

Julius Lester. *Shining*. Singapore: Harcourt Brace & Company, 2003. 32 pp. \$17.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-15-200773-7.



Reviewed by Gloria Creed_Dikeogu

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Lester's *Shining* is a captivating African tale that celebrates the beauty and goodness of blackness. Lester tells a story about the coming of age of an unusual child, named Shining, who has never spoken a word, but has learned and understood through experience more about human nature and human existence than any of her verbal peers could ever do. When Shining is twelve, the village council refuses her the chance to learn the ways of women and claim her status as a woman amongst them, simply because they misunderstand her silence and equate her character with inherent evil. Shining's peers will not accept her because she is different. They do not see Shining's wisdom, nobleness, and goodness because they are only concerned about what they encounter on the surface and remain completely blind to the possibility that, like The One, she is endowed with gifts and abilities that are beyond the norm for a girl of her age. They denounce her silence, claiming that her difference includes the ability to "steal" the "souls" of others.

When Shining first meets The One, these two recognize in each other kindred souls. Clearly they both understand that they were born for a purpose, to listen to and to serve their people.

When Shining finally claims her denied status as woman and speaks to her people, her utterances represent all creatures and all of creation, and are the emotions her people need to hear. In reading the book and learning more about the characters, the reader understands the importance of not only listening to the silence, but the importance of using the gifts of the heart. These involve listening to others around us and in turn serving their needs that cannot be met in any other way, but through listening, and then dealing with their deepest woes, fears, and concerns.

The prose in Lester's *Shining* flows like poetry. The language used in the book is simple, the storyline is easy to follow, and the book was written in picture-book format with the target audience of six to nine. However, I believe that the target audience would only understand the superficial layer of the story and that the book is more suitable for an audience of ten to adult. The illustrations in the book are not outwardly colorful and so would not be very attractive to younger children. Besides, the younger audience would miss the subtle, underlying message that can be gleaned from the illustrations by older readers who would better embrace and appreciate them.

It is almost as if the reader can feel the characters' emotions when viewing the accompanying illustrations; and, although the colors in the illustrations are sparse and dark, the splashes of moonlight blue and bright reds and yellows speak volumes to the reader at the level of symbolism. This book is a supreme example of the illustration in unison with the text. The illustrations in this book become the music that carries the metaphor of silence a long way.

Lester has presented his audience with a truly outstanding and thought-provoking book that is bound to have a phenomenal effect on its readers. *Shining* comes highly recommended to young adult and adult readers from all walks of life.

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