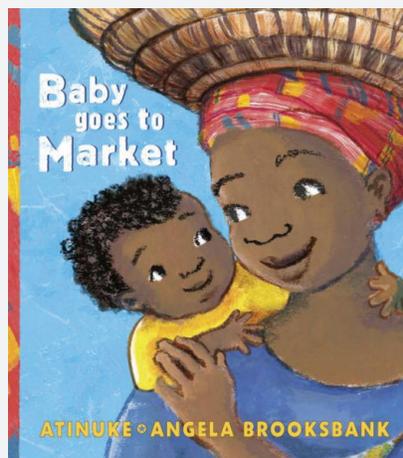


## **First Opinion: Manifestations of Mathematical Knowledge within a South Western Nigerian Market**

Atinuke. *Baby Goes to Market*. Illustrated by Angela Brooksbank, Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press, 2017. Print.

### *Elif Karslı Çalamak*



Baby goes to market with mama,  
Market is very crowded,  
Baby is very curious,  
And mathematics is everywhere!

Through a gentle sense of humor, Nigerian storyteller Atinuke tells the story of a baby and his mother shopping in a local West African market, portrayed beautifully with vibrant drawings and colorful patterns by Angela Brooksbank. The book nicely depicts routines in a market with certain cultural practices such as generosity and sense of community and shows how mathematical knowledge is intertwined with daily practices and embedded in cultural contexts.

The appealing image of a mother with a head basket and the baby strapped to her back, winding their way through the market with changing facial expressions, welcomes readers to each page. In the story, the mother does not realize different sellers share with the baby six bananas, then five juicy oranges, later four sugary chin-chin biscuits, followed by three chili peppers, and at the end, two pieces of coconut, as they walk around the various market counters and stalls. Each time, the baby eats one and puts the rest in the mother's head basket. At

the end, the mother finds out the baby was given all these treats but still does not know the baby has been eating the whole time. The story ends as the mother is trying to catch a taxi on their way back home, thinking the baby must be hungry. Young children would certainly enjoy the pattern of interaction throughout the book between the baby and each vendor, which is presented in a rhythmic language and repetitive expressions.

The book offers a wide range of explicit mathematics content with respect to number sense but also presents potential to be further mathematized. The story foregrounds numbers between one and six and introduces counting back from six as each vendor provides one less treat to baby. Parallel to this counting back practice, the story invites children to think about “subtracting one” as the baby eats one treat each time. Mathematical conversations at this point can be expanded to notions of cardinality and even subitizing. For example, by emphasizing the last number word to indicate the number of treats, children can be invited to count each set of treats one by one. Young children would also enjoy saying out loud how many treats they see before they actually count. The small sets of items with sharp colors and clear drawings such as chili peppers, corn, and oranges provide a context for such dialogue.

Measurement estimation is another relevant content which could be introduced to children through this story. Sacks of vegetables and grains, baskets of fruits, and bottles of palm oil could generate intriguing conversations about weight and comparisons of weight. The somewhat-hidden scale on page three could be a starting point for such discussions.

Overall, the book holds potential for critical mathematical conversations embedded in a picture of diversity. The story itself and the drawings reflect authenticity, for example, with a balanced number of women and men; people of all ages; both women and men working in the market; people in both traditional and less traditional clothes; both women and men taking care of children; different ways to carry and transport food with head baskets, paper bags and net market bags; and many methods of transportation with cars, buses, and motorbikes. Some of these images are foregrounded and explicit while some of them are smaller and in the background. When reading with children, it would be important to highlight such diversity to make it more visible and accessible to young children. In addition to this, one particular drawing of the baby when offered bananas could be thought of carefully. Such drawings might evoke the racist images circulating in public spaces because young children are very much aware of the portrayals of biases and prejudices with accompanying discourses around them. Depending on the age of children, this kind of possible resemblance to derogatory representations can be turned into critical conversations. Only then could we prevent feeding into pervasive stereotypical images and also assist children to grow as critical readers.

Mathematics teaching cannot be thought of as independent from cultural context. It even provides potential for social justice-oriented conversations. Along with mathematical learning and potential for dialogue about culture and diversity, *Atinuke's Baby goes to Market* offers a delightful reading and learning experience for children.

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### **About the Author**

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