



SAY THEIR NAMES PICTURE BOOK IMAGINATION GUIDE

By Author Caroline Brewer ©2022

For use by any reader, especially adults who engage children in reading the book

by Caroline Brewer, Author and Literacy Activist

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News Alert in Brief:

DC Author Helps Adults Talk Tough Topics with Kids

Say Their Names is a guide that contains the gift of a Positive Identity

DC-based Author Caroline Brewer is leading highly inter-active and musical conversations with students, educators, parents and community groups about children's voices in social justice movements and how to have conversations about difficult, but important, topics. [Say Their Names](#), Brewer's new picture book with [Reycraft Books](#), kicks off the discussion. The picture book was inspired by the author and literacy consultant's 2020 visit to DC's Black Lives Matter Plaza. In *Say Their Names*, a fictional 7-year-old Aliya responds to the aftermath of George Floyd's death with poetry, history, and an invitation to a love-inspired future. Brewer says the book comes with more than 30 "gifts" for children, such as hope, courage, and empowerment, which all work together to form a positive identity. (See page 5 for the list and student-youth engagement opportunities).

"As we have seen, especially since September 11, 2001, traumatic incidents, such as [school shootings](#), [natural disasters](#), terrorist attacks, [racist and religious attacks](#), wars, [pandemics](#), and the like, keep happening, seemingly with greater frequency, here and all over the world," said Brewer, "In the face of the world's ugliness, we'll be counting on today's youth to one day stand tall and lead our families, communities, and countries. So it's critical that we – and they -- are equipped with the confidence, language, empathy, mental and emotional stamina to handle the hard stuff. If I could give a child any gift, it would be the gift of a positive identity, and that's what *Say Their Names* is all about," says Brewer.

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Goals of the picture book, *Say Their Names*: To be a channel for children's agency, positive identity, strength, intellectual stimulation, healthy, self-actualized communication, to expand supportive communities, to be a source of hope, and a tool for imagining ways forward. **(8 goals)**

Getting started.

Read the book and this guide entirely before introducing the book to children. To open discussion with children before reading the book to them, invite the children to what I call an ***Imagination Station***. The Imagination Station is a place where we're free to open our hearts and minds to all sorts of thoughts and ideas and forms of creativity. We're free to express ourselves, always with kindness, in words, songs, artwork, such as illustration, dance, and certainly laughter.

Have a discussion about names.

Inside the ***Imagination Station*** is an ***Imagination Circle***. In the IC is where all thoughtful discussions should take place. To begin, have a discussion about names.

You might ask:

- How do you feel about your name? Why?
- Does your name have a special meaning to you? Or did your parents tell you your name had a special meaning?
- Do you like being called by your name?
- How do you feel when someone doesn't know your name, or forgets your name, or simply calls out to you by saying, "Hey you?"
- How do you feel when someone sings your name? Why do you think they're singing your name?

(End discussion here for Grades K-2– Move to the Picture Walk)

Continue Discussion for Grades 3 and up

- Ask: Have you heard of the Black Lives Matter Movement? If they have not, share this: The Black Lives Matter Movement is a movement for fair and humane treatment, designed to make clear that Black people, people of African descent, deserve to be treated as innocent, wonderful human beings in all circumstances, and particularly in encounters with police officers. It's designed to stop police discrimination, harassment, brutality, and murder and to demand that society treat Black people with decency and dignity. Ask students how they feel knowing this information and how much of it they understand. Can they express what they understand? Acknowledge their feelings.
- Ask: Have you heard of George Floyd? If they have not, share this: George Floyd is a Black man and father who was killed when Minneapolis Police Officer Derek Chauvin put his knee on his neck for 9 minute 29 seconds, while he was handcuffed and lying on the ground. It happened on May 25, 2020. Although Floyd kept telling Chauvin that he couldn't breathe, the officer refused to take his knee off his neck and eventually George died from lack of air. A teenager videotaped the murder and posted it to social media. People all over the world were so angry, frustrated, and saddened that they took to the streets to demand an end to this kind of inhumane treatment. Ask students how they feel knowing this information and how much of it they



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understand. Acknowledge their feelings and express gratitude for all who share and listen intently..

VERY IMPORTANT. Immediately take time to breathe. Guide students through 5-10 deep breaths. Ask them to stand. Ask them to hug themselves, and if, appropriate, one another.

OPTIONAL (Depending on how much time you have and where students are emotionally):

Ask students to share what gives them hope. (Examples: nature, pets, family, friends, religious or spiritual observances, birthdays, holidays, other celebrations, accomplishments. Have handy stories of people throughout history, including children, who have triumphed over difficult circumstances in ways that give us hope.)

Conduct a “picture walk” through the book (Highly recommended for Grades K-2). You conduct a “picture walk” by simply showing a page and asking them to share what they believe is happening based on the images. Thank them for sharing, and celebrate their answers, no matter how close they are to what you believe the author intended. (If an answer seems inappropriate, redirect them to the goal of the activity.) You also can thank them for showing you something you didn’t see. Keep it lighthearted.

Read the story. For ALL elementary grades, pay close attention to opportunities to use repetition, and create a beat during the chanting section. (Look for the Author video on how you can do this during your reading). Stay in the Imagination Circle for as long as you’re communicating with the whole group.

