

# Story Makers Ink

DECEMBER 2022

The Literary Resource for Teachers,  
Librarians, and Parents



**DAVID  
ATHERTON**

HAS THE RECIPE FOR FUN  
IN THE KITCHEN

**HEATHER MISHel WILLIAMS**  
OFFERS YOUNG READERS ADVICE  
FOR HEALTH AND HAPPINESS

**STEPHEN W. MARTIN**  
CAN'T DRAW ... BUT HE DID IT ANYWAY

**TAMEKA FRYER BROWN**

IS SPREADING HOLIDAY CHEER  
WITH YOUNG READERS

**KRISTEN SCHROEDER**  
PENS A COZY ODE TO THE SEASON

**DANCING ON THE PAGE**

YOU KNEW US WHEN...

**JUDY NEWMAN**

FINDING MAGIC IN  
THE ORDINARY

**THE BOOK BUG**  
COFFEE AND  
DOUGHNUTS WITH  
LAURIE KELLER

**Q&A**

MARA ROCKCLIFF

**LIV ON LIFE**

WRITING POETRY



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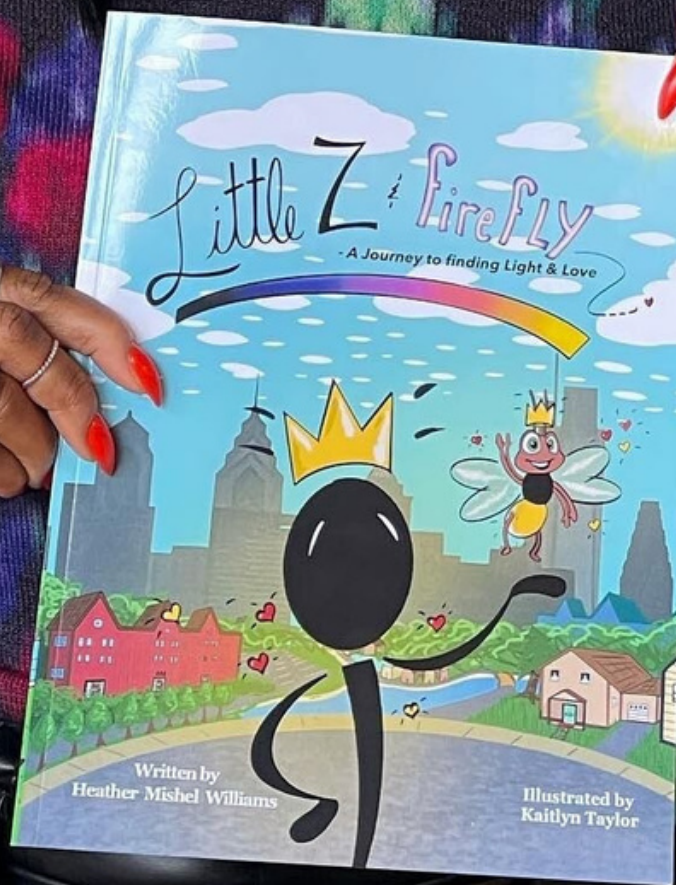
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### ONLINE

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# Heather Mishel Williams

Offers Young Readers advice for Health and Happiness

by Raven Howell

**Veteran** educator Heather Mishel Williams is a fierce advocate when it comes to mental health and self-care. Currently an Assistant Adjunct Professor at Temple University in Pennsylvania, she is celebrating the success of her debut book, *Little Z and Firefly – A Journey to Finding Light and Love*. The book guides the reader to incorporate seven healthy life coping mechanisms while the story's characters, "Little Z" and "Firefly" each learn valuable lessons and examples to help one out of a "Dark Place."

"Mishel lives by a powerful mantra: "Honor the Truth. Function with Order. Keep your Balance. Practice Reciprocity."

