



Just Like Me

Vanessa Brantley-Newton

Just Like Me Classroom Activity Guide



ABOUT THE BOOK

An ode to the girl with scrapes on her knees and the girl with flowers in her hair and every girl in between, this exquisite treasury will appeal to readers of *I Am Enough* and *Dear Girl*, and have kids poring through it to find a poem that's just for them.

I am a canvas
being painted on
by the words of my family
friends and community

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From Vanessa Brantley-Newton, the author of *Grandma's Purse*, comes a collection of poetry filled with engaging mini stories about girls of all kinds: girls who feel happy, girls who feel sad, girls who feel scared, girls who feel powerful, girls who love their bodies and girls who don't, country girls, city girls, girls who love their mothers, and girls who wish they had a father. With bright portraits in Vanessa's signature style of vibrant colors and unique patterns, this book invites readers to find themselves and each other within its pages.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Vanessa Brantley-Newton is an illustrator, a doll maker, and a crafter who studied fashion illustration at Fashion Institute of Technology and children's book illustration at the School of Visual Arts in New York. She is the author and illustrator of *Grandma's Purse* as well as numerous other children's books, including *Sewing Stories* by Barbara Herkert. Vanessa currently makes her nest in Charlotte, North Carolina, with her husband, daughter, and a very rambunctious cat named Stripes. Learn more about Vanessa and her artwork at VanessaBrantleyNewton.com and on Facebook.

Just Like Me Classroom Activities

PRE-READING ACTIVITY:

Before reading, have students brainstorm ways they are special or unique. Ask students to pair up and share their answers. Then take a picture walk through the book. As you flip through the pages, have students signal to you when they see an illustration that is just like them. If time allows, call on students to tell you why they connect to a particular illustration.

EXPLORE POETRY

This book is a collection of poetry. You can read the whole book or pick out certain poems. Use the poems in *Just Like Me* to show the ways poems can be written. Read "All in Together Girls," and highlight the rhyming scheme. What effect does the rhyme have on the reader? Have a few students read "Sundress Blues" out loud, one at a time. Afterward, discuss any differences in the way the students read the poem. Did they emphasize different words? Discuss the way the line breaks in poems guide readers.

EXPLORE PORTRAITS

Set up portraits and self-portraits by a variety of artists around your classroom, and have students study them. What is each artist trying to portray about their subject? Is there anything included in the portrait, like an animal or object? What portraits do they like or dislike? Why? Discuss the difference between creating a portrait and creating a self-portrait. After your discussion, have students create self-portraits using the template in the reproducible activity below. After the self-portraits are complete, display them in a portrait gallery in your classroom so the class can explore each other's portraits.

CREATE A COLLAGE

Have students create their own "I Am" poem using the skeleton provided. Vanessa Brantley-Newton uses a variety of mediums and techniques to create her unique illustrations. Consider exploring the art of collage-making with your students. Once their poems are finished, provide resources like newspapers, scrapbook paper, magazines, and construction paper. Encourage them to illustrate their poems using these materials. Have students present their poems to the class.

"I AM A CANVAS"

Just Like Me highlights the ways we are all special or unique. As a class, read "I Am a Canvas." Discuss what the phrase "I am a canvas" means. Discuss which parts of the poem students connect with. What affects their "canvases"? Has someone said something to them recently that made a particularly large mark on their canvas? Why does that moment stand out in their memory? When they speak to others, do they consider the effects of their words?

LIKES AND DISLIKES

Before reading "Weird," make a word association map around the word *weird*. Is weird good or bad? Why? After reading, ask students if they share any likes or dislikes with the girl in the poem. Do they like anything others consider weird? What do they think of the last two lines? Have students discuss and record their likes and dislikes. After they do so, ask whether their likes or dislikes have changed over time. Do they share any likes or dislikes with their classmates?

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Activities prepared by Vera Ahiyya, Kindergarten Teacher, Brooklyn, NY
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Write Your Own "I Am" Poem

I am

(name)

I am from

(place)

I am

(adjective)

I am

(adjective)

I am not

(adjective)

Because I am

(adjective)

I am

(name)

Create Your Own Self-Portrait