After reading the story, ask the children how they feel, what they’re thinking, and what questions are on their minds. You can invite them to remember someone they know who has died by asking what memory of that person makes them smile.

Use this section below, What the Author Says, to help with discussion afterwards or for another day’s discussion.

- This book, *Say Their Names*, places emphasis on saying names because:
- Our names communicate our natures, our identities. For instance, the root of my name is Carol, and a carol is a song, and goodness knows, I love songs and I love to sing, so my name, Caroline is a perfect match for my nature (meaning something that I love to do or that comes easily to me or that seems to be naturally a part of me).
- Our names are tied to our histories and our futures. My named is tied to my family history because I am named after my Aunt Carolyn. It’s tied to my future because it might show up in the name of a future family member. Or, sometimes when people hear or learn of our names, it might inspire them to create something or respond in a special way.
- Saying names of loved ones (or community members) who have died is a ritual observed by communities the world over. It is an important ritual for African Americans. More than 30 years ago, my family began having family reunions each year. Our reunions started off with about 40-50 people and eventually grew to 400. And on the very last day of our 3-day reunion, we always light candles and say the names of the family members who have passed on. Some of them had passed on, or transitioned, as many 150 years ago, and some within just the last year. In



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addition, during certain ceremonies, many African Americans offer libation (the pouring of some form of liquid into the ground) in memory of a deity or those who have passed on as they call out their names, and this ritual came directly from parts of Africa, where it is still observed. There's a movie called *The Song of Names*. It's a 2019 drama film directed by Francois Girard, and stars Tim Roth and Clive Owen as childhood friends. It's based on a novel by the same name and is a story about a child prodigy in the violin who moves to England from his home in Poland to study with a noted teacher. While away, his family is killed in the Holocaust. When he returns home, he discovers a synagogue that has written songs to remember those who died. There's a yearly ritual in Pakistan to say the names of young women who were killed because they dared to speak up for women's rights. The examples of observations such as this around the world are numerous.

- It's important to understand *why* we say their names. To say their names is to remember. It's a Jewish article faith that "To remember is to keep alive." I agree. To remember, especially all the good things, helps us heal from our hurt. To say their names is also to "sing" our loved ones a love song. To say their names is a way to come together in unity so that no one feels alone. Invite the group to discuss what some of these reasons *why* means to them.
- When we say their names, remember them and their stories, it helps us imagine and work toward a future free of police and racial violence. Ask students to begin to imagine how we can stop violence from happening to people who are stopped or followed by the police, or between people of different races. Not everyone will have an answer, and that's okay. We just want to encourage imagining. Children give us the gifts of their imaginations, if only we make space for them to do so.
- Dr. Ken Robinson has said that imagination is an extraordinary human power, which we too often take for granted, that it's "this capacity to hypothesize about things that have never been but could be." I often think about all the things the world has imagined. So take a few moments with students to consider what the world has imagined in music, dance, fine arts, science, math, social studies – all the things that one day did not exist and now they do because someone took the time to imagine them into being. A child's artwork is the result of imagining. A new song or dance or genre of music is the result of imagining. High-speed trains, washing machines, dryers, the traffic light, the cell phone – all the result of hypothesizing about things that had never been but now are. And sometimes the hypothesis is a sort of spontaneous combustion, where someone just springs into action after witnessing something, and it provokes a creative, never before seen, response. The same is true for ingenuity around human behavior. It all begins when we give ourselves permission and the space to simply imagine.

Invite children to create art in response to the book. You can break into small groups, or let the children work individually, outside the circle to create their art. **However, be alert to any child's need to express themselves artistically while the Imagination Circle discussions are under way.** Honor that need as kindly and creatively as you can.

- Invite them to create art, through drawing, coloring, painting, using found objects or any material that excites them; to write a short story or poem; or create a dance or song that shows ways of imagining peace during police and community encounters, or between people of different races.
- Invite them to take words, rhymes, and images from a page of the book and create something of their own using what they take.



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- Invite them to create fine art, a written work, dance or song using any of the “gifts” found in the story. Here’s the list of gifts:

Love*Hope*Courage*Determination *Empowerment*Positive
 Feelings*Positive Thoughts*Positive Actions*
 Agency*Imagination*Remembering*Good vibes*Love
 Songs*Poetry*Family*Community*Friends*Ancestor Wisdom*Good
 people*Freedom*Light*Rise*Perfume*Planet*Children*Justice
 *Peace*Truth*Coming up* Oneness

A great companion text for working with the *Say Their Names* picture book by Caroline Brewer is *Say Their Names: 101 Black Unarmed Women, Men, and Children Killed By Law Enforcement*, published by Campaign Justice, at campaignjustice.org. This is content best consumed by adults to help them understand the foundation for the movement. It will be very useful as a resource for working with middle school and high school students as well.

Lastly, look for my essay: *What if We Could Expect Beauty from Every Talk with Children about the*



World's Ugliness? As soon as it is published in a major online newspaper or website, it will be posted to my website. If you don't find it, contact me. It provides a helpful frame for working with this book and inspiring children to higher heights in terms of social and emotional growth.

Please EMAIL caroline@carolinebrewerbooks.com images from the artwork students create. Or feel free to mail artwork to Caroline Brewer, Unchained Spirit Enterprises, P.O. Box 9567, Washington, DC 20016.

Thank you so much, and enjoy your experience at the Imagination Station! – Caroline Brewer



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