



## S4E4: Diversity and Inclusion

Julie Bogart with Charnaie Gordon

**Julie:** Welcome to season four of the [Brave Writer Podcast](#): A Brave Writer's Life in Brief [theme music plays]. I'm Julie Bogart your host. This season we are releasing, via audio, our most popular YouTube broadcasts. We're so excited that you can now listen to these on audio while you're running, driving in the car, or folding laundry. We will also sprinkle throughout this season original content. Interviews with people I think are compelling to listen to. If you get a chance, please help us out by leaving a review at iTunes [now Apple Podcasts] or Stitcher or wherever you listen to Brave Writer's podcast. We really appreciate it. It helps us get the word out and it also gratifies all the people behind the scenes who work so hard to bring these to you for free. And now, let's get going with this episode [theme music plays].

**Julie:** Today's guest on the podcast is [Charnaie Gordon](#). She's a wife, mom of two, computer programmer by day and a blogger-influencer by night. Charnaie is also a self-proclaimed life-long learner, podcast junkie, and a distinguished Toast Master. Her blog, [Here Wee Read](#) (and wee is spelled W-E-E for small children, Here We Read is where she is currently expressing her creativity and passion for reading, diverse literature, and literacy. Her children and her husband are her inspiration and her followers and supporters are her book loving tribe.

More than anything else, Charnaie cares about connecting people with great books they'll love. In her world, books are an absolute necessity. And honestly, when I stumbled on Charnaie's Instagram account, I was instantly mesmerized by her book selection. Charnaie is passionate about instilling a love of reading, life-long learning, and curiosity in her kids and hopes to inspire others to do the same with their children. Welcome Charnaie to the podcast!

**Charnaie:** Thank you so much Julie for having me! I'm so excited.

**Julie:** Well I'm thrilled that you're here. I absolutely love your Instagram account and can't wait to talk about the books that you have selected for us to read. But first I want to address this title that you've given yourself, Diversity and Inclusion Expert. Can you explain to my audience what that is?

**Charnaie:** Sure. It's a question I get a lot actually and it's not a title that was given to me by any sort of certification, I just came up with that title on my own. Being a parent as well as a lover of literature—especially diverse literature—I just felt that that was a title that was fitting for myself. I've always been a lover of books and diversity and multiculturalism as a whole and I just came up with that title and it kind of stuck from there.

**Julie:** But what is diversity and inclusion? Maybe you could give us a little thumbnail sketch of what that is.

**Charnaie:** Sure absolutely. Well to me diversity and inclusion, it kind of incorporates everyone. It's being passionate about letting everyone have a voice, whether it be through books or through television. I think that it's important for people of all races, all ethnicities to be able to see themselves doing different things whether it be a profession or writing a book, being an author, being in the Olympics. It's just important for kids to be able to see themselves represented and being included in certain things.

**Julie:** That makes total sense. So would you say then that what you are doing in your Instagram account and on your blog is giving people an opportunity to find books that represent their family group?

**Charnaie:** Oh absolutely. I think especially seeing some of the statistics about diversity in children's books, the numbers are astounding. That you don't see many African American children or indigenous children or Latino, Hispanic, Asian, children that are featured in books. And I think that it's gotten better but it could be so much more than it is.

**Julie:** Well and what I was noticing—I am an Anglo Caucasian and what I was noticing is that when you do highlight or feature a book that shows a different protagonist, a different ethnicity, a different skintone, in my view it enriches and expands my experience of other cultures and even those that I think are different who actually turn out to be very similar to me. Have you noticed that when you are introducing this literature to a wider community?

**Charnaie:** Oh absolutely. I mean, even in books that I try to feature—I try to feature books a lot of the times with kids doing everyday things. We don't see enough of this, I believe, especially when you're looking at diverse books. It's usually books about slavery or the civil rights era. But I like to focus more on just kids being kids no matter what their race or culture is.

**Julie:** Yeah that might be the danger even of February being Black History Month, isn't it? It tends to focus on the historical oppression and sometimes misses an opportunity really to help us recognize the current state of affairs which is more and more integration, more and more opportunity for equality. Do you find that when you're in February? I know it sometimes get critiqued actually within the community of African Americans who are trying to promote this experience of social equality.

