

BOOK

9

Kimika & Kalynn SISTERS



Different but the Same

H.V. LYONS

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters “Different but the Same”



Book 9

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By

H.V. LYONS

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QUESTIONS ON THE PLAYGROUND

The afternoon sun stretched across the playground like a warm blanket, making the metal monkey bars shimmer and the slide glow a bright, golden yellow. A gentle breeze rustled the leaves of the big oak tree in the middle of the schoolyard, the one the kids had nicknamed “The Giant,” because its branches were so wide it could shade half the playground during recess.

Kimika and Kalynn sat on the blacktop beneath it, their knees dusty from chalk and their fingers stained with bright colors. A rainbow of chalk sticks lay scattered between them like treasure. They were deep in their favorite recess activity, sidewalk art.

Kimika crouched low, pressing a soft pink piece of chalk to the pavement and slowly shaping the curve of a butterfly wing. “There,” she said softly, “if I blend the purple right here, it’ll look like it’s glowing.”

“You’re such an artist,” Kalynn said, squinting at her own drawing. She grabbed a blue chalk piece and added big dots to her butterfly’s wings. “Look! I made mine scientifically accurate.”

Kimika raised an eyebrow. “Scientifically accurate? You made the antennae curly.”

“It’s artistic science,” Kalynn declared proudly. “A hybrid field.”

Kimika giggled. “You’re making that up.”

“Maybe,” Kalynn admitted. “But it sounds cool!”

The sisters laughed together, the kind of easy laughter that came naturally when they were doing something they loved.

Just then, a shadow stretched across their drawings.

The girls looked up to see **Michael**, a tall, pale-skinned boy from their class. His reddish hair flipped up at the ends, like it wasn’t sure whether it wanted to lie flat or stand up. He held a red jump rope in one hand, and his freckles glowed in the sunlight.

“Whoa...” Michael said, kneeling down beside them. “Did you guys make all these?”

“Yep!” Kalynn said proudly. “We’re chalk experts.”

“Chalkologists,” Kimika added.

Michael smiled. “They’re awesome. Mine never look this good. My butterflies always come out lopsided.”

Kalynn whispered, “Mine too. But don’t tell Kimmy.”

“I heard that,” Kimika said, smirking.

Michael’s smile faded a little as he looked from one sister to the other. His eyes narrowed—not meanly, just curiously, as if he were working out a puzzle in his head.

“Can I ask you something?” he said quietly.

Kalynn sat up straighter. “Yep! We love questions.”

Michael hesitated. His cheeks pinkened. “Okay, um... you’re sisters, right?”

“Obviously,” Kalynn said. “We have matching dimples.”

“And matching attitudes,” Kimika added.

Michael nodded slowly. “Right. But, um...” He pointed at their arms. “How come your skin colors are different? Like... Kimika is a little darker than you, Kalynn. And I’m even lighter than both of you. I don’t get how that works.”

Kalynn’s mouth opened like she was about to give a science lecture, but then she paused. “Hmm.”

Kimika’s hand paused mid-chalk stroke. Her chest fluttered with a feeling she didn’t quite have a name for yet, curiosity mixed with surprise mixed with... maybe concern?

Michael’s voice shook a little. “I’m not trying to be rude! I promise! It just popped in my head, and my mom always says it’s good to ask questions instead of assuming stuff.”

He looked so nervous, his shoulders tight, his hands twisting the jump rope.

Kimika softened. “It’s okay, Michael. You didn’t say anything mean.”

“Yeah,” Kalynn agreed. “You’re just wondering. I do that all the time.”

Michael exhaled, relieved. “Good. Because I don’t wanna be one of those kids who says things wrong and makes people mad.”

“You’re not,” Kimika said gently. “We can explain it.”

But before she could, a sharp **TWEEEEET!** Sliced through the air.

Coach Ortiz blew her whistle near the kickball field.

“TIME FOR KICKBALL! LINE UP IF YOU WANT TO PLAY!”

Kids started running in every direction, some toward the field, some toward the swings, some toward the water fountains, as a burst of energy swept across the playground.

Michael stood up quickly. “Uh—can we talk another time about it? I really wanna understand.”

“Sure,” Kimika said, brushing chalk from her hands.

“Yeah!” Kalynn added. “We like explaining stuff. Especially sciencey stuff.”

“And art stuff,” Kimika corrected.

Michael smiled. “Okay. Later.”

He jogged off toward the field.

The sisters stood up and gathered their chalk pieces.

Kalynn nudged her sister. “Did that bother you?”

Kimika shook her head slowly. “Not really. It just... surprised me.”

“Me too,” Kalynn said. “But he didn’t say it in a mean way.”

“No,” Kimika agreed. “He’s just curious.”

Kalynn nodded. "Like a scientist."

"Or an artist who wants to know how colors mix," Kimika added.

They smiled at each other, two sisters, two shades of brown, two pieces of the same puzzle.

The kickball whistle sounded again.

"Come on," Kimika said. "Let's play."

As they ran toward the field, the question Michael asked lingered softly in their minds, not heavy, not sad, just... waiting.

Waiting for a moment when they could sit down and understand it together.

Waiting for a moment to learn something new, about themselves... and each other.



THE RIDE HOME

The school bell rang with its usual bright *BRRRRING*, echoing through the hallways. Backpacks zipped, lockers slammed, and kids spilled out onto the front steps like marbles rolling from a jar. The sun had dipped lower in the sky, turning everything a soft, honey-gold color.

Kimika and Kalynn joined the line of students waiting for their bus. Kalynn bounced on the balls of her feet, her curls bobbing with every hop. Usually, she talked nonstop after school—about science videos, playground discoveries, or what she wanted for dinner.

But today, she was unusually quiet.

Kimika noticed. “You, okay?” she asked softly.

Kalynn shrugged. “Yeah. Just thinking.”

“About Michael’s question?” Kimika guessed.

Kalynn nodded. “Yeah. It felt weird. Not bad-weird... just... different.”

Just then, the bus pulled up with a hiss of brakes, and the driver called out, “Bus 27! Let’s go, kiddos!”

The sisters climbed aboard and found their usual seat halfway down. Kimika slid in by the window, placing her backpack on her lap. Kalynn plopped beside her, hugging her own backpack like a stuffed toy.

