

The Pirate Tree by Brigita Orel & Jennie Poh

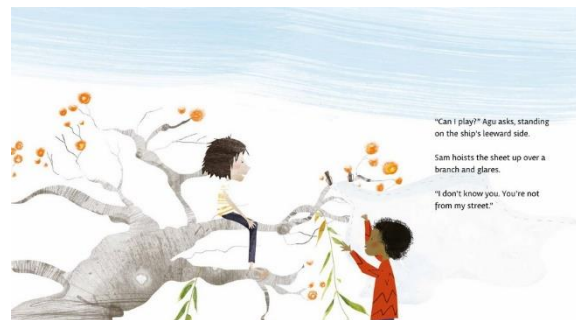
[Young Readers]



"The breeze is generous and the ocean is wide before them."

Look at the arms-open language there: the breeze is "generous", the ocean "wide", plus it's a new shared experience: "them". This is such a thoughtful, poignant and positive book which, like McIntyre's *THE NEW NEIGHBOURS*, has at its heart the warm welcoming of strangers. But first there are obstacles to overcome... Reservations, shall we call them.

'The gnarled tree on the hill sometimes turns into a pirate ship. A rope serves as an anchor, a sheet as a sail, and Sam is its fearless captain. Today, the tree watches as another sailor approaches.'



I love the warm antler-grey of the venerable tree and its feathery, willow-like leaves, as well as the cool blue above them and the exotic orange blossom which is reflected in the stripes of Sam's t-shirt. Then there's the vibrant red of young Agu's shirt, picked out in the parrot which later wears a pirate's hat. I also adore all the clean white space, so that those colours stand out and breathe.



"Can I play?" Agu asks, standing on the ship's leeward side.
Sam hoists the sheet up over a branch and glares.
"I don't know you. You're not from my street."

Ah yes, the reservations...

"Agu's face falls. He watches her struggle with a thick rope.
"No one wants to play with him because he's a newcomer."



Sam hasn't rejected Agu. She's just so immediately swept up in her imaginary game that she's forgotten him. But the effect on Agu is profound and Poh nails the boy's body language, his arms drooping heavily to his sides in contrast to Sam's wild gesticulation, his head bowed in introspection.

"When Sam doesn't as much as look his way, Agu's shoulders slump. Auntie told him to be patient, but he's been patient for days."

Oh, the poor love! There's no self-pity, merely dignity and disappointment. Unlike the Pirate Tree, he's had the wind knocked out of his sails, once more. But what makes all the difference in the world on the very next page is... well, Agu's difference! It's his specialist knowledge that there are no diamonds in Nigeria. He tells Sam that he used to live in Nigeria, and he has even sailed on a ship! His voice rising, Agu offers to tell her all about it, and that has Sam *totally* hooked.



"They set sail again."

Hooray! Wherever will their shared imaginations take them...?!

My heart soared while reading this book, and so will those of families keen for their young ones to make new, exciting and diverse friends. I adore all of mine for their individuality and all the knowledge and mad skills that they possess which are beyond my current capabilities. I do love to learn, though!

Additional Resource: Lantana Publishing

“In the United Kingdom, almost a third of school children identify as Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME) yet fewer than 5% of children's books feature BAME characters and fewer than 2% of children's book creators are British authors of colour. And the picture is even more bleak for those who identify as working class, LGBTQ+ or disabled. At Lantana, we're changing the game and publishing inclusive books that celebrate our differences - whatever they may be.”

They've won so many awards! Please visit their website: <https://lantanapublishing.com/>

