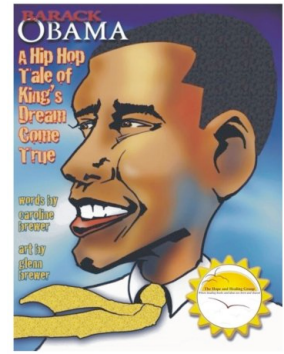


A Testimonial about the Student Impact of Barack Obama: A Hip Hop Tale *By Marni Barron, Second Grade Teacher*



As an elementary school teacher in Prince George's County Public Schools, I have been amazed at what *Barack Obama: A Hip Hop Tale of King's Dream Come True* by Caroline Brewer has been able to do to not only teach my 2nd graders about President Obama's historic road to the White House, but also how it is teaching my children how to become better readers.

The story itself is written with the power of truth behind it. As a mother of young children and a teacher of young children, I am so impressed with the way Ms. Brewer has been able to capture the true realities of each step in President Obama's campaign while keeping this historic journey engaging for children. Her use of animals to depict naysayers allows children a way in which to relate to people in their lives, and in the life of Obama, who have tried to keep them from their beliefs and dreams through harsh words and actions. It is critically important for children to understand this moment in history from the side of truth.

The teacher in me was thrilled to have this story to use to teach basic reading skills. The book is written with rhyme and rhythm that children can relate to. Despite the sophistication of some of the words, my 2nd graders are able to fluently read this book after only two weeks of formal instruction using it. I have been able to teach my students how to dissect the text and attain required skills from our curricular objectives. For example, children have been able to identify vowel pairs, diphthongs, vocabulary words, rhyming words, spelling words, suffixes and prefixes -- all within the context of a text that is of interest to them. In addition, we are practicing fluency skills by reading the text aloud and tapping to the rhythmic rhyme and flow of the story.

Children who are struggling readers often respond well to the use of a rhythm within text. Rhythm offers a familiarity and comfort that eases children into the reading process. Also, the children have been tape-recorded reading the text and use the tape in our listening center. Children hearing themselves and their classmates read is a powerful tool in building fluency. It also offers children a way to feel more confident about their reading. The fact that their teacher thinks enough of their reading to record it is special to children.

The reason why this particular book is different from other teaching tools, books and materials I have used in the past, is that the topic is current and relevant to children. Children want to be brought into the sophistication of the world around them. Most second grade materials I am asked to provide as a teacher dumbs down children's intellect and diminishes their interest. However, *Barack Obama: A Hip Hop Tale of King's Dream Come True*, is written using a deliberate system of scientifically proven strategies that engage children through reading and get children excited about reading. The author, Caroline Brewer, is also an education consultant who has spent the last 7 years developing her highly effective set of reading strategies. Each one of her children's books exhibits elements of her system that immediately pulls even the most reluctant readers into her stories. That is the first and most important step in becoming a reader: wanting to read!

One Teacher's Testimonial about Barack Obama: Hip Hop Tale 2009

The following are stories of my second graders who have been empowered by this book.

- ❖ When I first introduced this story to my class, I did not have the pictures. (President Obama had been elected and was three weeks away from his inauguration and the book was still days away from being printed. So I had the text.) I simply placed a few sentences of the text on the overhead for all to see. I read the words while tapping to the rhythm and asked the children to repeat. After repeating the text a few times, we took the process a step further by becoming word detectives and finding words containing the various phonics skills that were our objectives for the week. On day one, each and every one of my students volunteered to read the text aloud by themselves in front of their peers! They knew they could do it and if they struggled, they knew they had an emotionally safe environment that would support them through the text. All children successfully read. The use of tapping, rhyme, rhythm, relevancy and the scaffold of first dissecting the text brought each child into the story. Never before have I had all class members want to read so desperately!
- ❖ One student, who was a class clown and usually tuned out from learning, suddenly tuned in. Because I allowed the students to stand and tap to the rhythm of the text, he began to think of reading time as fun time. When I later asked this child to create his own illustrations for the text we reviewed, he was excited and shocked. I noticed that he had a high comprehension level, because he created thoughtful, detailed illustrations that fit beautifully with the text. He became so proud of his work, and his confidence as a reader grew instantly.
- ❖ Another student, who had been reading and writing on a preschool level and had no confidence as a student, was suddenly pulled into the world of reading when I paired him with two strong readers to record them reading this story. He hooked into the rhyme and rhythm as well as the comprehension background building he was given. Because he was not alone reading, he had the confidence to go for it. He did really well, and again, is so proud to hear himself really READING!
- ❖ While my class was reading the first few pages on the overhead, the custodian came into my room and could not believe what he was witnessing. He commented that he could not believe this was second grade reading such sophisticated text.
- ❖ As most young boys are, my second grade boys are active. This book allows my boys to put physical action into reading. They love to stand and tap and move their bodies to the rhythm of the text while reading it. The fact that this book is written with rhythm in mind makes reading time fun. It keeps children interested in books and lets them know that it is okay to read in a variety of ways.
- ❖ The fact that my students can so confidently and fluently read this book has also cured the ordinary monotone oral reading of young and new readers. My students read this book by changing their intonation and their voices to mimic the characters.
- ❖ I have another student who is already a very strong reader. He had been tuning out of learning because the traditional materials used were insulting to his intellect. Can't say I blame him. This book challenges his intelligence by offering higher-level vocabulary and language and a story line that is current, relevant, true and has depth. This child now has a reason to want to continue to participate in learning. He is learning in a way that challenges multiple dimensions of his intellect.