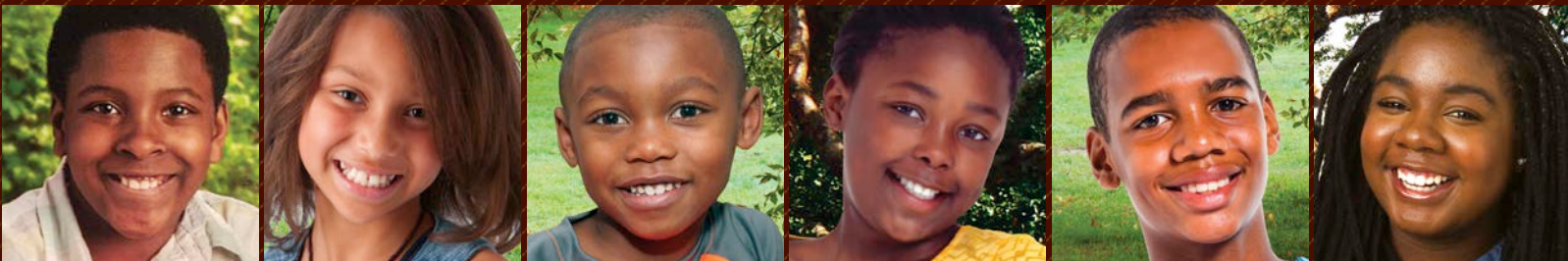


I Like My Brown Skin Because...

See back
cover for reviews
from *School
Library Journal*,
Booklist, and
Kirkus.



*Celebrating the Heritage of
African American Children*

School Edition

by JULIA A. DAVIS

Illustrations by Abner Cope, Alpha Frierson, and Emmanuel Mooty

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About The Author

Julia A. Davis holds a Bachelor's Degree in history from Earlham College, a Master's Degree in history from the University of Dayton, and a Master of Arts in Conflict Resolution from Antioch University. She has taught world history and American history at the middle school level, the high school level, and the college level. She enjoys writing and she enjoys traveling to places she has taught about in her history classes. She is a member of St. John Missionary Baptist Church, and a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc.

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I thank the artists who contributed to this book. Abner Cope is a retired associate professor of art at Central State University (Ohio). Alpha Frierson and Emmanuel Mooty are two of his former students. Much gratitude to Deb Slater for her cover design and her page layout.

To My Husband, Who Encouraged Me.

For John Christian And All Children Whose Questions Must Be Answered

“The arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice.”

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Prologue

Answering The Questions Of A Child

I Like My Brown Skin Because... was written after a four-year-old asked his grandmother if her brown skin ever made her sad, and then asked her why she liked her brown skin so much. "I was shocked by his words and I knew my grandchild was hurting."

This must-read book is an answer to his question. The author begins by saying all skin is good, and it is healthy for you to like the skin you are in. Then she highlights her special reasons for liking her brown skin. Throughout her narrative she shares personal experiences and gives sound advice that is full of wisdom.

I Like My Brown Skin Because... is a conversation launch pad for parents and children of every background – black, white, yellow, brown, red and mixed. It is for all families who want their children to live in a way that honors all people. It is for all people who want to understand the history behind the "racial" tension in the United States today.

The constant refrain of this book is, "I like my brown skin: I like me." People of all colors who feel good about themselves like other people regardless of skin color. They have enough love in their hearts to treat everybody with respect and dignity. *I Like My Brown Skin Because...* allows children to see that all people have choices: we can do what is right or we can do what is wrong. In every situation, each one of us has a choice.

The 156 pages of text and illustrations in *I Like My Brown Skin Because...* are divided into twelve chapters that introduce children to the African American story. With plenty of illustrations, even the child who

is not reading will soon be “reading” the messages on each page. Older children will go to the library to get more detailed accounts of what they have read in *I Like My Brown Skin Because...*

I Like My Brown Skin Because... is told sensitively, intelligently, and lovingly. The love and hope of a grandmother shine through this book. It is appropriate for people of all ages, and it is concise and easy to read. It highlights the fact that the United States is best when all people are valued. *I Like My Brown Skin Because...* gives children an opportunity to see that positive actions taken by people of every color have moved the United States closer to becoming “...one nation under God with liberty and justice for all.”

