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When you look in a mirror, who do you see?

A boy? A girl?

A son? A daughter?

A runner? A dancer?

Whoever and whatever you see—

just put out your fist and give yourself an "I am" BAM!

This jumping, jazzy, joyful picture book by the award-winning team of Walter Dean and Christopher Myers celebrates every child, and every thing that child can be.

Looking Like Me Details

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Betsy says

Says the parent to the librarian, "I need something for my child to improve their self-esteem." Uh-huh. Fine. Self-esteem. That's the kind of topic that inspires the worst possible books for kids, you know. Cute forest animals who learn about sharing and small classroom dramas about "being yourself." If an author goes out there and says, "I'm going to write a book about self-esteem" they may find it near impossible to do well. Books of that sort have to come from someplace deep inside, or else they end up sounding like a novelization of a *Barney the Dinosaur* episode. So the next time a parent comes up to me and repeats that request, I'm going to be ready. My reference desk is situated a mere two and a half feet from the poetry shelves. I will look them in the eye, push my chair to the right, and pluck *Looking Like Me* by Walter Dean & Chris Myers out of the J811 Myers section. And if they start in with the "I don't know if I want poetry" nonsense, I shall explain that this is the best of the best. A combination of text and image so far and above the usual schlock that they simply have no choice. They must take it. And I will say this with the confidence that is born of knowing that you are 100% right.

"I looked in the mirror and what did I see? / A real handsome dude looking just like me." Two handsome dudes, father and son, come together to write a book of poetry about a kid who has all kinds of identities. He's a son and a brother. A poet and a runner. "I'm a city child. / I love the dizzy heights, / the concrete, the steel, / the bright neon lights." He's a dancer and a dreamer. This kid is all sorts of things. Set against Christopher Myers' eye-popping paper and photographic collages, we see how many people one person can be.

I don't actually know the complete story behind *Looking Like Me*. As near as I can figure, though, it was something like this: Under normal circumstances picture book poetry titles are written first, illustrated second. That's how Myers, father and son, did *Harlem* and *Blues Journey* and such. *Looking Like Me* was completely different. First, Chris Myers made the art for one project and Walter Dean Myers wrote the poem for another. Then some genius somewhere thought to put the two together and by gum, it worked! That's no mean feat. To find a way to make a picture of a three-headed dude wearing white earmuffs make sense in the context of a story that was written for an entirely different purpose takes equal amounts of skill and luck.

It's probably too late to claim that this is the first instance of fist bumping in a children's book. I'm gonna go out on a limb, though, and claim that it IS the first instance of fist-bumping in a children's work of poetry put out by a major publisher. That's hardly the biggest innovation the book's text supports, though. Walter Dean Myers is the kind of guy who basically exudes depth and meaning every time he breathes. Which is great, of course, but it's nice to see him doing something a little lighter here. The book feels happy. Bouncy even. The first line sets the tone, and everything after that is just jocular. "Grandma's rings and bangles gave such a noisy BAM! / They were really celebrating the kind of guy I am."

Now the art is an interesting combination of techniques. Flip to the publication page and not a word is breathed about Chris and his style. Here are a couple of things we do know. The cover is a mix of cut paper and an enlarged microscopic image. Recently Chris has been playing around with microscopes. He's blown up slides of things like tree bark, enlarged them, and the vibrant colors. Inside the book are photographs, physical objects, and cut paper silhouettes of varying colors that over and underlap one another. Faces exist with cut out eyes. Mouths put out long house-covered tongues or open to reveal the necks of other mouths with other necks. It could be nightmarish if placed with the right text, but here it's a gentle surrealism. Walter takes away the dark elements, so that the book has a dreamlike rather than nightmarish quality to it.

And I like the font. Sorry. That's a relatively dull way to end a review of a book of this sort, but it's true. I like it. That and the words, colors, energy, tone, and message, of course. Little things like that. On the surface it's a book about loving who you are, but dig a little deeper and you'll find a visual stimulant and unapologetic shout of joy. This is a book that enjoys being a book. Read it with a smile on your face. You can bet plenty of kids will.