**Charnaie:** Oh absolutely. While I like Black History Month and I'm proud that we have a month dedicated to it, I truly believe that black history is American history and again it's great for it to be acknowledged but I think a lot of parents or educators they just see it as okay, we're going to focus on this, we're going to focus on learning about different people of color but only in the month of February.

**Julie:** Yeah.

**Charnaie:** When it should be all throughout the year.

**Julie:** That makes total sense to me. One of the books you featured not too long ago on Instagram was *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black Boy* and the title immediately intrigued me and it made me realize that whoever wrote it was actually aware that too many people hold a specific idea of what it means when you see an African American child or teenager or young adult or even adult man I suppose. Can you talk about that book? I want to buy it. It just sounds phenomenal. What a great idea.

**Charnaie:** Oh absolutely. It's actually a poetry book. It's actually quite simple, like the poems that are in the book. All of the poems are written by a guy named Tony Medina and his idea was basically to come up with all of these different poems but for each of the poems he came up with a different—he selected 13 different illustrators who illustrated each of the poems. So it's a book where you're again shown just black boys just being every day boys. Catching the school bus. There's one who's shown he wants to be a teacher. There's a little boy shown going

to church or getting ready for church. You know, so it's these kinds of experiences that are important for not only African American children to see but others to see so that they don't just—when they think of African American males they're scared, I see that sometimes. Even with my own children I see sometimes smaller kids are a little bit apprehensive about playing with my kids, which it shouldn't be like that. You know?

**Julie:** No that's got to be a painful experience to have that awareness that that's what's going on when you're with your kids. How do you talk to them about that experience?

**Charnaie:** Yeah well my kids are 4 and 5 so I just kind of—right now I'll just say something like come on over here, let's play over here." But when I'm reading books with my children or even just talking in everyday life, I just try to explain the differences between our skin color, other skin colors, different cultures. But it's more of like hey sometimes kids for whatever reason don't want to play with you guys. There's nothing wrong with you type of thing. That's what I kind of want to get across to them. That it's nothing with you, it's other people.

**Julie:** Well you're exactly right. I mean bullying and exclusion happen in every community. I know my oldest child had that experience in one of the neighborhoods we lived in and everybody in that neighborhood was white so being excluded can be a child experience regardless of race and then race on top of it just complicates that. I think it's really important for everyone to consider the ways in which our anxiety or our fear triggers behavior that's harmful to other people. Do you have any thoughts about that that you might share with our audience about what it is in us that needs to be transformed to be able to be more embracing to people who are not from our host culture?

**Charnaie:** Well you know it's one of those things where you hear people say this a lot but it's something that I truly believe is that it starts at home. You know, you can't tell me that a 3 year old or a 4 year old who sees someone who looks different than them that they thought of it on their own. I think that there are some conversations happening within that household because let's face it, kids are kids and they don't really understand fully the differences or even some of the stereotypes that a lot of adults have as they get older so I believe that conversations at home just need to be different.

Children need to just see more people that do not look like them. They need to be read books or interact with people and not be afraid. Because sometimes all it really takes it just going up to someone and saying hi, you know, and just kind of starting that conversation. Not being afraid to reach out to someone of a different race or of a different culture than you.

**Julie:** That's really where these books come in handy, isn't it? Because by helping us recognize the humanity in people who are dissimilar to us we will have more courage hopefully in our personal interactions to bridge that gap and make a connection.

**Charnaie:** Right absolutely. Absolutely. And I think books are one of the best ways to do that. You know, children who are of color they get to see themselves reflected on the pages and then other children who are of a different race, they get to look into the life of someone who's different than them [theme music plays].

**Julie:** Today on the podcast I want to make you aware of a brand new free product designed to get your writing program off to a great start this school year. It is called the [7-Day Writing Blitz](#). And you can download it from [bravewriter.com](http://bravewriter.com). Just got the home page and click on the button.

In those seven pages, you'll find activities, fun ways to explore writing with your kids that are super easy, and that are sure to create some energy around the writing life. Inside those seven pages, you'll also find instructions for how to create your own blaster—a writing blaster. You'll see what I'm talking about, it's especially fun for young children. But these activities work for every age and I hope that you will download it and take it as a gift from us to help you jump on the bandwagon of writing this fall.

