



amazeworks

America's Dreaming

**Lesson for Educators and
Caregivers**

amazeworks.org

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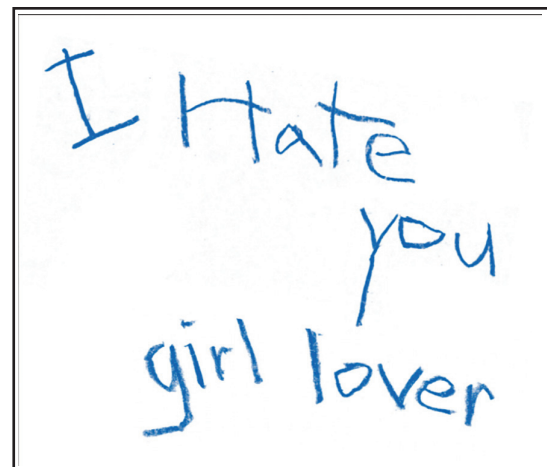
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History of AmazeWorks

AmazeWorks began in 1996 because of an incident of bias towards a 2nd grade student with two lesbian mothers. In response to this incident, the family worked with a committed group of educators, parents, school psychologists, and community members to create a program to talk about diversity in a way that helps children learn about themselves and the people around them. This group's belief that every child should see their family structures, identities, and lived experiences reflected in positive mirrors in the classroom led to the creation of AmazeWorks and our foundational Elementary Curriculum, rooted in Anti-Bias Education. AmazeWorks was incorporated in 1996 as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.



Our Process

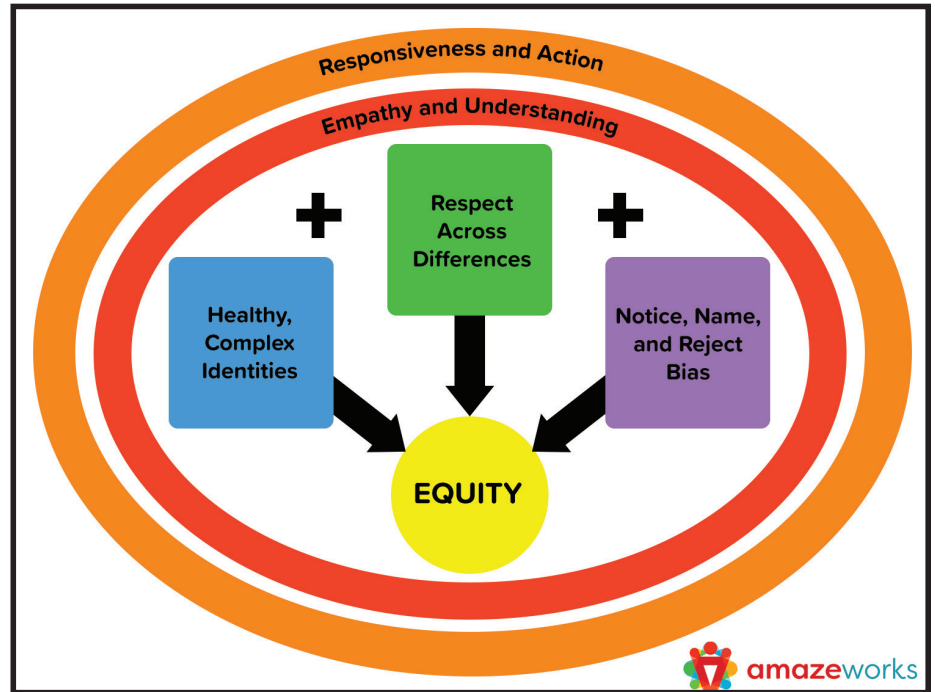
AmazeWorks carefully curates the books we use in our curriculum, identifying books that are written and illustrated from authentic voices as much as possible. We utilize task forces of educators, community members, parents, and specialists to vet and provide feedback on the books and lessons to ensure that the curriculum truly reflects the tenets of Anti-Bias Education and does not reinforce harmful stereotypes of different groups of people.

The curriculum was created using a backwards design process. Discussion questions and journal prompts are guided by the Six Facets of Understanding framework (Wiggins and McTighe).

