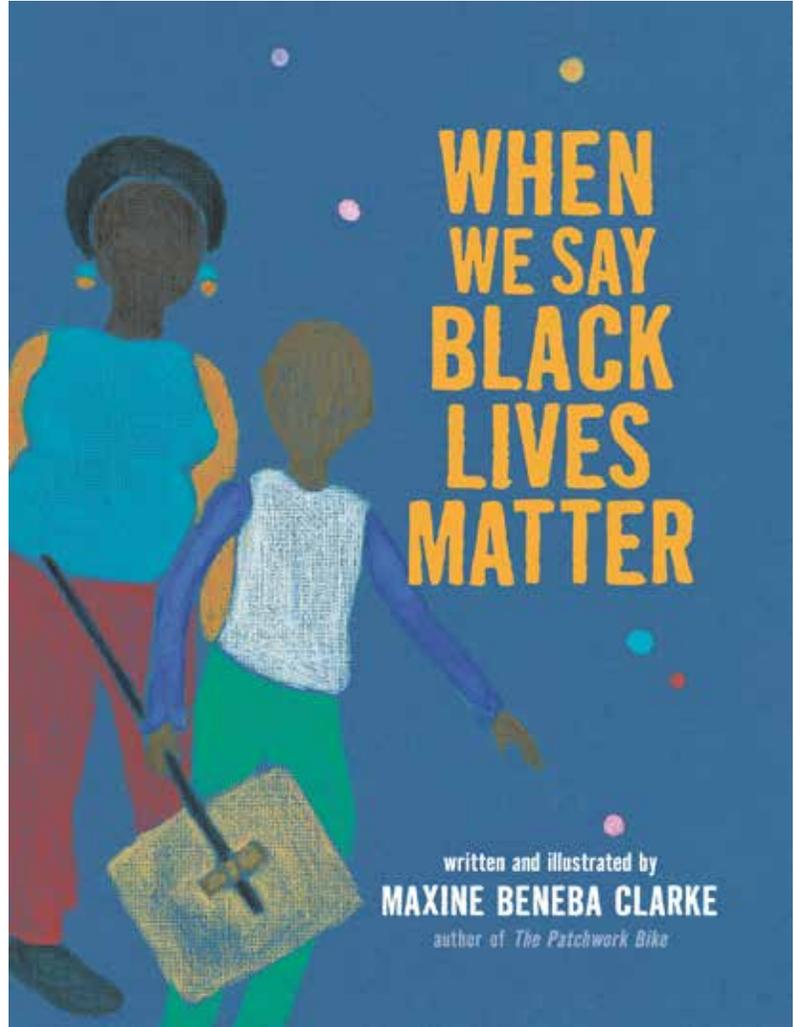


WHEN WE SAY BLACK LIVES MATTER

MAXINE BENEBA CLARKE

INTRODUCTION

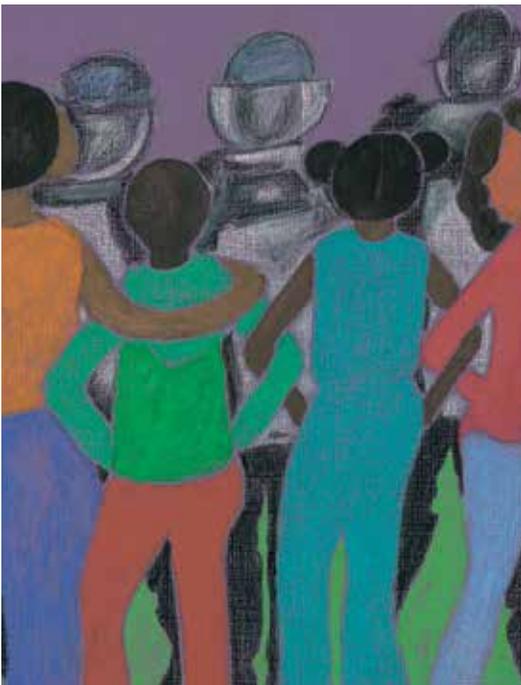
Written and illustrated by Maxine Beneba Clarke, *When We Say Black Lives Matter* is a joyful exploration of the Black Lives Matter message. Clarke is a writer and slam poet of Afro-Caribbean descent and wrote this book as “an act of Black love.” In this tender story, a loving narrator relays to a young Black child the strength and resonance behind the words. In family life, through school, and beyond, the refrains echo and gain in power among vignettes of protests and scenes of ancestors creating music on djembe drums. With deeply saturated illustrations rendered in jewel tones, Maxine Beneba Clarke offers a gorgeous, moving, and essential picture book.