Ages 4-8.

Inge says

Is it sacrilegious to feel this way about a Walter Dean Myers book? The opening lines are charming: "I looked in the mirror and what did I see? A real handsome dude just looking at me". But it's real down-hill from there.

The collage aspects have some interesting and appealing components (especially the photos of real children and NYC locations), but the mixture of paper collage and actual photographs is grating to the eye, and headache inducing to boot. Perhaps if they were integrated differently, the effect would be more alluring and less repelling.

The repetition of the line "I gave it a bam!" has real read aloud appeal. However, lines that describe the narrator's grandmother's jewelry celebrating his existence come off as saccharine and forced. The encouragement to "have yourself an "I am" jam" is cheesy beyond belief.

I appreciate the intention of this book, but the execution was way off.

Robyn Carroll says

Jeremy is more than just a boy, he's a son, a brother, an artist, a runner, and a writer. Jeremy fills so many roles and has several things that make up his identity. This book promotes a positive self image for students who may be struggling with a good self image. I would you use this book as a read aloud to my future students on the beginning of the school year to remind them how special and valuable they really are. While the illustrations don't go with the plot of the story, it is still beautiful and full of life. The illustrations that fill book show birds in the background, a set of heads traveling in a circle, a human figure in a boxing ring. These illustrations that I just mentioned aren't all of the illustrations but a few of them. The front cover of the book has a green and red background with a purple child looking up towards the title of the book, which gives a sense to the reader, who the main character of the book is. The back of the book shows a flashlight shining on a blue human being which doesn't relate to the book at all, but is still neat.

Josiah says

This book has great rhythm, and moves along at a nice pace. The text is highly descriptive and even beautiful at times. Walter Dean Myers brings his unique writing touch to the story, and Christopher Myers's illustrations are intriguing.

Looking Like Me doesn't have a straightforward plot, but its primary focus is the rhythm and style of the writing, celebrating the diversity within the human community without emphasizing particular characters. I would give this book one and a half stars.

Guen says

My 2-year-old daughter calls this the "Give it a Bam" book; she and I both really enjoy it. My daughter bams my fist every time we read the repeated phrase "I put out my fist, (s)he gave it a bam". She loves the interactive fist bammimg. She also loves the illustrations. They are done in a collage effect with photographs and cut-outs of African-American people in various bright colors. Some of the pictures could be viewed as disturbing, but they do not disturb my daughter; she seems to delight in the bright colors and the unique, creative images. She especially loves the cut-out of the three-headed person and the person who has eyes all over his torso. My 5-year-old son also enjoys this book.

The text is a very rhythmic lyrical poem that can pull you right into the life of a young, hip, Harlem man. Not being city people ourselves, I love the city flavor that the text and the illustrations provide. You can also feel the glow of this young man's self-pride as you read his self-affirming poem. Then he challenges the reader to create his/her own "I am, Jam" at the close of the book. This will be our go-to book for a self-confidence boost. This book is great for children in preschool and grade school.

School Library Journal Best Books: 2009

Aidalys Nazario says

I liked this book because its message is to be who you are and no one can tell you how many things you can be. I do not like the book because the illustrations are too much, I feel like they are all over the place and I am not sure if it will keep children interested. It might be a good book for older children maybe 2nd to 3rd graders.

Dinah says

This book is fabolous.

Dione Basseri says

No one is ever a simple, single-definition person, and this book make a point to describe some of the many things that can make up who you are. Child, dancer, writer, sibling, runner, dreamer. And so many other things. Such an important message in a day where one terrible event can lead to the media labeling someone as just a "Black man," rather than all the things they are.

Race isn't really brought up in this book, but Walter Dean Myers and Christopher Myers both focus in their other works on the Black experience, and there's plenty in this book to identify the narrator as Black.

