



**amazeworks**

**Black Joy Book Set for  
Caregivers and Educators**

**Windows and Mirrors Resources**

**For ages 4 and up**

www.amazeworks.org, 651-493-8702  
1380 Energy Lane, Suite 210, St. Paul, MN 55108



# amazeworks

Dear Caregivers and Educators,

This collection of lessons about Black joy serves as a resource to promote the healthy identity development of Black and Brown children by uplifting Black joy and positive experiences. In a society that does not often prioritize the health, wellbeing, and wholeness of those in the Black community, it is in the ability to thrive in spite of adversity that joy becomes an act of resistance and demonstrates strength and resilience.

At AmazeWorks, we believe that fostering healthy identity development, learning to show respect across differences, and naming and taking action against instances of injustice all begin from honest, intentional conversations. We hope that these lessons can support you with these important conversations with the children in your life. We thank you for engaging in this difficult, yet invaluable work.

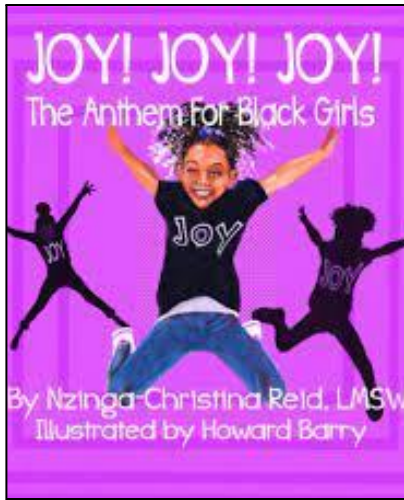
We also know the power of sharing stories. When we listen to each other's stories, we build empathy. This empathy is necessary if we want to shift our thinking from "them" to "us." When we take time to understand the impact of identity-based bias and discrimination, we are better equipped to stand up to it.

This work requires time and dedication. These books and lessons are a starting point. If you have additional questions or want more resources, we encourage you to visit our website at [www.amazeworks.org](http://www.amazeworks.org).

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## Elementary Book Lesson for Caregivers and Educators



### Book Title

*Joy! Joy! Joy! The Anthem for Black Girls* by Nzinga-Christina Reid, illustrated by Howard Barry

### Recommended Ages

4 and up

### Book Summary to Share With Children

*This book is about a girl overjoyed by her physical and cultural heritage and highlights the beauty of her kinky hair, wide nose, and incredible joy. As you listen, how can you relate to the girl in the story? Think about what you love about yourself and what brings you joy.*

### Reflection Questions for the Caregiver/Educator

1. As a child, what kinds of things brought you joy? Do you still find joy in those activities? How do you seek out opportunities to fill your day with joy and happiness?
2. In what ways is joy tied to resilience and liberation?
3. If you identify as Black/African-American, how is living with joy an act of resistance? If you do not identify as Black/African American but are raising or working with Black/African American children, how can you uplift and celebrate their joy?

### Reader's Note

The author Nzinga-Christina Reid is an activist and social justice advocate. This book and its companion, *Joy! Joy! Joy! The Anthem For Black Boys*, is used to promote Black joy and liberation through positive affirmation. In a society that oftentimes does not prioritize the health, wellbeing, and wholeness of those in the Black community, it is in the ability to thrive in spite of adversity that joy becomes an act of resistance and demonstrates strength and resilience.

### Connection to Social-Emotional Learning and Anti-Bias Education

#### SEL

##### **Self-Awareness**

Self-Management

##### **Social Awareness**

##### **Relationship Skills**

Responsible Decision-Making

#### ABE

##### **Empathy and Understanding**

##### **Healthy, Complex Identities**

##### **Respect Across Differences**

##### **Notice, Name, and Reject Bias**

##### **Responsiveness and Action**



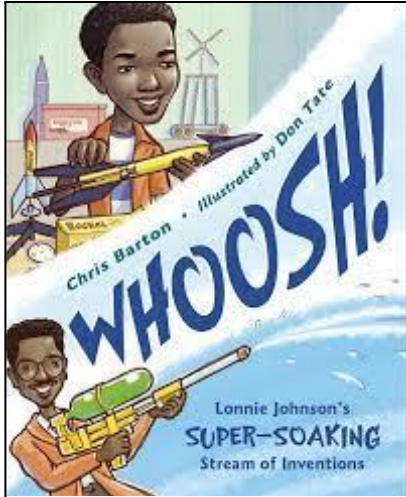
### Discussion Questions (\*essential questions are in bold)

