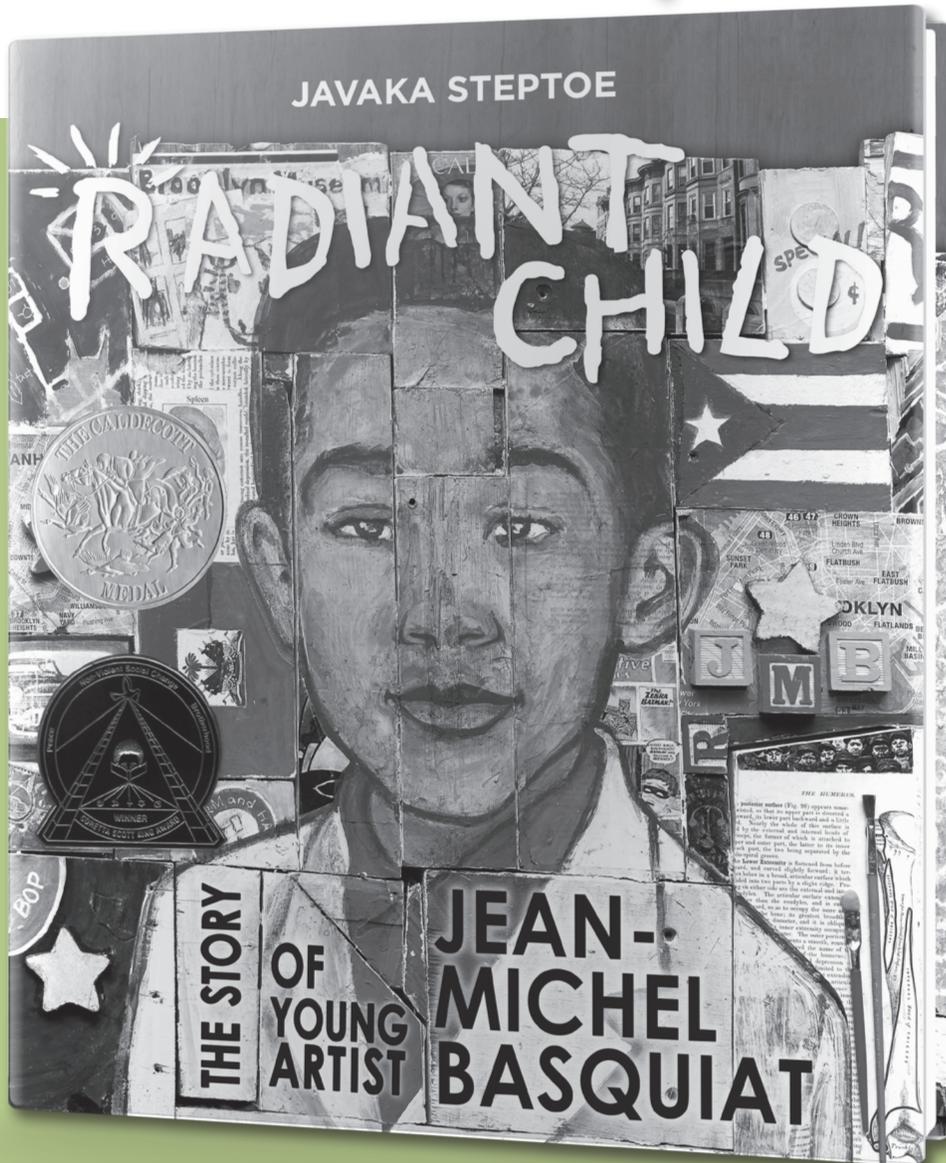


# RADIANT CHILD

BY  
JAVAKA STEPTOE



Curriculum  
connections

- ❖ Biography
- ❖ Art & History

Ages 8 – 12

## BUILDING BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

### Exploring Collage: Predicting the Stories Pictures Tell

Before reading *Radiant Child* aloud, select pages from the book with pictures that may be interesting for your students. Perhaps you to select the double page spread where young Basquiat is drawing at night, and we learn that “his drawings are not neat and clean, nor does he color inside the lines,” or the double page spread where he visits the Museum of Modern Art and views Picasso’s Guernica for the first time. Encourage students to note colors, shapes, and lines. Ask them about what inspires them to be creative.

