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Picture Books

Amadi's Snowman
Katia Novet Saint-Lot
Dimitrea Tokunbo, illustrator
Tilbury House
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When Amadi defiantly tells his mother, “I’m an Igbo man of Nigeria…I’ll be a trader. I don’t need to read to do business,” the shakiness of claiming manhood when still a foot shorter than his mother jumps out at the reader almost as much as the ignorance revealed by his claim. When he sees Mrs. Chikodili, who has volunteered to teach him to read, he runs away to the market. After enjoying a mango, he sees an older boy, Chima, sneaking a look at a book at the bookstall: “That Chima boy thinks my bookstall is a library,” complains the merchant. Looking inside the book, Amadi is entranced by a picture of “a boy bundled up in clothes [who] stood next to a strange animal with a nose that looked like a carrot. Everywhere around, the ground and trees sparkled, blinding white.”

Amadi has misplaced pride about what it means to be an Igbo man—a counter-cultural resonance that will make intuitive sense to minority boys in American classrooms—but he is smart enough to formulate questions and know what he needs to do to find answers. After an uncomfortable afternoon in which he faces his own ignorance, he is overjoyed to learn that Mrs. Chikodili has bought the book about the snowman for him: “He turned the pages, drinking in the pictures of a white world of snow he’d never known to exist before…He stared at the letters. These signs told a story, the story of a country where frozen rainwater fell from the sky.” Not reading is no longer an option for him.

Author Katia Novet Saint-Lot is an avid lifelong reader, so it makes sense that her first book would tackle this all-important topic. Illustrator Dimitrea Tokunbo has several books to her credit, including *Sidewalk Chalk: Poems of the City* and *The Sound of Kwanzaa*.

Elizabeth Breau