

IF
DOMINICAN

WERE A COLOR

Written by Sili Recio • Illustrated by Brianna McCarthy

HC: 9781534461796 • EB: 9781534461802 • Ages 4-8

BACKGROUND/SUMMARY

If Dominican Were a Color is written by Afro-Dominican storyteller Sili Recio, and illustrated by Trinidadian Brianna McCarthy, a mixed-media visual communicator. Both women come from islands and that informs this story with an authentic feeling and accurate descriptions. These descriptions bring the diverse beauty of the Dominican Republic and its people to life. The story delicately welcomes us to the island, the people, the hues, and the tones, through our senses.

If Dominican Were a Color provides teachers with a great opportunity to welcome conversations about skin tone with young readers, creating space for healthy exploration. One way to approach this topic is to invite students to notice the different shades of the characters and then appreciate and celebrate the differences in the classroom as well. This book can create moments for building a foundation of empathy and understanding for tougher conversations later on.

DISCUSSION OF KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

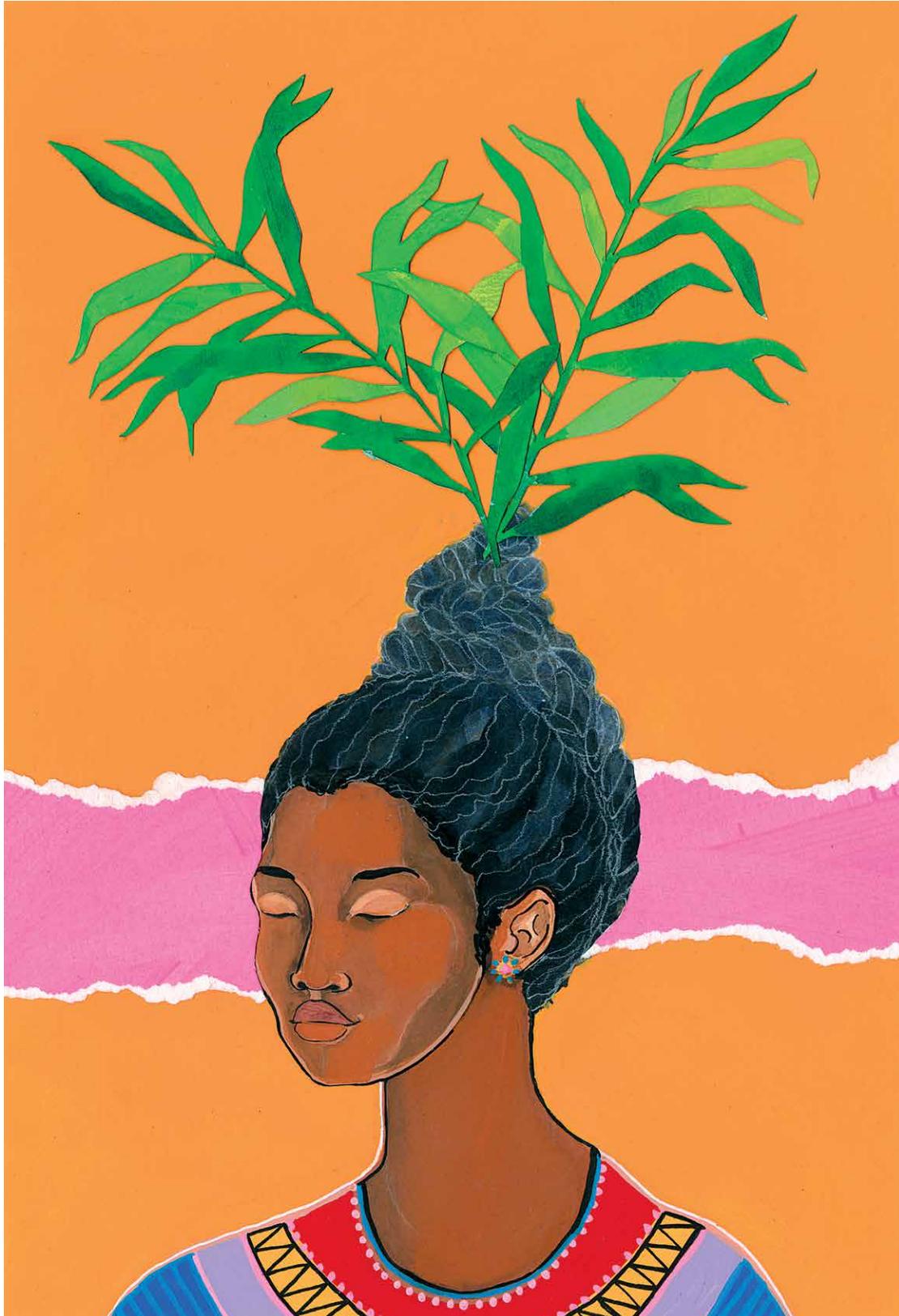
Teachers can share the discussion questions below with their students, inviting young readers to explore Reading Literature skills based on the Common Core State Standards for kindergarten through first grade. These skills will enable students to critically and comprehensively demonstrate their understanding and discuss key ideas and details in this book. By answering the questions below, students will be able to provide key details about 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).