The bus lurched forward, and the familiar rumble began under their feet.

For a moment, they rode in silence—just the low hum of the engine and the chatter of kids around them. Outside the window, houses passed by in slow motion: red brick homes, front porches with rocking chairs, neat lawns sprinkled with late-spring flowers.

Finally, Kalynn spoke.

“Kimmy...”

“Hmm?”

Kalynn twisted a loose thread on her sleeve. “Did Michael’s question bother *you*?”

Kimika thought carefully. “Not really. I mean... he asked nicely. He wasn’t trying to be mean.”

“Yeah, you’re right,” Kalynn agreed. “Some kids say stuff like that to be mean on purpose.”

They both knew the kind of comments they’d heard before, kids wondering out loud if their hair was “real,” asking why their curls were big, or why their skin got “darker in summer.” Some comments were mean, some just clumsy. But Michael’s voice had been different. It wasn’t teasing. It wasn’t mocking.

It was honest. Curious.

Kimika tucked a braid behind her ear. “I think Michael just wanted to understand something he’d never thought about before.”

Kalynn leaned her head on the seat. “Mom says people ask questions when they’re learning.”

“Dad says the same thing,” Kimika added. “He says when you stay silent and guess, that’s when the trouble happens.”

A pothole bumped the bus, and Kalynn grabbed the seat. “So... do you know why our skin is different?”

Kimika hesitated. “Well... kinda? I mean, Mom told me before that it has to do with our family. Like, people get skin colors from their parents and grandparents.”

Kalynn squinted. “So, I got more of Mom’s color?”

“Probably,” Kimika said. “And I got more of Dad’s.”

Kalynn held her arm up next to Kimika’s. “Yeah... see? Yours is like warm chocolate, and mine is like caramel candy.”

“Mom is brown sugar,” Kimika added.

“And Dad is almond latte!” Kalynn finished, both of them dissolving into laughter.

But when the giggles faded, the question was still sitting there, quiet and important.

Kalynn looked out the window. “But some kids in school act like lighter means something good. Or darker means something bad. Like your color says what kind of person you are.”

Kimika nodded slowly. “Yeah. But it doesn’t. It’s just... Who you are.”

“Right,” Kalynn said. “And who we come from.”

The bus rolled to a stop at an intersection. A crossing guard dressed in neon-yellow held up a sign, waving the children across.

Kalynn turned back to her sister. “Do you think Mom and Dad know more about it?”

Kimika smiled. “Definitely. Dad knows everything about family history. Remember his giant scrapbook?”

Kalynn gasped dramatically. “The *big* one? The one that smells like old library books?”

“That’s the one,” Kimika giggled.

“Let’s ask them when we get home,” Kalynn said. “They’ll know how to explain it better.”

The bus made its final turn into their neighborhood, a cozy row of houses with tall trees lining the street. The Lyons house was third from the corner, painted warm beige with brown shutters, the kind of house that looked like it always smelled like fresh laundry and Sunday dinners.

When the bus finally stopped, the girls hopped off, landing on the sidewalk with thumps that echoed slightly.

Kalynn took two steps back. “Race you to the door?”

“Why bother? You always lose,” Kimika teased.

“Not today!” Kalynn shouted, taking off at full speed.

Her backpack flopped side to side as she sprinted, curls flying wildly behind her like a comet tail.

Kimika laughed, running after her. “Hey! You cheated!”

“No such thing!” Kalynn joked, panting.

They burst onto the front porch, breathless and giggling.

Kimika grabbed the door handle and paused.

“Hey, Kalynn,” she said softly. “I’m glad we’re talking about this.”

“Me too,” Kalynn replied. “It feels important.”

“It *is* important.”

They stepped inside together.

Whatever answers they needed, whatever stories their family held, they knew one thing for sure:

They would learn it side by side, like they always did.

Together.



FAMILY HISTORY NIGHT

That evening, the smell of Mom’s baked chicken and sweet cornbread still lingered in the air as the Lyons family cleared the dinner table together. The kitchen lights glowed softly, making everything feel warm and safe, like the perfect atmosphere for sharing stories.

Kalynn dried the dishes while humming a tune she’d made up, and Kimika stacked them carefully in the cabinet.

Dad leaned against the counter, watching them. “You girls seem deep in thought tonight,” he said with a smile.

Kalynn and Kimika exchanged a look.

“Dad...” Kimika began.

“We have a question,” Kalynn finished.

Dad raised an eyebrow. “Oh? Big question or small question?”

“Medium-big,” Kalynn said.

“Maybe even big-big,” Kimika added.

Mom walked in with her cozy house slippers on. “Well, now I’m curious. What’s this about?”

Kalynn took a breath. "Someone at school... Michael... asked why our skin colors are different shades."

"And why our skin color is different from his," Kimika added quietly.

Mom and Dad shared a glance, it wasn't a worried one, just understanding. A glance that said, *Ah. A real conversation today.*

Mom gently put her hands on her hips. "Did he say it kindly?"

"Yes," both girls said immediately.

"He wasn't teasing," Kimika clarified. "He honestly didn't know."

"And we didn't really know how to explain it," Kalynn added, rubbing her arm. "So, we told him we'd talk to him another time. But first... we wanted to ask you."

Dad nodded slowly. "I think that's a beautiful idea."

Mom smiled. "Then I believe tonight is officially..."

She reached for a soft, leather-bound book on the top shelf of the hallway closet. "**...Family History Night.**"

Kalynn clapped her hands excitedly. "Yessss! I love Family History Night!"

Dad laughed. "Of course you do. You get that curiosity from your mother."

Mom winked. "And that dramatic flair from your father."

They all settled in the living room, snuggling onto the big couch with soft pillows. Dad placed the scrapbook on the coffee table like it was a treasure chest filled with magic.

Kimika opened it gently, the pages crackling under her fingers.



Mom’s Side of the Story

Mom flipped to the first page: a picture of a tropical beach with water so blue it almost didn’t look real.

“This,” Mom said softly, “is **St. Mary, Jamaica**, where my family comes from.”

Kalynn leaned close, her curls brushing the page. “It looks like paradise.”

