Amazon Best Books of the Month, January 2010

They don’t call it middle school for nothing. Reggie McKnight (aka Pukey) is trying hard to stay under the radar after a really embarrassing start to the school year. But, he’s somehow been drawn into the middle of a big school election, a volunteer project at the local homeless shelter, and the role of Big Buddy for a kid in the neighborhood. How will he ever find time to finish his comic book, Night Man? Reggie might see himself as a wimpy kid, but he’s anything but as steps up to new challenges and confronts big questions about doing the right thing in a tough world. Olugbemisola Rhuday-Perkovich’s debut novel is a smart and satisfying read for teens and tweens. --Lauren Nemroff

QA with Author Olugbemisola Rhuday-Perkovich

Q: What inspired you to write 8th Grade Superzero? A: I was always inspired by the young people that I’ve met, taught, and interacted with along the way. Two groups in particular, The Tara Belle Girls, 7th-10th grade students who participated in a discussion and creative arts group with me, and the Peace of My Mind crew, a faith-based teen discussion group that I led for a couple of years, were instrumental in the story’s development. We had such rich, wonderful talks about our public and private lives -- who we’ve been, who we were, who we wanted to be, and what we thought about our places in the world. In developing Reggie’s story, I knew that I wanted to share what I learned from those teens who cared deeply about justice, friendship, community, and love in all of its forms. Q: In 8th Grade Superzero, Reggie goes through some difficult experiences with his classmates at school. What did you find hardest about being in 8th grade? A: There was definitely a me that I wanted to be, and sometimes that girl just didn’t materialize when I wanted her to! When I was 13, there was a lot about me that was unusual in the context of the community in which we lived--my name, my cultural heritage, etc.--that made me stand out, and I constantly lived with that tension of simultaneously dreaming of being discovered as someone special and desperately wanting to blend in. Q: You have also mentioned that you were the “new kid” at school many times. How did you deal with it? A: I sharpened my observation skills, and remember moments from childhood quite vividly, which I think continues to help me as a writer. I’d spend my initial few days at a new school trying to get the lay of the land, learning the social hierarchy and figuring out the best survival system. Once, I drafted a popularity plan that included notes-to-self like saying Hi! with a smile all day long, dotting my is with hearts as much as possible, not rising to my
feet whenever an adult entered the classroom, and avoiding use of the metric system. I don’t think the plan worked. I went to one school in the U.S. at which I was the only Black person in the building; that experience brought considerable pain, and my first successful class election campaign. Two of my favorite school experiences were in Nigeria and Kenya; I remember those periods with such joy, I’d love to write about them one day. Even with the usual “Will I fit in?” questions that came with every move, I looked forward to the challenge of finding my place in a new school. I enjoyed moving around; we lived in communities that varied widely, and those experiences taught me a lot about tolerance, respect, and appreciation for community in both a local and global sense. Q: Reggie finds great satisfaction in helping a local homeless shelter build community. How did your own experiences with service shape this aspect of Reggie’s story? A: Reggie had the opportunity to see, as I did, that any type of service is a two-way street. He did not save or rescue anyone, and no person that he encountered acted as a talisman or magical figure whose primary purpose was to ease his guilt or facilitate his transformation to hero. He entered into relationships, with multidimensional people (I hope). The themes of small victories and personal action in the book were also major lessons learned in my own life. I found that there was just as much value (perhaps more) in being the person who offers a loving listening ear and a snack as there is in being the Big Speechmaker and shiny celebrity. Q: Were any authors or books particularly inspirational to you growing up? A: Such a hard question...There were so many! We had piles and piles books wherever we lived, and I could just go down and explore the shelves and discover new worlds on my own; I’m so grateful to my parents for that. *A Wrinkle in Time* is definitely one. My mom read it aloud to me when I was nine; I enjoyed those story times so much, and loved Meg Murry’s warts-and-all courage and spirit. (And it was so encouraging to see someone like her get the Guy!) *The House at Pooh Corner* is one of the early books that made me laugh out loud. I loved mysteries, and I was obsessed with Nancy Drew until I started wondering why she had the luxury of driving around in that little car all of the time and having a housekeeper at her age. Agatha Christie was a favorite whose depictions of race and ethnicity honed my critical reading skills. *Pride and Prejudice* and *Jane Eyre* fed my hunger for hidden princess stories, and I read them over and over again...I read and loved *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* when I was very, very young (so young that I wanted to marry him when I grew up. I didn’t quite get how the story ended at first.). I also read Anne Frank: *The Diary of a Young Girl* and *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings* when I was too young to really understand all they contained, but again, I was devastated and awed by their power. I’ve always loved a story with heart, and a character with soul.

My Personal Review:
Reggie Mcnight is one of those characters from a book who grabs you from the very beginning a never lets go. Everything about him is flawed perfection :o) This is one of the best middle grade books I’ve ever
read...funny, heartwarming, sad and inspiring, it has just about everything you could want in a good book!

This wonderful read deals with the sensitive issues of race, bullying, poverty and homelessness. The characters are so fully developed, that when I finished reading the book it really felt like they were kids I knew who moved away and I was sad to see them go!

This book is a must read for Tweens and middle-grade readers! Get it now!

Hey, even you young adult readers will find a gem here!

For More 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price: [Eighth-Grade Superzero by Olugbemisola Rhuday-Perkovich - 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price!](#)