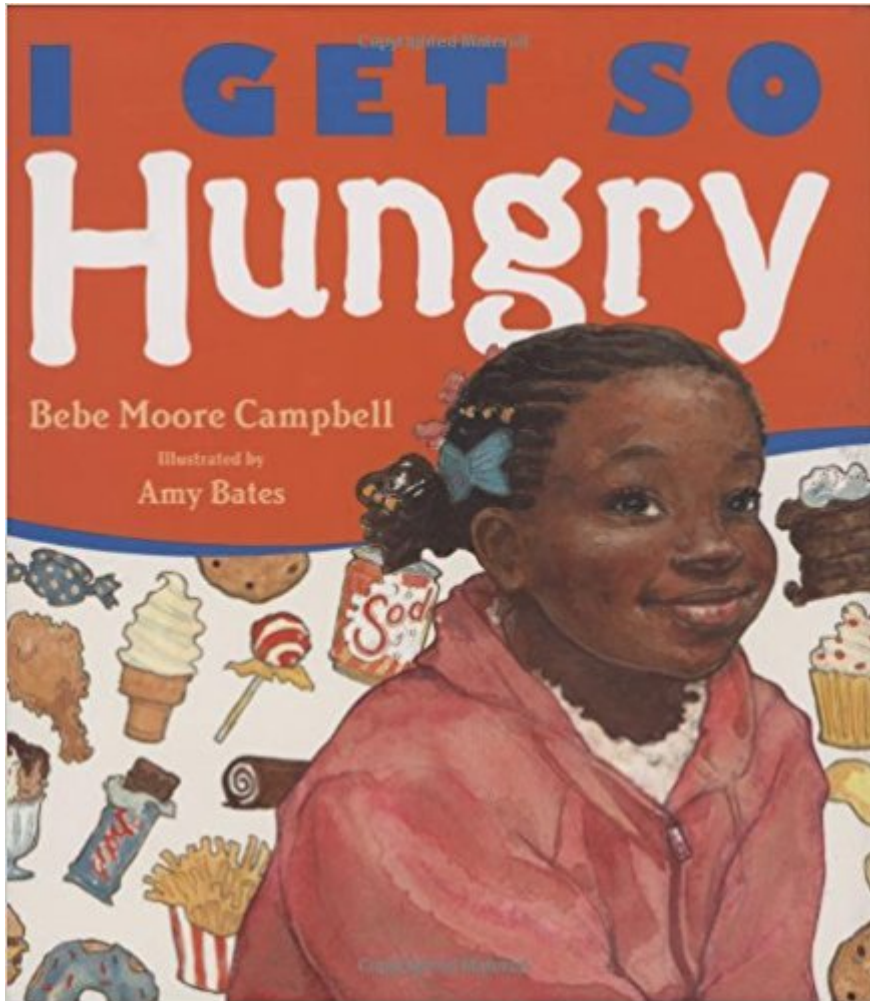


I Get So Hungry



Synopsis

Beloved author Bebe Moore Campbell's last book shines light on childhood obesity. Once Nikki starts eating, it's hard for her to stop. She snacks when she is upset, angry or bored. But when her teacher, Mrs. Patterson, is taken to the hospital because of her weight, Nikki realizes that she wants to live a healthier lifestyle. She and Mrs. Patterson work together to help each other succeed, and Nikki even convinces her mom to get involved and exercise too. Acclaimed author Bebe Moore Campbell said she wrote this as she felt strongly about the worth and necessity of this story. She hoped to touch kids and parents and help them make changes in their lives. Amy Bates' charming illustrations bring to life this important story of one young girl's struggle with weight gain, an all-too-familiar problem for children today.

Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 2.2 out of 5 stars 7 customer reviews

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Age Range: 6 - 8 years

Grade Level: 1 - 3

Customer Reviews

Kindergarten-Grade 3 — Nikki, a young African American, her mother, and her teacher all have problems with their weight. When her teacher has a health scare due to her obesity, Nikki is motivated to change her habits. She sees Mrs. Patterson walking the perimeter of the schoolyard each day and decides to join her. When she doubts that her mother will buy the healthy foods that her teacher has started eating, the woman suggests that Nikki eat smaller portions and be more active. What is particularly inspiring about this book is the strength of this child and her ability to take

control of her life, despite some resistance from her mom. Children will identify with Nikki; she is a realistically drawn character with a self-deprecating sense of humor, and she sneaks potato chips from her desk when she is sad. But when kids make fun of her, her friends step forward, a response widely recommended by many anti-bullying programs. This excellent book gives readers an example of a constructive response to a challenging social situation. Words are carefully chosen, never preachy. The watercolor illustrations add dimension and details to the text. A useful book on an important topic.

