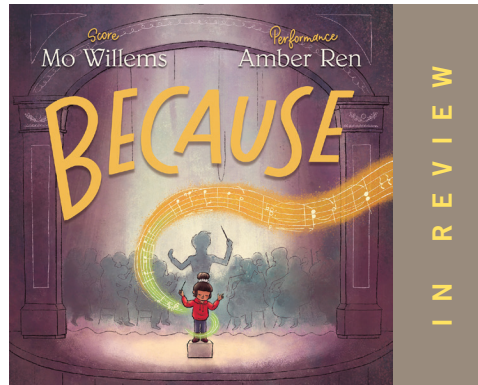


CHILDREN'S BOOK REVIEW

Reviewed by **Stacey Johnson**

Because

Written by Mo Willems/Illustrated by Amber Ren
Hyperion Books for Children, 2019



“**B**ecause ... in row C, seat 14 sat the girl ... she heard the beautiful music ... and it changed her,” is the basis of this enchanting book by award winning author Mo Willems. In this latest book, *Because*, Willems partnered with illustrator Amber Ren to tell the story of a young girl and her journey to become a composer.

Readers will be pleasantly surprised that this story does not start at the beginning of the composer’s journey; it begins almost 200 years before with a painting of Beethoven hanging in the home of Franz Schubert. “Because a man named Ludwig wrote beautiful music, a man named Franz Schubert was inspired to create his own.” The word “because” is carried throughout the book, much like a musical motif in a symphony. Because people wanted to perform Schubert’s music ... because the orchestra practiced ... because the train stopped at the concert hall ... on and on the motif continues. When the orchestra plays the music of Schubert, it changes the little girl and her journey begins. The motif threads through as we follow her life to the finale of the story where she has become a composer and her music inspires another.

You can take this book in many directions with your students when using it in your music classroom. Schubert’s eighth symphony was the music that inspired the young girl to become a

composer. The mysterious introduction of the first movement can prompt creative movement with your younger students. Willems and Ren partnered with American composer Hilary Purrington who, motivated by the character’s journey to become a composer, wrote a piano piece for the book. Purrington’s score for *The Cold* forms the back endpage of the book. Her website offers additional recordings of her compositions to use to stimulate and accompany movement activities.

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For older students, using the music of Beethoven, Schubert, and Purrington creates an opportunity to compare and contrast past and present music. You can also use the music as a springboard to create a class composition or arrangement and to explore instruments of the orchestra as well as careers such as performer, conductor, librarian, and promoter.

The overarching theme of how we affect others is apparent through the story. Willems and Ren have created a YouTube video, *The Story of the Story of Because*, in which they talk about their own “because” stories and the theme of this book. As you read the story, you may find, as I did, this theme is bigger than the music room. It should be shared throughout the school community. “Because you greeted me with a smile yesterday morning, I made it through the

day.” “Because you helped me find my gloves, my hands stayed warm at recess.” “Because you taught me that game in music, my friends and I play it all the time.”

Because is a book of promise and perseverance to share with all students. Its uplifting message is also a good reminder for teachers. You never know what you may say or do that will elevate your students and inspire them to do great things. ■

STACEY JOHNSON has 25 years of teaching experience. She currently teaches kindergarten through Grade 5 music for the Natrona County School District in Casper, Wyoming, where she is also the 504 coordinator. She earned a bachelor's degree in music education from University of Wisconsin-Superior and a master's degree as a reading specialist from Olivet Nazarene University. Stacey has completed three levels of Orff Schulwerk Teacher Education and Master Class.



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