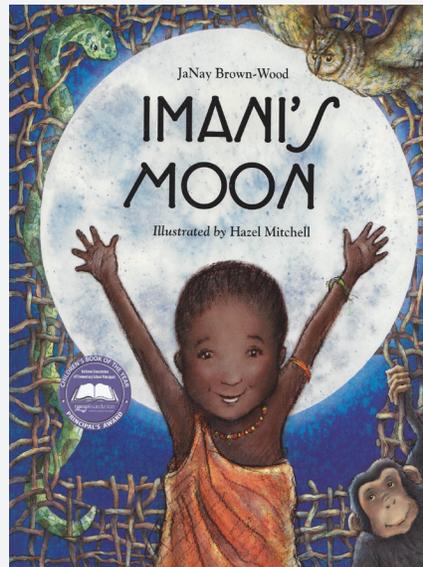


## Second Reaction: A Soaring Tale of Determinism

Brown-Wood, JaNay. *Imani's Moon*. Illus. Hazel Mitchell.  
Watertown, MA: Mackinac Island Press, 2014. Print.

Ann J. Koci



Imani is the smallest girl in her village, but she appears large as life in front of an even larger full moon on the cover of JaNay Brown-Wood's *Imani's Moon*. With her arms outstretched, her twinkling brown eyes, and a welcoming smile, she invites the reader to come to her village to hear her dreams of touching the moon. Hazel Mitchell's water color illustrations on the cover and throughout the book are playful and expressive. This is the story of Imani, a Maasai child who is taunted by the other children in the village because of her small size. Her mother comforts her with mythological tales at bedtime. One particular tale of Olapa, the fearless moon goddess, inspires Imani to touch the moon. After many failed attempts, Imani is able to reach her goal by performing *aduma*, the Maasai jumping dance, and is then able to tell her own story at the end—"The Tale of the Girl Who Touched the Moon" (Brown-Wood, unpagued).

I wanted to share this picture book with my eleven-year-old granddaughter, Lily, because of the lively nature of the illustrations and the mystical tone provided by the text, which gently persuades the reader to be self-confident and to believe in oneself. "It is my story, Mama," said Imani. "I am the girl who touched the moon and was welcomed by Olapa. I am the one who believed" (unpagued).

It was important for me to think ahead of open-ended questions I would ask Lily after we finished the story to ensure a discussion centered on her reactions. I remembered reading the article, “Building Empathy and Character: Children Reading and Responding to Literature” by Trudy Nelson, a retired fifth grade teacher. In that article, she asked her students to respond to three questions after reading self-selected books by Mildred Taylor. Those questions are:

1. Did anything in this story surprise you?
2. Do you think the events in this story could really happen? Explain.
3. Why do you think people are mean to each other when they look different from them? (qtd. in Henderson and May 125)

Lily’s and my discussion began with the cover. She noticed the animals, the little girl who looked excited, and the moon that might be important to the story. As we began to read, she guessed that the story took place in Africa because of the desertlike land—the huts instead of houses—and that Imani lost confidence in her ability to touch the moon after her first try.

When I asked if anything surprised her, she said that she didn’t think Imani would really touch the moon because, of course, it’s so high in the sky, but that she thought Imani was able to touch it at the end because she believed. She also noticed that the animals were taunting Imani, unlike in the fairy tales she knew of where the animals were nice to the girls, like Snow White and Cinderella.

We listed in two columns the things that could happen in the story and the things that couldn’t. She said some things that could happen were that Imani’s mama would tell her stories, that she could try to touch the moon but wouldn’t make it, and that kids can be mean. The things that couldn’t happen would be actually touching the moon, animals talking, visiting the moon goddess, and the moon rock glowing because the moon is a rock and it shines only because the sun lights it.

Lily believes that children are mean to each other when someone is smaller or taller, fatter or skinnier, too nice, too smart or too dumb, for the clothes they wear, and for hobbies they have, like not going outside to play (recess) and instead staying inside to play on their phones. She thought about why children chose to be mean and said it was because they probably didn’t feel good enough about themselves, or that they might just be mean. She said that there might be family problems or maybe they were made fun of by other people.

I shared with Lily that I could tell when she became engaged in the story. At the beginning, I noticed that her reading was choppy and hurried, but as she read further and became more fully engaged in the text and the illustrations, her reading became much smoother. By the end of the story, I also noticed that she was paying more attention to the illustrations. This is how I concluded that she liked the story, so I asked her why she liked it. She liked the moon goddess picture, the swirling of the moonbeam, and she liked Imani’s creation of the wings so she could fly. She also liked the message—to believe.

In conclusion, *Imani's Moon* is a picture book that incorporates illustrations with text to move the story along to a predictable but magical ending.

### **Works Cited**

Nelson, Trudy. "Building Empathy and Character: Children Reading and Responding to Literature." *Exploring Culturally Diverse Literature for Children and Adolescents*. Ed. Darwin Henderson and Jill May. New York: Pearson, 2005. 125. Print.

### **About the Author**

**Ann J. Koci** is a retired teacher, having taught in Tippecanoe County, Indiana; Houston, Texas; and at Purdue University. At the present time she is the editorial assistant for *First Opinions*, *Second Reactions* at Purdue University.