“It is,” Mom said. “Your grandmother grew up not far from this beach. She used to tell me stories about climbing mango trees and swimming in the river after school.”

“Grandma climbed trees?” Kimika asked, eyes wide.

Mom smiled. “Oh yes. She was fearless. Just like Kalynn.”

“Hey!” Kalynn said, but she grinned proudly.

Mom turned the page to an old black-and-white photo of a woman with warm, deep dark skin and bright eyes. Her hair was wrapped in a patterned scarf.

“This is your grandma when she was about your age,” Mom said.

Kimika gently touched the edge of the photo. “She looks like you.”

Mom nodded. “And like you both. That’s where some of your beautiful skin tones come from, my Jamaican side of the family.”

She pointed to another picture, a group photo of family members with a mix of warm

browns, sands, and caramels. “In Jamaica, people come in many shades, too. All beautiful. All connected.”

Kalynn whispered, “Like a sunset with lots of colors.”

Mom smiled softly. “Exactly.”



Dad’s Side of the Story

Dad cleared his throat gently and turned the scrapbook to a different set of pages, this one filled with history.

“This,” he said, tapping a slightly faded picture, “is **Greensboro, North Carolina**. Where my father, your grandfather, grew up.”

The photo showed a large crowd of people holding signs. Some signs said *EQUALITY NOW* and *WE SHALL NOT BE MOVED*.

Kimika frowned thoughtfully. “Was this... a protest?”

Dad nodded. “Yes. The **Civil Rights Movement**. My parents and grandparents lived through a time when Black Americans were fighting to be treated fairly.”

Kalynn scooted closer, her expression serious. “Did our family march too?”

Dad’s eyes softened with pride. “They did. My father marched in Greensboro. He was only a teenager. They wanted equal rights, for our people to be treated with dignity and respect.”

Kimika swallowed. “Was it dangerous?”

Dad nodded slowly. “Sometimes. But they marched anyway. Because they believed things *could* get better.”

Kalynn stared at a picture of men locking arms, walking with their heads held high. “They were really brave.”

“They were,” Dad said. “And their bravery is part of who you are, too.”

“Even though we never met them?” Kimika asked.

Dad smiled. “Family stories live inside us. Even the ones from long before we were born.”

He pointed to the shades of brown in the pictures, some deep like rich cocoa, some light like soft sand, and others somewhere in between.

“That’s where your skin tones come from,” Dad explained. “A mix of Jamaica’s sunshine and North Carolina’s strength.”

The Girls Begin to Understand

Mom closed the scrapbook gently. “Skin color is something passed down through families, like eye color, hair texture, or dimples.”

Kalynn poked her cheek. “We both have dimples!”

Mom giggled. “Exactly.”

Kimika looked down at her hands. “So, it doesn’t mean anything good or bad. It just... means we come from a lot of different places.”

Dad nodded. “It means you carry powerful stories. Stories of islands and rivers. Stories of marching feet and brave hearts. All inside of you.”

Kalynn’s eyes sparkled. “We’re like... a history smoothie!”

Kimika rolled her eyes affectionately. “A smoothie?”

“Yeah!” Kalynn said, spreading her arms. “Different ingredients mixed together to make something awesome!”

Mom burst into laughter. “Well... that’s one way to explain it.”

Dad winked. “A delicious way, at least.”

Kimika smiled softly. “So, what do we tell Michael tomorrow?”

Mom placed a warm hand on her shoulder. “Tell him the truth. Tell him your family comes from different places with different colors, and that’s why you each look the way you do.”

Dad added, “And tell him people everywhere come in lots of colors. Even in the same family. Especially in ours.”

Kalynn climbed into Dad’s lap. “I like our colors.”

Kimika leaned against Mom. “Me too.”

Mom pulled both girls close. “Hold on to that. Your shade is your story.”

Dad ruffled Kalynn’s curls. “And your story is something to be proud of.”

The girls snuggled into their parents, wrapped in love, comfort, and the weight of their history, warm and steady like a heartbeat.

They had come looking for answers.

And they found something even better:

Belonging.

Strength.

and Pride.



A LESSON SHARED

The next morning, sunlight streamed through the school windows like thin golden ribbons, painting soft stripes across the hallway tiles. Students bustled through the building—laughing at lockers, comparing lunches, trading jokes, and darting toward their classrooms before the bell.

But Kimika and Kalynn walked more slowly than usual.

Their backpacks felt heavier, not from books, but from the stories their parents had shared the night before. Stories of Jamaica, of Greensboro, of family, of history. Stories that tugged at their hearts in warm, important ways.

As they approached Kimika’s classroom, Kalynn tugged gently on her sister’s sleeve.

“Kimmy,” she whispered. “Do you think Michael still wants to know? What if he forgot he asked?”

Kimika shook her head. “He didn’t forget. He looked nervous yesterday. That means he really cares.”

Kalynn thought about that. “I get nervous too... mostly during math tests.”

Kimika giggled softly. “Different kind of nervous. Michael didn’t want to say the wrong thing. He didn’t want to hurt anyone.”

Kalynn nodded slowly. “That’s... a good kind of nervous.”

They reached Kimika’s classroom door just as the bell rang.

Kalynn squeezed her sister’s hand. “You’ve got this.”

Kimika smiled. “Thanks, Kaly.”

Kalynn waved and hurried off to her own classroom down the hall, her curls bouncing as she disappeared around the corner.

Kimika stepped into the room.

Michael was already at his desk, tapping his foot anxiously, glancing at the door every few seconds. When he saw her walk in, he straightened instantly, almost like he’d been holding his breath.

“Hey,” he said quietly, lifting one hand in a shy wave.

“Morning,” Kimika said, setting her backpack on her chair.

Michael fiddled with the edge of his notebook. “Um... did you... uh... talk to your parents? About what I asked?”

Kimika nodded. “I did.”

Michael’s face pinkened. “You don’t have to tell me anything. I wasn’t trying to be rude yesterday.”

“I know,” Kimika said gently. “You weren’t rude. You were curious. And there’s a difference.”

Michael let out a long breath, like he’d been holding it since yesterday.