A Note To Parents And Teachers: What Are Our Children Thinking?

(Please read.)

African American children today are living in a nation that promises equal opportunity for all, while practicing an unwritten policy of privilege for some and disrespect for others. Both privilege and disrespect are based on skin color. For centuries in this country, the dominant society has programmed children to see white as the norm, and to see People of Color as less than that norm. All around us are negative messages about People of Color. Rarely are privilege and racial profiling acknowledged: the privilege that assumes goodness on the part of European Americans, and the racial profiling that assumes guilt and inadequacy on the part of African Americans. Nor do we hear about the privilege that has traditionally propelled European Americans to the top regardless of their background and qualifications.

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Whether in the poor house or the White House, African Americans are treated as outsiders. They are appreciated when the majority society wants someone to entertain, play basketball, clean, cook, take care of children, or do hard and dangerous work. They are under-appreciated when they are equipped with stellar qualifications and have positions of leadership.

None of this is lost on our children. Since birth, they have spent most of their time observing. As a result, children recognize the elephant in the room that adults know is there but do not talk about. That elephant is racism: it is the fact that in American society, positions of power have traditionally been reserved for European Americans and positions of servitude are reserved for African Americans. Children see this at the grocery store, at the shopping mall, at the bank, at the post office, at amusement parks, in newspapers and magazines, on billboards, and on television. They even see it on U.S. money (paper currency and coins).

In segregated neighborhoods they see limited options. In desegregated neighborhoods, they are often among so few black people that they are prone to think about African Americans, and even the color black, in the same way that their white schoolmates think. As a result, we hear them make self-negating statements that shock us.

I have noticed these statements and conclusions among my own children, even as my husband and I worked tirelessly to give them a deep understanding of African American history and exposed them to outstanding African American role models. Unfortunately, this exposure did not seem to shield my children from moments of negative self-identification.

I recall my first-born at four years old watching a telephone repairman as he restored a phone line outside our house. I was shocked when

my child declared, "When I grow up, I will turn white and be a telephone man, too."

My second-born made similar statements. One day we were driving behind a car moving much slower than the minimum highway speed limit. When my husband started to pass the car, our son said, "Stop, Daddy, don't do that. You'll get in trouble for passing a white person."

Over the years, I have heard these statements from African American children in my neighborhood, at my church, and in my high school classes. I recall a good friend's son who was the only African American in his middle school. In one year, three pairs of sticks for his snare drum, two pairs of gym shoes, and one calculator were stolen from his locker. He never verbally assigned a color to the face of the person(s) who stole them. One day when he and his mother were driving through a neighborhood that is predominantly African American, he said, "Let's lock the doors. These people steal."

I am reminded of my young friend Karen, a chemistry professor at a local university, who dropped her daughter off at a highly ranked day-care center every day. One cold morning as she kissed Sarah "Good-bye," Karen said, "Sweet Heart, I miss you everyday. One of these days I'm going to stay here and be your teacher." Her daughter's response was, "Mommy, you can't do that. You have to be white to be the teacher."

With video recordings of police officers killing unarmed African American males in the past few years, many Children of Color are afraid. Some have nightmares about these killings and others verbalize their fears when awake. A colleague was driving her 11-year-old son to the library when she noticed him slumped over in the back seat of the car. He had slumped down when he saw a police car on the side of the road. "If the police don't see me," the child said, "they won't shoot me."

