



November 2, 2023

We received your Request for Reconsideration regarding the book *Born Ready: the True Story of a Boy Named Penelope* by Jodie Patterson and illustrated by Charnelle Pinkney Barlow. We have owned this title since July 2021, and it has been checked out 4 times. We reviewed it and have decided to retain it in the children's section, but due to the fact that it is a memoir and biographical in nature, it will be moved from the Picture Book section and into the Juvenile Biography section.

According to our book vendor, this item's intended audience is children ages 6-7, grades 1-2. The bibliographic record also includes the audience designation from the publisher: ages 4-8, grades K-1. The front cover, title, and description as well as the bibliographic information of the book include information that can help parents determine whether or not the book is appropriate for their individual child or family.

The online catalog includes details about the content in this book, and it also received positive reviews from publications like *Publishers Weekly* and *Kirkus* (excerpts below).

Some individuals may find the viewpoint of this book objectionable, but we provide access to other books on the same topic with different viewpoints. As you suggested Brave Books to be an alternative to this title, we do have a title from that publisher that addresses the same topic from a different perspective. Children's books can provide an opportunity for parents to discuss ideas in the way that works best for their families. The Christian County Library makes every effort to provide a broad selection of materials to meet the needs of diverse audiences, and we rely on parents and guardians to determine what is or is not suitable for their own households.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any further questions or concerns.

Sincerely,
Renee Brumett, Executive Director
Christian County Library

Reviews:

(Publishers Weekly, November 2020)

*This picture book companion to activist Patterson's adult memoir *The Bold World* centers her transgender son Penelope's coming-out journey, shortly before he turned five. Told in the first-person, the narrative follows Penelope, who knows that he's a ninja, and knows what he likes—"Skateboards and high-tops, baggy blue jeans." Initially, he acts out to get his busy family to pay attention, before he confides something else he knows to his*



mother: "No, Mama, I don't feel like a boy. I AM a boy." Without missing a beat, his mother affirms his identity: "We will make a plan to tell everyone we love what we know.... You are a boy." Barlow's illustrations, created digitally with handmade watercolor textures, emphasize the Black family's expressions and movement, allowing young readers to take in the family's emotions (and Penelope's karate moves). A heartening true story for children that offers guidance to caretakers. Ages 4–8. (Apr.)

(Kirkus Reviews, March 2021)

A Black transgender boy shares his identity and competes in a karate tournament with the encouragement of his family in this picture-book biography. Penelope knows who he is and what he likes even if his family is too busy to notice him. He stomps through the house, cuts in line, and pounds his fists so they will hear, see, and feel his anger that everyone thinks he's a girl. When his mom stops to listen, he tells her about his gender and helps her understand that he doesn't just feel like a boy, he is one. With his family's support behind him and the strength of his own determination to never give up, Penelope comes out at school and faces a new challenge: competing in a karate tournament. First-person narration centers Penelope's feelings and perspective in every stage of his story. Warmth and pride in identity radiate from the pages, brightened by the expressive, lively illustrations. The adults in Penelope's life model care by encouraging him to speak for himself and listening to him when he does. One thing he speaks up about is that he likes his name: Penelope. Perseverance also stands out as a significant theme within the narrative, with emphasis placed on Penelope's diligent practice and refusal to quit leading up to his victory. This representation of a Black family and transgender child (author Patterson is Penelope's mother) shines with joy and affirmation. (Since the creation of this book, the author's son has changed his name to Penel.) (This book was reviewed digitally with 10-by-20-inch double-page spreads viewed at 50.4% of actual size) A triumphant declaration of love and identity. (Picture book/biography. 4-7)

(Horn Book Magazine, July/August 2021)

Penelope knows he is a boy, despite his name and how others see him -- if only his family weren't too busy to notice. Penelope stomps through the house and acts out in school, hoping that someone will heed his frustration. Finally, Mom asks why he's so upset, and Penelope tells her who he truly is. Immediately, Penelope feels a rush of relief, and we see his first real smile. "For the first time, my insides don't feel like fire. They feel like warm golden love" -- powerful words for a child, illuminating the emotions Penelope was carrying inside. With the help of his family and community, Penelope navigates his transition and is able to focus on his next mission: mastering karate. The digitally rendered, watercolor-esque illustrations add softness to each page. Penelope's daydreams are displayed in wispy clouds of blue, green, and gold. Patterson's closeness



*to the protagonist (she is the real-life Penelope's mother) makes the first-person narration even more relatable, as we see the world through Penelope's eyes. Penelope and his family are Black, adding a necessary level of intersectionality to the pool of children's books exploring gender (see also *When Aidan Became a Brother*, rev. 7/19). Readers will be rooting for Penelope from the first page to the last. Hill Saxton
July/August 2021 p.92*