Ask students to make predictions about the story based on the intricate cover art. Working as a class using chart paper, or in smaller groups and/or pairs using construction paper or Post-It notes, ask students to record what they notice about the details of the front and back cover. What do they think the story will be about? What kind of person is this “radiant child,” Jean-Michel, based upon the elements of the collage? After they finish the story, you can revisit their initial impressions.

### Art Walk: Exploring Public & Street Art in Your Community

Not all art can be found in galleries or hanging on the walls of peoples’ homes. Almost every community, whether urban, rural, or suburban has its own artwork for its community. With families, as a class trip, or even around your school, organize an “art walk” so that students can take note of the many forms of art in their own community. This might include public statues, community murals, billboards with graphics, posters, or even graffiti. Once the walk is over, ask students to talk about, write about, or draw what they have seen. How does the art in your neighborhood compare to the art that young Jean-Michel saw around him as a child?

For more information, please refer to the following websites:

- PBS’s collection of videos for teaching & learning about street art – [pbslearningmedia.org/collection/street-art](https://pbslearningmedia.org/collection/street-art)
- Graffiti Art Lesson Plan I: Public Images – [graffiti.org/faq/lessonplan\\_1.html](https://graffiti.org/faq/lessonplan_1.html)

### Art in Context: Exploring the Art of Puerto Rico, Haiti and New York City

Jean-Michel Basquiat’s life and radiant artwork was influenced by a convergence of three incredible artistic cultures: Puerto Rico, Haiti, and New York City. Explore the art alongside your students, choosing 1-2 works of interest, and discuss them as a whole class. Students can write about selected images, or draw their own based upon what they learn.

You can use the following links for additional information:

- National Museum of Puerto Rican Arts and Culture – [nmprac.org](https://nmprac.org)
- Haitian Art Society – [sites.google.com/site/haitianartsociety/home](https://sites.google.com/site/haitianartsociety/home)
- Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) – [moma.org/artists/370](https://moma.org/artists/370)



## LANGUAGE ARTS

### Picture This! How Pictures Work to Tell Basquiat's Story

How do illustrations make meaning for readers of picturebooks like *Radiant Child*? In 1991, author Molly Bang wanted to teach her young daughter how people come to comprehend what pictures and other images mean. She wrote, "I went to museums and looked at paintings, I read books about painting, and I took painting lessons. I still didn't get it. So I figured maybe if I tried teaching other people how pictures worked, I might learn myself." For more information, visit [mollybang.com/Pages/picture.html](http://mollybang.com/Pages/picture.html).

According to *Picture This!*, there are three key elements that make pictures work:

#### 1. CONTEXT

Context refers to outside influences on the text; things that impact our thoughts or feelings about the text and that can give us clues when we analyze the text.

#### 2. COMPOSITION

While context looks outside the text, composition looks exclusively at the text itself. What is the text like? What are its parts? How are they put together?

#### 3. COMPOSITIONAL ELEMENTS

Compositional elements found in visual texts include color, contrast, size, shape, spatial arrangement, and symmetry.

Using Molly Bang's *Picture This!* (readily available from multiple sources; resources available throughout the web), walk students through Steptoe's use of context, composition, and compositional elements throughout *Radiant Child*. You may wish to focus on the context of New York City, the composition of the text using collage, or compositional elements such as line, color, and shape. Or, you may simply wish to focus students on a few pages of the text, spending time looking at all of the many elements on the page. How do the choices that the

author/illustrator make lead us to feel, believe, and understand Basquiat's life story from childhood through adulthood?

### Talking Pictures: Learning the Language of Picture Books

Along with your students, use the language of picture books to talk about the story represented visually in *Radiant Child*. Then in pairs, in groups, or as a whole class, invite students to create questions about the illustrations in the book.

