foundation. “And we are fully committed to donating books to libraries that cannot afford to add to their collections.”

Public and private schools across the nation are already celebrating the May Book Project. The Clayton School District near St. Louis is hosting a virtual [event](#) with author [Ed Shew](#), a Missourian who wrote the book *Chinese Brothers, American Sons*.

“We’re excited to be part of The May Book Project,” said Dr. Cameron Poole, Chief Equity and Inclusion Officer of Clayton Schools. “Students who see themselves reflected in their curriculum and in the books in their libraries experience a greater sense of belonging in their schools. Ensuring that our students have access to books that share these rich, diverse stories aligns directly with our efforts to ensure that Clayton schools are indeed a place for everyone.”

Chandler School in Pasadena, Calif., is celebrating The May Book Project by launching a book drive to purchase an entire book list for lower grade students.

“Literacy, reading, and diversity are integral components of academic excellence,” said Connie Mohandesi, DEI Chair and Language Arts Curriculum Director. “We are delighted that this book drive will be a kickoff to partnering with our families to bring a diverse and representative books to our school libraries.”

[Authors, illustrators](#), publishers, and other stakeholders have committed to enhancing this project as well with supplemental material, panel discussions, or author/illustrator visits. A number of

communities, schools, and libraries across the U.S. are celebrating The May Book Project in various ways, whether it's with book drives, sponsoring libraries, buying more literature, or hosting book discussions.

"Though there's been more traditionally published Asian/Asian American authors in recent years, it still feels like there's a disconnect when it comes to providing publishing industry support to BIPOC authors. It's not enough to just publish our books, it's also important to let readers know that our books exist so they can choose to pick them up. That's why it's always amazing to see grassroots initiatives like this, that get our books directly into the hands of young readers," said [Kat Cho](#), author of *Wicked Fox* and *Once Upon a K-Prom*.

[St. Louis County Library](#) is also partnering by providing the book lists in all 20 of its branches, as well as sharing the collection of electronic titles available on the [Libby app](#). Branches will also have displays throughout the month of May featuring Asian American selections, staff will be recommending titles on the Library's social media account, and popular YA author David Yoon will visit Library Headquarters (1640 S. Lindbergh Blvd.) on May 24, 2022 to launch his next adult novel, *City of Orange*.

Kristen Sorth, St. Louis County Library Director and CEO said, "We want our patrons to see themselves in our collection. Inclusion and equity in our services, staff, programs and collections is a top priority for the Library District. These principles guide our work and help us to remember exactly who we are, what we value the most and how we can support the St. Louis region."

None of this would be possible without The May Book Project's corporate sponsors. Platinum sponsor [Asutra](#) is a woman-owned, self-care company led by [Stephanie Morimoto and Venus Williams](#). The company is making a generous contribution that will buy more than 2,500 books to at-need libraries.

"Asutra is deeply honored to be a sponsor of The May Book Project to help schools in need buy 2,000+ books," said Stephanie Morimoto, the CEO of Asutra. "As an Asian American woman-owned business that supports active self-care, we know how important representation is to overall well-being. We're thrilled that students will see themselves, their history and culture in these books and hope that the books spark great conversations for everyone."

Students say they believe this multi-organization effort by communities allows them to be seen in ways they haven't been seen before.

"If we're able to spark these discussions by taking the small step of sharing these diverse stories of Asian American authors, it would be monumental for ensuring the safety and well-being of the AAPI community at-large," said Junnie Bae, St. Louis high school senior.

MEDIA CONTACT:

Courtney Clark, Very Asian Foundation Marketing and Communications
courtney@bigrushmarketing.com | 314-339-6914

Corporate platinum sponsor:

Asutra

Coalition members of The May Book Project: [Asian American Civics Scholars](#), [The Very Asian Foundation](#), [We Need Diverse Books](#), [Asian/Pacific American Librarians Association](#), [Asian Authors Alliance](#), and scholars [Poushali Bhadbury, PhD](#), [Sarah Park Dahlen, PhD](#), [Jung Kim, PhD](#), [Mohit P. Mehta, PhD Candidate](#), [Anna Gotangco Osborn, NBCT](#), [Noreen Naseem Rodríguez, PhD](#), [Marina Tinone, Independent Scholar](#), [Joanne Yi, PhD](#).

Community partners in support of The May Book Project:

Clayton High School, St. Louis
Chandler School, Pasadena, California
St. Louis County Public Library District

Corporate silver sponsor:

Barilla

#####

