



# Velvet Pumpkin Books

January 2026 Newsletter

## IDENTITY, HERITAGE & NEW BEGINNINGS

January always arrives quietly.

It comes after the noise of the holidays, after the rush and reflection, carrying with it something softer—an invitation to begin again. At Velvet Pumpkin Books, we see January not as a reset button, but as a widening of space. A chance to listen more closely. To make room for new voices. To step into a year shaped by empathy, curiosity, and care.

This month, we're reflecting on identity, heritage, and belonging, and the stories that remind us our names, our cultures, and our histories matter.

### *January's Focus: Identity & Belonging*

January is home to:

- Martin Luther King Jr. Day
- National Mentoring Month
- A national invitation to honor the dignity in every person

These themes align deeply with Velvet Pumpkin's mission: telling stories that center dignity, difference, and humanity—especially the voices of those whose histories have been overlooked or erased.

Dr. King reminded us that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. This January, we honor his legacy by celebrating the stories that help us see one another more clearly—across cultures, across generations, across the lines we're taught to draw.

*Belonging begins when we honor where someone comes from.*

### *January Reading Circle: Stories of Names & Knowing*

This month's reading selections focus on cultural identity, self-acceptance, and the courage it takes to claim who you are.

#### **Children's Pick**

##### ***The Name Jar***

by Yangsook Choi

When Unhei moves from Korea to America, she wrestles with whether to keep her Korean name or choose an American one. Her classmates try to help by filling a jar with name suggestions—but ultimately, Unhei discovers that her name carries her

grandmother's love and her culture's beauty. A tender story about the courage to embrace who you are, perfect for conversations about heritage, identity, and belonging.

### **Young Adult Pick**

#### ***Starfish***

by Lisa Fipps

Ellie has been bullied about her weight for as long as she can remember—by classmates, strangers, even her own mother. Written in powerful verse, this novel follows Ellie as she stops shrinking herself to make others comfortable and starts taking up the space she deserves. A story about body image, resilience, and the liberating moment when we stop apologizing for who we are.

### **Adult Pick**

#### ***How to Be an Antiracist***

by Ibram X. Kendi

Kendi weaves personal narrative with rigorous analysis to redefine what it means to be antiracist. Rather than asking "Am I racist?" he challenges readers to ask "What am I doing to challenge racism?" As we honor Dr. King's legacy this month, Kendi's work reminds us that the opposite of racist isn't "not racist"—it's actively working toward justice. Essential reading for anyone committed to building a more equitable world.

### ***Velvet Pumpkin Spotlight: Hidden Histories***

This year, Velvet Pumpkin Books is launching the Hidden Histories Universe—a multi-book series dedicated to amplifying the stories history tried to forget.

From women who shaped wars without ever being credited, to communities whose contributions were erased from the record, these books reclaim lost narratives and return them to the light.

Our stories center:

- Women whose contributions to history were overlooked or erased
- Communities whose labor built nations without recognition
- Young people navigating identity, belonging, and self-discovery
- Neurodivergent characters and LGBTQ+ identities

*Because when we recover lost stories, we recover lost dignity.*

Stay tuned throughout 2026 for book announcements, cover reveals, and opportunities to join our launch community.

### ***Community Connection – Utah Highlights***

Here in Utah, January offers meaningful ways to engage:

#### **MLK Day of Service Projects**

Volunteer opportunities across the state supporting food security, housing, education, and community building. Find events through Utah Volunteers or your local city calendar.

## Library Winter Reading Programs

Many Utah libraries host inclusive literacy events for all ages—a perfect way to explore this month's reading theme with your family or book club.

## Refugee Resettlement & Mentoring Organizations

January is National Mentoring Month. Organizations like the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in Salt Lake City and local refugee resettlement programs offer opportunities to welcome newcomers and help families build belonging in their new home.

*Check your local library, community center, or city calendar for events near you.*

### *A Question to Carry With You This Month*

*"Whose story am I making space for this year?"*

Let this be the question that guides your reading, your conversations, and your kindness this January. Whether it's learning about a culture different from your own, listening to a neighbor's history, or simply asking someone about the meaning of their name—every act of curiosity is an act of dignity.

## Looking Ahead

In February, we'll explore:

- Black History Month
- Stories of resilience, love, and cultural legacy
- *Lucy's Umbrella* as our featured children's pick

Until then, may your days be filled with warmth, stories, and the quiet courage to honor where we all come from.

*With gratitude,*  
**Velvet Pumpkin Books**

*Stories for the thoughtful, the curious, and the kind.*