

The Principled Academy: Seven Stories About Hope for Children

Isaac Durst

December 30, 2025



"Hope is the thing with feathers..."



Illustration by Diana Sudyka, (pronounced: soo-dee-kah), illustrator from Chicago, IL

Hey there friend,

As the cold frost creeps across our windows and plants and animals bundle up to conserve their energy for winter, this January, we've chosen **Hope** as our virtue of the month.

Hope is believing in the goodness within ourselves, in others, and in the world. It's the courage to dream—and to keep believing in that dream, even when it feels out of reach.

As Emily Dickinson beautifully writes:

*"Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without the words,
And never stops at all."*

This month, we honor the dreamers of the world through a selection of hopeful stories—both true and fictional. Stories of people like **Millo Castro Zaldarriaga**, featured in *Drum Dream Girl*, a Chinese-African-Cuban girl who broke Cuba's traditional taboo against female drummers, becoming one of the first women to play the drums in a field long reserved for men.

And people like **Emmanuel Ofosu Yeboah**, featured in *Emmanuel's Dream*, a boy born in Ghana with one deformed leg who, against all odds, became a world-renowned cyclist. Emmanuel rode more than 400 miles across Ghana to raise awareness and advocate for people with disabilities.

We invite you to explore these hopeful stories with your kiddos this winter season. Here are a few conversation starters to spark reflection and discussion:

- What gives you hope?
- Do you have any dreams?
- Can you remember a time when you felt hopeful, even when something was hard?

As always, for more story and activity ideas, please visit our website at valuesandvirtues.org.

Wishing you health, happiness, always,

Isaac Durst

Isaac Durst
Director

7 Books on Hope

The Story of Simone Biles

by Rachelle Burk

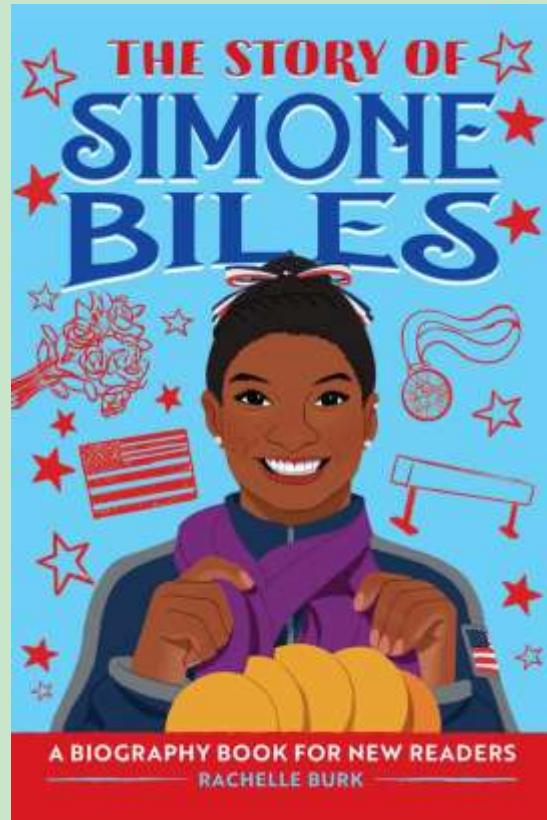
Age range: 5th & 6th graders

Genre: Biography

Simone Biles has been called the greatest gymnast of all time, winning five Olympic and 25 World Champion medals by age 22.

Before she wowed the world with her incredible gymnastics skills, Simone was an energetic young girl who dreamed of becoming a top gymnast. She trained for hours every day and made many sacrifices to pursue her goals.

Explore how Simone Biles went from being a kid growing up in Texas to an Olympic athlete who has won more gymnastics medals than anyone in history.



