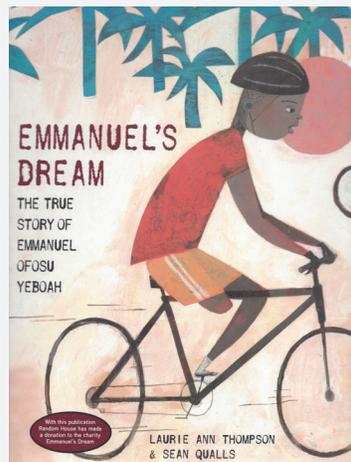


First Opinion: “Being Disabled Does Not Mean Being Unable”: *Emmanuel’s Dream* Realized

Thompson, Laurie Ann. *Emmanuel’s Dream: The True Story of Emmanuel Ofosu Yeboah*. Illus. Sean Qualls. New York: Schwartz & Wade Books, 2015. Print.

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Emmanuel's Dream is the biographical account of a young boy who was born with a congenital leg abnormality; yet, despite his hardships, he was determined to support his family, inspiring others with disabilities to follow their dreams. Written by Laurie Ann Thompson and illustrated by Sean Qualls, Thompson's narrative empowers youth to consider making a difference in the world. Sean Quall's colorful, vibrant, and powerful illustrations capture the reader's attention while the story's complexities are heightened with the black and white imagery that foreshadows events in the story.

Thompson begins by telling the story of Emmanuel, who was born in a small village in Ghana, West Africa, and relates his father's embarrassment of his son's physical deformities. "Most people thought he would be useless or worse—a curse" (unpaged). Once Emmanuel's family is abandoned by his father, Mama Comfort must raise him on her own. Early on, Mama Comfort knew life would be different—and sometimes difficult—for Emmanuel, and so she encouraged him to be determined, intelligent, and persistent.

As Emmanuel grew older, he learned to get around on only one leg, first by crawling and eventually by hopping. He quickly adjusted to his condition so that he could help his family earn money by doing small jobs around his village. When he was of age to attend school, he would hop for two miles each way every day. When his mother became too ill to work and

support the family, he left home at the age of thirteen to find employment in Accra (the capital and largest city in Ghana). However, to his dismay, it was difficult to land a job because shop owners did not want a disabled person working for them, but he was finally hired to work at a food stand. From this job and another shoe shining, he earned enough to send money home to support his family. But as the seasons passed, his mother grew sicker and he was only able to see her one last time before her death. He decided then that he would set out to change the world in her honor.

He developed a plan to ride a bicycle around Ghana. After receiving supplies from the Challenged Athletes Foundation, a blessing from the king of the region, and financial support from a few neighbors and friends, he set out on a 400-mile journey across Ghana. Along the way, he was greeted and celebrated by spectators. To see the *pozo*, “the disabled person,” ride a bike with one leg was more than a sight of amazement—it was a clear indicator that “disability does not mean inability” (Author’s Note). Emmanuel’s trek across Ghana inspired many people to face their own challenges head on.

Even though the setting of this story takes place across the ocean, many students in the United States and in other countries can connect with the central themes of overcoming personal obstacles, being determined despite situational and societal barriers, understanding stereotypes and biases, and making a difference in the world. Because these themes are so prevalent in the book, the content becomes highly relevant to a great mass of readers. *Emmanuel's Dream* addresses critical topics, such as single-parent families, poverty, disability, and bullying that can perhaps resonate with students from diverse populations. While the author suggests this book for students who are aged four to eight, older groups can also relate to the content and themes of the text.

Emmanuel's Dream also proves to be an excellent instructional resource for teachers. For example, the book could serve as a mentor text that would allow students to work in pairs and discuss an obstacle they overcame. Afterward, each student could create a short passage to share each other’s story as well as produce an accompanying picture. The writings and pictures could then be showcased in a presentation format. Students could also do an exploration on the topic of living with a congenital abnormality in order to better understand this condition. After researching the topic, students could write about and share what they learned. Finally, students could write a letter to Emmanuel to let him know how his story inspired them to become an agent of change. The letter could then be mailed to Emanuel’s Educational Foundation and Sports Academy. The teacher could set up a video conferencing session that would allow for students to meet and speak to Emmanuel directly.

In closing, Thompson appropriately situates Emmanuel as a disabled but determined youngster, and later, a national hero. The book should inspire youth—especially those with physical disabilities—to follow their heart and conquer their dreams. The overall message is clear: anyone can make a difference if they are determined enough.

About the Author

Lakia M. Scott is an assistant professor of curriculum and instruction at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, where she teaches elementary literacy methods courses to preservice teachers. Her current research interests include creating and sustaining literacy programming for minoritized youth and increasing multicultural awareness and perspectives in diversity in teacher education programs. In her spare time, she enjoys family, traveling, reading children's novels, and mentoring adolescent teens. Her fondest moment as an educator has been to see her former student become a reading teacher. Her life mantra is: the greatest investment we can make is not in oneself, but in the life of another.