—Mary Hazelton, Elementary Schools in Warren & Waldoboro, ME

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With a contemporary story and warm, watercolor artwork, this picture book about childhood obesity, as seen through the eyes of an African American child, confronts the problem with realism and sympathy. Nikki's friends cannot protect her from the teasing at school, and when emotions get the better of her, she sneaks food from her backpack. Her teacher, Mrs. Patterson, who is also overweight, does the same thing. One day the children find a substitute at their teacher's desk; when Mrs. Patterson returns to school, she has lost some weight. With her teacher's help, Nikki manages to do the same, eventually convincing her overweight mother the importance of healthy eating and exercise. The message here is the story ("Only eat when you're hungry, not when you're sad or hungry or bored"), but the book works because the words and pictures never deny how hard it is to change. The overweight characters don't become slim, the temptation for comfort food doesn't go away ("Potato chips always make me feel better when I'm sad"), and neither do the rage and humiliation. Preschool-Grade 2. --Hazel Rochman

Bebe Moore Campbell's heart was in the right place when she wrote this book, "to touch kids and parents and help them make changes in their lives." It is too bad that this final of her writings doesn't represent the thoughtfulness and careful research of her other work. According to the author, Nikki and her teacher, Mrs. Patterson, are gluttons--they load up on the wrong foods and fail to eat the right foods. Nikki's mother is even worse--not only is she a glutton, she encourages her daughter to be one, too. Nikki and Mrs. Patterson become thin when they stop being gluttons. This book demonstrates common attitudes: people are fat because they eat too much; anyone can become thin if they try; and everyone (and her mother) should be willing to try. Research supports none of it. Body weight is most strongly determined by genetics. Those who try to overcome their genetic

endowment by dieting get fatter, not thinner, even when they diet by eating "good food," or "the right things," as Nikki and her teacher do. Nikki's and Mrs. Patterson's weight loss is extremely unusual. So unusual, in fact, that it is simply cruel to lead the child reader and her parents to believe that problems with peers will be resolved by losing weight. Nikki's mother is represented as not caring what she feeds Nikki. Only a minority of parents of children of size simply don't care--about the same percentage as the population as a whole. Given all these flaws, rather than achieving the author's goals, it is more likely that this book will reinforce the bigotry that fat children and their parents have to deal with and make them feel worse, not better. It's too bad--Campbell had a good thing going by making Nikki popular and talented. I wonder why she didn't take Nikki one step further by having her stand up to her tormentor, thereby showing how successful she could be without having to be skinny? To read that book, check out *Fat, Fat, Rosemarie* by Lisa Passen. Ellyn Satter, author, *Your Child's Weight: Helping Without Harming*.

One of my kids picked this up at the library, and I found it disturbing and embarrassing. (Caveat: I hate all children's books that carry a "message" or deal with "issues".) I liked that it encouraged kids to eat healthy foods and exercise in ways they feel good to them, but it sets unrealistic expectations around the possibility of long-term weight loss. The most obnoxious aspect of the book is that the bully stops tormenting the girl because *she* changes--not him--setting up bullying as a sort of reverse inspirational technique. As if the fat girl deserved to be abused by the little jerk. Bullies are a real problem, fat people are not. I would guess that the psychologically-driven overeating portrayed in *"I Get So Hungry"* relates to a vanishingly small proportion of the obesity "problem" in our country. Television and simple caloric abundance are much more likely culprits. Nice illustrations, though. I only wish the artist would do something less in the line of propaganda.

The teacher allows the class to bully the girl. This book can only make heavy children feel worse about themselves and let other kids think it is ok to bully others. Poor approach to the topic.

A wonderful discussion of obesity and the use of food in ways destructive to health. This book would be good for a doctor's waiting room or a school library. It would help kids understand how they misuse food.

Nikki is a fat child. She eats because it makes her "feel better" when she's sad. She gobbles her food so quickly she can "barely taste" it. Her mother feeds her fried food and soda. When Nikki goes

to the doctor for a checkup and is told she's too fat and to cut out "junk food," her mother lies about what Nikki eats and buy doughnuts to soothe Nikki's hurt feelings. Her teacher (also fat) sneaks food and has some illness (a heart attack?) because she's fat. Once the teacher (and Nikki) simply stop eating "junk food" and taking a walk in the morning, they become thinner. So, in other words, fat people eat emotionally, eat only bad foods, gobble their food, lie about what they eat, reward themselves with food, sneak food and will inevitably suffer health consequences because of their poor eating habits. And if they'd just put down the fries and take a walk once in a while, they'll become thin. I believe strongly that we should teach children to eat a balanced healthy diet with plenty of fruits and vegetables, lean protein sources and with the occasional ice cream or potato chip thrown in. I believe we should exercise every day. I don't believe we should reinforce stereotypes in children's literature, that we should frighten children that eating a cookie will make them sick or that it's OK to tease other children if they're fat, but that the teasing should stop once they become thin. Please: feed your children well, take them outside to run and play and move their bodies and teach them tolerance and respect for others, not stereotypes and prejudice.

As a children's counselor this subject has been minimally addressed in young childrens literature. I was pleased to see this title and review it. It is important to address this issue, and this author does so in a realistic manner. This book makes a good starting point for further discussions with children and parents about nutrition, reasons we eat, exercise and healthy habits. Many people use food as a coping mechanism and to see this issue being addressed for young children is a positive step in addressing this problem.

Putnam and Penguin should be ashamed of this addition to the canon of fat-hating media culture.

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