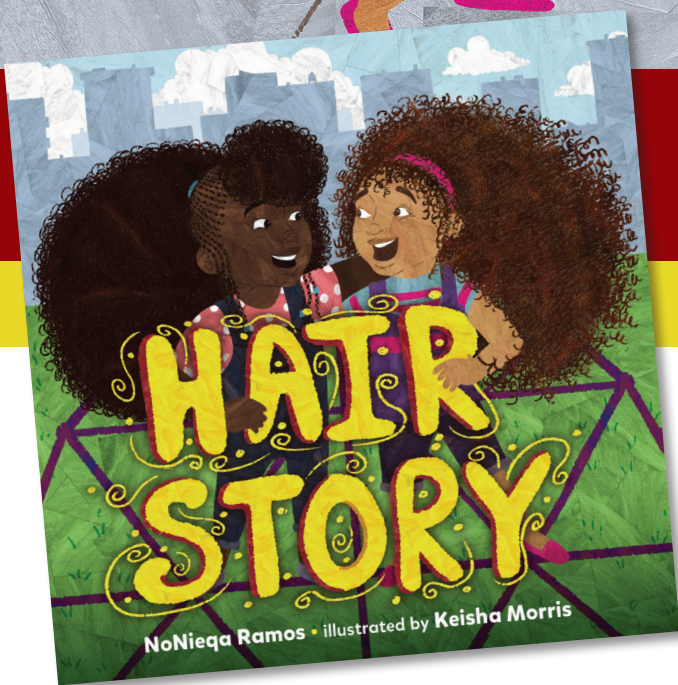




HAIR STORY

TEACHING GUIDE

By NoNieqa Ramos
Illustrations by Keisha Morris
ISBN: 978-1-5415-7916-3



Background

With rhythmic, rhyming verse, this picture book follows two girls—one non-Black Puerto Rican, one Black—as they discover the stories their hair can tell.

Preciosa has hair that won't stay straight, won't be confined. Rudine's hair resists rollers, flat irons, and rules.

Together, the girls play hair salon! They take inspiration from their moms, their neighbors, their ancestors, and cultural icons. They discover that their hair holds roots of the past and threads of the future.

With vibrant collage art, author NoNieqa Ramos and illustrator Keisha Morris enamor us with the beautiful resistance and resilience of hair!

This guide was created by Lorena Germán.

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Pre-Reading Preparation for Educators

This gorgeous book is about more than hair. Hair becomes the vehicle for a conversation about identity, beauty standards, bias, relationships, self love, and more. Ramos has created a picture book that touches upon identity as it is intertwined with other elements of life, all by celebrating hair types and styles. While this beautiful and empowering book is great for readers, it also requires some personal reflection in order to effectively teach it.

Hair Bias

It is important for you, as the educator, to think about your own hair journey and what biases for and against hair types you might have. That bias could impact the way you teach this book, discuss hair types, and celebrate (or not) different hair types and styles in the classroom. How you talk about hair and how you treat it is a model for students and sends clear messages, whether or not you intend to. Unfortunately, in our society, there are biases against naturally curly and textured African-descended hair. The hairstyle you possess can be perceived as unprofessional, ugly, and more. In fact, hair is often described as ‘good hair’ or ‘bad hair’ as if natural hair can be something other than naturally perfect. You can see the intentional dismantling of that notion on page 8 of *Hair Story*. Therefore, because this can be a subconscious bias or belief, it would be helpful for you to unpack those ideas you might have before you engage students in a study of this book. See the resource “The ‘Good Hair’ Study” for more information: <https://perception.org/goodhair/results/>

Tough Conversations

It’s important to think about what to do and how to handle tough conversations in the classroom if and when students make comments that are grounded in bias. While reading this book, students may make jokes or demeaning comments about the hair styles and types they see in the pages. It is important for you, as the teacher, to address that and intervene. Silence on your part communicates that the comment is acceptable. You can intervene by using any one of the following phrases:

- I heard your joke, but I don’t think it’s funny. It’s meant to make fun of someone and their hair.
- I heard what you said and we need to talk about why that statement is biased.
- I heard your joke, but I notice that there are people here, including me, who don’t find it funny. (This is in the case that other students in the room are visibly upset.)
- I heard what you said and I’d like to understand what you mean, because it sounds like an unkind statement. Can you try again?

