



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

By 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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**The Girl with the Brown Crayon: How Children Use Stories to Shape Their Lives** By Vivian Gussin Paley **Bibliography**

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### Editorial Review

#### From [Booklist](#)

Vivian Paley is a kindergarten teacher who won a MacArthur "genius" award for her work in her classroom at the University of Chicago Laboratory Schools and for the books she has written about how children play and think and imagine. Now she describes her final year of teaching when the preschoolers focused on the classic picture books of Leo Lionni and related his stories to their own lives. One creative child, Reeny, becomes a kind of mentor to her teacher, helping Paley discover her own uncertainties and connections in Lionni's elemental tales. There's no pedagogical jargon here; no stages of abstract thinking. Paley shows how far kids can go when their learning is connected, uninterrupted, and interactive--if the teacher is open, and the stories are great. *Hazel Rochman*

#### Review

Paley's book is the breathtaking account of a golden time she has carved out in the lives of [her school] children and herself. Essentially, she conducts a high-power kindergarten think tank in which she, the children, and some parents explore 'the artist's role in society, the conditions necessary for thinking, and the influence of music and art on the emotions.' Infected by their teacher's enthusiasm, wisdom, and human warmth, these beautiful children shape their semester of art, dance, song, and applied psychology around 14 picture books by the great writer-illustrator Leo Lionni...[Paley] render[s] tellingly the originality and sensitivity with which her kindergartners explore art and life as they skip from work to work, character to character, and back to their daily lives with persistence, eloquence, and depth...Her book is a reminder for adult readers that our task, at home and abroad, is to ensure that children may flourish with such awareness of their own worth that they can be free, then, to love another. (Peter F. Neumeyer *Boston Sunday Globe*)

I was delighted after an initial reading of *The Girl With the Brown Crayon* and couldn't wait to share it. However, after rereading the text and discussing it as a member of a learning community, I can more fully appreciate why it was awarded Harvard University Press's annual prize for an outstanding publication about education and society. (*Reading Teacher*)

[Paley describes how] she decides to give direction to her curriculum by focusing on the books of one author, Leo Lionni...The result, as recorded in the book, is a long exploration, questioning, and debate among the children and teachers about the characteristics and actions of the characters and important ideas (which become curriculum themes) as the books are read, dramatized, and portrayed in notebooks and posters. Throughout this journey, Paley shares her unique insight into the nature of young children and kindergarten learning as it could be, as it should be. (*Young Children*)

Paley, the charismatic teacher and author...is taken on a metaphorical journey of discovery and self-discovery by kindergartners with inquiring minds...[Paley's class] is an oasis, blessed with a unique curriculum and a teacher willing to be taught by her students. (*Publishers Weekly*)

To focus a year's curriculum on a single writer, no matter how acclaimed or popular, was a departure for [Vivian Gussin Paley] and her school. But as anyone can tell from reading *The Girl with the Brown Crayon*, Paley's experiment was a resounding success, cultivating among very young children a deep engagement with literature that they were able to share every day. (Molly McQuade *Book Links*)

A beautifully realized, deceptively simple classroom memoir from a longtime kindergarten teacher and

author. Paley begins the narrative of her final year of teaching by focusing on Reeny, a self-assured, thoughtful, and creative black five-year-old girl in a class that's mostly Caucasian and Asian. Reeny is a wonderful character, but it is her identification with another character, Frederick the mouse in a Leo Lionni children's book, that is the catalyst for a truly remarkable classroom experience...Disproving the general opinion that kindergartners are unable to focus on a lengthy, ongoing project, these children show an amazing aptitude for referring back to previous discussions, understanding metaphor, relating their reading to the world around them, and using the information they glean in creative and unusual ways. Their discussions cover everything from race and friendship to gender and the artistic personality, and they are able to appreciate the Lionni titles with a maturity that is sometimes startling...The reader closes the book with the hope that Paley will, with Reeny's help and her own newfound self-awareness, overcome her ambivalence about standing out and continue to write superb books like this one. (*Kirkus Reviews*)

Paley [tells how she] and her co-teacher turn a sizable portion of their curriculum over to a study of Lionni stories, and her students blossom with insight...Paley's book is a treasure for anyone who wants to know more about what magic is possible in a classroom where a teacher encourages what Paley calls...a "narrative community." (Carol Doup Muller *San Jose Mercury News*)

#### From the Back Cover

Once again Vivian Paley takes us into the inquiring minds and 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 that's 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 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 the 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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##### **Eric Bass:**

In this 21st centuries, people become competitive in each and every way. By being competitive at this point, people have do something to make these individuals survives, being in the middle of the particular crowded place and notice simply by surrounding. One thing that sometimes many people have underestimated that for a while is reading. Yeah, by reading a guide your ability to survive increase then having chance to stand up than other is high. For you who want to start reading a book, we give you this The Girl with the Brown Crayon: How Children Use Stories to Shape Their Lives book as nice and daily reading book. Why, because this book is greater than just a book.

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