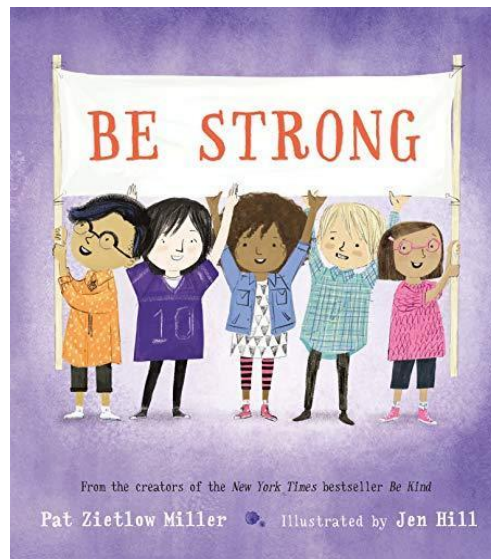


First Opinion: Be Strong

Miller, Pat Zietlow. *Be Strong*. Roaring Brook Press, 2021.

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Be Strong by Pat Zietlow Miller is a heartwarming and beautifully illustrated children's book that teaches strength, courage, and the power of kindness. Through the delightful story and vibrant illustrations by Jen Hill, young readers are taken on a journey that explores the true meaning of strength. The story revolves around a young girl named Tanisha, who is often told to "be strong" by her family and friends. Tanisha starts to wonder what it means to be strong, and as she embarks on her quest to discover strength, she encounters various animals and observes their unique qualities. Each person offers their interpretation of strength, whether it's dad's teamwork, mama's courage, or grandma's determination. Tanisha learns that strength comes in different forms and is not just about physical prowess.

Building on this central theme of the book, Pat Zietlow Miller's writing is simple and accessible for young readers, making it easy for

children to connect with the story and its message. The repetitive phrase "be strong" is a gentle reminder throughout the book, reinforcing the central theme without becoming overwhelming. The narrative encourages children to think critically about being strong, promoting self-reflection and empathy. Jen Hill's illustrations are magnificent—the vivid colors and intricate details bring the individual person's characters to life and captivate the reader's imagination. Her artwork complements the text beautifully, making *Be Strong* a joy to read aloud or explore independently.

One of the strengths of *Be Strong* is its ability to spark meaningful conversations between parents, caregivers, and children. The book provides an excellent opportunity for discussing the concept of strength and how it relates to emotions, perseverance, and kindness. It encourages young readers to embrace their unique qualities and understand that being strong is about more than just physical abilities. Moreover, *Be Strong* facilitates these important conversations and offers a range of relatable characters and situations that help children connect with the concept of strength on a personal level. Engaging narratives and vivid illustrations make it a powerful tool for fostering emotional intelligence, resilience, and empathy, making it an invaluable addition to any child's library. Its narrative complexity and well-crafted characters resonate with young readers, encouraging them to reflect on the multifaceted nature of strength and its significance in their lives.

In addition to being a valuable resource for parents and caregivers, educators can utilize this book as a tool for facilitating discussions about cultural diversity, strength, and kindness within an inclusive and culturally responsive framework. In the beginning of the book, Tanisha says, "I'm not strong. Some days, I can't even lift my backpack. Other days, simple things seem too hard." This quote can be a place where educators pause and facilitate a discussion or activity about some of the challenges that learners face and are willing to share, which contributes to the vulnerability and honesty of a judgment-free classroom culture. Tanisha then asks herself, "How can I be strong?" Educators can follow-up with an activity or discussion about strengths that learners have within themselves and ways that they can cultivate those strengths through

community and self-determination. By allowing space for sharing about everyday obstacles and how to overcome them, educators can acknowledge and listen to learners' lived experiences which can build rapport and might provide insight on how to best support the learner at school. Tanisha states how members of her family encourage her to be strong. Some examples include "showing up," "speaking up," and "not giving up." Educators can facilitate an activity where learners provide examples of how they have shown up, spoken up, and not given up to parallel the sentiments in the book.

Furthermore, in aligning with the book's theme of perseverance and participation, *Be Strong* can be a tool to invite learners to participate in mathematics. Mathematics has historically been deemed as a challenging class where some learners might struggle to be engaged and/or even feel welcomed. By drawing from their lived experiences and helping learners develop their perseverance, intuition, and resourcefulness in mathematics. For example, "showing up" and "speaking up" can be portrayed through learners collaborating with each other and helping one another when one feels stuck. "Not giving up" can relate to persistence with mathematical understanding when concepts are challenging to grasp.

Be Strong is a remarkable children's book that delivers an essential and timeless message about strength and resilience. Its captivating story and stunning illustrations engage young readers and leave a lasting impression. This book is a valuable addition to any child's library and a valuable resource for parents and educators looking to teach important life lessons through literature.

About the Author

Rose Mbewe is a PhD student in Mathematics Education. Her research interest is in using social justice mathematics in addressing the injustices presented in the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals.

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