

## Swim Team

Christmas, J.



When Bree and her dad move to Florida, Bree must face fitting in at a new school, making new friends, and facing a new challenge: having to take Swim 101 when she can't swim. When her elderly neighbour teaches Bree to swim, she also tells her about Black history and that Black people were banned from swimming. Bree eventually joins the swim team and when they compete against a rival private school Bree and the team aim to win the competition to convince the school board not to close their pool. This compelling graphic novel examines racism, classism, overcoming fears, making friends, teamwork, and doing the right thing, and is suitable for individual or small group reading.

**Collections** Novel

**Subject** English Language Arts

**Grades** 3-7

**Primary Identifier** 9780063056763

**Evaluation Date** Sep 2022

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## Resource Evaluation

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## **CURRICULUM FIT**

**Does the resource support BC curriculum?**

Extensively

**This product supports the Core Competencies of the BC curriculum:**

- Communication
- Creative Thinking
- Critical thinking
- Positive Personal and Cultural Identity
- Personal Awareness and Responsibility
- Social Responsibility

This graphic novel fits with several big ideas in ELA from grades three through seven, including: Exploring stories and other texts helps us understand ourselves and make connections to others and to the world, and Exploring and sharing multiple perspectives extends our thinking. The graphic novel format also allows for students to explore Curricular Competencies such as "Recognize and appreciate how different features, forms, and genres of texts reflect various purposes, audiences, and messages." As well, the themes of anxiety, racism, and classism support Competencies such as "Recognize and identify the role of personal, social, and cultural contexts, values, and perspectives in texts."

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## **SUGGESTED CLASSROOM USAGE**

This graphic novel could be used as part of individual or small group reading around themes of anxiety, overcoming fears, friendship, teamwork, or racism. If students were given this text as one among a variety of books touching on any of the themes listed, important discussions could be had on how the ideas are presented in each book and, in the case of this text, how the illustrations contribute to the students' understanding of such themes.

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## **SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

### **Age:**

There are excellent examples of intergenerational relationships. Bree becomes friends with her older neighbour, Etta, who teaches Bree to swim. Etta eventually brings in several of her friends to help coach Bree's middle school swim team.

### **Gender Roles, Identity & Sexual Orientation:**

Bree is being raised by a single dad. Bree's friend Humberto defies gender norms as a costume designer.

### **Multiculturalism:**

Most of the main characters are Black. Black culture is portrayed respectfully and is shown via discussions of food and hairstyles.

### **Socio Economic:**

Bree's middle school is said to not have "the newest stuff" and the school district is looking to sell the land their pool is on. Their biggest swim competition is a large, fancy, private school with an indoor pool. The students and coach at the private school are portrayed as snobby and mean but at the end everyone learns to get along and see what each other has to offer.

### **Ethical:**

Bree's neighbour Etta explains to Bree how segregation and discrimination prevented Black people from accessing pools and how this eventually led to Black people losing their swimming culture. This is shown through both general and specific historical examples of segregation laws and those who fought against them.

### **Safety:**

Bree does not know how to swim at the beginning of the book, and she falls into an unsecure pool. She is rescued by her neighbour Etta.

### **Do the social considerations support, rather than detract from, student learning?**

Extensively

## **Social Considerations Comments:**

The social considerations mentioned support student learning as they demonstrate strong intergenerational relationships and overcoming socio-economic differences to build friendships. The book highlights Black culture by demonstrating how systemic racism in the USA erased an aspect of Black culture (swimming) and celebrates the attempt to reclaim it.

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## **GENERAL CONTENT**

### **Content**

**Is the resource engaging?**

Extensively

**Is the content current for the intended curriculum and grade?**

Extensively

**Is the content accurate for the intended curriculum and grade?**

Extensively

**Is the content timely and important for student broad understandings?**

Extensively

### **Audience:**

**Is the content appropriate to the emotional maturity and cognitive level of students?**

Extensively

**Does the resource provide opportunities for creative and critical thinking?**

Extensively

**Can reading level be adjusted?**

Not at all or slightly

**Is the level of detail appropriate?**

Extensively

**Is the language use appropriate to the emotional maturity and cognitive level of students?**

Extensively

The story and illustrations are ideal for the intended grade level. The details in the illustrations add to the readability of the text and support the story. The section that discusses the historical events of segregation, discrimination, and protest are done with both words and images that are age-appropriate and they allow students an opportunity to think critically about the history of racism and how it shapes the present in terms of access and discrimination. Bree's story is engaging and relatable. Her experiences with moving, starting a new school, learning something new, dealing with anxiety, and overcoming fears will resonate with young readers.

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## **TECHNICAL DESIGN**

**Does the resource make effective use of the medium?**

Extensively

**Is the location of illustrations appropriate?**

Extensively

**Is the resource easy to use?**

Extensively

**Is the use of font, text size and presentation uniform?**

Extensively

**Are extraneous elements/illustrations kept to a minimum?**

Extensively

Physically, this graphic novel is typical of the middle grade graphic novel genre. The fonts used are easy to read and easy to differentiate (e.g. Bree's internal negative thoughts stand out from

actual dialogue and historical events clearly stand out from the present). The bright, colourful illustrations enhance the readability and support the text.

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## **PRINT NOVEL**

**Does the text show insight into the complexity of the human condition?**

Extensively

**Does the text broaden students' experiences and understanding?**

Extensively

**To what degree is this text stylistically rich?**

Extensively

### **Plot description:**

Middle-schooler Bree and her dad move from New York to Florida where math-loving Bree is forced to take Swim 101. Bree doesn't know how to swim, and her anxiety causes her to skip swim class until she eventually asks her elderly neighbour, Etta, to teach her to swim. Bree eventually joins the school swim team and makes some friends, but her father's busy schedule causes them to drift apart. A rivalry with the swim team from the private school causes conflict as Bree and her team hope to win the State Championships and gain prestige that might convince the school district to let their school keep their pool.

### **Related Comments:**

This graphic novel effectively uses the medium to tell the story of a young Black girl overcoming anxiety and fears to learn to swim and to help her team win the State Championships. All the main characters are well-developed and avoid stereotypes. Themes of racism, classism, overcoming fears, making friends, teamwork, and doing the right thing all make for a compelling story. The illustrations enhance the story by effectively conveying mood and emotion. This story has a lot with which students can engage and explore.

**Genre:**

- Contemporary
- Illustrated Novel

**Literary Highlights:**

- Rich Characterization
- Well-developed themes
- Point of view

**Type:**

Graphic Novel

**Visual Highlights:**

Graphic Novel

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**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS****Readability:**

- At intended grade level(s)

**Resource URL**

<https://focusedresources.ca/en/k-12-evaluated-resource-collection/swim-team>