



February 3, 2020

Dear Families,

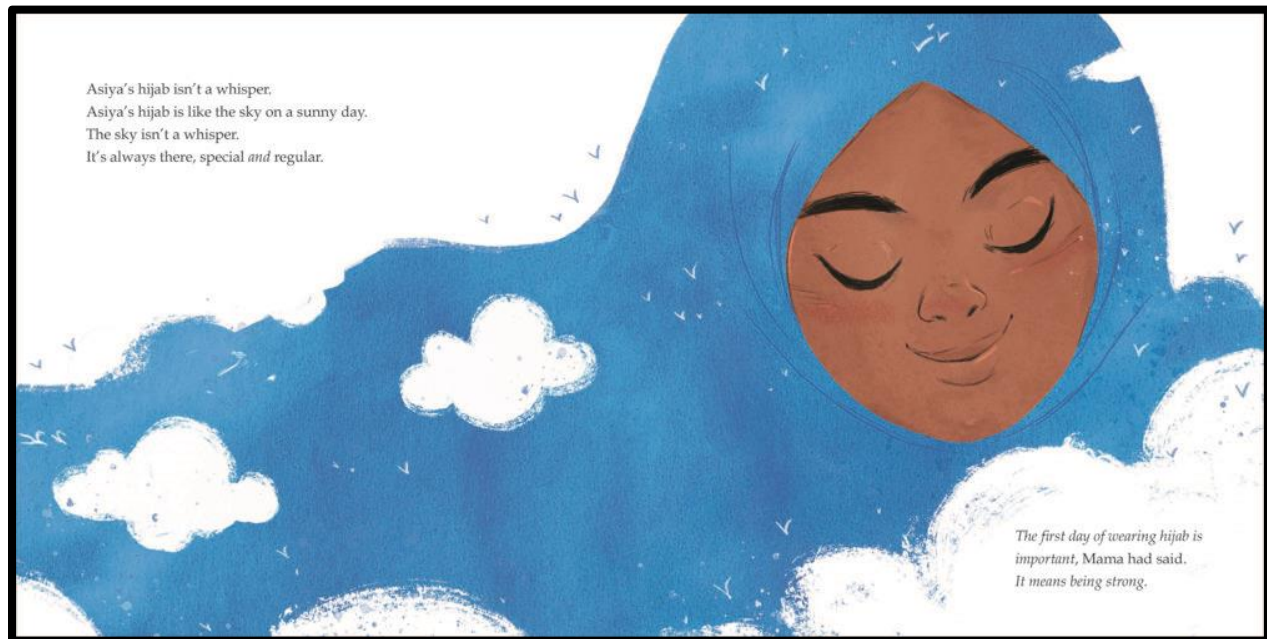
On Monday, we begin the nationwide week of Black Lives Matter in Schools. How has that affected children here at CPE1? To the left is how one of Marilyn's students drew herself and her sister two weeks before last year's Black Lives Matter week of action. On the right is how the same child drew her whole family after five days of BLM in school.



All children should see themselves consciously, and tell *their* stories. Yet in our city's classrooms, the faces on the cover of the majority of books don't look like the children reading them. For years, publishing companies centered the experiences of suburban white children. For years, educators who grew up loving *Ramona* and *Little House* kept buying those books for students.

CPE1 can do better. Over the past two years, our school has invested heavily in our classroom libraries. So far, we've purchased about seven brand-new books per child. The main characters in more than 80% of the fiction we bought are children of color. These newer books honor children's real lives.

Last week, we ordered the beautiful new picture book, *The Proudest Blue: A Story of Family and Hijab*. In that book, Asiya's first day of sixth grade, she wears her regal blue hijab for the first time. Her adoring little sister, Fahzia, reflects:



Asiya's hijab is like the sky on a sunny day. The sky isn't a whisper. It's always there, special *and* regular.

Think about that phrase, “special *and* regular.” Finally, publishers are printing more books in which Black main characters are special, such as Zetta Hammonds’s fantasy of magical quests, *Dragons in a Bag*. Still more books allow main characters to be special *and* regular. *Ode to the Crown* rhapsodizes about how barber shops make customers “Magnificent. Flawless. Like royalty.” In *When Aidan Became a Brother*, a transgender child realizes the most important part of welcoming a new baby into the family: knowing how to love someone.

If those books piqued your interest, well, not all of them will reach most New York City classrooms. *When Aidan Became a Brother*, most books by Zetta Hammond, and many more are not yet available in the New York City Department of Education’s citywide purchasing system. So here’s one action I will take during this Black Lives Matter week of action: writing to everyone I can think of for expedited approval of books. Our city must address the longtime imbalance in classroom libraries. Go to the top of this letter and look again at the drawing on the left and the right. There is power in the stories our children read and tell.

## **Black Lives Matter Week of Action**

The national week of action is busy here in New York City. The movement's thirteen principles are available in child-friendly language at:

<https://blmedu.wordpress.com/guiding-principles/>

You can access a full calendar of events at:

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1kbnqT6nTngzpaRBBJzmxm\\_lzjM\\_akFSw/edit#](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1kbnqT6nTngzpaRBBJzmxm_lzjM_akFSw/edit#)

There are many ways to honor the week, including having your child see the power of young people's advocacy. Stand outside the New York City Department of Education's headquarters (52 Chambers Street in Manhattan) on Thursday from 4:00 to 6:00, and teenagers who grab the mic will stir your soul. But if you can participate in just one thing this week...

### **BLM at CPE1 – Tuesday, February 4 – 6:00 P.M.**

CPE1 this year is hosting an event for elementary-aged children. Children will be active participants in a workshop on dance as a communication of Black identity through time, from traditional West African steps to hip hop.

We're honored to have two guests lead this workshop. **Cheri L. Stokes**, longtime choreographer and dance educator, is the associate producer of the dance group Urban Bush Women. **Nekia Wise** founded her own dance group fifteen years ago, but I'll always think of her as a gifted first grade teacher. I learned so much in her classroom when I was a brand-new assistant principal, and now, Nekia has become that school's assistant principal. I'm so excited to have her teach, even for just one night, at CPE1.

Thank you to the District Four Community Education Council for sponsoring this event. We'll have light food for participants. Please have your child be among them.

—Gabriel