1. **What do you love about yourself when you look in the mirror? What parts of yourself do you find beautiful and lovely? What can you say to yourself to show yourself appreciation for the ways in which you are beautiful and lovely?**
2. **What does joy look like, feel like, and sound like for you? What does it look like, feel like, and sound like for the members of your family? For your community?**
3. How does the world see your joy? What do you do or say to show the world your joy?
4. **What can you do with your own two hands to help make the world a better place and bring joy to others?**
5. **How do you show love and respect to others so they can feel joy, too?**
6. **In the book, the girl says that she gets back up when she falls down. This is an example of resilience. Resilience is our ability to recover from or adapt to something that is hard or challenging. Resilience is how we can have strength and not give up when things get hard. What is an example of resilience that you can think of from your own life, either for yourself or someone else?**
7. An ancestor is someone from your family who lived before you. What do you think the author means when she refers to “the strength of the ancestors”? What do you know about your ancestors? How can you use the strength of your ancestors to give you hope and help you be resilient?
8. As the girl in the book is meditating, she says, “*This Black girl joy means let me be*”. What does it mean to “just be”? What does that look like for you?

### Journal Questions/Extension Activities

- Ask your child, “What brings you joy? What does it mean for you to show up fully and joyfully in the world?” Encourage and help them to write about, draw pictures of, or print out pictures of these things on small pieces of paper, cardstock, or cardboard. Together, use them to create a mobile that can hang in your home or classroom to remind them of the activities they love to do and who/what fills them with joy and self love.
- **Activity:** Speak your goals! Write out a list of goals and post them where you can see them often. Speak them to yourself and check them off as you begin to see them accomplished.

## Elementary Book Lesson for Caregivers and Educators



### Book Title

*Woosh! Lonnie Johnson's Super Soaker Stream of Inventions* by Chris Barton, illustrated by Don Tate

### Recommended Ages

4 and up

### Book Summary to Share With Children

*This book celebrates the inventor of the Super Soaker, Lonnie Johnson, the maker behind one of the world's favorite toys. The Super Soaker is one of the top twenty toys of all time, and it was invented entirely by accident! Lonnie's passion for problem-solving was at the core of his career as an engineer and his work with NASA, but it is his invention of the Super Soaker water gun that has made his most memorable splash with kids and adults.*

### Reflection Questions for the Caregiver/Educator

1. As a child, did you ever play with a water gun or super soaker? If so, what memories do you have of playing with this invention?
2. This book talks about the struggles that Lonnie Johnson faced as well as his successes. What obstacles have you had to overcome in your life? How has failure also been a critical factor in success?

### Reader's Note

The SuperSoaker has been around since the late 1980s and yet is still a popular children's toy to enjoy in the summer. Although this is not a new invention, it is not common knowledge that the toy was invented by a Black man. Learning about notable Black leaders, inventors, and entrepreneurs has often been reserved for the month of February during Black History Month and is oftentimes limited to people from the Harlem Renaissance and the Civil Rights movement of the 60s and 70s. While learning about historical African American contributions to society helps Black children form healthy personal and social identities, it is also important to learn about contemporary Black people who are still alive and making a positive impact on society today.

Apart from being a scientist, nuclear engineer, NASA employee, and owner of three tech companies, Lonnie Johnson is also a billionaire. In February 2013, Johnson filed suit against Hasbro after he discovered that he was being underpaid royalties for the Super Soaker and several Nerf toys. In November of that year, Johnson was awarded nearly \$73 million in royalties from Hasbro Inc. and sales for the Super Soaker remain close to \$1 billion.

It is important to note that while Johnson's invention is a popular and exciting children's toy to be enjoyed during the hot summer months, playing with toys that resemble guns can pose a very real threat for Black and Brown children, particularly boys. In recent years, Black boys and youth have been harmed or



even killed when a toy gun was mistaken for a real one. This is not stated to discourage those who already have Super Soakers from enjoying them, but does warrant a note of caution. *Whoosh!* is a wonderful book that celebrates Black excellence and innovation, but it is important to be aware of how playing with toys that resemble or mimic weapons may impact members of Black and Brown communities differently. Please see the list of extension activities at the bottom of the lesson for alternative ways to engage with your child.