However, that's not one of this definitions. And that is so important. Because the Myers's show that his race ISN'T the first detail, or even in the top ten details. It's not denied, but there are so many other things about the narrator that the narrator celebrates.

This is a great intro to a unit on exploring your self. Read this to your class, and then have your students list all the things that make up who they are. It's less suited to a library story time, as there isn't much call for homework after one of those. And for the household, I think it's a good fit for most homes, since it really can give your child more confidence, but if you're skeptical, your local library should hold a copy for a trial run.

Ka'leneReads says

Cute Read

Meghan says

I loved the style to this book. This story could be read almost as a rap or song and it very powerful. I think this is would be a great book for second- fifth grade only because it might be hard for younger children to understand the message but with teacher guidance I think it would be great! However, The illustrations are creative and imaginative. This would be a great story to have your students do a project or activity on who they are and what makes them the person that they are. It would be a great way to establish community in your classroom. Students would be able to get to know each other and tell each other things they think make them the person they are. Students could re-create their "I AM JAM". I LOVE this book because there are so many things teachers could do with this poem. I would highly recommend to any teacher who wants to work on classroom community and self-esteem!

Kyle says

I read this book for my free choice picture book recommended off of the Goodreads list.

Looking Like Me by Walter Dean Myers is written in poetry. It is about a boy named Jeremy who spends time finding out who he is. With the help of family and friends he realizes he has many layers to him. He is a son, a brother, a dancer, a runner, a writer, a city boy, and artist, etc. The use of poetry was great for young readers because it brings about a beat that almost sounds lyrical. For example: "I looked in the mirror and what did I see? A real handsome dude looking just like me." The use of rhyme here is also beneficial for young readers because it helps them guess what could be the next word, without having to decode the whole word. I think any person could enjoy hearing this story, but I would say the readability level is around 1st-3rd grade because the simple use of word choice, and the limited use of words on a page. Young boys may appreciate this book because it uses words that they could relate to that they may use in everyday life such as: dude, and putting out a fist to give it a bam. The illustrations included in this book were very complex and quite interesting. It looks like Christopher Myers used the collage technique. Each page is layered with quite a few scenes that are hard to connect with one and other. For example on the front page, there is a simple drawing of a boy seeing a reflection, a possible photo of an amphibian eye, and a photo of a horse and carriage. It seems obvious that the boy and his reflection go with the story, but it is hard to pin point why the other pictures are included. My guess was that they were to symbolize the complexity of the boy in the story.

I think this would be a great mentor book to use to get students writing about themselves, and the author even recommends doing that at the back of the book. I actually did this with my students, and they thoroughly enjoyed it. Some used the predetermined words "I am", and some put more creativity into it and chose the own words.

Hailey Dellinger says

The main idea of *Looking Like Me* by: Walter Dean Myers, is about a kid with all kinds of identities. The book shows that he is a brother, son, poet and a runner. For example, "I'm a city child. I love the dizzy heights, the concrete, the steel, the bright neon lights." The book does a great job at describing the different identities with rhyming words! The main character is named Jeremy and other characters include his sister, father, teacher, and mom. Throughout the story these characters help Jeremy add different roles and identities that make him who he is. This book belongs to Fiction and Individuality. The fictitious story of a child who is a city boy living in Harlem and adds many roles to his "I AM LIST." Throughout the book this rhythmic self esteem builder shows children all the individual roles and identities that make everyone unique.

As a teacher, this would be a great project for the beginning of the year! I would use this text to help compile a book for each individual child. At first, they can write down their own "I Am" list. Afterwards they can get construction paper and either draw or cut out things from a magazine that describe the different identities and roles they wrote down. At the end we can laminate and bind the books together for each student to have! The students can really interact and relate to the story with this project. I believe by seeing the photographic collages and unique pictures, this will really engage and motivate the students to do their own collages. Also, the word choice is really captivating and will also reel in the students. For example, it says, "I'm a writer, spinning dramas, that dance across the stage." The words along with the picture will really keep the children's focus.

