

PS 39 Diversity and Inclusion Book of the Month: February

Theme: Black History

Book Title: Sulwe
By Lupita Nyong'o

Grade Level: K / 1st

Book Summary:

In Sulwe's family, everyone's skin is a different shade, but Sulwe is the only one with skin as dark as the midnight sky. At school, her classmates call her hurtful names because of her skin color, causing Sulwe to try almost anything to lighten it. But when none of her attempts work and even a talk with Mama can't lift her spirits, it's the magical storytelling of a shooting star that reveals the beauty in the blackest of nights and the darkest of people. Together, author Nyong'o's compelling narrative and Harrison's emotionally charged illustrations tell a story of a Black girl's journey toward self-love that will resonate with everyone who has ever felt different or out of place.

Discussion Questions:

- Based on what you've read, do you feel that Sulwe is a good book title for this story? Explain your answer.
- Sulwe's family members have skin colors that look like the sky throughout the day. Mama is the color of dawn, or sunrise; Baba is the color of dusk, or the sunset. What times of day do Mich and Sulwe represent? Why do you think the author chose a different skin color for each member of Sulwe's family?
- What is the main conflict in this story? How does this conflict make Sulwe feel in the beginning of the book? How is the conflict resolved? What evidence do you find to show that Sulwe's feelings have changed?
- The shooting star tells Sulwe the story of Night and Day, and how special and important each sister was to the world. Why do you think this story is so important for Sulwe to hear? What makes you special and important to the world?
- Sulwe's mama tells her that real beauty begins with "how you see yourself, not how others see you." What do you think this means? What does real beauty mean to you?
- Sulwe dreams of being lighter-skinned so that she can make real friends, like her sister, Mich. Why do you think Sulwe believes she must have lighter skin in order to make friends? What advice would you give to Sulwe? Explain your answers.
- At the end of the story, Sulwe understands that she is beautiful inside and out. Write about what makes you or someone you know beautiful in all ways.
- If you were to continue the story, what might have happened when Sulwe runs into the children who called her names at school? What might she have said to them after being reminded of her brightness? How might they have responded?
- The author, Lupita Nyong'o, includes a note for readers at the end of the book that describes her own childhood and feelings about her appearance and skin color. Why do you think she chose to share this personal information? How does it make you feel knowing that Sulwe was created from some of her own experience?

