

The Whole World Opened Up

Press Kit



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16-Year-Old Chicago Girl Publishes First Children's Book

Bolingbrook, Illinois: Teenager Laylah Richmond launches her first children's book. *The Whole World Opened Up* tells the story of a third grader who enters a reading contest. She soon finds herself on a surprising journey as she discovers the power of words, her African American heritage, and her true potential.

Aimed primarily at 8- to 10-year-olds, the book is based on Laylah's real-life experience with the Black Star Reading Contest, which she entered in third grade and won second place. Founded by Mr. Phillip Jackson in 1996, the Black Star Project is an educational nonprofit reform organization that aims to eliminate the racial academic achievement gap by improving the lives of those living in African American and Latino communities. The organization is behind many educational initiatives, including the Black Star Reading Contest.

Laylah wrote the original version of the manuscript when she was still in grade school. "I was that little girl in the book," says Laylah. "The contest opened my eyes to so many possibilities, and I wanted to share those with the world."

Laylah co-wrote the book with her grandmother Sharon Richmond, and designed all the illustrations.

Laylah and Sharon both pay tribute to Mr. Jackson's vision behind the Black Star Project. "I cannot say enough about what Mr. Jackson's work has done for the community," says Sharon. "He continues to inspire us all."

Laylah Richmond won first place in the 1st Annual Youth WNBA All-Star Essay Contest an essay contest through the BDM Sports and Education (BELIEVE) Project. In August 2022, she won first place in the Hello to Natural Back to School Laptop Giveaway essay contest presented by Back to Natural Health company. In October 2022, Laylah was selected to travel with the Chicago Knights Robotic team as part of the One Team, Two Continents Ambassador Program to Port Alfred, South Africa. She is currently working on her next children's book, "Don't Chew Bubble Gum in School," also expected to be published in 2023.

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Q & A

1. Tell us a little about the inspiration behind *The Whole World Opened Up*.

Laylah: When I was in third grade, the principal at my school, Mrs. Killingsworth, who is recently retired, challenged all the students to write a book for a writing contest presented by our school. It was called the Young Authors Writing Competitions. I won 3rd place in the reading contest. I kept the book with me all the years since. In the spring of 2022, my grandmother was looking through old school files and found the book. We read through it and decided to develop it more. I thought it could be a great tool to encourage more girls to read.

2. What are some takeaways you would like readers to get from your book?

Laylah: I want to encourage the younger generation of black girls to have confidence in themselves and their goals. If they pursue something important, they need to give 100% effort and have hope. I want this book to encourage them to never give less than their best, because without that, you'll never know the opportunities, jobs, goals, money and/or knowledge waiting for you.

Sharon: There's the African proverb "It takes a village to raise a child," and our book celebrates that concept. In the book the villagers are Grandma Irene, Mom, Dad, Phillip Jackson and his staff, and principal Killingsworth. Each character plays an important role in fostering Laylah's confidence. The book also reminds us of some valuable life lessons: behind every challenge lie some rich rewards; real friends pull each other up; There is greatness within each of us; words illuminate and reading allows us to see the world from a different perspective.

Q & A

3. *The Whole World Opened Up* explores African American identity and history. What can parents do to reinforce in their children pride associated with their African American identity?

Sharon: The most important thing we need is knowledge—knowledge of who we are and how we got here. Black Parents can support this need by associating with Black community-based programs. This will reinforce each child’s vision, mental clarity and purpose. Mary McLeod Bethune said, “We are custodians as well as heirs of a great civilization.” In their everyday behavior, parents must model empathy, caring and an insatiable appetite for knowledge. Let your children see you reading and researching your history. Let them hear you speak positively about Black life. There is great wealth in being proud of yourself.

4. Your book commemorates the work of Phillip Jackson and The Black Star Project. Laylah, how did Mr. Jackson impact your life?

A lot of black girls do not have their fathers around, but Philip Jackson represented that caring father that helped us gain confidence through the reading contest. From that first step of picking out our papers to read, Mr. Jackson encouraged us every step the way and pushed us to be our best selves.

5. Tell us more about your future goals.

Laylah: I love all things creative, like doodling and making face sketches, as well as making random music, free styling the lyrics from the top of my head and singing them to the beat. I already have a bracelet-making business that earns a small profit. But most importantly, I enjoy writing. I want to write more books for kids and teens, and I plan to go to college in journalism.

