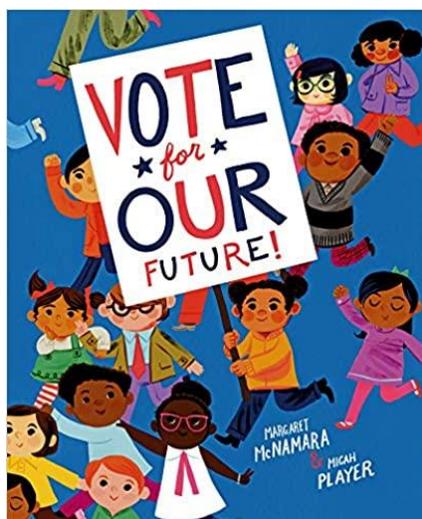


## Second Reaction: Voting for a Brighter Future: Empowering Children as Civic Leaders

McNamara, Margaret. *Vote for Our Future!* Illustrated by Micah Player. New York: Schwartz & Wade Books, 2020. Print.

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Do you want your young readers to know that they can have an impact on this election year and years to come? Be prepared to be informed and inspired by reading, *Vote for Our Future*, by Margaret McNamara! Youngsters will love learning more about their roles as active citizens.

This colorful picture book takes you inside a school on election day. Through contrasting examples of call and response as to why it might be closed, the children tour their gymnasium that has been transformed into a polling station—displaying patriotic bunting of red, white, and blue. Kid-friendly definitions are provided for *polling station* and the reason why we vote. As one would imagine, the youngsters have questions and opinions. Their inquiry leads to research and as one might predict, the students are eager to get involved. As one character exclaims, “Kids have to live with adult choices!” (McNamara unpaginated). The students spread the word to their community on when to vote, ways to vote, how to register, and give reasons why they may

want to vote. Some adults express reasons they may not want to vote, but the children and their guardians offer insightful ways to reconsider. Election day comes with a vibrant double fold out page that renders the importance and excitement on election day. The line is full of diverse community members waiting to cast their votes. On election night, the votes are so close the ballots must be counted twice. This moment reinforces the idea that every single vote matters. School returns to normal, with the future looking bright and full of change. The final page includes facts about the outcomes of voting and a few examples of Acts that were passed that will make our future better for our country.

While 2020 has brought many challenges, this book offers hope and the reminder of the beauty of our democracy. Micah Player's illustrations are full of vibrant colors, expression and emotion. The historically stylized election buttons on the inside cover are cleverly designed with word plays young children will find amusing. The author includes different font sizes and positions the text to emphasize the emotion and meaning throughout the book. Together, the author and illustrator capture the urgency, passion, importance and sensation surrounding an election. It is also clear that the author and illustrator made diversity a priority. Characters are represented by race, culture, religion, ability and age. Signs are displayed in multiple languages to highlight the beauty of our diverse nation and to promote a feeling of unity as we all participate in the very foundation of our democracy.

I was eager to read this book with my four-and-a-half-year-old daughter. We had already talked about the upcoming election, so she had some background knowledge on the topic. I briefly reviewed with her our previous conversation and let her know that we would learn more about voting by reading the book. Whenever it was natural timing to ask a question while reading, the book provided an easily comprehensible answer. My daughter was engaged and interested. She especially enjoyed the illustrations. After we read the book, I asked her, "Can young kids make a difference even if they cannot vote yet?" She eagerly said, "Yes!" and provided some of the examples listed in the book. She got it! We discussed ideas of what we could do in order to spread the word—just like the characters. I asked her if she would make a "Public Service Announcement" to encourage adults to vote. She stood tall with the book in her hand to remind people to cast their vote this November. My heart was full! The video has been delivered to several family and friends.

As someone who has worked the polls, taught social studies methods courses and always stressed the importance of teaching social studies for all ages, this book makes it easy for educators to share civic education with early readers. It brings one of the biggest days to a simple understanding while not losing the prominence of the moment. History is made with every election, and as previously noted, “Kids have to live with adult choices.” This puts the pressure on adults who care about their little ones. I plan to share this book aloud with my preservice teachers during our next seminar. I look forward to their responses as most of them, due to their age, have never had the opportunity to vote in a presidential election. So many educators hesitate to teach about elections with such divisiveness, but it can be done. Emotional learning makes for powerful learning. Let this book inspire you and those around you. Empower children to use their voices in encouraging everyone to vote! Let us hurry to spread the word together!

### **About the Author**

**Veronica Fife-Demski** is a wife, mother of two young children and a dedicated voter. She is an assistant professor in the Elementary Education Department at Ball State University and directs the Urban Immersion Internship through a partnership with Wayne Township Schools. She lives in Indianapolis, Indiana.