If you do decide to take pictures of your creative young writers, please use the hashtag #bwblitz, so that I can find you on Twitter and Instagram. My Instagram is [@juliebravewriter](#) if you want to tag me [theme music plays].

**Julie:** Do you have a book that just off the top of your head from all your years of blogging that you just love to recommend across the board. Like what are your one or two top favorite books that you return to or share with people?

**Charnaie:** Oh you're putting me on the spot. There's—there's one that was recently released—now are you talking about a diverse book or it doesn't matter?

**Julie:** It doesn't matter. You get to decide here.

**Charnaie:** Okay. The book—one of the books that I'm always now recommending since it came out is called *Little Leaders: Bold Women in Black History* by Vashti Harrison and I love what Vashti did with this book. It actually started as an Instagram—I guess her own Instagram kind of challenge if you will. Every day of February and I believe this was last year in 2017 if I'm not mistaken she just took an African American female role model and basically illustrated it.

She's an illustrator as well as an author so every day in February she just illustrated a different character. And she gave a little bit of information about that woman and it turned to such a huge success and she was immediately picked up by a publisher who wanted to publish a book about these little leaders that she drew. It's a New York Times Bestseller.

**Julie:** Wow.

**Charnaie:** Yeah so I recommend that book a lot. It's amazing. It truly is amazing.

**Julie:** I love—just scrolling through Instagram feed and I just expect everyone listening to go follow you. You have such a wealth of beautifully photographed books that give us such an overview of language and history and politics and the rich sort of tapestry of both famous people and everyday people living their lives. All described through pictures and beautiful writing. Are most of the books that you recommend picture books or do you also recommend novels?

**Charnaie:** Most of the books I do recommend are picture books. The way that I actually started my blog, which was about three years ago now, I really started it as a way for me to keep track of all the books I was reading with my kids and at that time they were two and three I believe. But really it was just a way for me to keep track of all the books I was reading with them. As well as you know sometimes I would write about a book I was reading on my own. But Instagram as well as my blog is primarily picture books only because that's what I'm reading right now with my kids.

**Julie:** [Laughs] that makes total sense.

**Charnaie:** We also will feature chapter books that are easy reader chapter books because we do read those as a family, easy reader chapter books. We'll read those over the course of a week or two weeks. We'll read a chapter or two per night.

**Julie:** That makes sense. And actually, one of the things that I think is often overlooked is that picture books are even valuable for kids who are out of the quote unquote "picture book age range." I found myself as an adult homeschooling my kids really educated by some picture books. Things that I had perhaps understood in an academic manner that then sprang to life because of illustrations and the storytelling of these expert writers. You can find that junior high kids and high school kids even can have entrée into a subject through a picture book before they need to read it in a textbook or in a novel or in some kind of non-fiction format. There's

something about illustrations and small quantities of writing that invite us in better than sometimes just jumping into the dense text of a non-fiction work—a non-fiction work. So I invite anyone listening, even if you have older children, to not just assume these books wouldn't have value for your family. There are plenty that would and I even—I even have found myself buying them and I don't even have children in my house anymore and it's all your fault Charnaie [laughs].

**Charnaie:** [Laughs] I mean I love picture books. I think there is so much to be learned through them. There's a picture book that's coming out about the life of Nelson Mandela and that one is featured to come out in July of this year. It's called *Grand-dad Mandela*. Yeah. It's actually written by two actual members of Nelson Mandela's family and I'm so excited about that book. You know, I think when you really find a great picture book and you love the story, it kind of makes me want to go and find out more about that particular person or that particular event just because the picture book moved me so much. You know—

**Julie:** That's 100% true. Yes. It can lead you into an active journey of learning. I also think these books would pair very well with the practice of poetry teatime, which we promote in Brave Writer all the time. I can picture having a set up—you know, set the table, get the tea, get the snacks, and then put out a variety of these picture books and take turns reading them and give yourself a deep dive immersive experience in widening your literature choices. I really think picture books pair beautifully with that experience as well. Have you done poetry teatime Charnaie?