#### Bleed:

when the illustration extends to the edge of the page, with no white space or border

#### Border:

limit or outer edge of a page

#### Continuous narration:

the use of several separate illustrations on the same page (a montage) that indicate motion, action, or the sequence of time



# RADIANT CHILD

## Cut-out:

illustration that has no frame, simply appears against the backdrop

## Double page spread:

illustration is spread over both pages of an opening

## Endpages (a.k.a. endpapers):

the first (and last) page one sees when opening (and closing) the picture book

## Establishing shot:

a term taken from the film genre; when a picture book opens with an illustration of where the action for the story will take place

## Frame:

when illustrations are frequently surrounded by an illustrated border or white space, giving the impression of a framed picture; when an illustration overlaps, it is called “breaking the frame”

## Gutter:

the middle line where the pages are bound

## Illustration sequence:

the order of the illustrations in a book

## Montage:

several illustrations included on the same page

## Motif:

recurring element in the illustrations or text

## Page break:

the gap between openings (that exists when we turn the page)

## Title page:

page-indicating title of the book, author, illustrator, publisher, and city published (page with only title and small illustration is a half-title page)

## Typography:

the typeface or font used in the book

## Vertical moment:

important or emotionally charged moment in the plot

## Vignette:

small illustration used to break up a section of text or otherwise decorate a page

(Adapted from Lawrence R. Sipe, Learning the Language of Picturebooks.” Journal of Children’s Literature 24, no. 2 (1998): 66-75.)

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## WRITING

### The Sound of Color: Writing Poetry About Art

Stephoe uses very colorful and evocative language throughout *Radiant Child* to tell the story of Jean-Michel Basquiat’s life. Invite students to write poetry of their own about the art in the story, and in their own lives. Encourage them to use some of the language from the text, remixing it for their own purposes—have they ever found that “art has a healing power?” Have they ever invented a new name for themselves, like Basquiat’s SAMO©? You may choose to have them work in small groups or in pairs, or you may choose to make this a whole class or individual project.

### Your Life in Pictures: Illustrated Autobiographies

Have students create an illustrated autobiography about their lives so far. For younger children, ask them to talk about, then draw, and write a scene from a special moment in their lives. For older students, they can create several drawings illustrating different moments. Encourage students to try out various styles (sequential art, picturebook, digital story, etc.) and multiple media, including drawing, painting, calligraphic word art, photography, digital media, and collage.

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## SOCIAL STUDIES

### Exploring the Heritage of Jean-Michel Basquiat: Puerto Rico, Haiti, and New York

Invite your students to learn more about the cultures and places that influenced young Jean-Michel's life.

You can use the following links for additional information:

- PBS's Puerto Rico to New York video – [pbslearningmedia.org/resource/0c3f6554-dffb-4d21-96aa-60edcb525398/puerto-rico-to-new-york](https://pbslearningmedia.org/resource/0c3f6554-dffb-4d21-96aa-60edcb525398/puerto-rico-to-new-york)
- University of Notre Dame's Haiti Behind the Headlines resources – [http://kellogg.nd.edu/outreach/haiti\\_resources.shtml](http://kellogg.nd.edu/outreach/haiti_resources.shtml)

- Brooklyn Historical Society – [brooklynhistory.org/education/museum.html](http://brooklynhistory.org/education/museum.html)

### Breaking the Silence: Learning More About Mental Illness

Many students may be able to relate to Basquiat's mother dealing with mental illness. The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) provides resources, toolkits, and lesson plans for elementary, middle, and high school students on this topic: [btslessonplans.org](http://btslessonplans.org).

## THE ARTS

### Be Like Basquiat! Create Your Own Collage

Author and illustrator Javaka Steptoe chose to create his own interpretations of Jean-Michel Basquiat's famous art instead of reproducing it. After reading all about the life of Jean-Michel Basquiat, students may wish to create their own collages, too!

Some students may wish to create collages based upon their own lives, but others may wish to imitate illustrations from *Radiant Child*, or street art they've explored during the unit. After the project, you may wish for students to write a brief reflection about the experience. What have they learned about their own radiance?