The morning announcements buzzed overhead. Both kids sat quietly until the final “Have a great day, students!” played. Then the class moved into independent reading time, and soft whispers filled the room.

Kimika glanced at Michael and gave a slight nod.

Michael scooted his chair closer.

“So...” he whispered. “Why are you and your sister different colors? And different from me?”

Kimika took a deep breath, remembering the things Mom and Dad told her, the stories that made her chest feel warm.

“Well,” she began, “people get their skin colors from their families. From their ancestors.

My mom’s side of the family is from St. Mary, Jamaica, an island with beaches, rivers, mango trees, and lots of sunshine.”

Michael’s eyes widened. “Your family is from Jamaica? That’s really cool.”

Kimika smiled. “Yeah. And my dad’s side is from Greensboro, North Carolina. Some of them marched in the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. They wanted equal rights for Black Americans.”

Michael blinked. “Wait... like the marches we learned about in history class?”

Kimika nodded. “Exactly those.”

Michael sat back in his chair, amazed. “Wow. That’s... kind of incredible.”

“It is,” Kimika said softly. “And both sides of my family have different skin tones. Mom’s family has warm, rich browns. Dad’s family too, but in different shades.”

Michael nodded slowly. “So, your skin... comes from all that?”

“Yep. It’s like mixing paint colors,” Kimika explained. “You mix two different tones, and you get something new and beautiful.”

Michael smiled—really smiled. “That actually makes a lot of sense.”

Kimika continued gently. “And everyone’s skin tone tells a story. It doesn’t tell you if someone is smart, funny, or kind. It just tells you where their family came from.”

Michael looked down at his own arm, pale with light freckles. He brushed a finger over it thoughtfully. “So... my skin has a story too?”

Kimika nodded. “Of course. Everyone’s does.”

Michael looked up, eyes bright with curiosity. “I never thought about it like that.”

“Maybe you should ask your parents about your family history,” Kimika encouraged. “Where your people came from. What places they lived in. What stories they passed down. You might learn something amazing.”

Michael’s entire face lit up. “You think so?”

“I know so,” Kimika said warmly. “Everyone’s history is interesting. Yours is too.”

Michael smiled shyly. “Thanks, Kimika. I’m really glad I asked you instead of just guessing. Guessing usually gets me in trouble.”

Kimika giggled. “We all get things wrong sometimes. But asking questions—nicely—is how you learn.”

Michael nodded. “Yeah. And maybe... if someone else asks something like that one day, I can explain it too.”

“That would be great,” Kimika said. “Sharing what you learn helps everyone.”

Their teacher clapped her hands to gather attention. “Alright, class! Time for morning stations!”

Michael scooted back to his desk, but before he turned around, he gave Kimika a soft, grateful thumbs-up.

She returned the smile—small, proud, and warm.

As she opened her notebook, Kimika felt something glowing inside her, brighter than the morning sun streaming through the windows.

It wasn’t just that she’d answered Michael’s question.

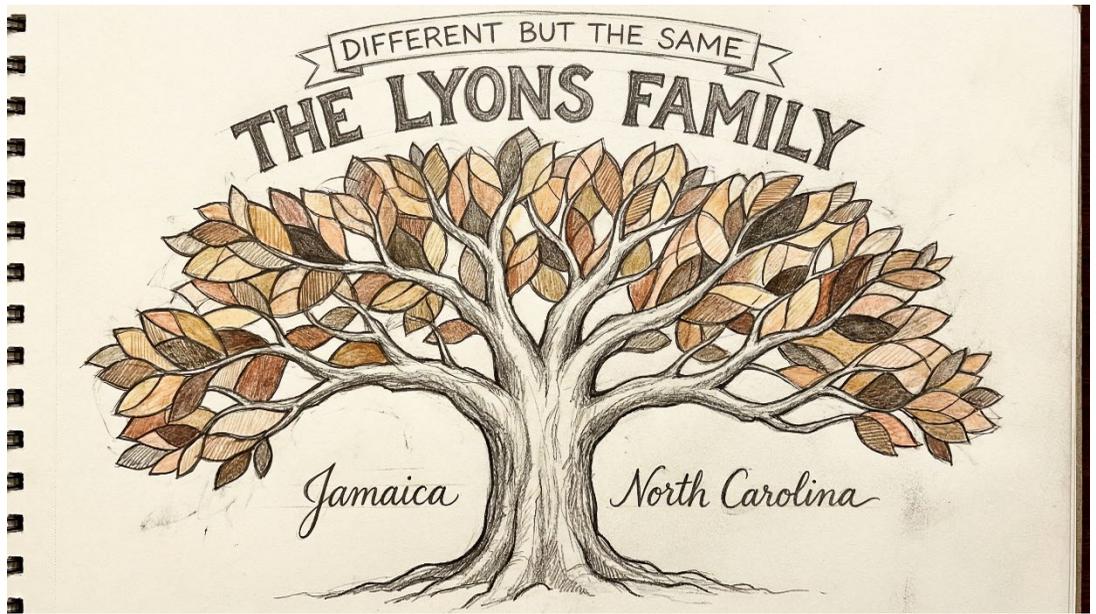
It was that she’d helped him understand something important.

She had spoken her truth with kindness.

She had shared her story with pride.

And she’d encouraged someone else to discover their own.

And that made her feel powerful, beautifully, wonderfully powerful.



THE BEAUTY OF ALL OF US

The sun was beginning to set when the Lyons family gathered once again in the living room after school. Soft orange light filtered through the curtains, casting warm gold across the furniture and wrapping the room in a calm, peaceful glow, like the whole world had paused to listen.

Kalynn hopped onto the couch first, bouncing twice before flopping onto the cushions. Kimika joined her more slowly, sinking into the corner of the couch and hugging a pillow to her chest.

Mom and Dad entered a moment later, each settling into their cozy spots like they could feel something important was coming.

Dad rested an elbow on the armrest and studied Kimika's face. "So," he asked gently, "how did things go with Michael today?"

Kimika took a breath, but the smile that spread across her face came easily. "Good," she said. "Actually... really good."

Kalynn leaned forward eagerly. "Tell us! What happened? Did you explain everything?"

"I did," Kimika said proudly. "And he listened the whole time. He didn't laugh or make weird faces or anything. He really wanted to understand."