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Common Core Connections

The discussion questions below invite young readers to explore Reading Literature skills based on the Common Core State Standards. These skills will enable students to critically and comprehensively demonstrate their understanding and discuss key ideas and details in the book. By answering the questions, students will be able to respond to key details in the text (RL K.1), retell familiar stories (RL K.2), identify characters, settings, and major events in a story (RL K.3), identify a central message (RL 1.2), and describe characters, settings, and major events citing details from the book (RL 1.3).



PRE-READING SUGGESTIONS

Before reading, it is helpful to support students by exploring some key concepts in order to ensure comprehension. This allows for them to understand the content and engage with the ideas and discussions more productively.

Protest

Help students understand what a protest is and what it means to protest something. For an example, you could show videos of students and young people marching and protesting.

Injustice/Unfairness

Children are able to understand what is or isn't fair. They tend to use the word *unfair* often. Use their familiarity with this word to help them see how unfairness can be both interpersonal and institutional and use that knowledge to talk about systemic unfairness. Understanding that concept builds the foundation for understanding systemic oppression.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Who is the story for? Who is the speaker talking to? How do you know?
2. What do you think it means to say that Black lives matter?
3. What is some unfairness you notice in the book? What is going on?
4. How do the people in the book respond to the unfairness? What do they do?
5. What are some of the feelings of the people in the book? How can you tell?
6. What do you think the message of the book is? What did you understand?

UNDERSTANDING CRAFT AND STRUCTURE

By understanding craft and structure, readers can identify elements of the text that help them with comprehension and basic analysis. The activities below will help students to consider setting, discuss words they don't know, learn about standing up for themselves and others, and more.

Looking at Setting

Begin by defining the concept of setting in a story. Explain that it is where a story takes place. After students understand what a setting is, create a T-chart where students can identify the different settings in the story and what takes place in those spaces. Students can do this with partners, or this can be a whole-class discussion facilitated by the teacher. This is an example of what student answers might look like.

Identifying Setting

SETTING IN THE STORY	WHAT'S TAKING PLACE
Home	The story begins at home with the child going to sleep.
Outdoors, streets	There are moments where the story is outside on the streets where people are marching and protesting.

Wonderful Words

For this activity, students explore words in the text they may be unfamiliar with. Some of the words in bold text in the book (listed below) offer a great opportunity to highlight potentially unknown words.

In the first box (top left), students write the word. In the second box (top right), they draw an image of what they understand the word to mean. In the bottom section, students use modeling clay, beads, beans, rice, or another material to re-create the word and practice letter writing in a tactile way.

<p>Write the word in this box.</p>	<p>Draw a picture of the word.</p>
<p>Create the word here.</p>	

Word Selection

Here are some bolded words from the book you can use:

Bellow	Radiant	Respect	Stalks
Precious	Raise	Sob	Whisper

Fairness Role Play

In *When We Say Black Lives Matter*, Maxine Beneba Clarke is using the phrase “Black lives matter” to show what can be done in the face of injustice and social problems. Young students often like to point out how actions or situations they are experiencing are fair or unfair. This book offers a great opportunity to engage them in understanding what fairness is and how to handle unfairness. Start by asking students to think of experiences they’ve had that were unfair. After you hear from all of them, find one that they all have in common. Maybe they’ve all experienced someone teasing them, someone taking a toy away, or not being able to do something they want to do. Discuss how this action or experience may have indeed been unfair. Have an example of your own ready in case you’re not able to elicit an example from students.

When the example has been identified, pair students up in partners or groups of three. In these small groups, students can practice how to address the unfairness through role play in case they find themselves in that same situation. Have them plan how to respond, what words to use, and how to take action. If working in small groups is not best for your class, then do this as a whole-class exercise. Be prepared to offer multiple chances so students can practice how to stand up to unfairness. After all the groups or students have practiced standing up, have a class debrief where they talk about what they’ve learned and how equipped they feel to address unfairness in their lives.

