

Middle school teacher launching children's book representing Black men

By Fatima Baig

Adesewa Ona Laoye, a middle school teacher in Orangeville, recently authored a children's book called 'Men Like My Father,' representing Black men in the community.

Laoye likes to refer to her book as affirmations for sons and validations for fathers.

A picture book, 'Men like My Father' highlights the role Black men have in society.

'In the media, we often [see a] misrepresentation of Black people in general and specifically Black men in our society, so my book highlights the impact of good men and the various roles they place within our society,' said Laoye.

She told the Citizen she wants to change the narrative surrounding Black individuals as well as inspire and educate people about stereotypes. Laoye also wants the book to serve as a reminder of how valuable Black men and Black people are.

Laoye was inspired and motivated to write the book because of the world's current situation with racial injustice and the Black Lives Matter movement.

'I was inspired or motivated to write this book because of the event that happened in the world, especially with the whole Black Lives Matter movement and just due to racism as a whole,' she said.

Laoye, who is Black, says she was also motivated to write the book because of her son and desire for him to be able to see more people who look like him.

'I do have a son, and he's young now, and I want him to grow up seeing people who look like him every day, whether it's on T.V., at school, in the community or in children's literature. I want my son to know he can see himself in somebody else. I want him to know that there are people of color out there doing amazing things,' said Laoye.

She wants Black children to be able to dream big, no matter their race and know they can accomplish their dreams.

Laoye, in her five and a half years of teaching and as a student, hasn't seen much Black literature and believes it's essential to have representation.

'Representation is important for Black people of color. They need to know that despite what the media says about us, Black people contribute to society and do amazing things,' said Laoye.

According to an article in the Toronto Star, publishers reported, in 2019, 419 books with a Canadian author or illustrator were published in Canada, featuring 525 main characters. Of those books, 37.5 per cent feature main characters who are white, a decrease of 8.2 per cent over 2018, while 29.3 per cent have main characters who are Black, Indigenous, East Asian or South Asian, an increase of 4.9 per cent over the previous year.

Laoye told the Citizen she believes the risk of lack of representation in literature impacts social and emotional learning and that people of color are being told to change themselves.

'The risk is that they never see themselves as worthy or good enough to be in the same spaces as their peers who are Caucasian or from other races. The risk is that they will never really truly believe that they can achieve anything despite the fact that they are Black,' said Laoye.

She believes the book allows parents to raise Black allies and educate themselves about what Black people go through. She wants the book to enable parents to teach their children that what matters is individuals characteristics, not their race.

The book, 'Men Like My Father' is available on www.menlikemyfather.com.