Mom brushed a curl away from Kalynn's forehead, her voice soft. "How did it feel, sharing all that with him?"

Kimika looked down at her hands, then up at her family. “Honestly... I felt proud. Like our story meant something. Like I was teaching something important.”

Dad’s face warmed with pride. “That’s because it does mean something. Your family comes from strong, beautiful people. From Jamaica. From North Carolina. From courage and history and love.”

Kalynn stretched her arm across Kimika’s, comparing their shades like she always did. “And our colors tell some of that story.”

Kimika nodded. “Yeah. And he got it. He really did.”

She hesitated, then added with a small smile, “I even told him he should ask his own parents about where his family comes from. It might help him understand himself, too.”

Mom’s eyes glowed. “Kimika... that was thoughtful and wise.”

Dad leaned forward, impressed. “Helping him explore his history shows you weren’t just answering questions—you were encouraging him to grow.”

Kimika’s cheeks warmed. “I just figured... if learning about our story felt good, maybe learning his would feel good too.”

Kalynn scooted closer, eyes wide. “I didn’t know our family history was so awesome.”

Dad laughed softly. “Oh, it’s more than awesome. It’s powerful.”

Mom took both girls’ hands, her voice gentle and full. “You know what the most beautiful part is?”

They shook their heads.

“Your skin color doesn’t tell people how kind you are,” Mom said. “Or how brave. Or how smart. Skin only tells one tiny part of your story—where your ancestors came from. You get to write the rest.”

Kalynn’s eyes sparkled. “So... we’re writing our story right now?”

“Every day,” Dad said, wrapping an arm around her. “Every choice you make, every kindness you show, every time you teach someone something new—you’re writing your story.”

Kimika rested her head on Mom’s shoulder. “Then I want our story to say we’re proud. Proud of where we come from and who we are.”

“Exactly,” Mom whispered, kissing the top of her head.

The room fell into a soft, full silence. Not empty, but full. Full of love. Full of understanding. Full of something bigger than the four of them could see.

Then Kalynn shot upright with a burst of energy. “We should make something!”

Mom laughed. “What kind of something?”

“A poster!” Kalynn declared. “A big one! With all our shades. Caramel, chocolate, brown sugar, almond latte!”

Dad burst out laughing. “We sound like a bakery menu!”

“Exactly!” Kalynn said proudly. “A delicious family!”

Kimika grabbed her sketchbook. “Let’s draw our family tree. One branch for Jamaica, one for North Carolina.”

Mom pressed a hand to her heart. “I would love that.”

Dad nodded. “Make it bold. Make it beautiful.”

The girls hurried to the dining room table, their excitement buzzing.

Markers. Crayons. Fresh paper.

Kimika sketched a tall, strong tree with wide branches.

Kalynn shaded the leaves in different tones, browns, tans, golds, cocoa, and peach—all glowing together like stained glass.

“Look, Kimmy!” Kalynn said proudly. “All different colors... but all part of the same tree.”

Kimika smiled softly. “Just like us.”

Mom stood behind them and wrapped her arms around their shoulders. “Exactly like us.”

Dad joined them, resting a hand on both girls’ backs. “You two understand what truly makes people beautiful: kindness, pride, and respect.”

Kalynn struck a pose. “And my dimples!”

“And my art skills,” Kimika said, flipping her braids dramatically.

The whole family burst into laughter.

As evening deepened and the sky outside faded into deep blue, the poster was finished. Across the top, in bright, bold letters, the sisters wrote:

DIFFERENT BUT THE SAME

THE LYONS FAMILY

Mom hung it on the refrigerator, the family’s place of honor.

“It’s perfect,” she whispered.

“It’s us,” Kimika said, her voice warm.

“And we’re kind of awesome,” Kalynn added, hands on her hips.

Mom kissed both girls’ foreheads. “Yes, you are.”

Dad lifted his mug of tea like a toast. “To family—every shade, every story, every piece of beauty.”

The girls clinked their juice cups against his mug.

“To family!” they echoed.

Warm. Whole. Loved.

As the sisters leaned into each other, gazing at their creation, they knew one thing for certain:

Their differences didn’t divide them—they made them shine.

And in a world full of colors, their family was its own masterpiece.





A STORY SHARED, A STORY GROWING

A week later, on a bright, breezy morning, Kimika was at her locker when she heard fast footsteps pounding down the hallway.

“Kimika! Kimika!”

She turned just in time to see **Michael** rushing toward her, his backpack bouncing wildly. He skidded to a stop, nearly losing a shoe, his cheeks flushed with excitement.

“You are NOT going to believe this!” he burst out. “I talked to my parents, just like you told me to!”

Kimika grinned. “Really? What did you find out?”

Michael opened his notebook so fast the pages fluttered. He flipped to one covered in drawings, arrows, and notes written in huge, excited handwriting.

“So first,” he said, pointing proudly, “my mom’s side of the family is from Ireland. They came here a really long time ago. But that’s not even the coolest part—”

He leaned in, eyes shining.

“I found out I’m named after **Michael Collins**, one of the most important heroes in Irish history! He fought for Ireland’s independence and helped create the Irish Free State. So, you see, he fought for freedom and equality just like your Dad’s family!”

Kimika gasped softly. “That’s incredible! They’re different but the same!”

“I KNOW! Isn’t that cool!” Michael said, bouncing on his toes. “They told me he was brave and smart, and he changed Irish history forever. And my parents said they also named me ‘Michael’ because the name means **‘Who is like God?’** They said it was meant to inspire me to be strong and kind.”

He pressed a hand to his chest, still amazed.

“I didn’t know any of this before!”

Kimika smiled warmly. “That’s amazing, Michael. Your name has a story. And your family has a story, too.”

Michael nodded eagerly. “And my dad’s family? They’re from Norway! My grandpa even showed me a picture of the old village where our family lived. It’s right by these huge mountains.”

He pointed proudly to a sketch in his notebook of a little house under tall peaks.

“And get this,” he added, grinning. “My great-grandma had red hair and freckles—just like mine!”

He tapped the freckles on his nose with a laugh.

Kimika beamed. “See? Your skin, your hair, your name... it all tells a story.”

