

YA Book Review

I WILL RISE: A REVIEW OF TOMI ADEYEMI'S *CHILDREN OF BLOOD AND BONE*

Alexis Bean

L.M. Smith Middle School, Birmingham, AL

Children of Blood and Bone, published in 2018 and a finalist of 2019 John C. Morris Debut YA Award, envelops the reader in fantasy and power, pulling them into the hate-filled life of seventeen-year-old Zelie, relishing her sorrow and pain, while enduring the oppression and persecution of her people. Readers vicariously experience the dreaded “Raid” in ways that link chains, holding them prisoner to Adeyemi’s prose.

Zelie (along with a few other girls like her) is being secretly taught to fight back against the guards of the Kingdom. In the fantasy world Adeyemi created, there are two “races” of people. There are the Kosidan and the Diviners, who (when they come of age) turn into the Maji, people who can wield one of the ten types of magic. That is before King Saran massacred all living Maji and destroyed magic before the young children could have a taste of what it is like to experience power. By a twist of fate, Zelie meets Princess Amari, who is running for her life, and Prince Inan, who is pursuing her; these siblings were raised in King Saran’s palace to hate all magic. With her brother, Tzain, and her newly found friend/enemies, Zelie embarks on a quest to restore magic to the Land of Orisha.

As an answer to so many tragedies in our society, *Children of Blood and Bone* was written in remembrance of unarmed black men, women, and children who were shot down by police. After a string of violent incidents demonstrating police brutality, Adeyemi felt that she needed to do something meaningful to fight this injustice. She accomplished that by allowing us to view oppression and racial violence not only through multiple perspectives but also in a context that transcends genres and cultures. The two levels of this book, the fantasy and the social response, are perfectly in tune with curriculum that addresses discrimination and oppression. With its

As an answer to so many tragedies in our society, *Children of Blood and Bone* was written in remembrance of unarmed black men, women, and children who were shot down by police. After a string of violent incidents demonstrating police brutality, Adeyemi felt that she needed to do something meaningful to fight this injustice. She accomplished that by allowing us to view oppression and racial violence not only through multiple perspectives but also in a context that transcends genres and cultures.

beautifully crafted plot, this work of fiction can allow our students to experience trauma and racism while safely hiding behind a wall of magic and fairy-tale lands. Because of slight sexual depictions, I would suggest an audience of grades 9-12 for this book. I do not anticipate that anyone would challenge this book being used in a high school curriculum.

I could easily imagine teaching this novel in collaboration with Civil Rights Movement studies in History common core, comparing the fantastical world that Adeyemi created and the trials her characters go through with the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, racial and social oppression and segregation, Jim Crow and anti-racism protests as an in-depth look at how literature mirrors social conflict. I would also want to include a lesson on how the author addresses police brutality and racial violence in her book as a direct commentary on violent incidents depicted on our nightly news. Speaking as a teacher who preaches emotional literacy, I believe that this is a fantastic book to reach across racial backgrounds as it unites characters and readers against evils in the world. I would hope that my students would be able to see the parallel between the literature and their own reality.

Tomi Adeyemi's mythical writing style captures you with her independent, sassy characters and fills you with the passion to fight alongside them. The dynamic characters grow before your eyes through independence, tough (sometimes brutally unnatural) love, friendship, and heart wrenching trauma. The pain, sorrow, rage, forgiveness, powerlessness, and rebellion are felt in such a force you will find yourself crying, screaming, and gearing up for battle. As Adeyemi says, "we have been knocked down for far too long. Now, let's rise" (p. 527).

Author Biography

Born in Valley Center, Kansas, Alexis Bean graduated from Wichita State University in spring 2020 with a Bachelor of Arts in Education, Secondary English Language Arts 6-12. She completed her teaching internship in spring 2020 at Wichita Heights High School in USD 259. Alexis is a proud Air Force wife and a mother to a beautiful two-year-old boy. She has two rescue dogs and lives in Birmingham, AL, with her husband. She presented at the 2019 Kansas Association of Teachers of English (KATE) Conference on young adult literature and lesson implementation in the classroom. In fall 2020, Alexis will assume the head teaching position for eighth grade English language arts at L.M. Smith Middle School in Birmingham, AL. She can be reached at atbean@shockers.wichita.edu.