### Poetry Out Loud: Choral Recitation and Creation

The language of *Radiant Child* is poetic, narrating the life of the brilliant young artist through vivid word pictures. After reading

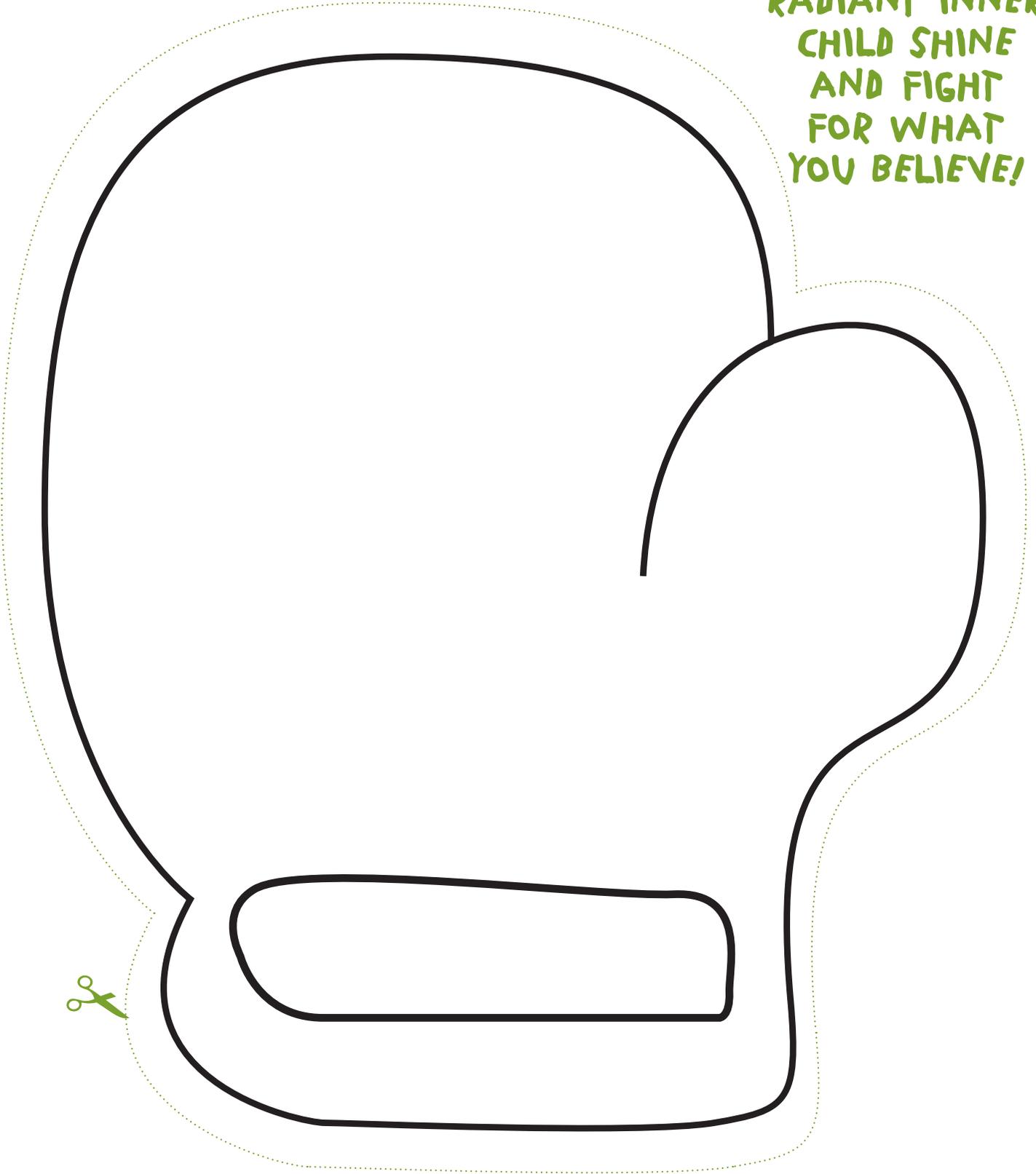
the picture book aloud, ask students to recite their favorite parts as a class, rehearsing together in groups. (They may wish to even create their own Basquiat-like scenery for special effect!) Once all groups have finished their recitation, invite them to write poetry of their own that is meant to be read out loud.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Jean-Michel Basquiat's Official Website – [basquiat.com](http://basquiat.com)
- PBS's Independent Lens Jean-Michel Basquiat: The Radiant Child Documentary – [pbs.org/independentlens/films/jean-michel-basquiat](http://pbs.org/independentlens/films/jean-michel-basquiat)
- The Art Story – [theartstory.org/artist-basquiat-jean-michel.htm](http://theartstory.org/artist-basquiat-jean-michel.htm)

SIDE A

LET YOUR  
RADIANT INNER  
CHILD SHINE  
AND FIGHT  
FOR WHAT  
YOU BELIEVE!