Michael closed his notebook with a proud little thump. “I’m going to make a family poster—just like you and Kalynn did. My mom said we can put it on the refrigerator!”

“That’s a great idea,” Kimika said. “Everyone’s story is worth seeing.”

The bell rang, echoing through the hallway.

Michael waved as he hurried toward his classroom. “Thanks, Kimika! Really. If you hadn’t told me to ask, I never would’ve known any of this!”

Kimika waved back, her heart glowing.

As she walked into class, she felt something warm swell inside her, brighter than sunlight and steady as her heartbeat.

She had shared her story.

She had helped someone understand.

And now, because of that, another story had been discovered—another history brought into the light.

Kimika sat at her desk, opened her notebook, and smiled.

Her family’s story was growing.

Michael’s story was growing.

And the world felt just a little bit brighter,

one shared story at a time.



THE LESSON OF THE STORY

Our world is full of people who look different from one another—different skin colors, hair textures, family histories, and cultures. These differences are not mistakes or problems. They are beautiful parts of who we are, woven from the stories of our ancestors, the places they lived, and the courage they carried.

Everyone's skin tells a story.

A story of where we come from.

A story of who came before us.

A story worth honoring and sharing.

Kimika and Kalynn learned that even within one family, people can have many shades and still belong completely to one another. Their story shows us that when someone asks a question with kindness, it's okay—good, even—to answer with kindness in return. Talking, listening, and truly understanding each other is how friendships grow.

When we understand our own story, we can share it proudly.

When we listen to someone else's story, we show respect.

And when we treat one another with kindness, we help make the world a place where everyone feels valued and seen.

Being different doesn't divide us.

It adds beauty, strength, and color to the world.

Our stories matter.

Our families matter.

And we matter—every shade, every background, all together.

“WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?”

1. Families can come in many shades, and that is something to celebrate.
2. Skin color comes from family history, not from whether someone is good, smart, or kind.
3. Asking questions respectfully is okay—that’s how we learn about each other.
4. Sharing your story helps others understand you better.
5. Differences make the world more colorful, just like a box of crayons with many hues.
6. Kindness and respect are the most important things, no matter what anyone looks like.

Teacher Guide

&

Standards

1. Lesson Overview

- **Book Number:** Book 9
- **Book Title:** *Different but the Same*
- **Grade Level(s):** 2–5
- **Estimated Instructional Time:** 45–60 minutes
- **Lesson Focus: Literacy:** Analyzing character development and central themes related to identity and family history.
 - **SEL:** Building self-awareness and social awareness through the exploration of diversity and shared humanity.

2. Learning Objectives

- **Reading:** Students will identify the central message of the story—that differences in skin color and background add beauty to the world—using specific evidence from the text.
- **Speaking & Listening:** Students will participate in a collaborative discussion about how the characters (Kimika and Kalynn) respond to questions about their appearance.
- **Writing:** Students will write a reflection on their own “story” or family history, using details to explain what makes them unique.
- **SEL:** Students will demonstrate social awareness by identifying ways to ask questions about differences respectfully.

3. Standards Alignment

- **NYS ELA Standards:**
 - **4R2:** Determine a theme or central idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details.
 - **4R3:** Describe a character, setting, or event, drawing on specific details in the text.
 - **W4:** Develop personal, cultural, textual, and thematic connections through written responses.
- **NYS SEL Benchmarks:**
 - **Goal 1:** Young people develop a self-awareness that nurtures and affirms a strong sense of identity.
 - **Goal 2:** Young people use social awareness to establish and maintain mutually supportive relationships.

4. Pre-Reading Activity (Activate Prior Knowledge)

- **Visual Prompt:** Show students a box of crayons with many different shades.
- **Discussion Question:** “Just like these crayons, people come in many different shades and colors. How do these different colors make a picture or the world more interesting?”
- **Vocabulary Preview:** Briefly introduce the word Melanin as a “natural pigment” that gives us our unique skin colors.

5. Vocabulary & Key Concepts

1. **Hues** (Noun): Different colors or shades.
2. **Ancestry** (Noun): One's family history or background.
3. **Respect** (Noun): A feeling of deep admiration for someone based on their qualities.
4. **Difference** (Noun): A way in which people or things are not the same.
5. **Shade** (Noun): A particular variety of a color.
6. **Melanin** (Noun): A natural pigment that gives color to skin and hair.
7. **Valued** (Adjective): Considered to be important or beneficial.
8. **Curious (Celebrate)** (Adjective): Eager to know or learn something.
9. **Unique** (Adjective): Being the only one of its kind; unlike anything else.
10. (Verb): To acknowledge a significant happy event with joy.

6. Read-Aloud / Shared Reading

- **Teacher Action:** Read the “Questions on the Playground” section with expression, pausing when Michael asks the sisters why they look different.
- **Think-Aloud:** “I notice that Michael is curious, but his questions make the sisters feel a bit put on the spot. I wonder how they will explain their family history.”

7. Guided Reading Questions (During Reading)

- **Literal:** What were Kimika and Kalynn doing on the playground before Michael approached them?
- **Inferential:** Why did the author compare the chalk sticks to “treasure”?
- **Emotional:** How do you think the sisters felt when they were asked why their skin colors didn't match?

8. Post-Reading Discussion

- **Theme:** What does the story teach us about being “different but the same”?
- **Character Growth:** How did the sisters' conversation at “Family History Night” help them feel proud of their identity?
- **Format:** Use a “Turn-and-Talk” for students to share one thing they learned about melanin.

9. SEL Focus Activity

- **Activity:** “The Beauty of Our Hues” Map.
- **Description:** Students will use various shades of brown, tan, and peach crayons to color a “self-portrait” handprint.
- **SEL Skill:** Self-awareness. Students will label their handprint with one word that describes their Ancestry or a quality they feel is Unique to them.

10. Writing Extension

- **Prompt:** Write a “Letter to a Friend” explaining why it is okay to be different and how our “stories matter”.
- **Differentiation:** Provide sentence starters for students: “I am unique because...” or “My family history is special because...”