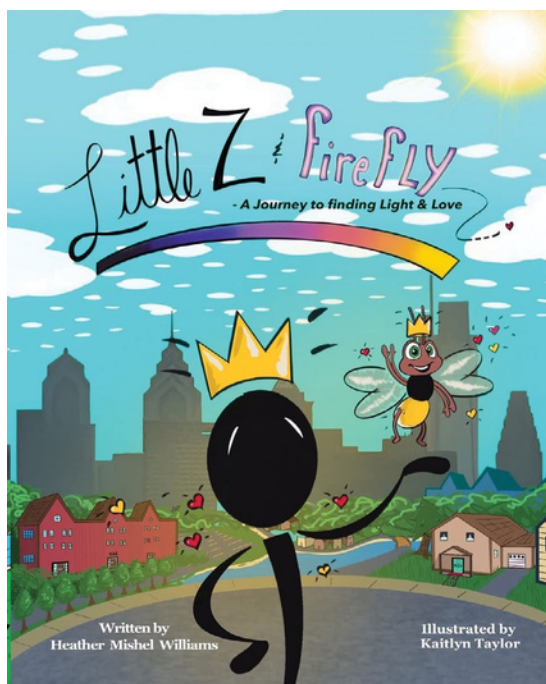
"She elaborates, "This is a quote that I live by and have used with my students throughout my years teaching. It is a reminder to always honor your truth, tackle difficulties or large tasks in a way that makes sense and can be done successfully, always regulate your emotional responses in a balanced and measured way, and be kind to others."

Potent advice, and Mishel's book addresses this theme and then some. *Little Z and Firefly* comes with *The Workbook – An Interactive Mental Health Guide for Kids*.

It's evident that it's not always so easy for kids today to stay level-headed and optimistic. Mishel says, "I think one of the more difficult tools for students to master is practicing mindfulness. It's a new strategy that is only recently picking up more attention. While it's highly effective, it takes a concerted effort and practice. In today's digital world where every part of our lives is concerted to social media or electronics, it can be hard for young people to take time out of their day to unplug; even if just for a moment."

Along with mindfulness, there are several other strategies explored in the book, such as journaling, talking it out, healthy diet and exercise, and creating joy.

Mishel offers examples for "creating joy" to assist a child with restoring health and happiness. "Anything that sparks joy and is of interest in your child should be supported and fostered. I find providing opportunities for children to express themselves in creative ways is always a great place to start. Some examples are painting, crafting, and putting together puzzles. Other great activities that older kids can do independently include reading, going for a walk, or helping someone in their community."



“Life is hard, be patient and be kind. you never know what someone else is going through behind closed doors so you can never go wrong leading with love.”

Eager to help others and spread the message, Mishel has promoted her book in various communities. “I have done several readings with different organizations. I’ve read in a summer literacy camp with elementary-aged kids, and nonprofit organizations that work with high school students who have behavioral challenges. I’ve also had speaking engagements at libraries that commemorated Black History Month.”

Although she had always considered writing a book, she didn’t know when that would come about. Mishel says, “I wanted to write a book one day, but writing a children’s book was never actually on my radar; Little Z and Firefly came about organically after experiencing some significant traumas. With that said, I wanted my book to be a resource to teach others how to overcome their own challenges, and I’m grateful that my book has connected with so many people, young and old.”

She continues, “I was inspired to write my book when I was temporarily fostering a student from my classroom. I had been using the strategies in my book as a part of my own personal healing journey after experiencing a sexual assault. While fostering, I modeled those same tools for my student during the three-month period in which she stayed with me. After seeing their initial success, I wanted to create a way to help other children who may need wellness tools.”

Her passion and drive emerge in other areas of Mishel’s life, too. “I also advocate for mental health and self-care through my blog titled, “Mishel Noor.” I write about ways that prioritizing self-care can help you lead a happier life. I believe everyone deserves to put their wellness first, and I enjoy sharing ways I do that in my personal life.”

Little Z and Firefly, along with the workbook, is a great dialog starter. Mishel points out, “Because the topic of mental health and wellness is so universal, I believe my book is appropriate for all ages. I have done book readings with children as young as second graders and as old as eleventh graders.”

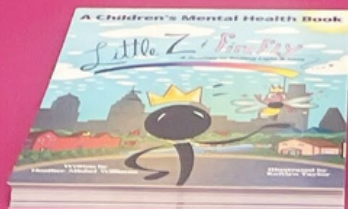
Her book and resources have been applied by school counselors as well as teachers. “I have had several past colleagues who work as mental health professionals use the workbook in group therapy sessions with kids. They take advantage of the Mirror Work section and have students write positive affirmations and the Journal section to help them write out and process situations they go through. I have also heard counselors utilizing the Mindfulness section to help deescalate a student who might be having a hard time. The breathing exercises and reflections help in seeing the benefit of implementing the practice.”

