



## **"Frustration" was fuel for girl behind the #1000BlackGirlBooks drive**

Marley Dias is a 12-year-old with a mission. Dias is the force behind #1000BlackGirlBooks, a project to collect and donate children's books that feature black girls as the main characters. She hoped to collect 1,000. She's up to 9,500.

Marley was even invited to speak at an event in Chicago, Illinois, on June 6 and 7. "I'll be talking about how to use frustration as fuel to help others," Marley said. "And how I was able to use the problem of only seeing white boys and their dogs as characters as a way to uplift" the stories of black girls. Marley began her work to change reading lists in 2015 when she was in the sixth grade. She had to read "Old Yeller," "Shiloh" and "Where the Red Fern Grows." However, "Brown Girl Dreaming" and other tales about girls of color were not on the list.

### **Getting Books For Libraries**

Her mom, Janice Johnson Dias, helped her to launch a social media project. The goal was to collect 1,000 books with black girl main characters. The books were to donate to libraries. Booksellers and authors quickly jumped on board with donations. Ellen DeGeneres gave her a check for \$10,000 to buy books. Marley discovered authors and books she never knew existed.

"I normally got books from big publishing companies like Penguin, Simon & Schuster and Scholastic," she said. "I didn't know there were so many independent authors out there making books. Now I want to promote their stories even more."

Of the 9,500 books she's collected, she said 1,500 are unique titles. One of her favorites is "Aya: Life in Yop City." It is by Marguerite Abouet, who was born and raised in Ivory Coast, Africa.

## **Promoting Stories Of Black Girls**

“My goal is to promote the stories of black girls, not only for black girls, but for other kids who are different,” she said. “I come from a community that has a lot of white kids, and I notice how a lot of times they don’t understand our differences.”

Marley said she comes from a different culture, and her ancestors and history are different. She says she wants black girls to see themselves in the books they read. She wants them to see themselves and learn about their history.

“If I meet someone who’s Native American, and I don’t know anything about indigenous people in New Jersey, which I kind of don’t, which is not really good, I can learn more and more about their lives,” she said. That makes me a more open and accepting person, she adds. “At the same time, I’m showing others that I can be kind.”

## **"Marley Dias Gets It Done"**

In addition to the heroes in books, there are people she admires in real life. “I have role models,” she said. Marley looks at the qualities of the people whom she admires. "I use them to create my best self. I can look at Madam C.J. Walker, who was one of the first (black female) millionaires, and I can say, ‘I want to be as industrious and I want to be as motivated as her.’ Not that I want to live the life she did, but that I want to be my best self and have those traits and abilities of Madam C.J. Walker to allow me to do that.”

Marley has a book coming out in January. “Marley Dias Gets It Done — And So Can You” will be published by Scholastic. “It’s a guide for everyone to use their gifts and talents to make the world a better place,” she said.

### Let's Talk:

1. Why did Marley Dias become interested in starting #1000BlackGirlBooks?
2. Read the paragraph from the section "Mirrors And Windows." What do you believe it means?

Marley said she comes from a different culture, and her ancestors and history are different. "I want to create mirrors and windows for people."

3. What is the main idea of the section entitled, "My Best Self"?
4. Which selection from the article BEST helps you understand that Marley wants people to be understanding and accepting of one another?

### Let's Write:

Directions: Choose one of the following prompts to write about 5-10 sentences.

- A. Marley Dias wanted to read books that interest her. She was upset about the lack of books about girls who look like her and her family. If you were to start a campaign about books that you like to read, what would be your #hashtag? Why is this topic important to you?
- B. Read the section entitled: "Promoting Stories Of Black Girls". Marley mentions not knowing about a particular culture but wanting to learn about them because they are a part of her community. If you had to do a research about a specific group of peoples, which group would you research? Why?  
OR
- C. If someone wanted to research your culture, what would you want them to learn? What would you share with them?