11. Independent or Small-Group Practice

- **Small-Group:** Students work in pairs to create a “Diversity Butterfly” (inspired by the book’s art) where each wing represents a different culture or family tradition they value.
- **Independent:** Students read the “What Have We Learned?” summary at the end of the book and pick the lesson they think is most important to them.

12. Assessment & Check for Understanding

- **Exit Ticket:** “Explain one way that melanin is like the ‘paint’ of our bodies.”
- **Observation:** Note if students can identify that “skin color comes from family history,” and not from “whether someone is good or smart.”

13. Reflection & Closure

- **Prompt:** “If a new student joined our class tomorrow and felt ‘different,’ how could you make them feel valued and seen?”
- **Closure:** Remind students that “Being different doesn’t divide us. It adds beauty, strength, and color to the world.”

14. Extension & Enrichment Activities

- **Creative Project:** Create a classroom “Heritage Tree” where students add leaves detailing their family history or Ancestry.
- **Home-School Connection:** Ask students to go home and ask a family member about a story from their past to share with the class.

15. Differentiation & Support Strategies

- **Visual Aids:** Use the illustrations from the book (e.g., the chalk drawings) to help students understand the concept of “blending” and “hues.”
- **Small-Group Instruction:** For students with disabilities, provide a graphic organizer that uses pictures to represent the 10 Tier 2 vocabulary words.

Workbook Activities

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

Book 9: Different but the Same

Word Bank

Before starting the chapters, review these ten words found in the story

1. **Hues** (Noun): Different colors or shades.
2. **Ancestry** (Noun): One's family history or background.
3. **Respect** (Noun): A feeling of deep admiration for someone based on their qualities.
4. **Difference** (Noun): A way in which people or things are not the same.
5. **Shade** (Noun): A particular variety of a color.
6. **Melanin** (Noun): A natural pigment that gives color to skin and hair.
7. **Valued** (Adjective): Considered to be important or beneficial.
8. **Curious** (Adjective): Eager to know or learn something.
9. **Unique** (Adjective): Being the only one of its kind; unlike anything else.
10. **Celebrate** (Verb): To acknowledge a significant happy event with joy.

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

ACTIVITY: 9-1A

Chapter 1: Questions on the Playground

(Answer in complete sentences using evidence from the text)

1. What activity are the sisters doing at the beginning of the chapter?

2. How does Michael approach the sisters, and what is his initial reaction to their art?

3. What specific question does Michael ask the sisters that surprises them?

4. How do the sisters react to Michael's question before the whistle blows?

Continue to the next page...

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

Feelings Check-In:

Identify how Michael felt when he spoke to the sisters. What clues in the text helped you name these feelings?

Adjective Hunt:

Find four adjectives in this chapter used to describe the setting or the characters. Explain what each adjective tells the reader.

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

ACTIVITY: 9-2A

Chapter 2: The Ride Home

(Answer in complete sentences using evidence from the text)

1. How does the atmosphere change on the bus compared to the playground?

2. What does Kimika tell Kalynn about why Michael asked the question?

3. How do the sisters describe their different skin tones using food analogies?

4. What do the sisters decide to do when they get home?

Continue to the next page...

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

Feelings Check-In:

Identify the emotion the sisters feel as they ride home. How does the author show this emotion?

Vocabulary Detective:

Find the word **difference** in this chapter and explain how it is used

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

ACTIVITY: 9-3A

Chapter 3: Family History Night

(Answer in complete sentences using evidence from the text)

1. Where does Mom's side of the family come from, and what was it like?

2. What historical event did Dad's family participate in?

3. According to Dad, why are the sisters' skin tones different?

4. What "smoothie" analogy does Kalynn use to describe their heritage?

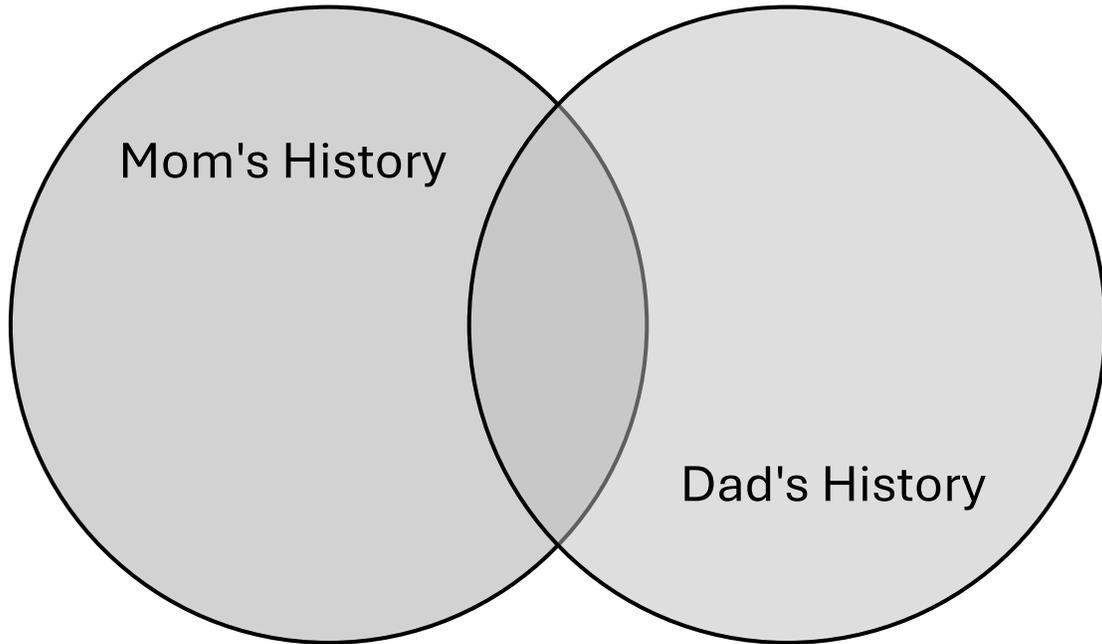
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ACTIVITY: 9-3B

Character Study

Compare and contrast Mom's Jamaican history with Dad's North Carolina history.

Explain how they are both similar and different.



Turn-and-Talk

Discuss with your partner how Mom and Dad's backgrounds influence how they raise the sisters. Record your thoughts.

