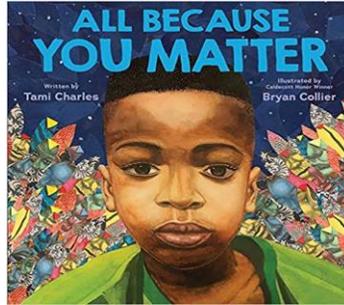


First Opinion: An Artistic Ode to Black, Indigenous, Children of Color: *All Because You Matter*

Charles, Tami. *All Because You Matter*. Illustrated by Bryan Collier. New York: Orchard Books of Scholastic Inc., 2020. Print.



Demetrice Smith-Mutegi

If 2020 has taught us nothing else, it has taught us that one day can change the rest of our lives. From the day that the World Health Organization declared coronavirus a pandemic, to the day we witnessed the murder of George Floyd, to the days and nights of protests and riots; last year was unprecedented, and our children were watching. Furthermore, our children have experienced first-hand what it is like to be separated from friends and teachers, to lose a close or distant family member, or to live in fear of disease or systemic racism, to name a few. *All Because You Matter* by Tami Charles presents a fresh take on the realistic experiences of some youth, especially youth of color, that artistically embraces their power, their resilience, and their existence, despite traumatic and unwelcomed events.

Charles opens the book with a definition of matter. She states, "...matter is all things that make up the universe: energy, stars, space..."(unpaged). As a teacher educator and former science teacher, my ears perked up. "Could this be a children's book about science?" I asked myself. She goes on to add, "If that's the case, then you, dear child, matter " (unpaged). This creative approach to introducing the audience (children) to the very technical and countable definition of matter intertwined with the uncountable understanding of the noun is only the beginning of this illustrative piece. She writes, "But in galaxies far away, it may seem that light

does not always reach lonely planets, covered moons, stars unseen as if matter no longer exists" (unpaged).

While I appreciate the artistic expression and imagery in this text, as a teacher educator and a parent, I see this as a valuable opportunity to help children distinguish between scientific references and the more technical role that these objects play outside of this text. For example, it is only until a child has a basic understanding of a galaxy, the nature of light, or the moons, that they will begin to see the magnitude of their mattering. Moreover, metaphors and similes presented in a rhythmic-like fashion continue to guide the fluctuation between scientific mentions and references of emotion and worth throughout the piece. This can be seen when she asks, "Did you know that you are the earth?" (unpaged). The aforementioned metaphor represents the audience's critical significance to the universe.

The author-illustrator team aims to uplift and empower the assumed powerless. This can be seen through Charles's alluding to historical legacies founded and created by ancestors of the Black community and the illustrator's images of love represented through illustrations of in-tact Black families, mothers, fathers, and grandparents. Further, the author mentions the names of Black boys and men murdered unjustly: "Trayvon, Tamir, Philando" to emphasize the relevancy and importance of helping Black children see that they matter, and the slain mattered, too.

At first glance, I took this as a work that was largely representative of Black children. However, after reading the text and the author's note, I reframed my thinking. While the vibrant, original illustrations represent Black people and Black culture (see illustrator's last photo depicting *Black Lives Matter*), the author makes several subtle BIPOC references through her use of colloquial language spoken by Latino and Filipino communities, such as terms like *mamá*, *papá*, *mahal kita*, *montañas*, and *barrios*. Additionally, she also mentions names, such as Hossam, Uzoamaka, and Yordenis—all names with diverse origins. Interestingly, the incorporation of non-Black cultures is not apparent until the middle of the book. This integration could serve as an opportunity for enhancing cultural knowledge for some or a point of confusion for others.

In almost every sense, this book is a tribute to every little Black, Indigenous and child of color out there who has ever doubted their worth, who has been consistently exposed to negative images of themselves, who is struggling with self-confidence, who wants to know that someone loves them, who needs to know that they come from greatness and who is eager to know that

they are important in this universe, despite what they see. While it is unfortunate that any child would ever have to wonder if they mattered, Charles makes it loud and clear that they do. She appropriately closes the text with the words: "You mattered. They mattered. We matter... and always will" (unpaged).

Works Cited

Charles, Tami. *All Because You Matter*. Illustrated by Bryan Collier. New York: Orchard Books of Scholastic Inc., 2020. Print.

About the Author

Demetrice Smith-Mutegi is an assistant professor of education at Marian University in Indianapolis, Indiana, where she teaches foundational courses to P-12 preservice teachers and science methods courses to elementary preservice teachers. Her current research interests revolve around studying the motivations and experiences of Black students as it relates to STEM and determining which factors impact the career trajectory of Black STEM teachers. Long term, Demetrice aims to improve the conditions of STEM learning for all children through the engagement of best practices, as well as diversify the field of STEM teaching. As parents to a five-year-old, Demetrice and her husband spends lots of time engaging in good children's literature.