



Author Q&A

with

Deborah C. Mortimer

1. Why and when did you start writing?

I have always been a writer at heart. I have been writing poems and stories and sharing them with my family since I learned how to write. I began to take it a little more seriously when I was in college and studied creative writing.

2. Why children's books?

I initially didn't have children's books in mind. I thought I was going to write the next great novel, and I may still do that. However, as a former homeschool parent and aunt to half a dozen nieces and nephews, writing children's books is a perfect union of the three things I hold dear- education, children and writing.

3. What was your motivation to write this book?

Oddly enough, I just woke up one morning and wrote it. Of course, writing about what a child wants to be when he/she grows up isn't a new concept. But I began to think about BIPOC children (Black girls in particular), the way they view the world around them and how they fit in it. While there are endless careers, the world may not reflect that there are endless options open to them. So, the question for them may not be "What do I want to be when I grow up?", but it may be the more important question, "What CAN I be?"

4. What do you hope children take away from this book?

I hope all children take away that:

- They can become anything, if they work hard.
- It is ok to ask big questions in life, and not necessarily have the answer right away.
- Parents and teachers are great resources to talk about their feelings and ask big questions.

I was intentional in putting women of color in the featured careers. I did this not only to further normalize them in these roles, but to inspire BIPOC girls (Black girls in particular) through representation that they can become anything they want.

5. How do you hope educators and parents will use this book?

Well, I hope parents and teachers will use it to spark interest, curiosity and open dialogue about the career options and possibilities that are out there. I also hope they use it as a means to promote self-exploration and thought, self-advocacy and empathy. And encourage children to analyze their world and how they fit in it, now and in the future.

6.. As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?

I wanted to be a doctor, all the way until college. Then I changed my mind and went to law school. Honestly, I wanted to be a doctor, mainly because I was exposed to women who look like me in that profession and so I saw it as something to strive for.

7. What's your favorite children's book?

Well, my favorite children's book that I read to my son all the time when he was young was, Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters by John Steptoe. It's the first children's book I encountered that had beautiful black characters that were depicted in such a positive way. I love the story and the lessons it teaches about kindness, humility and empathy.

8. Is this book part of a series?

Yes! Zorah is actually based on me when I was a little girl. I draw from my own thoughts and experiences as a child when writing about her. Her name is actually a play on my name, Deborah, and my favorite author, Zora Neale Hurston.

9. What's next for Zorah?

The next book entitled, "Zorah, The Brave Ballerina" is based on an essay I wrote about my mother's decision to send me to ballet school to combat my shyness around strangers. It's slated to be release in early 2022.

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