Walter Dean Myers is a writer, a photography collector, a flute player, a cat owner, a Harlem native, a former basketball player, a husband, and a father. His Harlem background definitely shows throughout his illustrations in the text. The author displays his culture and many identities by showing jazz bands, harlem traditions, places in Harlem, and connects them with many identities similar to himself. This relates to Individuality by showing all the various identities that someone may have. It really displays the general message that everyone is a me, myself and I and someone very unique and special. Overall, the positive words, colors, confident energy, and tone is great! Great book to teach about unique roles and how that makes a person special!

Adynah says

Another wonderful book to read in the K-3 classroom, perhaps in the beginning of the year before students create their student portraits or I am statements. Bravo!

Tami says

I LOVE this picture book! One of the most exciting things to me is the way in which I found it: I was reading Sharon Creech's wonderful book written in free verse, *LOVE THAT DOG*. The main character is a young boy who narrates his journey, led by his classroom teacher, into the world of poetry and the wonderful things it can mean in and add to his life. In the course of their poetry unit he is exposed to the poet Walter Dean Myers who quickly becomes his favorite after he reads Deans' poem *LOVE THAT BOY*.

Reading Ms. Creech's book spurred me to investigate Mr. Walter Dean Myers and I found that he is not only a poet, but has a vast body of work for young adult and middle grade readers, as well as this fantastic picture book.

LOOKING LIKE ME refers to each individual looking in the mirror and seeing all of the people they are and all of the people they can be. We are defined in terms of our relationships: mother, father, sister, brother, friend. We are defined by our likes and dislikes. We are defined by our talents.

The narrator of the book discovers not only can he create a list of the things that define him, but that he can discover things in himself of which he was unaware by listening to those around him.

For example, I might not realize I have a talent for drawing until someone I love and respect comments favorably on a drawing I have done. I may not realize that compassion defines me until a friend I have helped says a heartfelt thank you when I take time out of my day to help or comfort her.

The book is illustrated in magnificent collage style by Christopher Myers (the author's son). It's bold colors and shapes stand out from the page in a way that is accessible and recognizable to the reader.

Each time the narrator discovers a new characteristic about himself he gives the other person (including himself in the mirror) a fist bump. I often use this action to make the story interactive with my listeners, whether it is my own children or a full classroom.

I have used this as a read-aloud selection in 3rd and 4th grades. It is a magnificent discussion starter for all kinds of topics related to self-esteem and how we become and define ourselves. It lends itself as a great introduction to art activities using self-expression and collage technique. It can also be used to begin teaching brainstorming or interviewing techniques to be used in writing assignments later in the year.

It is a great conversation starter at home for self-esteem issues as well.

I highly recommend this picture book for both classroom and home libraries.

Paula says

There's nothing like starting out on a strong, affirming foot. Let's just put it out there, son - I am a good looking guy. And things are just going to get better from there. My sister comes along and tells me I am a

brother. My teacher calls me a writer. I look in the mirror and call myself a talker. Fist bumps all around.

This big bold boy-centric anthem is illustrated with strong, bright-colored collage images - wild animals, city buildings, and images from non-Western culture underlay graphic silhouettes of young men in motion, implying the threads of civilized and wild culture that weave together to make a boy. Extra fist bump to my boy Christopher for using a picture of the gorilla diorama at the American Museum of Natural History. That silverback gets around.

This is exactly the read-aloud for the strongest, most confident read-aloud-er you know. My friend Kate, for example. You need the rhythm and flow of a Nikki Giovanni or a Jacqueline Woodson to read this book aloud. But you need nothing but fifteen minutes and an open mind to read it to yourself.

One cautious note: I held out my fist for a bump with a little boy not too long ago, and, not hip to the procedure, the kid hauled off and punched my fist as hard as he could. Didn't hurt me much, but ne nearly broke his fingers on my rings. So, if you're going to do the fist bumps along with Walter Dean and Christopher, make sure everybody knows - a real man is gentle.

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