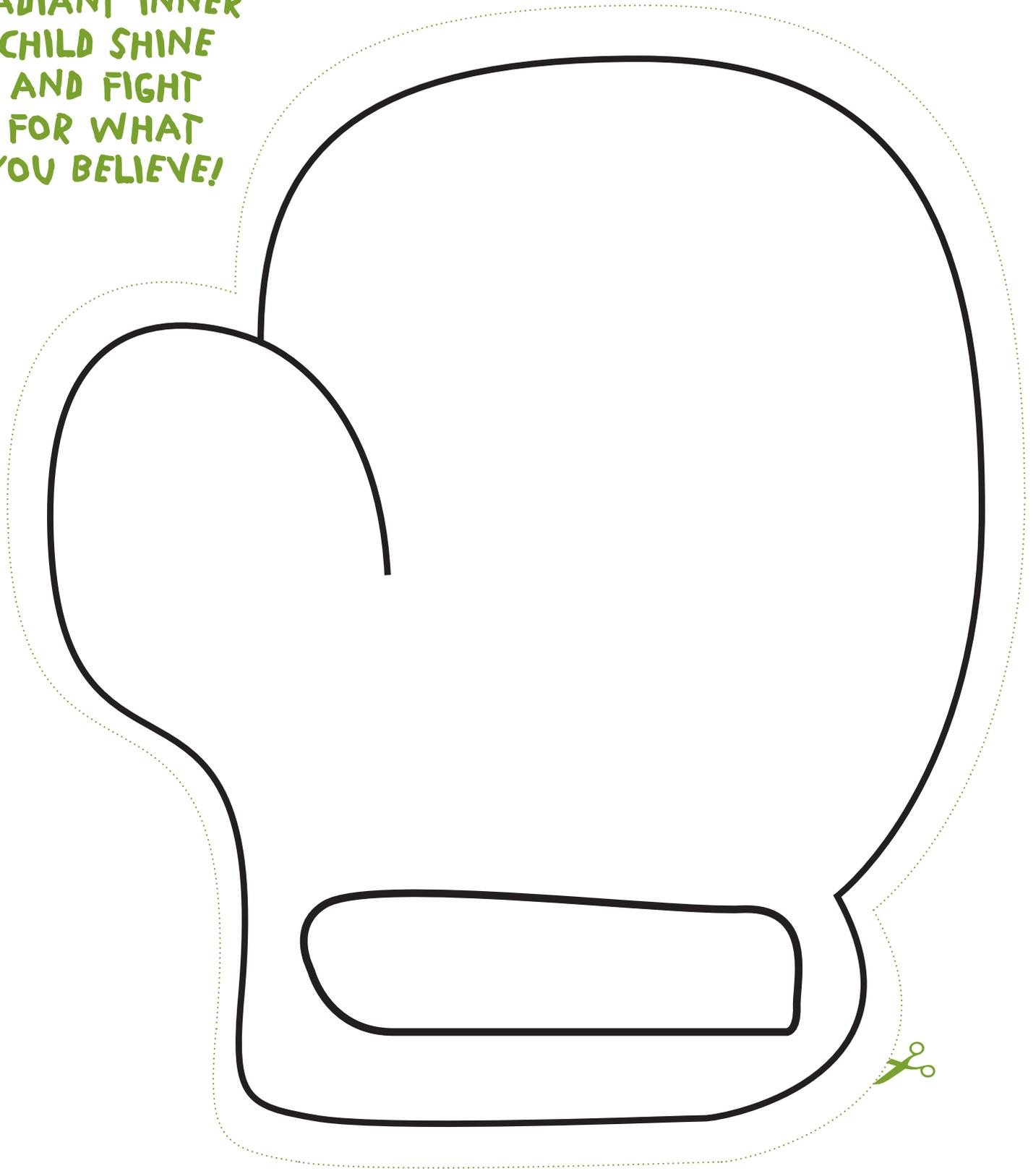


## GLOVE INSTRUCTIONS

Color side A and B. With the help of a grown-up, use scissors to cut along the dotted line of both gloves. Flip over side A. With the uncolored side facing up, apply glue along the edge of side A. Make sure not to apply glue to the bottom of the glove—you'll need the space