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

ACTIVITY: 9-4A

Chapter 4: A Lesson Shared

(Answer in complete sentences using evidence from the text)

1. How does Kimika describe the difference between being "rude" and being "curious" to Michael?

2. What details does Kimika share about her Jamaican ancestry?

3. How does Michael react when he learns about the Civil Rights Movement?

4. What advice does Kimika give Michael at the end of their talk?

Continue to the next page...

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

ACTIVITY: 9-4B

Perspective-Taking

Why did Michael give Kimika a "grateful thumbs-up"?

Vocabulary Detective

Use the word “**unique**” to describe why every family's story is important.

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

ACTIVITY: 9-5A

Chapter 5: The Beauty of All of Us

(Answer in complete sentences using evidence from the text)

1. How did Kimika feel after her conversation with Michael?

2. What does Dad say about the act of helping Michael explore his own history?

3. What does Mom say skin color *cannot* tell you about a person?

4. What is the "one tiny part" of the story that skin color *does* tell?

Continue to the next page...

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

ACTIVITY: 9-6A

Chapter 6: A Story Shared, A Story Growing

(Answer in complete sentences using evidence from the text)

1. What does the family decide to do with their "Family History" project?

2. How has Michael changed since his conversation with Kimika?

3. What does Kalynn want to add to the scrapbook next?

4. Why is the book titled "Different but the Same"?

Continue to the next page...

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

Feelings Check-In:

Find a part of the chapter that describes the feeling of being “Hopeful.” What does this mean to you?

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

ACTIVITY: 9-7A

Chapter 7: The Lesson of the Story

(Answer in complete sentences using evidence from the text)

1. What is the "ultimate lesson" Kimika learned?

2. How does the world look to the sisters now?

3. What does the author say is the "most important thing" regardless of what anyone looks like?

4. What does being "different" add to the world?

Continue to the next page...

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

**Assessment 9A
Vocabulary Mastery**

Fill in the Blanks

Choose the correct vocabulary word from the word bank to complete each sentence.

1. Tomorrow we will _____ our family's 25th year in this country.
2. The _____ in my family's skin comes in different _____.
3. Being able to juggle is a very _____ thing to be able to do.
4. It's okay to be _____ about the _____ between one person's complexion and another as long you do so in a kind way.
5. It is important to _____ your _____ because it is where your family gets its history from.
6. Because of _____ I have a dark brown complexion.
7. I feel good when my ideas and views are _____.

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

**ASSESSMENT 9C (Part 1)
Character Study (Feelings Map)**

Directions:

Track how Kimika’s feelings changed throughout the story. Fill in the chart using evidence from the story.

Story Moment	What were Kimika’s Feelings	Text Evidence from the Story
Chapter 1		
Chapter 2		
Chapter 3		
Chapter 4		
Chapter 5		
Chapter 6		
Chapter 7		

ASSESSMENT 9C (Part 2)

Character Emotion Graph Activity

(Grades 4–5 – ELA RL.3 Alignment)

Directions:

Characters' feelings change during a story. Plot Kimika's emotions on the graph below based on events from the story.

Emotion Scale (Low → High Energy)

1. **Low Energy** – Feeling drained or tired; minimal motivation or alertness.
2. **Quiet Reflection** – Calm, introspective, and thoughtful state; energy is inward-focused.
3. **Calm** – Peaceful and steady; emotionally balanced and content.
4. **Confusion** – Mentally uncertain or unsure; energy rising due to cognitive tension.
5. **Curiosity** – Engaged and open; energy directed toward learning or exploring.
6. **Proud** – Confident and satisfied with oneself; positive, high-energy emotion.
7. **High Energy** – Very active, enthusiastic, or excited state; energy peaking.
8. **Anger** – Intense, high-arousal emotion focused on perceived injustice or frustration.

Kimika & Kalynn: Sisters - STUDENT WORKBOOK

Using the Emotion scale, fill in the chart below.

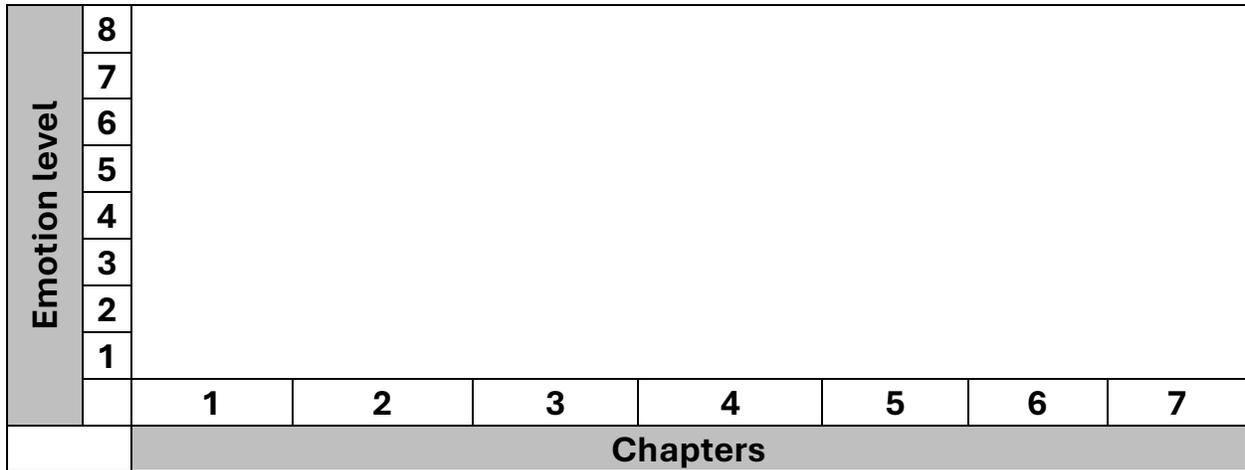
Chapter	Emotion Level (1-8)	Why Did Kimika Feel This Way?
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		

Continued on next page...

ASSESSMENT 9C (Part 3)

Graph Instructions:

Using the information you entered in **ASSESSMENT 9C Part 2**, plot your answers on the graph below, connecting the emotion level numbers for each event.



Analysis Question

How did Kimika’s feelings change during this story? Using two pieces of evidence from the text to explain in detail.
