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Miriam Makeba, a Grammy Award-winning South African singer, rose to fame in the hearts of her people at the pinnacle of apartheid—a brutal system of segregation similar to American Jim Crow laws. Mama Africa, as they called her, raised her voice to help combat these injustices at jazz clubs in Johannesburg; in exile, at a rally beside Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.; and before the United Nations.

Mama Africa!: How Miriam Makeba Spread Hope with Her Song Details

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Author : Kathryn Erskine , Charly Palmer (Illustrator)

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Cindy Mitchell *Kiss the Book* says

Erskine, Kathryn Neil Mama Africa! How Miriam Makeba Spread Hope with her Song, 25 pages. NON-FICTION. Farrar Straus Giroux (Macmillan), 2017. \$19. Language: G (0 swears); Mature Content: G; Violence: G.

This is the life story of Miriam Makeba –a talented singer from South Africa who uses her words, her singing, and her passion to fight against Apartheid in her country. At one point, she is not even allowed to come back home and travels the world to sing her songs of protests. Blurry painted illustrations accompany.

This book would make a great addition to library sections on civil rights, South African history, and biographies of powerful influential talented woman. I think it works better as a teacher read-a-loud than for a student picking this up on their own to read. The illustration are bright but blurry and dated, making it hard to share with a group –I would have rather seen Miriam brought to life with vivid and clear imagery. Also students will be upset not to see an actual photograph of her in the back of the book. Because of the illustrations I am rating this as optional.

EL –OPTIONAL. Stephanie, Elementary School Librarian & Author
<https://kissthebook.blogspot.com/2018...>

Barbara says

Troubled by the apartheid she sees and experiences in South Africa, Miriam Makeba lifts her voice and sings in protest of the unfair treatment. More than once, she has personal experiences with whites being treated differently than blacks, and eventually she leaves her homeland to live in the United States where she works to raise awareness of what's happening back home, even speaking in front of the United Nations. Arguably, nothing would have changed had it not been for this woman raising her voice on behalf of those who were voiceless. But eventually pressure from outside and inside the country causes apartheid to fall. An Author's Note provides additional information as well as quotes from the woman who came to be known as Mama Africa. Although some readers may find it hard to follow the narrative or understand the complexity of apartheid, this picture book has value for telling the story of an influential woman who used her talents to make a change in things that were wrong in the world. A timeline of events as well as an Author's Note detailing her experience living in South Africa and becoming aware of discriminatory policies as well as artwork with sweeping brushstrokes that brings the life and times of this social justice warrior to life add to the book's appeal. This book fits nicely in a book collection devoted to civil rights, voice, social activists or one focused on music used for social change.

Brian Duffy says

I found a text-to-world connection in this book. I knew very little about apartheid South Africa and never heard about Miriam Makeba. All I knew was that apartheid was bad and it is now gone and that Nelson

Mandela was somehow involved. My only connection to South Africa is that I run a blog on tumblr and when the blog got too popular to run by myself I brought on a woman living in South Africa to help me run it. I once asked her how it was living there and she said that while the government was less racist it was still corrupt in the sense that politicians and police were known for taking bribes and things of that nature. She also said the South African government was very anti-free speech. Which is something we take for granted here.

Antionea says

This is a true story about Zenzilemiriam Makeba, born March 4th, 1932. Makeba is from South Africa, she was apart of a singing group the Manhattan Brothers. In South Africa africans were not being treated fair and did not have equal rights, so she had made songs expressing the hate African receive, and what they should do, when she recorded her songs she was in the united States so when she tried coming back t South Africa she was banned from South Africa from raciest people and could not come back home. So later on into the story Zenzilemiriam Makeba was able to attend a United Nations meeting, and there she became a voice for the people in South Africa who were being murdered, beaten, or not getting medical assistance because they were black, and because she became a voice she gained understandable, and she was able to legally go back to her home in South America, and her people had gotten the rights and equality that they deserved, also she was ale to watch Mandela walk free.

The literary of this book was just a bit a wide vocabulary talking about African American race, and the harsh treatment this book would be great for fifth graders.

I gave this book 5stars because being African American I totally get and understand the inequality and hatred that the Africans were receiving in South Africa.

Jennifer says

3.5 stars

This picturebook biography details part of the life of Civil Rights activist Miriam Makeba, who protested apartheid in South Africa through acting and singing around the world. Skillfully written and beautifully illustrated in rich colors combine classic painting styles with graphic design elements.

Shaye Miller says

Miriam Makeba was a South African singer who used her fame to fight the system of segregation in Africa. She escaped her homeland and traveled the world, spreading new of what was taking place. The story is told with just enough detail, including bright, bold colored illustrations painted across each page spread (one spread is strictly black and white). It is a very moving depiction of what happened -- very important for children to learn about so that history doesn't continue to repeat itself. There are seven full pages in the back matter with an author's note, a bibliography, further reading, a detailed timeline, a glossary, and some original photos. For more #kidlit, #mglit, and #yalit book reviews, please visit my blog: The Miller Memo.

Linda Mitchell says

As many Americans, I have very little knowledge of modern Africa....modern South Africa. This book gave me wonderful background knowledge about South Africa during apartheid and how Miriam Makeba was a part of bringing it down. What's so beautiful about the story, for me, is again I see how art is vital to progress. Even in the darkest times, our artists can point us toward a brighter future...they can see it and they invite us to follow them.

