

# The "Multicultural Toolbox": Parenting Ideas for Asian-American Families

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There are many tools, strategies, and resources we can use to teach our children about their cultural heritage and place in America, and to build self-esteem. The objective is to let them see themselves at the forefront, in the center of things, not an afterthought; let them be the hero of the story for once, not a perpetual supporting player. Redefine what is "normal." Put them in situations so they can see what you are teaching them has relevance, and is not just some Crazy Chinese Thing that Mom does. Help them develop their critical thinking skills—teach them to question generalizations and assumptions. Let them know that a generic, mainstream definition of American culture is not necessarily "better."

Repeat the mantras: "Everybody is different and difference is cool."

We are lucky that multiculturalism is in vogue right now, so there are lots of resources available on the Internet, in catalogues, in ethnic communities and stores, and even increasingly at mainstream stores like Toys-R-Us and Target. The following is a round-up of some past articles by myself and other Asian-American Village contributors that I reviewed while preparing the February 2003 feature, *Harry Potter, Asian-American Living, and Raising Our Children with Culture(s)*.

## The "Multicultural Toolbox"

Indexed on this page is a "toolbox" based on Frances Kai-Hwa Wang's parenting columns over the years.

Clicking any link will open the corresponding reading in a new browser window.

And as always, AAV welcomes *your* e-mailed additions, too!

# The "Multicultural Toolbox"

(underlined sentences are hot-linked to other great articles-click to read)

**Languages:** Teach your child your family's language(s), opening doors to people, family, travel, adventures, and eventually jobs. Early language instruction even creates new neural pathways in brain, and what parent does not want a more sophisticated brain for their child? At minimum, create an interest in languages; she can always learn more later. Do not worry, her English will not be hampered.

**Community:** Surround your child with people from your ethnic community so that she'll see she is not the only one, and can see the relevance of learning another language and culture (and so she can practice too!). Help her network and build friendships with other kids (they can complain about language school together).

**Reading:** Read books—both Asian-American stories and traditional folktales. Retell stories in your family's language, if you are able. And when your child is young, change the gender/race/language of animal characters to make them more like you, i.e., "Ling-Ling the Chinese girl rabbit goes to visit her Po Po..."

**Fun:** Toys—Collect dolls that look like her, Asian play food, multicultural crayons, Asian dress-up clothes, traditional toys and games, Asian fads like Hello Kitty and Pokemon.

**Multimedia:** In this day and age, videos, television, music, computer games will inevitably compete with books, so be on the lookout for those with Asian and Asian-American characters and themes.

**Food:** Always treating her with McDonald's gives it higher value; other cuisines can be made special, too. Also, if you are afraid of sending her to school with Asian food, she will learn to be embarrassed by it; either educate the kids around her, or surround her with other Asian American kids.

**Activities:** Local field trips—go to Chinatown, the Asian grocery store, a sushi bar, an Asian Art museum, a tofu or fortune cookie factory, a mochi store; make every errand a cultural opportunity

**Holidays and Festivals:** Attend lion dances, dragon-boat races, mochi-making events, New Year's festivals, International Night at school so your child can see her culture being celebrated and learn about others.

**Schools:** Pick your school, get involved, know the teachers, and make class presentations to educate your child's peers

**Travel:** Visit places with large Asian populations like Toronto, Chicago, Detroit, Vancouver, California, or Hawaii so that she can soak in culture and see that she is not the only one. Better still, visit anywhere in Asia; it makes concrete the lesson that if Asians are a minority at home, we are not minorities in the world.

**Education:** Teach your child to critically read the media and to stereotype-proof them; watch television shows and videos with them, and be sure to discuss them afterward

**Prepare:** Prepare your child for racism before it hits: lay the groundwork early, be sensitive to your child's experiences, instill self-esteem and understanding, and be ready to take action when necessary

## Related Readings

- *Harry Potter, Asian-American Living, and Raising Our Children with Culture(s)*  
By Frances Kai-Hwa Wang, AAV Contributing Editor  
Multiculturalism as a lifestyle choice, not just an abstraction or afterthought
- *Asian Pacific American Heritage Month for Kids*  
By Frances Kai-Hwa Wang, AAV Contributing Editor  
Did you know you see Asian-American heritage in action every day?
- *Asian-American Village Archives: Frances Kai-Hwa Wang*  
Family, lifestyles, culture, and other writings by AAV Contributing Editor
- *APA LIVING @ AAV: Family and Lifestyles from Asian-American Village*

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**Frances Kai-Hwa Wang** is a second-generation Chinese American from California now living in Ann Arbor, Michigan. With an academic background in Asian Studies and Chinese Philosophy, she has worked in anthropology and international development in Nepal, in the nonprofit sector in Michigan, and as the Financial and Marketing Director of a small business start-up called Two Wheel Tango. She is now contributing editor for [IMDiversity.com](http://IMDiversity.com)'s Asian-American Village, where she writes most frequently on culture, family, arts, and lifestyles topics. She has four children.

Frances Wang is also available for speaking engagements, on topics such as Raising Children with Culture(s), Raising Multilingual Children, Asian Pacific American History and Identity, and more. She can be reached at [fkwang@aol.com](mailto:fkwang@aol.com).

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