AmazeWorks Anti-Bias Education Model and Conditions for Belonging Framework

The Elementary Curriculum is centered around the AmazeWorks Anti-Bias Education model, developed from the work of Louise Derman-Sparks and Julie Olsen Edwards in early childhood.

“Anti-bias education is a critical approach to teaching and learning that recognizes that change is needed. Anti-bias educators actively challenge prejudices and injustices. They engage in critical thinking and problem solving, supporting all children in developing a fuller understanding of themselves and their place in the world. Anti-bias teaching helps children strengthen their identities as capable and empowered human beings. Through anti-bias education, children identify issues and inequities in their lives, ask questions, consider multiple perspectives and thinking about their lives critically, growing to actively resist prejudice and discrimination. Anti-bias education acknowledges that while education is a human right, in today’s classrooms, schools, and society, biases are shaping the experiences and very futures of children.” (Derman-Sparks et al. Leading Anti-Bias Early Childhood Programs: A Guide for Change. Teachers College Press, 2015.)



Anti-Bias Education (ABE) promotes:

- Empathy and understanding for self and others
- Healthy and complex identity development
- Respect across and appreciation of differences
- The ability to notice, name, and reject bias
- Responsiveness and taking action against bias, prejudice, and discrimination

Infused within Anti-Bias Education is **Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)**. When children engage in discussions around identity, difference, and bias, they are developing and practicing the important SEL skills of:

- Self-awareness
- Self-management
- Social awareness
- Relationship skills
- Responsible decision-making

America's Dreaming

by Bob McKinnon
illustrated by Thai My Phuong

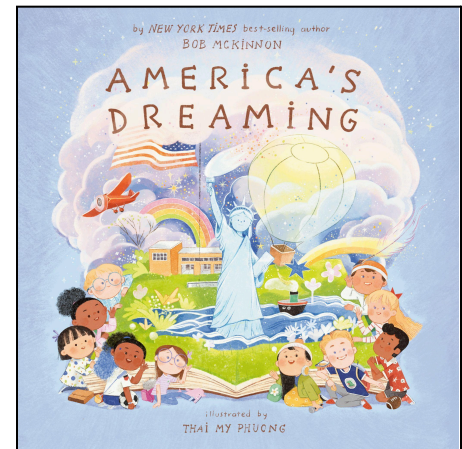
Book Lesson for Educators and Caregivers

Book Title: *America's Dreaming* by Bob McKinnon, illustrated by Thai My Phuong

Recommended Ages: 4-8 years

Book Summary to Share With Children

In this book, America is a child who starts school full of excitement, eager to make new friends and have fun. But the first day is lonely and tough. Thankfully, a caring teacher introduces them to the Welcome Wagon, a cart of inspiring books about historical figures who faced challenges and persevered. After reading these stories, America dreams of meeting heroes like Amelia Earhart and Martin Luther King Jr., who help them find the courage to return to school and make friends.



Reflection Questions for Educators and Caregivers

1. Think about a time when you were in a group and felt like an outsider. What made you feel like an outsider? Was there anything someone in the group could have said to help you feel welcomed? How does that experience affect you now?
2. When did you notice that you became more open to different perspectives and people who were different from you? How can you encourage and support children in being open to people who are different from them and have different perspectives?

Anti-Bias Education Tenets

- Empathy & Understanding
- Healthy Complex Identities
- Respect Across Differences
- Notice, Name, & Reject Bias
- Responsiveness & Action

Social-Emotional Learning Competencies

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management
- Social Awareness
- Responsible Decision Making
- Relationship Skills

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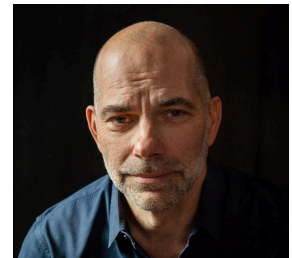
Reader's Note

This book invites readers to step into the narrator's shoes, experiencing the world from their perspective. Interestingly, America is never shown, allowing them to represent any child longing to fit in. Through the empowering stories of historical figures, America learns to be both brave and kind, offering a universal message of belonging and courage.

