



Monthly Featured Book

Presented by ADL's Education Department

About the Monthly Featured Book: This collection of featured books is from Books Matter™: The Best Kid Lit on Bias, Diversity and Social Justice. The books teach about bias and prejudice, promote respect for diversity, encourage social action and reinforce themes addressed in education programs of **A World of Difference® Institute**, ADL's international anti-bias education and diversity training provider. For educators, adult family members and other caregivers of children, reading the books listed on this site with your children and incorporating them into instruction are excellent ways to talk about these important concepts at home and in the classroom.

Swim Team

Author: Johnnie Christmas

Bree can't wait for her first day at her new middle school, home to the Mighty Manatees—until she's stuck with the only elective that fits her schedule, the dreaded Swim 101. The thought of swimming makes Bree more than a little queasy, yet she's forced to dive headfirst into one of her greatest fears. Lucky for her, Etta, an elderly occupant of her apartment building and former swim team captain, is willing to help. With Etta's training and a lot of hard work, Bree suddenly finds her swim-crazed community counting on her to turn the school's failing team around. But that's easier said than done, especially when their rival, the prestigious Holyoke Prep, has everything they need to leave the Mighty Manatees in their wake. Can Bree defy the odds and guide her team to a state championship, or have the Manatees swum their last lap—for good?



ISBN: 978- 0063056763
Year Published: 2022

Publisher: HarperAlley
Age Range: 8-12

Book Themes

Race, Discrimination and Swimming, History, Stereotypes, Teamwork, Friendship, Perseverance

Key Words

Discuss and define the words below with students prior to reading the book. Rather than focus on students' retention of all the words, make sure they understand the words enough to follow the story and remind students of the words' meanings as they come up in the book. You can also post the words and point out when they appear in the story. For definitions that are differentiated for young children, see ADL's **Education Glossary Terms**.

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|------------------|---------------|--------------|------------------|-------------------|
| ■ access | ■ elective | ■ fancy | ■ overthink | ■ under-resourced |
| ■ complicated | ■ embarrassed | ■ fluke | ■ professionally | ■ unpredictable |
| ■ disappointing | ■ endurance | ■ generation | ■ routine | ■ wealthy |
| ■ discrimination | ■ excuses | ■ medley | ■ segregated | |
| ■ dominates | ■ infiltrate | ■ nervous | ■ self-doubt | |
| ■ doomed | ■ familiar | ■ outmatched | ■ snobs | |

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Discussion Questions

If the students read the book in small groups or as a whole class, ask discussion questions throughout their reading in order to check comprehension and engage them on a deeper level. Some of these questions can also be used as writing prompts. When students have finished the book, choose from these questions to guide a group discussion:

- What is the book about? What happens in the story?
- When you first meet some of the characters (Bree, Clara, Ms. Etta, Dad, Keisha), what are they like? How are they different by the end of the story? What causes these characters to change and evolve throughout the story?
- How do Bree and her dad feel about moving to Florida? Why do you think Bree's dad tells her about the "butterfly effect" in the car ride to Florida? What does the "butterfly effect" mean to you?
- What happens when Bree doesn't get her first, second or even third choice for an elective? How does she feel and what does she do when she is forced has to take swimming as an elective? Have you ever been in a situation where you didn't get your top choices for something? How did you feel and what did you do?
- What examples of teasing, name-calling and bullying do you see taking place in the book? (e.g., Tinsley makes fun of Humberto's clothes, she calls Bree "kiddie pool," etc.) How do the characters react to this behavior?
- What is it like when Ms. Etta teaches Bree how to swim? How does Bree feel? How does Bree's swimming improve over time? Has this ever happened to you when you are learning something new?
- When Bree says to Ms. Etta, "But... Black people aren't good at swimming?" what thoughts came to mind? How does Ms. Etta's respond? Why do you think Ms. Etta shares some of the history of swimming and racial discrimination with Bree at that moment?
- How does understanding the history of race, swimming and discrimination impact how Bree sees and experiences swimming in current times?
- What did you learn about the history of swimming, race and discrimination? Why do you think the author decided to make this history part of the book?
- What happens when Bree learns to swim and starts to like the pool? What does Bree mean when she says, "I started to understand what Ms. Etta meant about how positive swimming culture is"?
- Are there hobbies or other activities in your life you think about as having a "positive culture?" What are the characteristics of this positive culture? What makes it a positive culture? What impacts (positively or negatively) a positive culture? Please explain.
- Why does Bree decide to join the swim team? What worries and doubts does she have about being a member of the swim team? How does she face those doubts?
- What are some of the positive aspects of being a team that are shown in the book? What are some of the negative or challenging aspects of being on a team? What have your experiences with teamwork been like?
- Do you notice anything different about how Bree's team's coach treats their teammates and how the Holyoke Prep coach treats their teammates? What do you notice? What do you wonder about that difference?