Even if the moment passes and you weren’t sure, you can model for students how to return to it by pausing the lesson and coming back. It’s never too late to stand up to bias.

Ideas to Explore

Many teachers use picture books to launch a study on a thematic idea or use a picture book to build lessons around larger concepts. *Hair Story* explores many overarching ideas that can lead to a rich study of many broader topics.

Identity: You can use the book to engage with students on a self study about what external factors of their appearance impact their identity. You can welcome discussions about what they like about themselves, what makes them unique, what about their appearance is special, and more. Instead of focusing on the negative aspects of themselves, you can invite them to celebrate who they are. You can also get into conversations about the difference between what people see and who they are inside.

Self Love: *Hair Story* follows the story of two girls, in their neighborhood, and all of the hair types and styles they have and see. There is a lot of love expressed for others, hair, and self. This book, then, presents a good opportunity to talk to young students about the concept of self love and engage them in discussions and learning activities that lead them to practice words of affirmations about themselves and others. Some activities for students can include:

- Using a mirror, students can repeat words of affirmation to themselves. You can offer them sentence stems, such as: “I believe in myself because...”; “I am beautiful and important” or “I am blessed and loved by many.”
- Students can write themselves notes of affirmation (you could use the same sentence stems from above) and hang those notes in a locker, on the wall as a class mural, or in another highly visible place.
- While sitting in a circle, one student is highlighted. The rest of the class makes one statement of affirmation and celebration about that student. This can be a daily activity where each day a different student is highlighted, or it can be a weekly or biweekly activity where all students go around in a circle and get to be highlighted and affirmed on the same day.

Family: The story begins with grandmothers, leading us into other relatives and friends. We meet the two main characters and their mothers and while the girls seem to be neighbors, they seem to have a familial relationship. These depictions can lead to great conversations about families, family structures, blended families, the concept of chosen family, and more.

Understanding Craft

NoNieqa Ramos wrote *Hair Story* in verse and through rhymes, repetition, and other literary techniques. Studying these elements, even with young learners, is useful because it builds a foundation for deeper literary analysis skills later. The activities listed below welcome a study of these literary techniques with a class of young learners.

Elders & Culture (1st-2nd Grade Activity)

In *Hair Story*, we meet elders and explore culture. Begin by talking to students about what these two words mean. When there's an understanding of their definitions, guide students to find the pages where elders and cultural ideas are depicted by the illustrator, Keisha Morris (p. 3, 4, 5, 8, 16, 17). When the group has identified those pages, begin a discussion by asking the following questions:

- Describe the elders that you see. What does their hair look like?
- What are the words the elders are saying to the children in the story?
Are they positive words or negative words?
- On page 16, we see a person in the mirror dressed in cultural clothes.
What do you notice about their outfit and hair?
- On page 17, we see a person in the mirror dressed in cultural clothes.
What do you notice about the outfit and hair?
- On pages 16 and 17, the girls are drawn with a different picture in the mirror.
How do you think the girls feel about their cultures? What words make you think that?

Rhymes (2nd-4th Grade Activity)

Ramos uses rhyme throughout the story and it is a great tool for learning about word parts and spelling. Begin by having students work with partners. Together, they will find as many rhyming words as they can on the pages and keep them on a running list. When all students return to the whole group, create a whole group list combining everyone's words. Next, focus on words from the list you think the students might not be very familiar with and/or words that have unique spellings, or common spelling patterns they should know. Have each student use the document below to take notes and work on spelling using the words you've identified.

In this first column, list the words from the book that rhyme.

Have students explain the words briefly

Have students identify if it's a new word for them

Students should list similar words & notice any spelling patterns here

"Knots" and "hot" (p.10)

Knots means tangled tightly and hot means very warm

Knots is a new word

Knight (silent K)

"Stoop" and "scoop" (p.15)

Stoop is the staircase at the front of the apartment building and scoop means information or gossip

Stoop is a new word and this is a new meaning for scoop

The double 'o' sounds like a 'u'

Discussion Questions & Writing Prompts

The next series of questions can be used for discussion or reflective writing. Students can use these to express their comprehension of the story as well as basic literary analysis.

1. Based on the title and the cover, what do you think will take place in the story?
2. Describe the setting of the story. What do you notice about the city and neighborhood?
3. What is your hair story? Tell about who your hair is like, what your family thinks of your hair, how you feel about it, and your favorite hairstyles.
4. What do you think it means that doing hair is “mathemagic”?
5. On pages 20 and 21, there are drawings of ballet dancers on the page. How do you think doing hair might be like dancing ballet?

