

Whispers from Mother Earth: Celebrate the Skin You're In

Maryam Khalifah

Fair Share

(40pp)

978-1-963981-04-9

Self-conscious children are taught to see themselves as part of the diverse beauty of nature in the soothing picture book Whispers from Mother Earth.

In Maryam Khalifah's warm picture book *Whispers from Mother Earth*, Mother Earth helps children to love their skin colors and textures and to see themselves as beautiful.

A self-conscious girl stands before a mirror, prompting Mother Earth to mention people's worry over their skin colors and their feelings of wanting to change how they look. Each page thereafter is dedicated to a nature image that's about comparatively showing how lovely a child's skin is, referencing eagles, an elephant, waterfalls, and a "sari stretching above the night sky," traveling through a range of exciting scenes in the wild. The poetic narration concludes by asserting that all people are beautiful because they are all part of life on Earth, which is obvious "if you ... sit on the moon." The larger social issues behind people's self-perceptions are eschewed in favor of this focus on nature, which is also used to suggest that the environment itself is worthy of care and full of wonders.

The prose relies on evocative imagery that's metaphorical, rather than literal, about children's complexions. Its soothing lullaby meters are complemented by the fact that each verse begins with "my dearest child." And the stylized illustrations make use of deep colors, emphasizing movement and light; they portray children of all races, as well as a child with vitiligo. These images complement the text's similes well, as with a child who called beautiful "like a racing cheetah" who is depicted riding said feline through the savanna. And the text is incorporated into the illustrations themselves, with the text boxes sometimes touched or held up by the focal child. Links to an audio version of the tale, games, and educational resources make the book interactive.

A sweet and engaging picture book about the beauty of people and nature, *Whispers from Mother Earth* is full of wisdom and fun.

M. W. MERRITT (November 4, 2024)

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