Mishel explains the Mirror Work from a personal perspective. “After my sexual assault, I fell into a deep depression. Thoughts of self-loathing, shame, and embarrassment frequently took over my thoughts. It’s hard to feel good about yourself during dark times so you have to actively work against those negative thoughts. When you practice Mirror Work, you look at yourself in the mirror and recite positive affirmations to yourself. The connection you make by looking at yourself in the mirror is powerful and after some practice can lead to improved self-esteem, self-efficacy, and positive self-image. We often accept kind words about ourselves from others but are unwilling to

FEATURE

HEATHER MISHEL WILLIAMS

DO WHAT  
YOU LOVE



accept kind words from ourselves. Mirror Work helps with that. To get started, I suggest writing out your affirmations and saying them out loud once a day or in the evening. Then work your way up to saying them in the mirror. Also keeping them posted with a sticky is another great daily reminder."

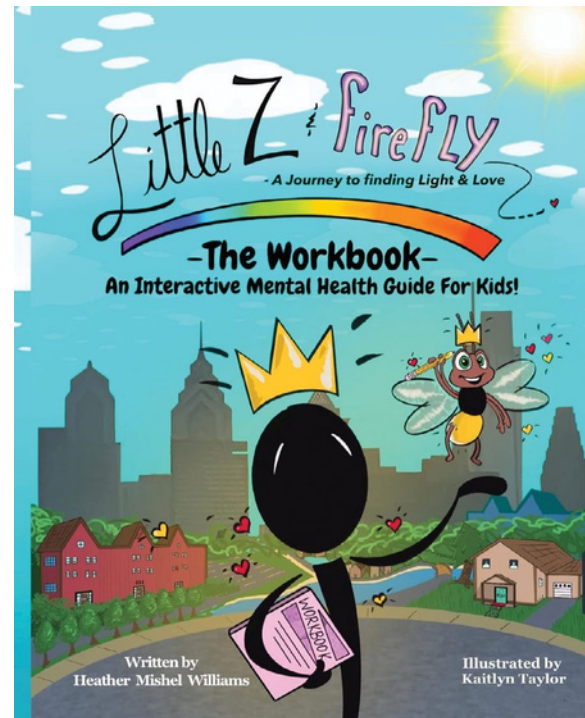
These days, Mishel has a furry partner offering lots of comfort, friendship, and healing. She exclaims, "My dog Charlie is the happiest, most playful, and energetic senior dog ever!

He's 12 years old and still acts like a puppy. Though not mentioned in the book specifically, I couldn't leave him out of the illustrations. You can find a little tribute to him in Step 5, "Talking Things Out." He brings me great joy and gets me out of the house at least once a day, which is extremely beneficial especially since I mostly work from home. There are many health benefits to having a pet, including reduced anxiety, assistance with PTSD, and healing feelings of loneliness."

She hopes her book and guide finds its way to "everywhere children are in need."

"After the terrible shooting in Uvalde, Texas, I got my community to raise over 1,000 dollars. With that money I was able to send 105 books and 105 workbooks to "Let it Bee" Counseling Services. They were working directly with the families of Robb Elementary school and helped distribute the books to the community."

"Another big moment I'll never forget is when I met a woman who worked at the bank where I was opening my business account. She saw my book and asked about it, then told me how necessary and important it was. Just the day before, her son, who was 11 years old, told her he wanted to take his life because he was being bullied at school. I was stunned and deeply affirmed that this book would indeed help families. I gave her a book right there on the spot and have always hoped it helped her and her son."



A "Happiness to me feels like peace and safety. It looks like being a service to others. I have always enjoyed taking care of and supporting the people around me, it truly gives me joy!"

On a light-hearted note, few may know that when Mishel was 14 years old, she was on the Slime Time Nickelodeon show at

Universal Studios. "I won a pickle tossing contest and won a bike that arrived months later right before my 15th birthday! And yes, I got slimed ... it was gross and very fun!"

Addressing her future plans, Mishel considers, "I have some ideas for other Little Z and Firefly books, but no clear timeline. I enjoy the challenge of taking really complex concepts and making them digestible for kids. My dream is for Little Z and Firefly to become a children's mental health app. I think it would be really cool to turn all the workbook activities into an app that children can use wherever they go."

For today though, her words of encouragement are sincere and timeless. "Life is hard, be patient and be kind. You never know what someone else is going through behind closed doors so you can never go wrong leading with love."

For more information about Heather Mishel Williams and her books, visit [littlezandfirefly.com](http://littlezandfirefly.com).