

Marley Dias's latest project is "Bookmarks: Celebrating Black Voices" on Netflix; she's 15

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Image 1. Marley Dias speaks onstage during the 2020 Embrace Ambition Summit on March 5, 2020, in New York City. Photo: Craig Barritt/Getty Images for Tory Burch Foundation/TNS

Marley Dias is known for starting the online campaign #1000BlackGirlBooks. She is 15 years old.

The campaign, #1000BlackGirlBooks, is to collect and donate children's books that have Black girls as the main characters. It is not common to find books with Black girls as the main character in many libraries.

Dias also wrote a book, "Marley Dias Gets It Done (And So Can You!)." She wrote about social justice and young people working to make positive changes.

Netflix Series Highlights Black Experience

Now she has a new project, "Bookmarks: Celebrating Black Voices." It's a collection of 12 five-minute video episodes with Black celebrities reading children's books by Black authors. The show began on September 1 on Netflix.

Dias is the host of the series. Its books and conversations center on identity, respect, justice and action. Among the guests are rapper, actor and writer Common, actor and writer Lupita Nyong'o, and ballerina and writer Misty Copeland.

Among the books to be read are "ABCs for Girls Like Me" by Melanie Goolsby and "Brown Boy Joy" by Thomishia Booker. Another is "Firebird" by Copeland.

Dias Wants To Spark Families Learning Together

Dias said the project will give families ways to start conversations with kids. They can talk about difficult topics through books. She said "Bookmarks" can help parents who have children who don't enjoy reading.

It's important for #1000BlackGirlBooks and "Bookmarks" to encourage families to read together and learn together, Dias said. She hopes to create "campaigns that can change the world and really shift conversations" about Black people.

Since the #1000blackgirlbooks campaign began, Dias has won several awards for it. She answered questions after her appearance at August's online Democratic National Convention (DNC). The DNC is held every four years to name someone to run for the U.S. president. The Republican political group also holds a convention to name someone to run.

Q: There's a wide range of celebrity readers for Bookmarks. How did you get the big names?



First, we came up with ideas about books and the messages we want to cover. The four core things that these books cover are identity, respect, justice and action. So we thought about what authors have already published books that tell these messages. We had lists, and Netflix has people that can join all these groups together.

You can tell the people on the show want kids to love these stories as much as they do.

Q: With all the books out there, was it hard to select this dozen?

It was a difficult process. I think it's important that the books have great art, important stories and those four core ideas that we wanted. A lot of stories don't hit that note right away. I think the books that have been selected really represent Black girls' experience, Black boys' experience and Black families' experience. I'm super proud of the collection that has been chosen.

Q: Your message from your own book is about being a force for change, and you were a part of the DNC. How was that experience?

I was excited and concerned because I wasn't sure where I wanted to stand on a political point of view. But my parents and I had a conversation, and I decided to do it. It's important to me to show that I want to see change. By making this decision, I express my interest in changing the world. I express my interest in making sure politicians care about the voices of girls like me.

I was a bit nervous at first, but people have received it so well. I felt so much kindness.

Q: How is the #1000BlackGirlBooks campaign going?

We're still collecting books. We have a lot of people donating, which is super exciting. It makes me happy that people remember that the message is still there. That's how I started, so I want to make sure we always come back to #1000BlackGirlBooks.

Q: Previous articles have you saying that there's a lot of negativity out there these days, and not much optimism. Do you feel a bit more hope on the horizon with more young people a part of the conversation?

I think there's a lot more hope on the horizon. I think watching people who look like me be attacked and have a lot of hate going on can definitely be difficult for people. But I think seeing "Bookmarks" happening and being grateful for places like Netflix for trying to create space for girls like me has given people hope.

It can be sad sometimes, definitely scary. You're not being listened to, you're not being heard. But I hope we can always look at it from a hopeful point of view.