



The Girl with the Brown Crayon: How Children Use Stories to Shape Their Lives

Vivian Gussin Paley

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Once again Vivian Paley takes us into the inquiring minds and the dramatic worlds of young children learning in the kindergarten classroom.

As she enters her final year of teaching, Paley tells in this book a story of farewell and a story of self-discovery--through the thoughts and blossoming spirit of Reeny, a little girl with a fondness for the color brown and an astonishing sense of herself. "This brown girl dancing is me," Reeny announces, as her crayoned figures flit across the classroom walls. Soon enough we are drawn into Reeny's remarkable dance of self-revelation and celebration, and into the literary turn it takes when Reeny discovers a kindred spirit in Leo Lionni--a writer of books and a teller of tales. Led by Reeny, Paley takes us on a tour through the landscape of characters created by Lionni. These characters come to dominate a whole year of discussion and debate, as the children argue the virtues and weaknesses of Lionni's creations and his themes of self-definition and an individual's place in the community.

The Girl with the Brown Crayon tells a simple personal story of a teacher and a child, interweaving the themes of race, identity, gender, and the essential human needs to create and to belong. With characteristic charm and wonder, Paley discovers how the unexplored territory unfolding before her and Reeny comes to mark the very essence of school, a common core of reference, something to ponder deeply and expand on extravagantly.

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