

## **WALKOUT**

Written by Tina Shepardson

Illustrated by Terry Sirrell

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Reviewed by Eve Panzer, The Barefoot Librarian for Reader Views Kids (05/2020)

In the picture book *WALKOUT*, experienced educator and author Tina Shepardson takes on the difficult and scary topic of school violence. Based on a true story, the author helps children see what they can do about a situation that feels out of their control. She also helps children understand that feelings that are different from their own are acceptable and valid.

The story begins with two best friends, Stella and Maddie discussing an anti-violence walkout planned at their school at the end of the week. While Maddie is all in to participate in the walkout, Stella is hesitant especially since the principal announced that the walkout is only for upper grades. Despite what the principal said, Maddie feels compelled to participate in the walkout, explaining “But my days would be as dark as rain clouds if something happened to you or anyone else.” Stella voices her hesitation by asking, “What if we get in trouble?” “We might,” Maddie answered. “But this march should be for all, including the small.” Maddie respects Stella’s stance while also quietly trying to get her to participate. When Maddie and her classmates make signs for the march Stella does not join them, even when Maddie gently prods by asking “Stella, is there any way you could join us?” Maddie tries again by telling Stella, “You can wear orange to show you feel the same way too.” Still, Stella declines, and Maddie questions her own decision.

However, on the day of the walkout, Maddie is ready to march. Maddie, her classmates, and even their teacher grab signs and head out, leaving Stella in the classroom reading a book. As Maddie walks past Stella she says, “We’re outside if you change your mind.” Stella feels very torn. She admires the courage of her friend Maddie. And Stella does not want anybody to be unsafe. Motivated by Maddie’s bravery, Stella goes outside and joins the group. She realizes that working together makes everyone stronger.

This seemingly simple picture book provides a springboard to many important topics. The main theme of the book is violence in school, a topic that has to be approached with sensitivity depending on the age and maturity of the children. The author does a great job of introducing the topic for young audiences without going into details that might be frightening.

Another aspect of the book is social learning. Maddie shows sensitivity to Stella’s feelings. Maddie kindly offers Stella options that might make her comfortable enough to become involved on some level. Maddie treats Stella with respect, instead of shaming her. Also, there is a point where Maddie questions her own actions because Stella is so reluctant to participate. However, Maddie is strong enough in her beliefs that she does not back down from her decision. The author gives both characters room to be who they are, despite their differing positions, and they are still able to remain friends.

Also, the book introduces the concepts of how democracy allows even younger children to have a voice in changes. The right to protest and freedom of speech empowers them when they may otherwise feel helpless to tackle an overwhelming problem. This book could be used to introduce young children to the concept of democracy and some of the rights that our constitution has granted Americans.

The illustrations in the book are playful and full of vibrant colors. The characters are cartoonish rather than true to life, giving the book a light tone despite the seriousness of the main topic. I appreciate how diversity is brought into the book by the depiction of students of different colors and races. The illustrations contribute to making this offering a well-rounded, solid package.

There is an author's note that gives more details about school violence and what to do if there is an incident at your school. Also included are websites to visit to learn how you can become part of the solution to school violence. This book is highly recommended.