Anti-Bias Learning

While picture books are ideal for young learners in elementary school and younger, they can certainly be a tool explored in middle and high school classrooms. *Hair Story*, specifically, can be used for conversations about race and language bias. The learning activities below are geared for middle and high school classrooms.

Race & Hair

Open the lessons on this topic by exploring the history of racism as connected to hair in the United States. You can begin by inviting students to share what biases they’ve heard of against certain hair and asking them about how hair might also be used when racially stereotyping. Then, students can be partnered off to do a little research on the topic. You can use the resource “The ‘Good Hair’ Study” (<https://perception.org/goodhair/results/>). With partners, they can explore that site and study. When back in the large group, students can share what thoughts they have and what new discoveries they made. After this discussion, students can write an essay or written response merging their new findings and evaluating *Hair Story*’s effectiveness as a tool for starting this conversation with younger children.

Additionally, you can watch this trailer for the documentary “Good Hair” by Chris Rock.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1m-4qzx08S>)(Warning: there are 3 sex references in this short clip. Please watch it first and ensure that it is appropriate for your group of teenagers.)

Multilingualism

Throughout the book, NoNieqa Ramos uses Spanish, English, Spanglish, African American Vernacular English (AAVE), and language she originated. It enriches the story as well as adds authenticity. It also welcomes conversation about language and multilingualism. The following questions can be used to facilitate a discussion about the language diversity present in *Hair Story*.

- What are the different words you notice in the book and how are they used?
- Why do you think NoNieqa Ramos included this language?
- How did it feel to see all the language diversity throughout the book?
- How does the language used help you understand the neighborhood better?
- What impact does the diverse language have on the development of the story and the characters?
- Often, Spanglish and AAVE are seen as “lesser-than” types of writing in English classrooms. Why do you think that is?

Interdisciplinary Activities

Arts: This book can be a great opportunity to practice drawing skills. Invite students to partner up and have them draw each other’s portraits. When they draw the portrait, have them pay special attention to their partner’s hair. Then, they can write words around the head/portrait positively describing their partner’s hair. (Kindergarten)

Science: Use this book to launch a study in science! Talk about the content and chemicals in hair products and test out the ideas of hypotheses and experiments with students. Consider bringing in a doll where you try some of the products and make hypotheses about what will and may not happen as the products are used. (3rd-5th grade)

History: Toward the back of the book, there is a mural celebrating “prominent Black, Afro-Latinx, and non-Black Latinx figures known both for their accomplishments and their notable hair styles.” Use the identified people as part of a lesson on research skills. Have students work with partners to research their selected individual and keep a document with notes from their research. Ask that they cite their sources and use quotation marks accurately. Explain what plagiarism is and

encourage them to keep a works cited page. (6th-8th grade)

Paired Readings:

Other books teachers can read to explore alongside *Hair Story*:

- Barnes, Derrick. *Crown: An Ode to the Fresh Cut*. Illustrated by Gordon C. James. Chicago: Bolden, 2017.
- Cherry, Matthew A. *Hair Love*. Illustrated by Vashti Harrison. New York: Kokila, 2019.
- Miller, Sharee. *Don't Touch My Hair!* New York: Little Brown, 2018.
- Mirchandani, Raakhee. *Hair Twins*. Illustrated by Holly Hatam. New York: Little Brown, 2021.
- Roe, Mechal Renee. *Cool Cuts*. New York: Doubleday, 2021.
- Roe, Mechal Renee. *Happy Hair*. New York: Doubleday, 2019.
- Tarpley, Natasha Anastasia. *I Love My Hair!* Illustrated by E.B. Lewis. New York: Little Brown, 1998.

About the Teaching Guide Creator

Lorena Germán is a Dominican American anti-bias and anti-racist educator. A two-time nationally awarded teacher, Lorena is Co-Founder of the Multicultural Classroom, as well as Co-Founder of #DisruptTexts, and also Chair of NCTE's Committee Against Racism and Bias in the Teaching of English. She's author of *The Anti-Racist Teacher: Reading Instruction Workbook* and *Textured Teaching: A Framework for Culturally Sustaining Practices*. Follow her on Twitter @nenagerman and on Instagram @MulticulturalClassroom.