



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.

BIG

Vashti Harrison (Author and Illustrator)

This book traces a child's journey to self-love and shows the power of words to both hurt and heal. With spare text and exquisite illustrations, this emotional exploration of being big in a world that prizes small is a tender portrayal of how you can stand out and feel invisible at the same time.

ISBN: 9780316353229

Publisher: Little, Brown Books for Young Readers

Year Published: 2023

Age Range: 4-8

Book Themes

Weightism and Sizeism, Self-Esteem, Teasing, Name-Calling and Bullying, Power of Words

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](#).

- adults
- advice
- clearly
- dreams
- exposed
- hurt
- invisible
- judged
- omg
- recital
- space
- stung
- understood



Note to Teacher:

This book is about weightism and sizeism, which is very common in schools and among young people. The National Education Association's (NEA) report on size discrimination says, "For students (targeted by weightism) the school experience is one of ongoing prejudice, unnoticed discrimination, and almost constant harassment. From nursery school through college, students experience ostracism, discouragement, and sometimes violence." According to the [Centers for Disease Control](#), approximately one in three overweight girls and one in four overweight boys report being teased by peers at school, and peers regard overweight children as undesirable playmates.

As you consider reading this book together, it is important to reflect on and consider that you may have students in your classroom who have been the target of bullying, name-calling, body shaming, bias and discrimination due to weightism or sizeism. Be prepared and sensitive to those students, considering the extent to which you have already discussed these issues in your classroom, the severity of the bias and bullying and your thoughts about how those students may feel about talking about this issue. Some students may feel relieved to have this conversation and others may feel embarrassed or upset. If you haven't already, be sure to **establish a safe learning environment** that includes creating group guidelines. Prior to reading the book, it may also be helpful to do some self-reflection about weightism, noticing potential assumptions, preconceived notions or strong feelings related to body size and weight so as not to apply those thoughts and feelings to children. You also may want to tell your students in advance about the book to give them an opportunity to talk with you privately about concerns they may have. Read the Author's Note in the back of the book to explore the author's thoughts and experiences about weightism.]

Discussion Questions

Before reading the book aloud, ask some or all of these pre-reading questions:

- Describe the cover of the book. Who and what do you see?
- Why do you think the book is called *Big*?
- What do you think the book will be about?

As you read the book aloud, ask a few discussion questions periodically throughout reading to check for comprehension and keep the students engaged. Below are some sample questions that correlate to specific page numbers:

- What is happening to the girl on this page? (Page 11)
- What role does the girl play in the recital? (Page 22)
- How does the girl feel now? How do you know? (Page 43)

After reading the book aloud, engage students in a discussion by asking some or all of the following discussion questions:

- What happens in the story?
- When the girl was a baby and toddler, what was she like?
- What activities does the girl like to do?

- What words are used to describe the girl in the beginning of the book? What do those words mean?
- Why do you think other people called the girl names?
- How does the girl feel when she's being called those words/names? How do you know?
- What kind of "advice" (an opinion or suggestion) do different people offer to the girl? How does that advice make her feel?
- In the book, it says "One day she finally let it all out..." How does the girl "let it out?"
- Have you ever wanted to let it out? What happened and how did you feel? How did you let it out?
- What does the girl do to see her way out? How do you think that makes her feel?
- What does the girl say when others continue to put her down or say they want to help her "change?"
- How did you feel as you were reading the book? What are some words to describe your feelings?
- Why do you think the author/illustrator wrote this book? What do you think the author is trying to say to her readers?
- How did you feel when the book ended?
- Why do you think the author called the book *Big*?

Extension Activities

Below are activities for students that can extend learning from the book.

1. Most Impactful or Memorable Scene

Ask students: *What part of the book did you find memorable, unforgettable, important or impactful?* With students, brainstorm a list of scenes from the book that students liked or found important or memorable (e.g., when the girl is a baby, when the girl is dancing, when the girl is teased and bullied when she's on the swing, when the girl starts to feel "not herself" and "judged," when the girl makes more space for herself, when the girl gives the words back to those who hurt her). After compiling a list of scenes, have students select a scene that they found memorable, unforgettable, important or impactful. Then have them turn and talk with someone sitting nearby and share the part they chose and explain why it was memorable or important to them. Based on their selected scene, have students draw a picture of that scene. For students who are able to write, invite them to also write words or sentences that describe the scene or words the characters are saying. For students not yet writing, you can write the words for them. Create a new book with all of the students' drawings together.