for your hand to go into the glove. Then, carefully place side B with the colored side up on top of the glove A. Allow glue to dry before placing your hands inside the glove. Repeat these steps to create a second glove.

LET YOUR  
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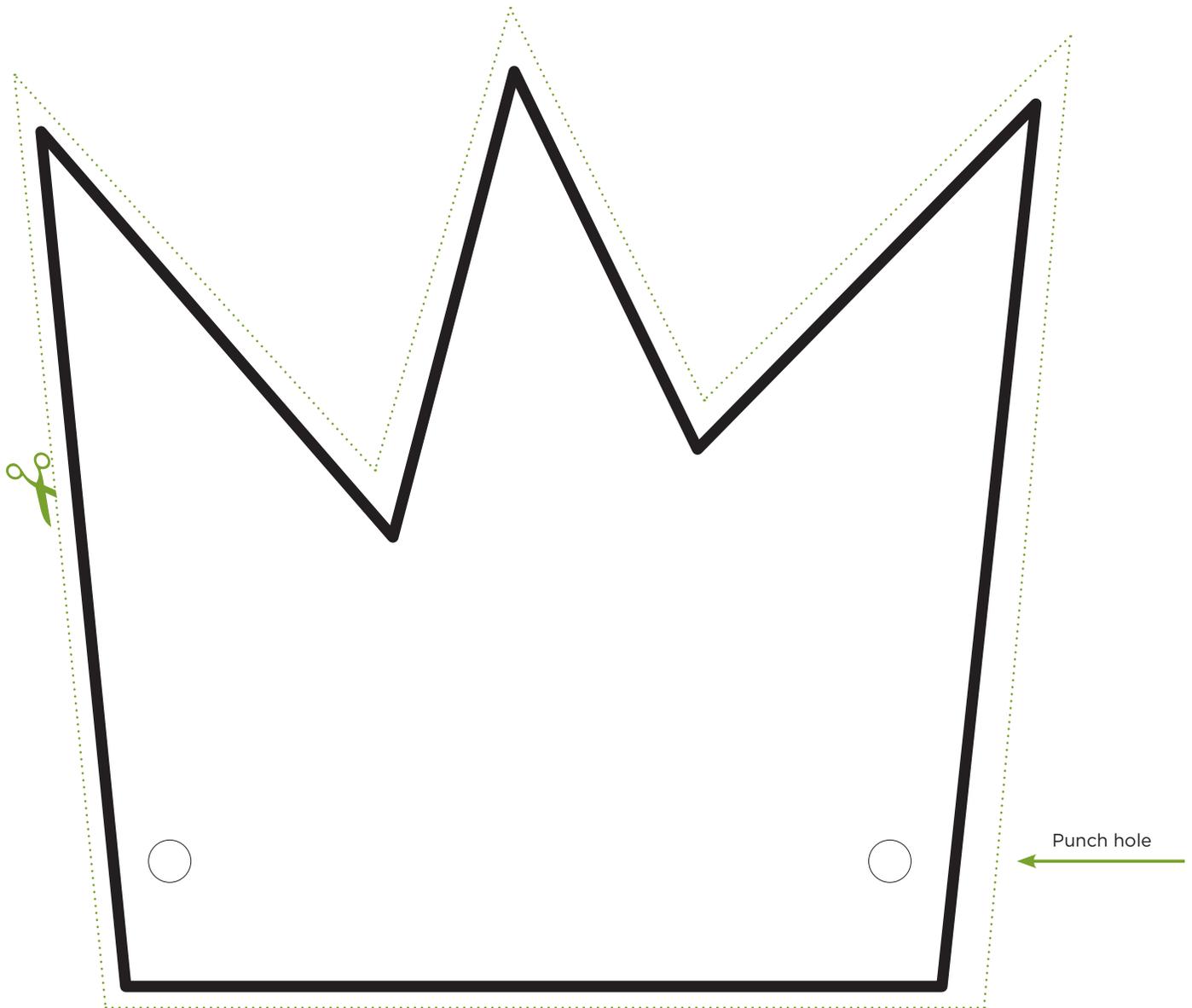
SIDE B