[See Story](#)

I Can't Do That, YET

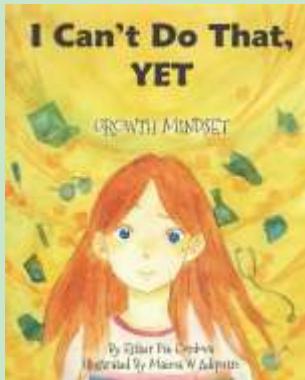
by Esther Cordova

Rain Before Rainbows

by Smriti Prasadam-Halls, David Litchfield (Illustrator)

Jabari Jumps

by Arnold Lobel

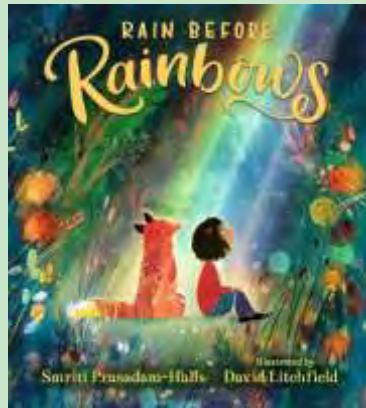


Age range: 1st & 2nd
Genre: Fiction

Enna isn't a queen of confidence. Struggling to believe in herself, the young girl is certain she doesn't have what it takes to read during bedtime. But when she finally falls asleep, she's greeted by a wonderful woman who's incredibly familiar...

As the journey across her dreamscape shows her potential versions of herself, Enna is amazed at everything she's learned how to do. But she knows all that growth won't come free – it will take time, knowledge, and dedication.

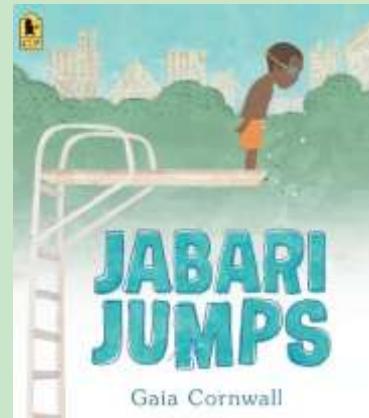
[See Story](#)



Age range: Pre-K / K
Genre: Picture Book

In this heartfelt story about courage, change, and moving on, a girl and her companion fox travel together away from a sorrowful past, through challenging and stormy times, toward color and light and life. Along the way they find friends to guide and support them, and when the new day dawns, it is full of promise.

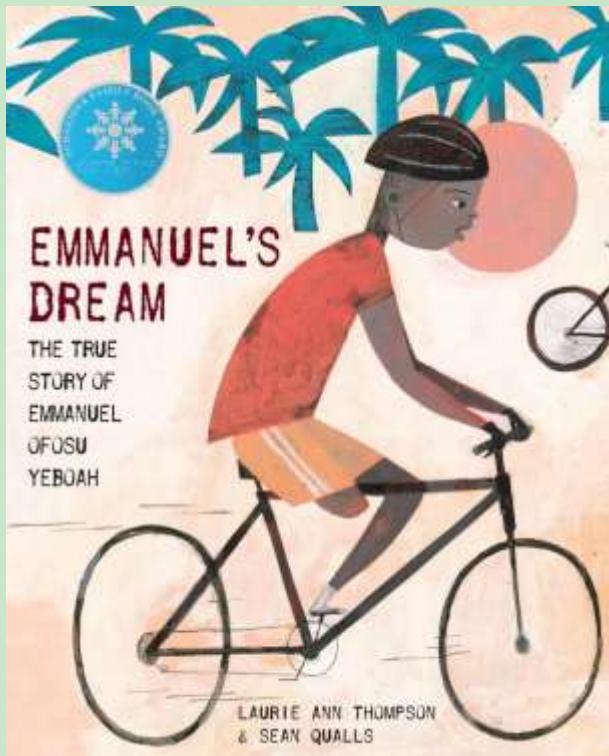
[See Story](#)



Age Range: 1st & 2nd
Genre: Fiction

Jabari is definitely ready to jump off the diving board. He's finished his swimming lessons and passed his swim test, and he's a great jumper, so he's not scared at all. "Looks easy," says Jabari, watching the other kids take their turns. But when his dad squeezes his hand, Jabari squeezes back. He needs to figure out what kind of special jump to do anyway, and he should probably do some stretches before climbing up onto the diving board.

