



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 parents, guardians and family members, reading the books listed on this site with your children and integrating the concepts into your interactions with them is an excellent way to help children grapple with and learn about these important principles.



Swim Team

Author: Johnnie Christmas

Age Range: 8-12

Year Published: 2022

Book Themes

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

About the Book

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?

Conversation Starters

Whether you read the book along with your child or your child reads it on their own and you discuss it later, you can use these open-ended questions to deepen the conversation. Remembering not to judge their responses, listen thoughtfully and engage in a give-and-take will help them expand upon their understanding of the book and its themes.

- What happens in the book? What are your biggest takeaways?
- After Bree doesn't get her first, second or third choice elective, how does she feel and what does she do? Has something like that ever happened to you? How did you react?
- What are some examples of the characters working together positively? What is the impact on the team? What are some examples of the characters not working as a team? What is the impact? What lessons can you learn from this?
- After swimming lessons with Ms. Etta, Bree starts to really like swimming. 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 in this way? Tell me more.
- Why do you think Ms. Etta shares some of the history of swimming and racial discrimination with Bree? What did you learn that you didn't know before? What more do you want to know?
- How do you think understanding the history of race, swimming and discrimination impacts how Bree thinks and feels about swimming today? How did learning about this history affect your thoughts, feelings and perspective?
- In the book, we see that some of Bree's thought bubbles are thickly outlined in black. What kind of thoughts are they? Do you ever have thoughts like this, and how do you deal with them?
- What is your favorite, most impactful, or most memorable part or scene in the book?
- How did you feel when the book ends? What do you think will happen next for Bree, her dad, Ms. Etta and Clara?
- Why do you think the author wrote this book as a graphic novel? What is his message?

Talking Points

Below are some important considerations to highlight in order to make this a learning opportunity for your child and your family

1. Teamwork

A major theme in the book is teamwork and collaboration. The book is called *Swim Team* and it focuses a great deal on how the Manatees swim team works together to achieve their ultimate goal. The book also explores what happens when they don't work together as a team. Elicit some examples from the book about how the Manatees engaged in teamwork (e.g., cheering on teammates, teaching teammates new skills, helping to boost their confidence, the relay medley, giving advice, supporting each other). Talk with your child about their thoughts and feelings about teamwork and collaboration. Share examples from your own life when you worked with others to achieve or do something, and also when that was difficult. Ask them for examples from their own life, which could include things like participating in team sports, working on a project, dancing or working on a play or skit together, making a meal with others, being in a club. You can share that sometimes it can be hard to be on a team and support each other, as Bree found out from her swim team. Talk with them about what's positive and helpful about collaboration and what's difficult or challenging about collaboration and continue to draw on examples from your own life as well as their experiences.

2. History of Race, Swimming and Discrimination

Talk with your child about what they learned from the book about the history of race, swimming and discrimination. You can re-read pages 78-84 where the idea is introduced when 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. Talk with your child about what they learned from that section and 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, the 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." Talk with your child about what discrimination is, defined as: "Unfair treatment of one person or group of people because of the person or group's identity (e.g., race, gender, ability, religion, culture, etc.)." Ask your child about other examples of bias and discrimination that they've learned about or experienced. Talk with them about how in the past and in current times, people have worked together to fight for equity and fair treatment for all. You can also share with them an example of an assumption or stereotype you previously had (like Bree had about Black people and swimming) and how you learned something which helped you see that assumption/stereotype was wrong.

3. Learning Something New

In the beginning of the book, Bree doesn't know how to swim and she doesn't want to learn. Her dad doesn't know how to swim either. Because Bree doesn't get her first, second or third choice for an elective, she is forced to take swim class as an elective. After a lot of struggles about this (i.e., she is very worried, pretends to be sick and attempts to skip class), Bree decides she needs to learn how to swim. Ms. Etta teaches her and eventually Bree even joins the swim team. Talk with your child about what it is like for Bree to learn something new and all the different feelings she has about learning something new, especially for an activity she is fearful about. Share your own experiences with learning something new and ask your child about their experiences and feelings about learning something new. You can share that when people learn new things, they may end up being really good at them just like Bree ended up being great at swimming. Or they may be just okay at those new skills or hobbies, and that's okay too if they enjoy the activity. Learning new things and learning about new people and experiences is an important part of the world and connecting with others.

Other Books You Might Like



El Deafo <https://www.adl.org/el-deafo>



March <https://www.adl.org/march-book-one>



New Kid <https://www.adl.org/new-kid>



When Stars are Scattered <https://www.adl.org/when-stars-are-scattered>

ADL Additional Resources

The following are curriculum and other resources on allyship, race and racism and civil rights.

- Six Simple Ways <https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/be-an-ally-six-simple-ways>
- 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>
- 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>
- Civil Rights Movement <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgroundunder/civil-rights-movement>
- Lonnie Chavis of 'This is Us' Writes about Racism <https://www.adl.org/resources/lesson-plan/lonnie-chavis-us-writes-about-racism>
- Swimming Pools, and Segregation: A Long History <https://www.adl.org/resources/blog/swimming-pools-and-segregation-long-history>
- Table Talk: Family Conversations about Current Events <https://www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/table-talk>
- Who Am I? Identity Poems https://www.adl.org/resources/lesson-plan/who-am-i-identity-poems?gclid=CjwKC AiA3KefBhByEiwAi2LDHJ81XD9HKHICRDiy6IR0vjYag0d4tudxFIRalzpe5XEEEf_LeDap5BoCxGgQAvD_BwE