

**JaNay Brown-Wood, PhD, Author & Educator** [she/her/hers]

**JaNay will be accepting applications for:** Picture Books, Board Books, Children's Poetry especially from creators who are from marginalized backgrounds. She especially enjoys rhyming picture books with all the elements of a good story and strong rhymes.



**Bio:** JaNay Brown-Wood, PhD, is an award-winning and New York Times Bestselling children's author, poet, educator, and scholar. Her first children's book "Imani's Moon" won the NAESP Children's Book of the Year Award and was featured on Stephen Colbert's The Late Show and Storytime with the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Her second book "Grandma's Tiny House: A Counting Story!" received a starred review from Publisher's Weekly and won the CELI Read Aloud Book Award, and her third book "SHHH! The Baby's Asleep" received a starred review from School Library Journal. She enjoys writing, discussing the importance of authentic diversity in children's literature,

teaching about child development and literacy, and spending time with her husband, Catrayel, and her daughter, Vivian.

**1. You have two minutes to give a speech on anything! What would your topic be?**

I would talk about the importance of supporting young children's development—especially literacy development! And also the importance of diverse books.

**2. If you could live in any film, tv, or book universe, what would it be?**

If I could be in any film, I think it would be in Men in Black beside Will Smith kicking alien butt. And also, in Harry Potter so I can go to Hogwarts and get placed into a house (Gryffindor, of course).

**3. What are your five favorite picture books not written, illustrated, and/or edited by you?**

Five of my favorite picture books at the moment include

1. *In a Blue Room* by Jim Averbeck and Tricia Tusa
2. *Thank You, Omu* by Oge Mora
3. *Pokko and the Drum* by Matthew Forsythe
4. *A Story of Afiya* by James Berry and Anna Cuhna
5. *We Don't Eat Our Classmates* by Ryan T. Higgins

**4. What writing and/or publishing-related accomplishment are you most proud of?**

I am so excited that a book I collaborated on with Ciara and Russell Wilson called *Why Not You?* hit the New York Times Bestseller list. It debuted at #3! So very exciting!

**5. What about mentoring excites you most?**

Sharing my knowledge with new authors thrills me. My hope is to share what I know in a way that ignites my mentees' own excitement and helps them develop the tools to write excellent stories—stories that they are proud of and excited to send out into the world.

**6. What are your strengths as a mentor?**

My full-time job actually includes teaching, so I think one of my strengths is my ability to communicate ideas to others in a way that is meaningful to them. I give lots of feedback and I try to explain my rationale for the feedback I give.

**7. What is your feedback/critique style like?**

I tend to offer a nice amount of feedback. I try to give feedback at multiple levels such as overall story, language use, voice, as well as line edits, too. I give my students/mentees some things to think about when they are writing their stories, and then have them think critically about whether they are effective at achieving what they are striving for.

**8. What are the most important things you're seeking in a mentee?**

A willingness to learn is important to me. Someone willing to consider my feedback and use the tidbits that they feel are most useful for them. I also am looking for mentees who are ready to dive in deep—I give assignments and reading to help expand understandings of writing for kids. It's important that mentees are ready to put in the work, to set some goals, and to work to achieve them!

**9. Who are you not the best mentor for?**

I am not the best mentor for individuals who are not willing to learn something new, step out of their comfort zones, or expand their skills. Those who may feel like they don't really have anything new to learn—that's not a good fit for me.

**10. How will you help your mentee and their stories develop?**

I will have mentees increase their familiarity with books in the market and look at them with a critical eye. I will also have mentees analyze their own work. Additionally, I will offer critiques of manuscripts,

share thoughts of how to improve their work, and give mentees the space to ask questions that they want answers in order to ensure that their needs are being met.

**11. What is your style of communication like?**

I appreciate email communication and the use of track changes to improve manuscripts—this is similar to the same type of work I do when working with editors, so it would be scaffolding the editorial process. I also like to have periodic Zoom meetings to allow for discussion and conversation.

**12. What are you looking for in the applications you receive?**

I am looking for excitement and creativity. I am looking for fresh ideas or new ways of looking at the world—but with the perspective of children taken into account. I also want to learn more about applicants through the works they submit—I am a believer that we put bits of ourselves into our works of creativity, so I look forward to learning about applicants through their stories.

**13. What kind of mentorship experience do you envision for you and your mentee?**

I envision some initial knowledge building, followed by critiquing work and revising based on the new knowledge built. Then, I picture consistent back-and-forth communication to further refine work. I also picture discussions about the world of publishing and some key tips to help navigate this space.

**14. Any tips/advice for applicants to make their applications and/or manuscripts shine?**

Help me learn about you through your story—help me hear your voice in the works you create and submit. And help me care about your characters, your story, and YOU as a creator.

**15. What advice or inspiring and/or motivational words would you like to offer up to anyone applying to be your mentee or simply reading this questionnaire?**

I am going to use a quote from my book *Imani's Moon* to answer this question because I think it is applicable here. Mama says to “A challenge is only impossible until someone accomplishes it...Imani, it is only *you* who must believe,” and that is true here as well. Keep believing! This industry is difficult to break into. It takes years and years for many of us. But, if you learn the craft and continue to persevere, I do believe you will be able to make it. Believe, put in the work, persevere, and it will take you so much closer to your dream of writing and publishing for children!