

Becoming My Best Self: My Shero Attributes: Be the Best Me That I Can Be

Shamena Maharaj

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Becoming My Best Self is an instructional guide designed to help children lead happier, more fulfilling lives.

Shamena Maharaj's instructional picture book *Becoming My Best Self* is concerned with cultivating inner attributes with practice and intention.

Each of the twelve months are used in turn to frame the book's focal "shero" attributes, which are forwarded as items to be studied every day. January covers compassion; February, kindness; September is devoted to failure, and October discusses mindfulness. Suggestions for bringing these special, admirable characteristics to life are active: the text encourages its audience to practice inclusion, experience joy, and set goals. It also clarifies the part of speech that each attribute embodies—share is labeled a verb, and inclusion a noun. Terms are also defined, and examples of children living each concept out are clear: two sisters learn about care as they look after their new dog; a boy practices happiness on a trip to the zoo.

Its methodology instructional, the book is most concerned with providing lessons attached to its central attributes, though it also creates a narrative around each. Children with varying characteristics and looks help others from different backgrounds; the text, as a whole, imparts a sense of unity and caring. Diversity is represented in the characters' names and pictures to assert that these lessons apply to all; the book becomes a safe space to learn.

How these attributes were chosen is not explained, and arguments for their integration into the audience's lives don't extend in a compelling way beyond the images of happy children. Beyond the specific examples, there's little guidance for incorporating the attributes in a responsive way beyond the text.

The book's tense shifts and changes in point of view are distracting, and its structure is repetitive. Images of attributes are followed by descriptive pages of text; headings in bold are instructional, and examples are provided in the paragraphs that follow. The layout holds attention and gets points across with speed. Hearts over bolded "i"s help to set the book's tone of acceptance and love.

Quirky hand-drawn illustrations depict the children who act out each month's lesson. They are inclusive, showing children of all nationalities, abilities, shapes, and sizes; their color scheme includes greens, peaches, pinks, and yellows. The result is gentle and warm.

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REBECCA MONTERUSSO (October 28, 2019)

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