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While African American children are feeling left out and inadequate, most European American children are feeling privileged because of their white skin. A European American friend recently told me she was aware of white privilege as early as the first grade when she watched it work to her advantage. Several white boys had been disrupting the class by passing gas, and they all sat on the far side of the room. Rebecca was at a table with two other white girls, two white boys, and an African American boy named Charles. One day Rebecca passed gas and the noise caused the class to laugh. The teacher looked at her table and said, "Who did that?" Rebecca knew that if she just sat quietly, Mrs. Schultz would blame Charles. A few seconds later, Mrs. Schultz said, "Charles, go to the office." Ashamed that she let Charles get blamed for what she did, Rebecca did not tell this story until she was in college.

Perhaps the saddest experience for me, and the one that prompted me to write this book, occurred a few months ago. It was a bright November morning when my 4½-year-old grandson, John Christian, and I left a going-out-of-business sale at a major discount store. I had purchased shirts for the pre-school youngster, and a book that would help him with sounds and word parts for reading. When I told him he could select one toy that costs less than \$10, he chose a dinosaur with a plastic skeleton and rubber skin that could be removed to show the skeleton. This child was really into dinosaurs and he was happy to have his new Para-saurol-ophus. With much excitement, he told me what dinosaurs ate, and how they became extinct. As we were leaving the store, he showed me how dinosaurs walked.

On the way home, John Christian was securely locked in his car seat, taking off the skin of the dinosaur and putting it back on. I was thinking about making soup and sandwiches for lunch. I looked into the

rearview mirror and saw him holding the dinosaur. Our eyes met and I smiled at him. Suddenly, as if out of nowhere, he said, "Gram, does your brown skin ever make you sad? Why are we brown? Why do you like your brown skin so much?" His words upset me greatly, and I knew he needed fortification for the world in which we live.

I am a product of the 1960's Civil Rights Movement. I have books and pictures of famous African Americans all over our house, and similar books and pictures are at his house. I had no idea these thoughts were in his mind.

"My Precious Child," I said, "I love my brown skin, and I love your brown skin. Granddaddy loves his brown skin and Mommy loves her brown skin. Your uncles, aunts, and cousins love their brown skin. We will talk more about this when we get home. Traffic is heavy right now and I need to concentrate on driving. Let's listen to your Christmas music while we drive. I love you and I love your brown skin."

While John Christian was taking his afternoon nap, I started jotting down reasons for liking my brown skin. I decided to put these reasons into a story for him, his cousins, and their friends of all colors. *I Like My Brown Skin Because...* is the text of my story.

A Note To John Christian And All Children

My beautiful, brown skin always makes me happy. It has never made me sad. But I do feel sad when I meet people who treat others in a mean way because of their skin color. I feel sad for the person who is being mean and I feel sad for the person who is being mistreated. Some people do not have enough love in their hearts to treat all people with love. Often they feel unloved themselves and they are hurting so much inside

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that they hurt others. Occasionally you will run into people in this condition. Just remember who you are, remember that you are loved, and remember all the good things you can do with your life. Also remember that there are plenty of people who judge a person on character rather than on color. The election of President Barack Obama is proof of that.

I am writing this story to tell you why I like my brown skin. But first, I want you to know that skin is merely an outside covering for the wonderful person you are inside your skin. It is good and healthy for each person in the world to like his or her skin, and to like every physical characteristic he or she has. If my skin were blue, I would be telling you why I like that color. Liking your skin is a part of liking yourself. I like my skin: I like me. When you like yourself, you can also like people who have skin that is different from yours.

I like my family's brown skin because it is beautiful and strong. Some of us are a rich, dark, delicious chocolate brown. Others are medium brown, light brown, yellow-brown, red-brown, and olive-brown. Many people who are not considered brown admire our skin colors. They flock to the beach, go to tanning booths, and lie in the sun to become the colors we are. They do this even at the risk of developing skin cancer.

Anthropologists and other scientists say that the first people on earth were dark-skinned people who lived in Africa. All people on earth are descendants of these dark-skinned people.

Scientists also tell us about a substance in each person's skin called melanin. The darker a person is, the more melanin he has in his skin. Our skin is brown because of the amount of melanin in it. Nature is full of diversity and differences. All people on earth are different colors, different sizes, and different shapes. People also have different mental abilities, different physical abilities, different talents, and different personalities.