- How does Bree feel about the fact that her dad hasn't come to any of her meets? When she asks him about it, what does he say?
- What does Bree do when she feels like her team is not acting like a team? Have you ever felt that way? How does this get resolved?
- What does Bree learn about Ms. Etta and her team from fifty years ago? What happened between the four "swim sisters?" What kind of discrimination did they face back then? What happened to the swim sisters as a team when they faced discrimination? How did they resolve those differences decades later?
- Did you notice throughout the book that some of Bree's thought bubbles are thickly outlined in black? What kind of thoughts do they represent? Do you ever have thoughts like this and how do you deal with them?
- What is your favorite, most memorable or most impactful scene(s) from the book and why?
- How did you feel when the book ends? What do you think might happen next, if the story were to continue?
- Why do you think the author decided to make this story a graphic novel? What are the advantages and disadvantages of using this genre?
- If you are going to recommend this book to someone, how would you summarize its central theme or message?
- What did you learn by reading this book?

Extension Activities

Below are activities that can be done with students in order to extend the learning from the book.

1. Reader's Response Writing Activities

Write and draw the next few pages of the book: Elicit or share a quick summary of the last few pages of the book including the following: the Mighty Manatees win the championship, the four original "swim sisters" from 50 years ago reunite, the Holyoke Prep swimmers stand up to their coach who calls them "losers," Clara plans to go to Holyoke Prep but vows she and Bree will remain best friends, and Bree teaches her dad how to swim. Engage students in a discussion by asking: *What do you think will happen next? What do you think happens to the Mighty Manatees? Does Clara's dad learn how to swim? Are Clara and Bree still best friends? Have students then write and draw (using the graphic novel style of the book) the next few pages based on what they think will happen next. When completed, invite students to share their additional pages with the class. You can also put all these pages together into a new book and share with families and the school community.*

Diary entries of a character: Have students select one of the main characters of the book; they can select a favorite character or a character they find interesting, compelling or complex. Among the main characters are Bree, Bree's dad, Clara, Keisha, Ms. Etta, Coach Pinella, or Humberto. Then have students write a collection of diary entries for the chosen character, writing 5–8 diary entries that the character might have kept before, during or after the book's events. Remind students that the character's thoughts and feelings are very important in a diary as well as their reaction to day-to-day events and other activities that take place throughout the book. Invite students to focus on their character's perspective using the following questions: *How do they observe the events of the story? What assumptions do they make about other characters they interact with? What thoughts might they have that they wouldn't want to share with others, but share in their diary? What are their wishes and hopes? What are their fears?* You may choose to have students engage in prewriting discussions with a partner about their character in order to get their ideas out. After students have completed the diary entries, have them share their writing with the class and consider creating an online collection of all the diary entries.

Text to self: Brainstorm some of the situations that happened in the book that caused conflict (internal or external) for the main characters. Examples include: when Bree didn't get the elective (math puzzles) or her other top choices so she is forced to take swimming; when Clara's mom tells Clara that she will be attending Holyoke Prep next year; when Bree quits the team; when the team has to welcome Keisha onto their team. Based upon a specific situation from the story, have students share (in writing) a story or situation that they faced that was similar to what the character in the book experienced. You can begin this activity by having students first talk with another student (turn and talk with a partner) and then have them write the story and how it relates to the situation in the book. In their writing, they can share what happened, what impact it had on them, what impact it had on others, what they said or did, whether it ended or resolved the way they wanted, and whether (if applicable) they would do something different next time. Share these essays with the class.