### Connection to Social-Emotional Learning and Anti-Bias Education

#### SEL

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Self-Management

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**Healthy, Complex Identities**

##### **Respect Across Differences**

Notice, Name, and Reject Bias

Responsiveness and Action

### Discussion Questions (\*essential questions are in bold)

1. What activities did Lonnie Johnson enjoy as a child? Are there any that you like doing as well?
2. **What were some of the obstacles and challenges that Lonnie faced as a young person? How did he demonstrate resilience and determination?**
3. **When Lonnie's ideas were rejected from the science fair, why do you think he continued to enter the competitions year after year?**
4. One of Lonnie's first inventions was a robot named Lennox. How might a robot be helpful to you in your life or in your family/community?
5. **Where did Lonnie get the idea for his high-powered water gun? How did this "accident" turn out to be very significant in his life?**
6. Lonnie Johnson has a passion for problem-solving. How do you like to find solutions and create new things as well?

### Journal Questions/Extension Activities

- Write or draw about an invention that you would like to create. What resources, tools, and support would you need to make your invention a reality?
- Write or draw about a possible career or life goal when you are older. How can you not let disappointments or setbacks keep you from reaching that goal?
- **Activity:** Read through the following list (not exhaustive) of Black inventors: Who would you like to learn more about? Support your child in researching more about these inventors and any other African American creators or entrepreneurs.
  - Benjamin Bannaker - almanac
  - Sarah Boone- ironing board
  - George Washington Carver- peanut butter, Worcester sauce, salad oils, and many more
  - Matthew A. Cherry - tricycle

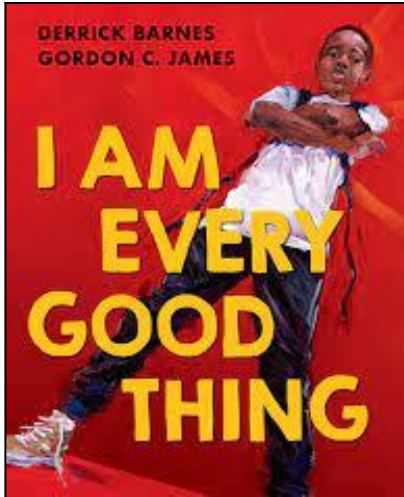


- Alfred L. Cralle - ice cream scoop
- John L. Love - pencil sharpener
- Thomas Marshall- fire extinguisher
- Garrett Morgan- gas mask, traffic light
- Alexander Miles- elevator
- Madam C.J. Walker- straightening comb





## Elementary Book Lesson for Caregivers and Educators



### Book Title

*I Am Every Good Thing* by Derrick Barnes, illustrated by Gordon C. James

### Recommended Ages

5 and up

### Book Summary to Share With Children

*The confident Black narrator of this book is proud of everything that makes him who he is. He's got big plans, and no doubt he'll see them through--as he's creative, adventurous, smart, funny, and a good friend. Sometimes he falls, but he always gets back up. And other times he's afraid because he's so often misunderstood and called what he is not. So let's remember to slow down and really look and listen when somebody tells you--and shows you--who they are. There are superheroes in our midst!*

### Reflection Questions for the Caregiver/Caregiver

1. When you were a child, who in your life affirmed you in a positive way? What kind of words did they say? How did they make you feel?
2. As an adult, how would you describe yourself using "I am" statements? Why is it equally important to be reminded of what makes us special, unique, and talented as an adult as when we were younger?
3. In a society that is rooted mainly in White dominant culture, how can we counter anti-Black/anti-Brown messaging to ensure that all children of color have a positive, confident sense of themselves?

### Reader's Note

Every parent, caregiver, and educator wants to see their children express confidence and pride in who they are. With so much messaging from the outside world that seeks to lower their confidence and sense of self, it is imperative that the adults in their life help them to see their value and that they feel they are highly esteemed. This book is filled with positive affirmations and declarations for a young Black child in the United States. It is imperative that young Black children see and hear themselves affirmed and represented positively, as so much is working to counter that.

Please note that this book is dedicated to Tamir Rice, Trayvon Martin, EJ Bradford, Jordan Edwards, Michael Brown, Jordan Davis, and Julian Mallory. These are all the names of young unarmed Black males who were unjustly killed by gun violence. The impact of gun violence and racism can weigh heavily on members of the Black community. While it is important to praise and uplift all children's identities, it is especially important that Black males see and hear themselves affirmed and represented positively.





