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Mina's Rain Dance by Sarah McAneney

A special girl finds joy when her imperfect dancing helps others—and ultimately herself.

A heartwarming and lushly illustrated picture book celebrates the magnificence of loving oneself and our flaws.

Mina loves dancing but she is a terrible dancer! She is even banned from dancing in the end of year dance performance. Yet Mr. Brady's problems are even worse. The drought means no one is buying his umbrellas, and now he can't afford Christmas presents for his children. Can Mina use her terrible dancing skills to make it rain and save Mr. Brady's Christmas? Author Sarah McAneney masterfully weaves a tender story reminiscent of an earlier time in the dreamily illustrated picture book *Mina's Rain Dance*.

"She could never remember the steps in class, so she made up her own. Mrs. Prim, the ballet teacher, would look at her and sigh, 'Oh dear, Mina.' The other girls giggled behind her back."

Upset from her dance class's unkindness, Mina runs home, sobbing, when she passes Mr. Brady's umbrella stand and sees that he is sobbing too. When he shares his dilemma about the drought and his umbrellas, Mina thinks about it for days until she decides that she needs to make it rain.

Mina's generosity of spirit is moving, through her diligence and efforts in helping Mr. Brady and his children. More importantly, in creating her rain dance, Mina learns not only to listen to her heart to help others, but in doing so she listens to her voice within, loving herself for who she is, imperfections and all, and continuing to dance from her heart, unleashing her joy.

Illustrator Zita Varga's soft painterly brushstrokes, evocative of an earlier era of cherished children's books, bring an ethereal quality to the heartwarming story. McAneney's uplifting and easy style of writing shares a sweet story and a hopeful message of self-compassion and acceptance to the youngest of readers.

A psychologist by trade, the internal workings of McAneney's book characters thoughts, emotions and beliefs are significant to her. She also likes to emphasise themes of empathy, kindness, ethical values, and diversity. She believes that although children's books that teach good values are important, the storyline must be the priority and books that are too openly moralistic can bore young readers. She finds that children learn best through imagination and

play, and books that focus on this through creativity and adventure, are the most successful in engaging them.

As a mother whose kids are biracial—half New Zealander, half Lebanese—showing diversity and diverse family structures in children’s books is something that is critical to McAneney, simply as a matter of fact and everyday life, not to impart a social lesson. McAneney has witnessed that whereas many children’s books provide a window for children to view stories about race or cultural differences, not many books provide a mirror for biracial children to simply see themselves, someone familiar, as a part of the story. Through *Mina’s Rain Dance*, she hopes to provide a story where a young biracial reader can see herself through Mina’s eyes.

[Short version]

In *Mina’s Rain Dance*, a special girl finds joy when her imperfect dancing helps others—and ultimately herself. A heartwarming and lushly illustrated picture book celebrating the magnificence of loving oneself and our flaws.