Jazz and Power

One page of the book reads, “tenor-baritone-alto-soprano, we’ll make a jazz-howl of a noise.” Invite students into a study of jazz and how music can be used to share a message of empowerment. Explain to students what jazz music is, discuss instruments used in the genre, and listen to famous Black jazz musicians such as Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, Miles Davis, Sarah Vaughan, and Ella Fitzgerald. After you’ve explored the music, invite students to write a short chorus or chant with jazz music in mind about any one of the following topics:

- How Black lives matter
- How to make good choices
- Standing up for others
- What being good to each other looks like

Djembe Drums

Maxine Beneba Clarke writes, “When we laugh that Black Lives Matter, that’s the ancestors, inside: a-thundering on djembe drums and guiding us, steady, to rise.” Educate yourself on djembe drums and their significance. Using online sources, show students what djembe drums look like and sound like. After spending some time making observations about how djembe drums are shaped and how they differ from other drums, invite students to create their own drums using materials such as boxes, cups, cardboard, etc. Even if they aren’t djembe drums, students can practice creating instruments and playing them. After all students have created their drums, they can try them by drumming their new creations to a shared beat.

Police Violence Discussion

The book surfaces the issue of police violence, and one illustration shows a protest where police are present. This will surely bring up questions from students. For some, this is ordinary and a common part of their lived experience. In these cases, some might be triggered if the book surfaces trauma they or others near them have experienced. For other students, these types of interactions might be unfamiliar. In any case, this is an opportunity to introduce students to the idea that issues can be complex, and that while police officers are called to serve us, sometimes things don’t work out that way. As a teacher, you want to make sure to teach about these matters so students can begin to build an anti-bias and anti-racist foundation in education. Below are some questions you can use to guide this conversation:

- Why do you think we might need police officers?
- What should happen if a police officer makes a bad choice and someone gets hurt very badly?
- How would you feel if someone you knew was hurt by a police officer?
- What help do you think police officers might need so they don’t hurt people when they make mistakes?

Of course, you should tailor this conversation to fit the children in front of you, doing your best to approach this from an informational lens and not a persuasive one. Consider the racial and ethnic backgrounds of students in your classroom and their prior knowledge on the topic. Consider welcoming a guest, such as a community activist, who can speak to them about their experiences and how to make good choices in life. You definitely want to keep in mind that the tone of this conversation, while serious, should also be positive. Maxine Beneba Clarke models that for us in the book by talking about pain and sobbing, but also joy and love.

EXTENDING THESE ACTIVITIES

Music

One of the pages features a person playing a trumpet and text talking about jazz. Invite students to listen to trumpet playing via digital videos or a guest artist. Also talk about jazz music, listen to some jazz music, and pay attention to songs that talk about change and protests, such as “A Change Is Gonna Come” by Sam Cooke.

History

Children and young people have long been at the center of positive social change. Watch the documentary *Mighty Times: The Children's March*. Using the internet, search for images of children protesting in the Civil Rights Movement. Explore these resources and more to help students understand their historic power as change agents.

Art

Use Maxine Beneba Clarke's work as a model for artistic expression. Some of the images were created with a stencil design. Have students use stencils to make shapes. Then have them combine the shapes to see how they can make pictures. Challenge them to use stencils to create pictures of their homes.

ABOUT MAXINE BENEBA CLARKE



Photo © by Nicholas Walton-Healey

Maxine Beneba Clarke, a writer and slam poet champion of Afro-Caribbean descent, is the author of *The Patchwork Bike*, illustrated by Van Thanh Rudd. About *When We Say Black Lives Matter*, she says, “I see this picture book as an act of Black love—I was inspired to write and create it when thinking about how to explain the concept of Black Lives Matter to the young African diaspora kids in my extended family, living in over eight different countries across the world.” Maxine Beneba Clarke lives in Australia.

This guide was prepared by Lorena Germán, a Dominican American educator supporting teachers with anti-bias and anti-racism education. She is the author of *The Anti Racist Teacher: Reading Instruction Workbook* and the forthcoming book *Textured Teaching: A Framework for Culturally Sustaining Practices*. Lorena Germán is cofounder of Multicultural Classroom as well as cofounder of #DisruptTexts and chair of NCTE's Committee Against Racism and Bias in the Teaching of English. Follow her on Twitter @nenagerman.