## GLOVE INSTRUCTIONS

Color side A and B. With the help of a grown-up, use scissors to cut along the dotted line of both gloves. Flip over side A. With the uncolored side facing up, apply glue along the edge of side A. Make sure not to apply glue to the bottom of the glove—you'll need the space for your hand to go into the glove. Then, carefully place side B with the colored side up on top of the glove A. Allow glue to dry before placing your hands inside the glove. Repeat these steps to create a second glove.

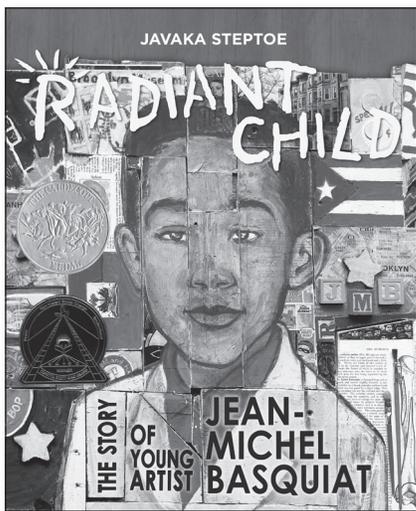
LET YOUR RADIANT INNER CHILD SHINE  
AND FIGHT FOR WHAT YOU BELIEVE!



## CROWN INSTRUCTIONS

Color your crown. With the help of a grown-up, use scissors to cut along the dotted line.  
Use a hole-punch to make holes where the two circles are. Tie a length of string or yarn to each hole.  
Then secure your crown on top of your head by tying the strings together.

# RADIANT CHILD



## RADIANT CHILD

HC 978-0-316-21388-2

Also available as an ebook

## ABOUT THE BOOK

**2017 Caldecott Medal Winner**

**2017 CSK Illustrator Award Winner**

Jean-Michel Basquiat and his unique, collage-style paintings rocketed to fame in the 1980s as a cultural phenomenon unlike anything the art world had ever seen. But before that, he was a little boy who saw art everywhere: in poetry books and museums, in games and in the words that we speak, and in the pulsing energy of New York City. Now, award-winning illustrator Javaka Steptoe's vivid text and bold artwork echoing Basquiat's own style introduces young readers to the powerful message that art doesn't always have to be neat or clean—and definitely not inside the lines—to be beautiful.

★ “Visually arresting and vibrantly narrated.” —*Publishers Weekly*

★ “Stellar bookmaking—a riveting portrait of a young artist.” —*Kirkus*

★ “Offers a new generation a fittingly powerful introduction to an artistic luminary.”  
—*School Library Journal*

★ “A tour de force that will introduce an important artist to a new generation”  
—*The Horn Book*



## about the author

Javaka Steptoe is an artist, designer, and illustrator. His debut picture book, *In Daddy's Arms I Am Tall*, won the Coretta Scott King Award, and *Jimi: Sounds Like a Rainbow* (written by Gary Golio) received a Coretta Scott King Honor. He has also illustrated *Do You Know What I'll Do?* by Charlotte Zolotow, *A Pocketful of Poems* by Nikki Grimes, *Amiri and Odette: A Love Story* by Walter Dean Myers, *Rain Play* by Cynthia Cotten, and *Hot Day on Abbott Avenue* by Karen English, which received the Jane Addams Children's Book Award. He is also the author and illustrator of *The Jones Family Express*. Visit his website at [Javaka.com](http://Javaka.com).



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