**Charnaie:** I have not. I've seen it and I'm a big fan, I always see the pictures on Instagram but I think maybe when my kids are just a little bit older. I do read some poetry books with them. They don't seem as interested right now as they are in like a regular picture book or a chapter book. But I'm trying! I'm trying [laughs].

**Julie:** [Laughs] no you're doing great. I absolutely love what you are promoting here. So tell me why you think it's so important to instill a love of reading in childhood.

**Charnaie:** Oh absolutely. For me, growing up, I didn't grow up with books—being surrounded by books in my home. I grew up very modest, might say poor. But I learned to read at an early age and kind of found books, I didn't want to let them go. Yeah and it's one of those things where I didn't have a lot of great positive role models growing up. Very first role model, it was someone I didn't even know and a lot of people know her very well know, Oprah Winfrey. Yeah I remember being really small when the Oprah Winfrey show first came out I was still small but I loved going home from school and watching the Oprah Winfrey show. It was someone who looked like me and I just loved her so much and I love the way that she talks and I was

immediately infatuated with her throughout my whole childhood. But she didn't have Oprah's book club at that time. She did—in her early shows—she did talk about books and reading a lot so I did have in my household was a lot of magazines so I read those. When I had the chance to read—I read books.

**Julie:** Let me just piggyback for a minute on Oprah because I'm such a huge fan, too. I think Oprah embodies a spirit of self-education and growing and becoming more of who you're meant to be and her role in your life is so precious. It's just wonderful to hear how she stood out to you as an icon and a role model and of course she does then go on to promote reading the classics. When she started her book club it wasn't modern books, it was books that had been written ages ago meant to catalyze a love of reading. So piggybacking on that, how has reading benefited your children in ways you didn't get to experience when you were a child? What do you see that's been a value for them?

**Charnaie:** Sure. Well, instilling a loving—a love of reading in my kids' childhood as well as my own childhood, is important because it can open so many opportunities later in your life. Not only for your vocabulary but it leads to academic success in school. And I love now when I'm reading with my children the bond that's happening. You know—especially at night, we do read throughout the day and at breakfast and whenever they want a story but my most precious time to read is at night when they're all—we're all cozy in our pajamas and it's just time to snuggle up and they always say "Mommy, I'm ready for a story!" So just building that strong bond with my children and our family in general has just been a blessing to me. But I believe it's just important also because I love that I'm teaching them to be more curious, more resourceful, on their own and I'm doing that not only through my parenting skills but through books as well, which makes it that much more special to me.

**Julie:** Well that's perfect. I love ending on that note actually. I think all of us value reading who are broadcast listeners and participants and the role modeling of reading around your children is one thing but reading to them is actually creating that meaningful bond both with the author and the content and as a family so thank you for sharing that with us. Charnaie, tell us where we can find this great list of books that you recommend, you Instagram account has over 20,000 followers so we know that you're doing a great service out there in the world and I would love people to follow you.

**Charnaie:** Thank you. Well you can find me on my blog it's [hereweeread.com](http://hereweeread.com) and it's here, the word here, wee with two E's, E-E. Read. Dot com. And I'm hereweeread pretty much all social media networks, platforms.



**Julie:** Well Instagram of course is where I discovered you but I welcome people to look for you on Twitter and all the other platforms as well. And you know definitely let Charnaie when you pick one of those books and read it, please put a comment on her post and let her know that you heard about it through Brave Writer because that's how we broaden our community, that's how we create gateways between homeschooling, non-homeschooling, diverse communities, and I am just so thrilled that you were willing to join us and share with us today Charnaie.

**Charnaie:** Oh it was my pleasure. Thank you so much for asking me [theme music plays].

**Julie:** That's it for today. I hope you found some ideas you can implement even this week. I'd love to hear from you. Follow me on Instagram [@juliebravewriter](https://www.instagram.com/juliebravewriter) or you can follow us on Facebook. [Facebook.com/bravewriter](https://www.facebook.com/bravewriter). Every Monday morning at 11:30 EST, I do a Facebook Live broadcast [no longer a regular broadcast]. Feel free to join me then as well. In the meantime, live honestly, write bravely. I'm Julie Bogart, from Brave Writer [theme music plays out].

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