[See Story](#)



[See Story](#)

Drum Dream Girl: How One Girl's Courage Changed Music

by Margarita Engle
Illustrated by Rafael López

Age range: 1st & 2nd
Genre: Picture Book Biography

Girls cannot be drummers. Long ago on an island filled with music, no one questioned that rule—until the drum dream girl. In her city of drumbeats, she dreamed of pounding tall congas and tapping small bongós. She had to keep quiet. She had to practice in secret. But when at last her dream-

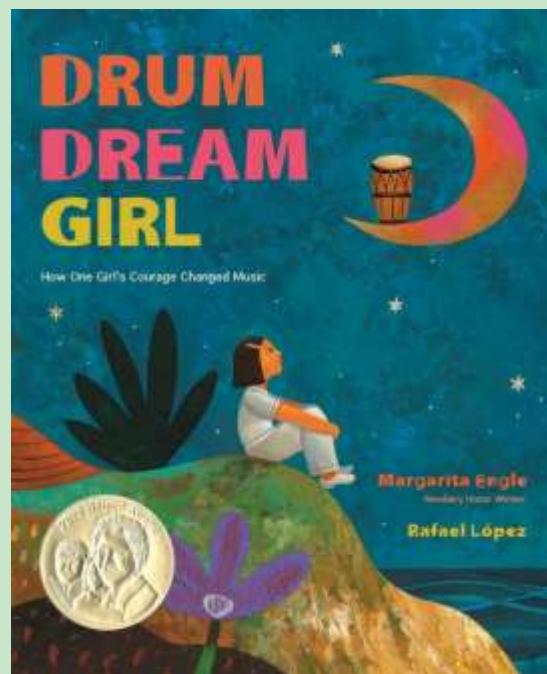
Emmanuel's Dream

by Laurie Ann Thompson
Illustrated by Sean Qualls

Age Range: 3rd & 4th
Genre: Biography

Born in Ghana, West Africa, with one deformed leg, he was dismissed by most people—but not by his mother, who taught him to reach for his dreams. As a boy, Emmanuel hopped to school more than two miles each way, learned to play soccer, left home at age thirteen to provide for his family, and, eventually, became a cyclist.

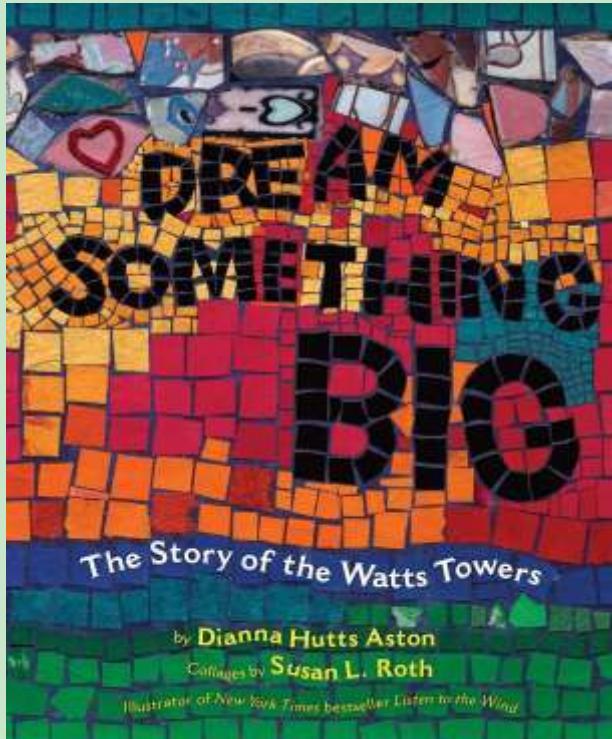
He rode an astonishing four hundred miles across Ghana in 2001, spreading his powerful message: disability is not inability. Today, Emmanuel continues to work on behalf of the disabled.



bright music was heard, everyone sang and danced and decided that *both* girls and boys should be free to drum and dream.

Inspired by the childhood of Millo Castro Zaldarriaga, a Chinese-African-Cuban girl who broke Cuba's traditional taboo against female drummers, *Drum Dream Girl* tells an inspiring true story for dreamers everywhere.

[See Story](#)



Dream Something Big

by Dianna Hutts Aston
Collage by Susan L. Roth

Age Range: 3rd & 4th
Genre: Biography

Between 1921 and 1955, Italian immigrant Simon Rodia transformed broken glass, seashells, pottery, and a dream to "do something big" into a U.S. National Landmark. Readers watch the towers rise from his little plot of land in Watts, California, through the eyes of a fictional girl as she grows and raises her own children.

Chronicled in stunningly detailed collage that mimics Rodia's found-object art, this thirty-four-year journey becomes a mesmerizing testament to perseverance and possibility.

[See Story](#)



Thanks for reading and happy New Year!

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