This book also uses many metaphors to describe the main character. A metaphor is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is used in place of another to suggest a similarity between them. The comparison is not literal but conveys shared characteristics. For example- the snow is a white blanket.

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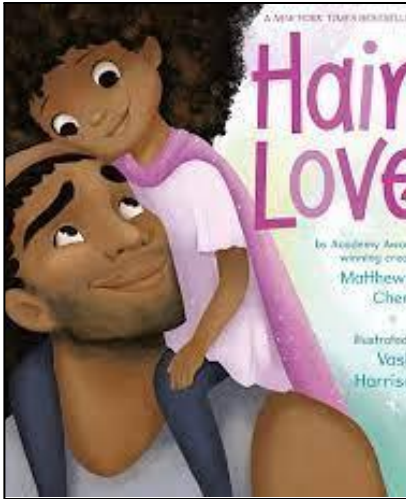
1. What are some of the adjectives (descriptive words) that the boy uses to describe himself in the book? Are there any that you would use to describe yourself as well?
2. What are some of the metaphors that the boy uses to describe himself in the book? Which of these is your favorite?
3. What are some of the activities that the boy in the book likes to do? Are there any you enjoy as well?
4. **Why do you think the author chose to include “scraped knees and elbows” when the boy describes himself as “skateboard tricks”? Why does he follow that with, “But you know what? I am right back on my feet again”?**
5. **Why is it important that the story ends by repeating the line, “I am worthy to be loved”?**
6. **How can you relate to the characteristics of the boy in this story? What aspects of his identity do you share?**

### Journal Questions/Extension Activities

- What are some of the things about yourself that you love? Practice writing a few positive affirmations about yourself using the sentence starter “I am”. Place them on sticky notes and post them around your home where you can see them often as a reminder.
- **Venn Diagram Activity:**  
Instruct children to create a Venn diagram by drawing two circles side by side that overlap (see example below). On the left side of the circle, have them list all of the words that they can think of to describe themselves. On the right side, have them list the words they heard mentioned to describe the boy in the story. In the middle, they can write any of the words that are the same and things they have in common with the boy in the story. Finally, compare and contrast their identity to that of the main character in the book. How are they alike? How are they different?



## Elementary Book Lesson for Caregivers and Educators



### Book Title

*Hair Love* by Matthew A. Cherry, illustrated by Vashti Harrison

### Recommended Ages

5 and up

### Book Summary to Share With Children

*In this book, a young girl named Zuri embraces her natural hair texture that kinks, coils and curls every which way. Zuri knows her hair is beautiful, but it has a mind of its own! Mama is not home, so it's up to Daddy to give his daughter an extra-special hairstyle. Tender and empowering, Hair Love is an ode to loving your natural hair - and a celebration of daddies and daughters everywhere.*

### Reflection Questions for the Caregiver/Educator

1. Where and from whom did you learn hair care as a child? Who primarily helped to style or maintain your hair as a child?
2. What memories do you have of special occasions as a child? Did you wear a special outfit or have your hair styled or cut for this? What emotions come to mind when you think back to preparing for this big moment or day?

### Reader's Note

*Hair Love* celebrates natural Black hairstyles and father-daughter relationships. The book originates from a short animated film that was written by former NFL wide receiver, Matthew A. Cherry. (You can also watch the [Hair Love Oscar®-Winning Short Film from Sony Pictures Animation](#).)

In the Black community, the ritual of doing a child's hair is often seen as an expression of love. As in many communities, the task of grooming and styling children has often fallen to the mothers or other female members of the family/community, but this has begun to change. More and more fathers and men are learning how to style the hair of their daughters and other females in their lives. Although the thought of combs, brushings, curlers, hair pins, barrettes, and bows may be daunting at first, their efforts pay off when their loved ones smile and show pride in their hair.

There are several examples of traditional hairstyles for Black hair in its natural state (curly, tightly coiled or kinked texture), and Black hair can be very versatile. Note that some Black people may choose to wear their hair naturally, some may straighten it with heat, chemical relaxers, and some may wear protective styles such as wigs or weaves. All forms of Black hair are beautiful, and love is felt whenever someone cares for their tresses.

