The skin I’m in
By Sharon G. Flake

Constantine Vythoulkas
A new English teacher came to school. Her name was Miss Saunders. She was a very odd woman, a person I should stay clear off, Maleeka Madison thought.
‘Maleeka, your skin is pretty. Like a blue-black sky after it’s rained and rained’ miss Saunders told me. But then John-John started teasing me: ‘I don’t see no pretty just a whole lotta black’. Before I knew it, three more boys are pointing at me and teasing me too.
People started teasing me about my clothes too. My mother sews them for me. I stopped worrying about that this year, that Charlese lends me her clothes.
I’m in the girls room with Char and the twins. They are smoking and writing on the walls. If you go along with Char you can’t be sensitive. I had no friends since Caleb started teasing me about my clothes, my hair, my colour, my good grades. So I went to Char. At first she was laughing, because I was ugly. But when I told her that I will do her homework, she changed her mind, although she continues to insult me which hurts a lot.
Miss Saunders asked the class: ‘Can anyone tell me what their face says to the world?’. ‘It takes long time to accept yourself for who you are. To see the poetry in your walk. To look at the mirror and like what you see, even if it doesn’t look like anybody else’s idea of beauty. My face says I’m smart, sassy, sexy, self-confident, caring and even a little cold sometimes.’ Miss Saunders to class.
Miss Saunders asks the class to pretend we’re teenagers living in the seventeenth century. She wants us to know what it feels to live in someone’s else skin. Maleeka started writing a diary about a slave girl that lives in a boat, starving and chained to some boy. Miss Saunders praised my work and asked me to continue the diary.
Daphne is accusing me of stealing her boyfriend. I told her she’s got the wrong girl. Before I could understand we started fighting. As a punishment I started working in the school office.
While I was looking myself in the mirror I came up with an idea, I’m going to cut my hair, Maleeka thought. I want to show that I’ve changed. Although, I have the feeling that I look pretty everyone at school started teasing me. I felt disappointed. Then I remember Daddy telling me: ‘Maleeka got to see yourself with your own eyes. That’s the only way you are going to see who you really are.’
Char had an argument with one of the lunch ladies and as a result her food was spoiled. She demanded me to go and get her another plate. At first, I refused but with Char you have no choice. I was very angry with Char and I didn’t give her all her homework. As a punishment she didn’t bring me any new clothes.
As I was returning home from Charlese’s house, two boys started bothering me. I ran as fast as I could but they chased me and finally they caught me. The one was holding my hands and the other was trying to kiss me. I resisted and succeeded to escape.
Maleeka continued writing her diary and developed a friendly relationship with Miss Saunders. But the closer she got to Miss Saunders the more distant she became to Char. In the girls bathroom Char accused her of being a slave to Miss Saunders and admitted that she doesn’t like her. Suddenly, Miss Saunders entered the room, saw them smoking and told them to go to her office.
As a punishment Maleeka had to pass the evening in the detention room. Caleb was in detention too. He told her that he was sorry for teasing her and asked her to become friends. Maleeka didn’t answer him.
One day as Maleeka was walking in the corridors she overheard a conversation between miss Saunders and Tai, the math teacher. Miss Saunders admitted that despite the fact that her students loved her class, they are not doing very well at tests. Tai consoled her by telling her that no one is perfect, but Miss Saunders told her that she always wanted to be perfect at everything she does in order to make people forget her ugly face. At the end of their conversation she realised that Maleeka was sneaking. Maleeka promised that she won’t repeat anything she heard.
The next day, Miss Saunders asked me to go to her office after school and I did as she said. She told me that I was a talented writer and I should take part in the Library Contest with my diary.
While I was searching a box I found a poem that my Daddy wrote about me.

Brown
Beautiful
Brilliant

My Maleeka
is
Brown
Beautiful
Brilliant
Mine
Char had a very strong argument with Miss Saunders. Miss Saunders told Char that she will flunk again the seventh grade. But Char wanted revenge.
Next night, Char, Maleeka and the twins went to miss Saunders’ office and started destroying it. Maleeka didn’t do anything, but Char hit her and forced her to burn some money they found. Suddenly they heard someone coming. Char and the twins started running but Maleeka stayed back to put out the fire. The door opened, the janitor came in and he saw Maleeka.
I am punished at school and at home too. Everyone is laughing at me and I feel so embarrassed. However, those days two positive things happened. Firstly, while I was walking to the marker I saw two boys hitting John-John and I was the one that saved him. Secondly, I won the first prize in the Library Contest.
One day Char called. I told her that I’m going to admit that she did everything. She started laughing. She told me that I was accused of being a thief, because she put Miss Saunders’ watch in my locker. I was going to be expelled from school.
The next day Miss Saunders asked me and Char to meet her at her office. She asked who was really responsible for destroying her office. Char started threatening me and insulting me. But I admitted the
‘Call me by my name! I am not ugly. I am not stupid. I am Maleeka Madison, and yeah, I’m black, real black, and if you don’t like me, too bad cause that’s the skin I’m in! No matter what you think, Charlese Jones, you are ten times worse. I would never force somebody to burn down a classroom, or pick up on kids weaker than me, or say words so mean they make people bleed inside. You are the one that pushed me to burn up Miss Saunders’ room!’ Maleeka yelled at Char.
I was not expelled from school and Char went to live with her grandparents in Alabama. I am free. Char can’t harm me now. I became friend with Caleb again and he gave me a poem.
To Maleeka: My sweet chocolate candy girl.
Would you be my Almond Joy
My chocolate chip, my Hershey Kiss
My sweet dark chocolate butter crisp?

Hand and hand, we’d walk to class
And sit and talk in sweet green grass

Roller coaster way up high
Pick moonbeams from out the sky

Would you be my Almond Joy
My chocolate chip, my Hershey Kiss
My sweet dark chocolate butter crisp?