In addition to reading the **Author's Note** at the back of the book, you can reference the [Author's Letter to the Reader](#) and the [Illustrator's Letter to the Reader](#).

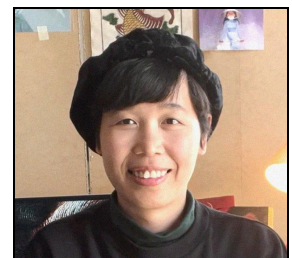
About the Author:

Bob McKinnon lives in a village north of New York City with his wife, three daughters, and dog—who makes him feel very welcome every time he steps through the door. He is the author of the New York Times best-seller *Three Little Engines*, a modern retelling of the classic *The Little Engine That Could* story. Bob writes and teaches about issues related to the American dream and directs an organization whose mission is to inspire people to reflect on who and what has contributed to where they end up in life. Learn more about his work and his own American dream story at www.movingupusa.com.



About the Illustrator:

Thai My Phuong is a Vietnamese illustrator who graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Interior Design. She has a deep passion for visual storytelling and teaching for international publishers, magazines, brands, and universities. Phuong currently lives in Los Angeles with her husband.



America's Dreaming

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Discussion Questions (*essential questions in bold)

- 1. How does America feel at the beginning of the story as they walk into the school and classroom? Have you ever felt that way?**
- 2. On the first day of class, America's classmates share what they love to dream about. What is something you like to dream about?**
- 3. What did America feel and worry about when it was their turn to share?**
4. America loves to read books about real people. They say, "[O]pening a book is like someone opening their door for you. Letting you in to see what their life was like and how it might help you with yours." What kinds of stories do you like to read or learn about and why?
5. What do the book characters teach America when they dreams about them at night?
- 6. How did America show their courage, truth, and character to their classmates?**
 - a. What would you do to show your courage, truth, and character if you were in America's situation?**
- 7. How did America's classmates make up for their unkind behavior towards America from the first day of school?**
 - a. What can we do to make sure that everyone feels welcomed and included in our community (classroom, neighborhood, etc.)?**
8. What do you think America meant when they said that their dreams become more real as each day passes?
- 9. As the reader, we never see what America looks like because we only see the story from their perspective. We don't even know America's gender.**
 - a. What does America look like in your head?
 - b. For younger children:** Does it matter what America looks like? Why or why not?
 - c. For older children:** Why do you think the author and illustrator chose not to reveal what America looks like to the reader? How might it change your perspective on the story if you knew America's race, gender, or other physical characteristics?

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Follow-Up Journal Prompts and Activities

1. All children sometimes feel alone, confused, or sad. Ask children what has helped them feel better when they feel this way. They can write or draw about a time when they felt one of these emotions and what helped them feel better.
2. Ask children to tell what they can do to make a new student or visitor to the community (classroom, neighborhood, etc.) feel welcome. Create a "Welcome" book or poster with their ideas.
3. Identify two or three additional historical figures who were important in creating spaces of welcome or inclusion and research them. Children can write or draw about what they learned about that figure.
4. **Freeze** (for groups)
Ask the children to sit in a line or a circle. Call two to five children up and ask them to act out scenarios about getting along with friends. Remind them to use their bodies and their faces to show you how they would feel if what you describe really happened. After a moment of acting, say, "Freeze." You may want to assign specific roles to specific children to speed up the action. Make sure every child gets a turn to act out something positive and something negative.
 - *"You are playing together and there are three of you and only two bikes. You have to figure out how to share...freeze."*
 - *"Two of you are playing and another child comes to play. That child figures out how to make the play even more fun...freeze."*
 - *"Two children are playing and one of them takes a toy from the other child...freeze."*
 - *"Four of you are at the park and a new child comes along. They really want to play, but seem quite shy...freeze."*
 - *"Two children are having an argument and another child comes along and helps them solve their problem...freeze."*
 - *"Three children are playing but one of them gets left out...freeze."*
 - *"Three children are playing with blocks and one of them takes all the blocks and won't share...freeze."*
 - *"Three children are playing and another child wants to join. The child who wants to join watches carefully for a minute to see what is going on so they can easily join the play...freeze."*



AMERICA'S DREAMING
by Bob McKinnon; illustrated by Thai My Phuong
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