About Laylah & Sharon



Currently a high school sophomore, Laylah Richmond started writing in second grade with her first story, “Don’t Chew Bubble Gum in School.”

Laylah won first place in the 1st Annual Youth WNBA All-Star Essay Contest an essay contest through the BDM Sports and Education (BELIEVE) Project. In August 2022, Laylah won first place in the Hello to Natural Back to School Laptop Giveaway essay contest presented by Back to Natural Health company. In October 2022, Laylah was selected to travel with the Chicago Knights Robotic team as part of the One Team, Two Continents Ambassador Program to Port Alfred, South Africa.

Laylah is currently rewriting “Don’t Chew Bubble Gum in School’ to be published in early 2023.

After a thirty-four-year career, Sharon Richmond retired from the engineering department at Navistar, Inc. as a technical designer. Following that, she obtained her massage therapy license from Soderworld Wellness Center and Academy.

Besides writing, she also enjoys performing/singing, roller skating and raising her two grandchildren, Laylah and Taydon. It has been a joy to work with Laylah on her first book.



About the Book

Laylah is your typical third grader—she loves playing with Lego, hanging with her BFF Ria, and spending time with her grandmother Irene.

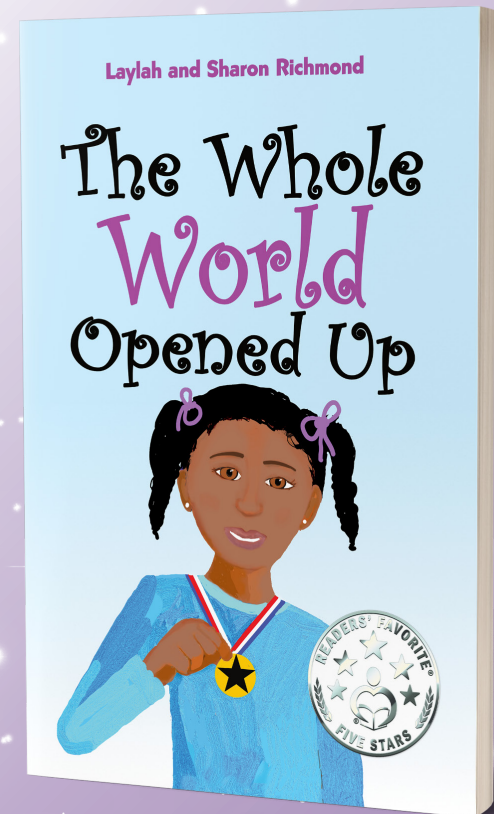
When her grandmother suggests Laylah enter a reading contest, Laylah's not sure. She's always dreamed of being a writer, but reading doesn't always come easily. What if she stumbles on an unknown word in front of everyone?

After some encouragement from her family, Laylah agrees, and soon finds herself on a surprising journey as she discovers the power of words, her African American heritage, and her true potential.

The Whole World Opened Up is the stunning debut by Laylah and Sharon Richmond, and a child's perfect introduction to independent reading. Featuring a rich story and fun illustrations, this chapter book explores numerous themes, including:

- The power and magic of words
- Perseverance and pride
- African American history
- Friendship and community

The Whole World Opened Up invites children to join Laylah on her journey of inspiration, hope and self-discovery.



[Purchase a copy](#)

What the Critics Are Saying

"The Whole World Opened Up is just the right length and style to be encouraging rather than intimidating... a great story for encouraging and supporting developing literacy."

- The Childrens Book Review

"The Whole World Opened Up weaves history, language arts and intergenerational engagement into a powerful story for all ages. The book encourages children and adults to live their best lives. Thank you, Laylah and Sharon Richmond, for this beautiful work of art!"

- Gloria Smith, Executive Director
of The Black Star Project

This book will be an eye-opener for young readers being educated about black history and the world around them... Get a copy of this book to help your child become excited about their future and see themselves as these black women that made history and influenced the world.

- Vernita Naylor for *Readers' Favorite*

"A well-paced work that encourages academic risk-taking and showcases Black history."

- Kirkus Indie Reviews