**Note:** Be aware of the issue of cultural appropriation of Black culture by non-Black/non-African American



people. Cultural appropriation is the adoption of something from a minority culture for the benefit (often for entertainment) of the dominant culture. Non-Black/non-African American children might want to wear afro wigs, dreads, or braids with traditional African beads for Halloween. It is important to learn more about the history of Black hairstyles and what they represent to Black/African American people and then engage students in a conversation about what might be problematic about donning certain styles for fashion or entertainment.

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Responsiveness and Action

### Discussion Questions (\*essential questions in bold)

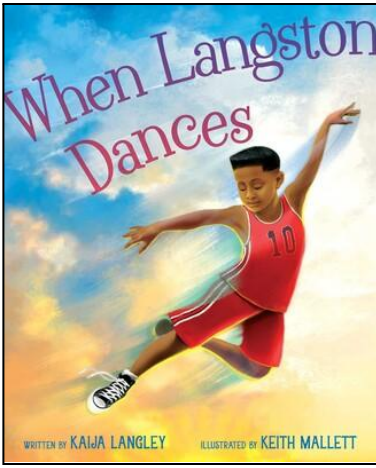
1. **Zuri says that her hair “has a mind of its own”. What does she mean by this?**
2. **Zuri feels like a princess when her hair is in braids. Do you have a hairstyle or way of dressing that makes you feel special?**
3. **Why is Zuri’s appearance so important to her that day? What was she looking forward to?**
4. What are some of the fun things that Zuri gets to do with her dad after school?
5. Why doesn’t Zuri want to wear a hat?
6. In the end, Daddy makes Zuri’s hair look great. Where do you think he learned how to style Zuri’s hair?
7. **Zuri refers to her hair as love. How is the love and care of her family reflected in her hairstyle?**

### Journal Questions

- What is your favorite way to express your style, whether through your hair or hats/scarves, clothing, accessories, etc.? How does expressing yourself make you feel?
- *Hair Love* demonstrates care that Zuri’s dad shows to her by grooming her hair. Who in your life takes special care of you? What activities do you really enjoy doing with them?



## Elementary Book Lesson for Caregivers and Educators



### Book Title

*When Langston Dances* by Kaija Langley, illustrated by Keith Mallett

### Recommended Ages

5 and up

### Book Summary to Share With Children

*After going to the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater with his mother, Langston falls in love with ballet dancing. He decides to practice hard, so one day he can be a dancer like the ones he saw. Not everyone thinks boys should do ballet, but that doesn't stop him. Langston finds Ms. Marie's Dance Studio and his place as a ballet dancer.*

### Reflection Questions for the Caregiver/Educator

- Thinking back to your childhood, what did you learn about gender roles and expectations?
- How has your understanding of gender stereotypes changed as an adult?
- How do you address gender with your child? How might gender stereotypes show up in media/society in areas involving sports or the arts?

### Reader's Note

Dominant Western society has dictated strict gender stereotypes, roles, norms, and expectations associated with masculinity and femininity, which influence how we feel about ourselves and others. Gender has been linked to our outward behavior and our internal ideas about ourselves.

As children continue to explore their identity through activities such as sports or the arts, they may have questions about who can do what based on gender stereotypes. These questions are normal because children are trying to make sense of the messages they receive from society about gender roles and expectations. It's important to acknowledge their questions as valid and lean into the conversation, so children receive accurate information and build healthy identities. It's also important for children to see positive, normalized reflections of all genders breaking gender stereotypes, so they learn that they can be or do anything they want.

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### Discussion Questions (\*essential questions in bold)

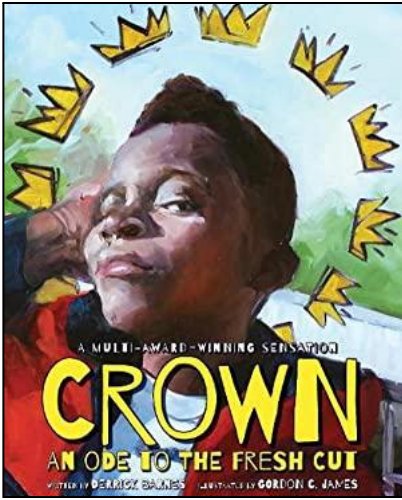
1. What did Langston love about watching ballet?
2. **Langston's mom said, "You can do whatever you set your mind to doing." What did Langston do after hearing these words from his mother?**
3. **Why did the kid passing by say, "Boys don't dance like that"? How do you think Langston felt when he heard that? What could someone have said to the kid passing by in order to stand up/show support for Langston?**
4. **Why was Langston so nervous when he arrived at Ms. Marie's Dance Studio?**
5. Tell me about when you were nervous about being in a new place. What were you nervous about? What helped you feel better/less nervous in that situation?
6. **How did Ms. Marie help Langston feel belonging when he entered her ballet class? Why was this important?**
7. How did Langston show the other ballet students he belonged in the class?
8. **How can you help others feel like they belong when they are doing what they love to do?**

