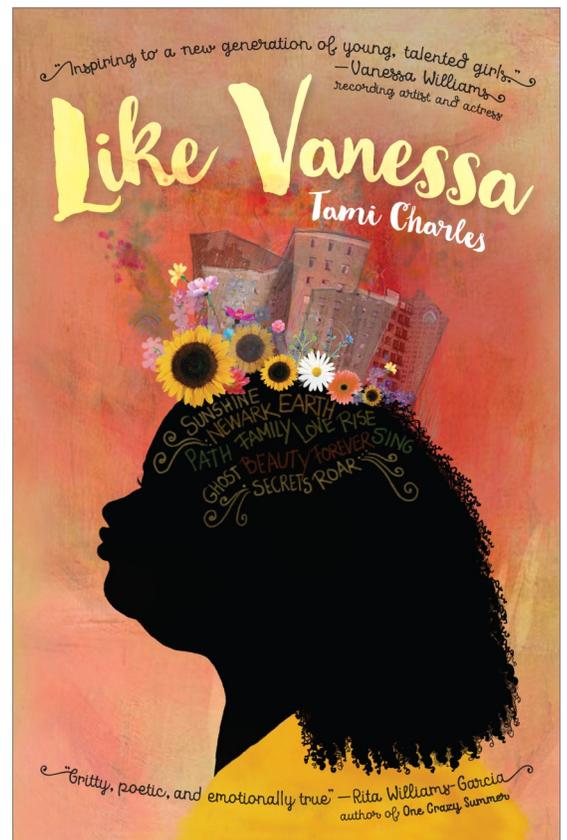


**"And in that moment I believe what they say could be true for me.  
That I could be like Vanessa Williams."**

## About the Book

In this semi-autobiographical debut novel, thirteen-year-old Vanessa Martin watches as the first black Miss America is crowned. It's 1983 in Newark, New Jersey, and Vanessa's life is a far cry from the glamorous Miss America stage. She struggles with family, friendships, racism, and self-confidence.

When a new teacher at school coordinates a beauty pageant and asks Vanessa to enter, Vanessa decides there's no way. But with help from Pop Pop and her cousin TJ, Vanessa prepares for the challenge. Add in the neighborhood mean girl, a mysterious envelope addressed to Vanessa, and trying to make monthly ends meet, and eighth-grade is as stressful as it gets.



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## About the Author



Tami Charles is a former teacher and full-time author of picture books, middle grade and young adult novels, and nonfiction. As a teacher, she made it her mission to introduce her students to all types of literature, but especially diverse books. While it was refreshing to see a better selection than what she was accustomed to as a child, Tami felt there weren't nearly as many diverse books as she'd hoped for. It was then that she decided to reignite her passion for writing. Tami is the author of the middle grade novel *Like Vanessa* (2018) and the picture book *Freedom Soup* (Candlewick Press, 2019).

Visit Tami online at [tamiwrites.com](http://tamiwrites.com), on Twitter @TamiWritesStuff and on Instagram @tamiwrites

## CharlesbridgeTEEN Readers' Group Guide

1. Name three reasons why Vanessa thinks she could never qualify as Miss America.
2. Who accidentally outs Vanessa to her choir teacher as a possible contender for the Ms. King Middle School Pageant?
3. Who does Vanessa live with?
4. Who is TJ? What are his aspirations? What is “different” about him according to local gossip?
5. Where did Darlene come from? How does Darlene help Vanessa ?
6. What scheme do Pop Pop and TJ pull to make sure Mrs. Walton hears Vanessa’s singing voice?
7. When Vanessa sings, what does she see when she closes her eyes?
8. What does Pop Pop give Vanessa for good luck when she auditions for the pageant?
9. How does Vanessa and Tanisha’s relationship evolve over the course of the book?
10. Why is Mrs. Walton so drawn to helping Vanessa with the pageant?
11. Why does Beatriz want to be Vanessa’s friend?
12. Why won’t Vanessa use her bathtub? How/when does she overcome her fear?
13. How does Vanessa fund her pageant clothes, jewelry, and makeup?
14. Who is TJ’s *muy caliente* lover? What ultimately happens with TJ and his crush?
15. Who rats out Vanessa as a pageant contestant to her father?
16. Where is Vanessa’s mother? Why?
17. Who escorts Vanessa at the pageant?
18. What is the result of the pageant and how does this impact Vanessa’s future?
19. What becomes of TJ after he is jumped by the Diablos?
20. Describe how Vanessa and Daddy’s relationship evolves throughout the novel.
21. Identify the historical moments presented in “Like Vanessa.” How do these “current events” contribute to the novel?
22. Vanessa desperately wants to be like her idol, Vanessa Williams. How does this evolve throughout the novel? What does young Vanessa learn in the end?