(Note: Encourage students to not unnecessarily repeat hurtful words during this activity.)

2. Name-Calling, Bullying and Acting as an Ally

Ask students: *What is name-calling? What is bullying?* Explain and elicit definitions as follows:

Name Calling: Using words to hurt or be mean to someone or a group.

Bullying: When a person or a group behaves in ways—on purpose and over and over—that make someone feel hurt, afraid or embarrassed.

Ask students: *How does the girl feel when she experiences name-calling and bullying?* (Some examples: she is called names, she is laughed at, others tell her that she's "too big" to play on the swing, she's told the tutu she's wearing is "no good," she's told she's being too serious or it was just a "joke." While talking about these examples, you can go back to those pages and point them out.) Elicit that the name-calling and bullying that is happening to the girl is based on prejudice about her appearance and specifically her size. Share with students that in bullying situations, there are several roles that people can play (or ways people can behave), including acting as an ally. Elicit/explain that an ally is "someone who helps or stands up for someone who is being bullied or the target of prejudice." Ask students: *How could you (or others) act as an ally to the girl in the book?* Brainstorm ideas, and then have them draw a picture of them acting as an ally to the girl, including what specifically they would do or say. For older students, have them write a short essay of what they would do or say to act as an ally.

3. Power of Words to Hurt, Help and Heal

Ask students: *How are words that describe the girl used in the book?* Elicit/explain that in the beginning of the book, the girl uses words to describe herself (e.g., caring, considerate, creative, free, fun, graceful, nimble, smart). Then, when she's on the swing, we see others calling her names and using hurtful words. Then at the end, we see the girl again using words to describe herself (e.g., compassionate, creative, funny, gentle, good, imaginative, kind, smart, sweet). Write the positive/helpful words on the board/smart board and elicit definitions for some or all of the words. Ask: *How do these words, at different points in the book, make the girl feel? How are these words powerful, important or meaningful?* You can explain that these words and words in general have the power to make people feel good or bad about themselves. Ask (either ask as a group or have students turn and talk with someone nearby): *Has a word ever been used that made you feel good or bad? What happened and how did you feel?* Then have students write their name in the middle of a piece of construction paper, putting a circle around it. Invite them to write words about themselves to describe themselves. Prior to doing this, you can create a collection of words that describe personality traits from which to choose, an online list of personality words, or use your classroom's word wall if you have one. Have students create their word web and then share with others in the class. Then, as a closing, invite children to complete this sentence: "Words have the power to _____."

ADL Resources

The following are curriculum and other educational resources on weightism/sizeism, identity, and name-calling and bullying.

Curriculum Resources

Bellen Woodard, Identity and "Crayon Activism" <https://www.adl.org/resources/lesson-plan/bellen-woodard-identity-and-crayon-activism>

Identity-Based Bullying <https://www.adl.org/resources/lesson-plan/identity-based-bullying>

Starfish by Lisa Fipps: Educator Discussion Guide <https://www.adl.org/starfish>

What is Weight Bias? <https://www.adl.org/resources/lesson-plan/what-weight-bias>

Websites

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

National Bullying Prevention Month Resources <https://www.adl.org/resources/tools-and-strategies/national-bullying-prevention-month>

Safe and Inclusive Schools for All <https://www.adl.org/resources/tools-and-strategies/safe-and-inclusive-schools-all>

What Bullying Is and Is Not <https://www.adl.org/resources/tools-and-strategies/what-bullying-and-not-en-espanol>

Children's Books

Books about Bullying and Cyberbullying <https://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?f%5B0%5D=topic%3A7238>

Books about Size Bias <https://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?f%5B0%5D=topic%3A1603>