2. Race, Swimming and Segregation

Start this discussion by asking students: *From the book, what did you learn about race, racism, segregation and the history of Black people and swimming?* Read aloud or have students re-read pages 78-84. Remind students that Bree says to Ms. Etta, "But... Black people aren't good at swimming." Bree wonders this because she, many of her friends and her dad can't swim. Ms. Etta then shares (on pages 80-84) a history of Black people, swimming, pools and discrimination. Elicit/explain that there used to be laws in place that prevented Black people from swimming in beaches, lakes and swimming pools. Eventually, because Black people and others fought for their rights, these laws changed. However, even though the laws changed, there were very few pools in Black neighborhoods and when Black people went to public pools in other neighborhoods, they often faced discrimination, which happened to Ms. Etta when she was a child (see pages 202-205). Ms. Etta explains, "Not knowing how to swim is not your fault, Bree." Ask students to share their thoughts about how the author/illustrator addresses this important topic as part of this graphic novel. With students, brainstorm a list of other issues of bias, discrimination or injustice in history. Then, invite students to tell that story, as author/illustrator Johnnie Christmas does, through one panel or a few panels that might be part of a larger graphic novel or a standalone piece. Students can first do research and plan out what they want to say and then use elements of a graphic novel/comic (character, frame, lettering, pictures, captions, speech and thought balloons, special effect sounds) to create a few panels to share what they learned in an engaging way. After completing their panels, have students share with each other and display in the classroom or school.

(Note: See the back page of the book for resources to learn more about this history.)

3. Teamwork and Collaboration

A major theme in the book is teamwork and collaboration. With students, define collaboration as "to work with another person or group in order to achieve or do something." Ask: *How was teamwork or collaboration addressed in the book? What are some examples of people working together to achieve or do something?* (Some examples of teamwork include cheering on teammates, teaching teammates new skills, helping to boost their confidence, the relay medley, giving advice, supporting each other). Then ask students: *What are some experiences you've had with collaboration or teamwork?* Record their responses on the board/smart board which can include participating on team sports, working on a project, dancing or working on a play or skit together, making a meal with others, being in a club, etc. After brainstorming, have students talk in pairs or triads and discuss what's positive and helpful about collaboration and what's difficult or challenging about collaboration. After discussing, share some of what was discussed in small groups with the whole class. Engage the whole class in brainstorming the characteristics of a positive team culture and invite students to reflect on how they can contribute to that positive team culture in the teams or groups for which they participate.

Curriculum Resources

Civil Rights Act of 1964: 7 Ways to Commemorate the Anniversary <https://www.adl.org/resources/lesson-plan/civil-rights-act-1964-7-ways-commemorate-anniversary>

Lonnie Chavis of 'This Is Us' Writes about Racism <https://www.adl.org/resources/lesson-plan/lonnie-chavis-us-writes-about-racism>

Mo'Ne Davis and Gender Stereotypes <https://www.adl.org/resources/lesson-plan/mone-davis-and-gender-stereotypes>

What is the Soul Cap and Why Was it Rejected for Olympic Use? <https://www.adl.org/resources/lesson-plan/what-soul-cap-and-why-was-it-rejected-olympic-use>

Websites

6 Ways to be an Ally <https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/6-ways-to-be-an-ally-en-espanol>

Civil Rights Movement <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounder/civil-rights-movement>

Swimming Pools and Segregation: A Long History <https://www.adl.org/resources/blog/swimming-pools-and-segregation-long-history>

Children's Books

Below are links to lists of recommended anti-bias and multicultural books for the indicated category:

Children's Books about People, Identity and Culture <https://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?f%5B0%5D=topic%3A1586>

Children's Books about Race and Racism <https://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?f%5B0%5D=topic%3A1580>