

Dear Reader,

Like a lot of writers, I spent my childhood reading voraciously. But at around 8 years old, I started getting frustrated because I barely ever saw myself represented in books. The characters I adored and spent so much time with – characters like Elizabeth Wakefield, Anne Shirley, Nancy Drew – all lived in worlds that were overwhelmingly white.

I couldn't understand why the books on library and bookstore shelves hardly ever featured diverse worlds. I wanted to see my neighborhood, my school, my social circles reflected in my favorite stories. So I made a declaration: I would grow up and write books that allowed me to see myself on the page.

Fast forward a few decades, and that declaration is finally becoming a reality. For every story I write, I imagine my childhood self reading it, and hopefully finding the comfort and recognition she longed for.

The first time I saw *Everybody in the Red Brick Building* with Oge Mora's beautiful final artwork, I read it with my 8-year-old self in mind. But something surprising happened near the end of the book.

The final spread instantly brought me back to the months I spent writing this manuscript, when I lived in an apartment with an infant whose loud, middle-of-the-night cries felt like they would wake the entire building. The spread features a Black mother, bonnet on her head, lovingly putting her baby back to sleep.

I hadn't been looking for my *adult* self in this book. But there she was. And as it turns out, the comfort and recognition I get from seeing myself in a book is still just as powerful, all these years later.

- Anne