Kathryn Erskine writes with the authority of someone who lived in South Africa but is not South African. Her unique observations of the people, place and time are braided into a beautiful picture book biography that I am so happy to bring to the shelves of my middle school library.

Tasha says

A picture book about the incredible South African singer, Miriam Makeba, who became the voice of fighting against apartheid. Called Mama Africa, she sang to expose the injustice happening around her at a time when it was dangerous to do so. Eventually, she lived in exile in the United States yet never stopped speaking and singing about her home. She spoke before the United Nations to appeal for help. Finally able to return home after apartheid ended, she continued to fight for justice the rest of her life. Erskine lived in South Africa during apartheid and draws from that knowledge in her book. Throughout, there is a celebration of the impact of song and the importance of giving voice to those living under injustice. The art by Palmer is rich and vivid. He offers portraits of people as well as landscapes that capture the fight for freedom. Appropriate for ages 6-9.

Linda says

Looking for the music of Mama Africa, Miriam Makeba, made me realize that I'm not sure I've ever heard her voice, and it is powerful. Because the tragedy of Soweto of many children being killed is mentioned in the story, here she is in concert with Paul Simon and Graceland singing "Soweto Blues".

Miriam's countrymen of South Africa were fortunate indeed to have her fighting for them, against apartheid, first in her youth, then all over the world. And she lived to see freedom, but only after years of living away, watching her people live under harsher and harsher restrictions, and die because of them or fighting against them. This story of Miriam begins with her early childhood when she was already singing, through the praise for her voice and for her ability to sing in the numerous languages of her people. Charly Palmer's wonderful full-color paintings bring both sadness and exuberance to the text. A favorite, but sad, page shows Miriam with tears streaming because she has just become banned from re-entering her country. Kathryn Erskine spent part of her childhood during apartheid and reflects on this and the story of Mama Africa in a beautiful afterword. There is also a timeline, a bibliography and a list of books for further reading. Erskine interjects different foreign words and phrases into the text and gives the translation and pronunciation in a glossary.

Monica Edinger says

Wrote starred Horn Book review. Outstanding.

Stephanie Tournas says

The life, career and political activism of famed singer Miriam Makeba are made accessible for young children in this inspiring picture book biography. South Africa's system of apartheid is seen through her eyes, with examples of its cruelty and division from her life. Erskine shows how Makeba's joy and spirit as a child is transformed into a remarkable force for change in South Africa. Short sentences with the rhythm of repeated words and phrases make the information as compelling as the subject. Many original quotes are part of the text. Gorgeous painterly art in deep colors leaps from the page, like Makeba's spirit. Erskine credits Thando Njovane, a scholar from South Africa, for help on issues of trauma, representation, and South African heritage. Since Erskine is white, this vetting is important. She also includes an extensive note about her childhood in South Africa, as well as the origins of some of Makeba's quotations, bibliography, sources for further reading, a timeline of Makeba's life and events in the anti-apartheid movement and the American civil rights era, and a glossary.

Laura Harrison says

Miriam Makeba is one of my absolute favorite singers. She was a brilliant choice for the author Kathryn Erskine. I can't believe no one has done a children's biography about this amazing woman before. I am thrilled that new generations will become aware of Mama Africa. Hopefully they or their parents will play some Miriam Makeba songs for them. Pata Pata would be a great choice. It is one of the most gorgeous songs ever sung. 4 and an imaginary half star!

Erica says

This picture-book biography gives young readers a feeling and understanding of South Africa's anti-apartheid movement, and how Miriam Makeba's iconic life had an effect on it. (The chronological list in the end-matter also shows how events in South Africa relate to the American Civil Rights Era.)

Palmer's vibrant oil/gouache paintings depict the excitement of live music, the devastation of civil rights abuses, her hope-filled appeals at world gatherings, and the sadness of demonstrators being ignored, beaten down, and killed. The lively text (with action words and the phrase "Mama Africa" in contrasting colors) also seems very much to be riding on the wave of global appreciation for a larger-than-life figure whose music inspired so many around the world to DANCE and also to pay attention to the problems in South Africa.

The Author's Note at the back intersperse quotes from Makeba (not dated) with reflections by the author of how her several-year-long stay in South Africa as a child affected her, and what she and her white family did as guests of and occasional allies to the black South Africans. For white readers, these 3 pages provide a good object lesson in how it is for privileged children to live in an unjust society - painful, sad, & frustrating IF they are paying attention.

Useful, beautiful, inspiring, as intended. It'd be even better for a South African to create a picture book biography of their most famous activists, and share that point of view with the world.

June says

How a South African used her voice and talent to expose the injustice of the apartheid and help bring it down. Bold, colorful illustrations bring this dramatic story of South Africa's fight for equality to life.

The one draw back is that it doesn't include a CD with some of her songs.

Joan says

Wow! What a wonderful book! This will be perfect for librarians in so many ways! Black History Month, Women's history, South Africa History. Or as a biography of a musician. Or even as an exposure to a number of different languages through the glossary on the last page. The story is powerful. Most particularly, in terms of the Steptoe Award for a beginning illustrator, the illustrations are stunning. Mr. Palmer is going to become a major talent in my guess.

While it won't be a heavy mover, I think this book can have constant circulation if librarians remember to use it for various displays.