### Journal Questions/Extension Activities

- **Write or draw:** What images come to mind when you think about ballet? How has reading this book helped you see the art of ballet differently?
- **Somatic Awareness Activity:** How do you feel when you are dancing? Pick a couple of your favorite songs from any genre with different tempos- one upbeat one and one that is slower- and dance with your child. Notice what happens in your body as you move. Is your heart rate faster with one of the songs? Are you smiling as you move? Are you laughing? How is your breathing? Take time after dancing to notice how your mood and energy levels have changed as well and discuss with your child.



## Elementary Book Lesson for Caregivers and Educators



### Book Title

*Crown: An Ode to the Fresh Cut* by Derrick Barnes, illustrated by Gordon C. James

### Recommended Ages

5 and up

### Book Summary to Share With Children

*In this book, the importance of a trip to the barbershop for a Black/African American boy is highlighted. Visiting the barbershop means being cared for and tended to by community members who help to contribute to developing a healthy sense of self. Listen to hear how being treated like royalty and getting a fresh haircut makes him feel smarter, more visible, and ready for the world.*

### Reflection Questions for the Caregiver/Educator

1. When have you felt pampered, tended to, or treated like royalty? How did it change your outlook on the world and your confidence? Why is it important for children to feel this as they grow up?
2. Where and from whom did you learn to care about how you presented yourself to the world? Who were the adults that taught you about this?
3. How might the children in your life see themselves reflected through this story? If so, might this story help boost their self-esteem? If a child's culture is not represented in this story, how is this a powerful window into the life of a young Black child?

### Reader's Note

Some of the language in the story is colloquial. The terms *tight fade*, *high/low/bald*, *(Dark) Caesar*, *faux-hawk*, *deep part*, and *skin fade* all refer to haircut styles and are commonly used in barber shops. *Cornrows* are a hair braiding style. A *durag* is a piece of fabric worn on the head and tied in the back, and it is used to hold waves, braids, or locs in place. The book uses the term *loc* instead of *dreadlock* because of the negative association of the word *dreadlock*. If you are a member of the African American community, you and your child will likely be familiar with terms, but it may be helpful to read through them to boost understanding. You will also see the use of the word *dude*, instead of *man*. In a poem such as this, written from a first-person narrative perspective about a personal experience, this language is appropriate and relevant to the narrator's life.

Be sure to share the Author's Note at the back of the book with your child, as it gives more insight into the importance of the barbershop in Black/African American communities.





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## Discussion Questions (\*essential questions in bold)

1. **What do the terms *Tight fade, Dark Caesar, faux-hawk, deep part, skin fade, cornrows, durag, and loc* mean? Have you ever had any of these hairstyles?**
2. Why might getting a "fresh cut" help someone do well on a test or get on the honor roll? Is it true that it might "do something to your brain"?
3. **How can "looking good" (in whatever way you define that for yourself) help you to feel good about yourself? Why is it important to have confidence in yourself?**
4. What are some adjectives that the narrator uses to describe himself and others at the barber shop? What do these words tell you about the significance of the barbershop experience?
5. **What does the boy learn from his trips to the barbershop?**
6. **What is something you can say when you see someone with a fresh haircut or if you notice someone is trying a new style? Why is this important?**

## Journal Questions/Extension Activities

- What makes you feel "magnificent", "flawless", and "like royalty"?
- Describe a time that you felt confident, proud, and ready to conquer the world. What helped you feel that way? How can remembering that experience help you in times when you are struggling?
- **Activity:** Invite your child to write their own odes to what makes them feel magnificent, flawless, and like royalty, using their journal responses as a starting place. This can be a poem, a story or a rap. Encourage the use of figurative language that the book uses.