



***Like Vanessa* by Tami Charles**

Charlesbridge 2018

ISBN: 9781580897778 Hardcover, 9781580898997 Paperback

\*Age Range: 10 and up

**BOOK SYNOPSIS**

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Middle graders will laugh and cry with thirteen-year-old Vanessa Martin as she tries to be like Vanessa Williams, the first Black Miss America.

In this semi-autobiographical debut novel set in 1983, Vanessa Martin's real-life reality of living with family in public housing in Newark, New Jersey, is a far cry from the glamorous Miss America stage. She struggles with a mother she barely remembers, a grandfather dealing with addiction, and her own battle with self-confidence. But when a new teacher at school coordinates a beauty pageant and convinces Vanessa to enter, Vanessa's view of her own world begins to change. Vanessa discovers that her own self-worth is more than the scores of her talent performance and her interview answers, and that she doesn't need a crown to be comfortable in her own skin and see her own true beauty.

**REVIEWS AND PRAISE**

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★ "Charles evades the clichés and imbues Vanessa with an inner life that's so real and personal it's hard to deny the charm, heartbreak, and triumph of her story. Additionally, the protagonist has a fractured and flawed, but loving, family at her back, which acts as a bulwark against her insecurities and drives the narrative to its hopeful, graceful conclusion. Best of all, is that with some support Vanessa ultimately finds strength in herself and goes on to be the greatest architect of her dreams. Superb." —*Booklist*, **starred review**

★ "Readers of all ages and backgrounds will cheer Vanessa on and see themselves in her story. This debut is a treasure: a gift to every middle school girl who ever felt unpretty, unloved, and trapped by her circumstances." —*Kirkus Reviews*, **starred review**

★ "As, for the first time, her friends and family help her see the strong, talented, and beautiful young woman that she is, young adult audiences may be helped to similarly embrace how they, too, are worthwhile. *Like Vanessa* is an emotionally potent, engaging young adult story with a heroine whom it is impossible not to root for. The life lessons that Nessy learns are relevant and worthwhile for everyone." —*Foreword Reviews*, **starred review**

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Charlesbridge

trademarketing@charlesbridge.com

“Loosely autobiographical, Charles’s debut novel dexterously interlaces pathos and humor and introduces a refreshing new voice.” —*Publishers Weekly*

“Sprinkled with poetry and motivational phrases from her entries in “Darlene,” as Vanessa names the diary she receives from Pop Pop every year, Charles’s debut novel will appeal to young readers, who will appreciate and empathize with the protagonist’s journey to earn the crown. Vanessa’s failures and triumphs lead both her and readers to realize the meaning of true beauty.” —*The Horn Book*

“Charles’s writing is engaging and her characters are infused with a subtle depth and resonance that leave deep impressions even with only brief appearances. Complex and heartfelt, Like Vanessa is a truly remarkable coming-of-age tale.” —*Shelf Awareness*

## AWARDS AND ACCOLADES

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- A 2018 Junior Library Selection
- 2018 Winter/Spring Indies Introduce
- Spring 2018 Kids' Indies Next List (top 10 -- #7)
- Foreword INDIES Book of the Year 2018 Awards Silver
- 2020 Sequoyah Book Award (Masterlist)

## MEDIA AND RESOURCES

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- [Like Vanessa Excerpt](#)
- [Like Vanessa Discussion Guide](#)
- [Charlesbridge Unabridged: Charlesbridge Unplugged #3: Tami Charles](#)
- [Like Vanessa Alyssa | YouTube](#)
- [Creator Corner with Tami Charles | LIKE VANESSA | YouTube](#)
- [Like Vanessa, Author Discussion | YouTube](#)
- [Interview with Tami Charles, Author of LIKE VANESSA - BookRiot](#)
- [Like Vanessa - Interview with Author Tami Charles - YAYOMG!](#)
- [Interview with Tami Charles, author of LIKE VANESSA - From The Mixed Up Files](#)
- [The Great Story Behind Tami Charles' Poignant Novel 'Like Vanessa' | Black Girl Nerds](#)

## AUTHOR STATEMENT

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Vanessa Martin is all of us navigating the early teen years. Shy, but wishfully bold. Creative, but also afraid. Her journal is her safe space--a place where she shares her biggest dreams. Could she win the school pageant, even though the bullies think she doesn’t stand a chance? Could she help her family heal, years after losing her mother? These questions shape and strengthen Vanessa throughout the novel, imparting sage advice:

You are resilient, powerful, and capable of greatness, even when it feels like the world says otherwise.

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I wrote *Like Vanessa* to encourage empathy and self-acceptance, to show that people should embrace their unique qualities, no matter how difficult external forces may be. It is the type of story that *all* readers can find a small piece of themselves in.

### **\*A NOTE ON AGE RANGES**

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A publisher-suggested age range covers the gamut of readers that publishers envision using the book, whether for independent reading, family sharing, group study, or in other ways. Educators have the best sense of the appropriate age range for the diverse learners they work with and understand these ranges vary depending on a book's intended use.