When I see my beautiful brown face in the mirror, I see brown people who did great things before me, brown people who are doing great things now, and brown people who will still be doing great things when I am no longer here.

I will say it again: I love my brown skin. I like the pride that comes from my heritage. I am from a people of winners, a people who cannot be defeated. I am from a brilliant people who excel in every endeavor. You will understand my pride as you read *I Like My Brown Skin Because...*

In the United States today there are more than three hundred million (300,000,000) people. All of them have ancestors who were immigrants to this country. Some came here from Africa, some from Europe, and some from Asia.

Persons who originated in the same part of the world had similar color in their skin. The people from Africa had black or brown skin and very curly hair. Most people from Europe had light skin and very straight hair. Some people from Asia had a yellow tint to their skin. Others had brown skin with a reddish tint. All human beings look alike under the skin.

Regardless of skin color, each and every person in this world has been “created equal.” And in the words of the Declaration of Independence, they have been “...endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.”

Many people in the United States today are a mixture of Europeans, Africans, and Asians. Together, Americans are a beautiful montage of colors and physical characteristics. Most African Americans were brought here from West Africa. This book introduces you to their history. African American history makes me very proud of my brown skin and my African features.





I Like My Brown Skin Because... was written after a four-year-old asked his grandmother if her brown skin ever made her sad, and then asked her why she liked her brown skin so much. "I was shocked by his words and I knew my grandchild was hurting."

This must-read book is an answer to his questions. The author begins by saying all skin is good, and it is healthy for you to like the skin you are in. Then she highlights her special reasons for liking her brown skin. Throughout her narrative she shares personal experiences and gives sound advice that is full of wisdom.

For 4th Grade and Up

"In response to her grandson's surprising question ('Does your brown skin ever make you sad?') Davis has written a set of 12 engaging essays celebrating African American heritage. Titled with positive mantras, such as 'I Am Beautiful,' 'I Am Brave,' and 'I Believe in Myself,' the selections highlight African Americans who have made significant contributions to U.S. history... Each essay presents facts in an anecdotal style that is appealing. Accomplishments of Americans who are not black are also featured in many of the essays. Dramatic pencil illustrations are interspersed throughout the text... Messages of positivity abound... – School Library Journal

"A palpable warmth comes through the pages of this book... as Julia Davis shares the legacy that taught her to accept and celebrate not only herself but others. The core of her message: 'I like the pride that comes from my heritage. I am from a people of winners, a people who cannot be defeated'. She introduces the hideous cruelty of slavery—and subsequent, subtler forms of subjugation – in such a way that young readers will absorb the horror without being overwhelmed. Davis comes across as a teacher you'd welcome in your classroom or home, along with her empowering book." – Booklist

"Davis thematically organizes stories of noteworthy figures in twelve chapters featuring titles such as 'I Am Beautiful' and 'I Believe in Myself...' The result is a narrative that's both serious and upbeat, suited for children to read independently as well as for parents to read aloud... An attractively illustrated, engaging book that skillfully balances pride in the past with awareness of 21st-century challenges." – Kirkus Review

"... a beautiful and important book that delighted my heart in a way very few books have. As an educator... I have never seen such a positive, empowering resource to celebrate brown skin and encourage young people to overcome challenges and be proud of where they come from and the skin they are in. A fabulous book..." – Kelley Rhoads, Educator

"I love this book. It gives children hope. Julia Davis has translated the difficult subject of 'race' into clear and concise language. *I Like My Brown Skin Because...* helps usher in a future that allows people of all colors to be treated with dignity and respect." – Lauren Heaton, Reporter, *Yellow Springs News*

"This book is awesome. It is everything African American parents need to strengthen our children for today's world." – Shirley Smith

"At first I thought *I Like My Brown Skin Because...* was only for African American children. I was wrong. This book is equally for European Americans – most of whom do not want their children to live with the terrible limitations of prejudice." – Barbara Kneipp, Marketing Manager

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