

Little Rebels Exploring Social Justice

Mayowa and the Sea of Words

by Chibundu Onuzo

illustrated by Paula Zorite

Bloomsbury

Aged just 8, Mayowa started jumping on books. Despite her mum's ban, Mayowa secretly keeps up this family tradition. With a visit to Grandpa Edward, she finally discovers what lies behind this legacy and learns how to channel her inherited magic in to a force for good. An encounter with a local refugee family and a campaigner alongside the looming threat of a vicious anti-immigration bill, crescendo in to a clash of magical forces and a fight between cruelty and compassion.

Shortlisted for the 2025 Little Rebels Book Award



Social Justice Themes: Refugees; Well-being; Freedom; Racism; Ethics

Things to talk about

- When Mayowa describes her friend Hamza as a refugee, her Mum says 'He's not a refugee...He's a person who needs refuge' (P52). Why do you think she says this?
- Grandpa Edward describes his relative as 'jingoistic' (P84). What does this mean? There is a brief explanation in the footnotes. Expand on this.
- The bill that Mayowa wants to stop becoming law is a bill making it illegal to rescue drowning refugees (P116). Do you believe anything like this could happen in real life?
- What do you understand by the term 'A necessary evil' (P132)? Is there any such thing?
- Adut Deng believes in changing minds by using words but ultimately Mayowa and Grandpa Edward are forced to use their powers to counter David and Daniella Hayward. Do you think they were right to do this?

Activities

- An important theme of this book is the power of words. Write a speech about something you are passionate about. Think about the language you use. What emotions will you inspire? How will you persuade the reader to your way of thinking?

Extended

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (P140) is the reason Adut Deng is successful with an injunction to stop the bill. Learn more about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights here. https://kids.kiddle.co/Universal_Declaration_of_Human_Rights

For more information about The Little Rebels Book Award visit littlerebels.org