1. What are some of the colors the author uses to describe the Dominican Republic?
2. What are some of the colors the author uses to describe Dominican people?
3. Describe some of the places shown in the book. Have you ever been to a place like that? What was it like? Consider reviewing pages 1–2, 14–15, 20–21, and 21–22.
4. What are two games that children in the book play? What games do children play here in the United States at recess or at home with friends?
5. What words would you use to describe your favorite place?
6. Have you ever been to a beach similar to one shown in the book? What memories do you have there? What words would you use to describe that experience?
7. Have you ever had hot cocoa? Have you had it with cinnamon? What's your favorite drink?
8. Have you ever used or played a drum? If so, what words could you use to describe those sounds? If not, what words could you use to describe what you imagine it might feel like on your hands? Teachers: consider bringing in a drum, if possible, and offer students the chance to try it.
9. What do you think is the message of the story?



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 discussion topics and corresponding activities below will help students to discuss words they don't know and words that suggest feelings and appeal to the senses (RL K-1.1) and to recognize types of texts while considering genre (RL K-1.2).



Discussion and Activity: A Colorful Drawing

For this discussion, teachers can invite students to explore words in the text that they don't know, specifically colors. Teachers can revisit the pages out loud and call out the colors mentioned on each. In pairs, students can select four colors they don't know well or want to explore for their activity. Teachers can also engage students in a discussion of their favorite colors in general.

Materials needed: paper, boxes of crayons, pencils

1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
<p>In this box, write some words that describe the drawing you've created.</p>	

Discussion and Activity: The Senses

In this book, the author and the illustrator work together to show us how the Dominican Republic looks, smells, tastes, feels, and sounds. In addition to the colors featured, there are many descriptions that appeal to our senses. The activity below will help students identify words in the text directly and reflect on the impact of the author's word choice. This activity can be completed as a whole class with discussion. The first two lines are completed for students as an example.

Materials needed: a copy of this sheet and a pencil

Word(s) from the book:	Write the sense the word(s) is/are appealing to and what you think about the description:
<i>"burning bright"</i>	<i>"burning bright" Feel/touch: the weather must be hot</i>
<i>"Merengue hips"</i>	<i>Sound: I hear music</i>

Discussion and Activity: Melanin and Skin Tones

If Dominican Were a Color could be a great launching point for a conversation about understanding skin tone differences. This type of discussion normalizes difference and sets the foundation for having conversations about racial and ethnic diversity at a later time. This also helps students understand why people look different and helps give the language to understand the science behind the why.

Materials needed: More than Peach crayons (MoreThanPeach.com/Collections/Ed-Materials) and drawing paper

For this activity, teachers should begin with a lesson on melanin. Through a video or using their own explanations, teachers can help students understand what melanin is and how it causes different skin tones. They can help students say the word and get to know it well. Next, teachers can provide a list of color names that can be used to describe skin tones. For example: white, mahogany, brown, dark, light, tan, etc. Those can be displayed on a wall or written on chart paper. One idea might be to reference the names of the crayon colors they're about to use. Then, teachers can engage in an open conversation where they notice the skin tones in the class. Allow students to compare and contrast each other's skin tones in an exploratory, non-derogatory way.

For this to occur, teachers might need to offer sentence stems like these:

- I notice that _____ has darker skin than I do.
- I notice that _____ has lighter skin than I do.
- I notice that _____ has (color name) skin.

After the discussion and observations, teachers can invite students to use their drawing paper to draw a group of people using the multicultural crayons and practice coloring with diversity in mind. The group of people can be at a park, at school, or any other mundane activity. Once completed, the drawings can be hung around the room or displayed together to showcase their imagination, but also to highlight the beauty of skin tone diversity.

EXTENDED ACTIVITIES

Geography:

For a geographical exploration of this book, the teacher can guide students to learn about the Dominican Republic. Teachers can display a map of the Caribbean to identify where the island is. Next, students can receive a blank copy of a map of the Caribbean and color in the island. They can also add a flag of the country on that map and discuss the colors they notice on that flag. Another way to do this is to print a large, poster-sized map of the Dominican Republic that the whole class can color in together. They can include palm trees, *café con leche*, and other details from *If Dominican Were a Color*.

Mathematics:

The book features many trees and other plants. Students can count the trees and/or plants throughout the book. They can count page-by-page and write those numbers down as they go. In the end, they can add up all the trees and plants across the many pages. While this helps them to practice addition, it also helps them practice writing numbers.

Arts:

Teachers can guide students to revisit the page where the braids are drawn. Walk students through describing what they notice. Ask: What color hair do you notice? What hairstyle do you notice? With yarn, students can learn to braid, or practice braiding if they already know how. This can build fine motor skills while simultaneously engaging in a cultural activity. Teachers can consider playing merengue music (as featured in the book) while students are braiding, talking about the style of music and its origins in the Dominican Republic.

Science:

Students can spend time researching palm trees and other plants, vegetation included, featured in the book. The teacher can invite them to research what types of plants grow in Dominican Republic, and what an export and import are. They can also consider drawing some of those plants, and having students compare and contrast these images with the plants and trees they see in their neighborhoods.

World Languages:

The book features certain words in Spanish. Invite students to stop and focus on those words. Practice saying them aloud. Teachers can consider welcoming a guest speaker who speaks Spanish to say some of those words and more for students. The guests can share a song in Spanish or help students practice saying common words. This book can be an opportunity for students to be introduced to Spanish in a personal and engaging way. Consider sharing *Si Quisqueya fuera un color*, the Spanish edition of *If Dominican Were a Color*, with students as well.

Paired Readings:

Other books teachers can read to explore alongside *If Dominican Were a Color*:

Islandborn by Junot Díaz

Drum Dream Girl by Margarita Engle

Caribbean Dream by Rachel Isadora

Down by the River by Grace Hallworth



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