

Children's Book by Katrina Kid Turned Award-Winning Civil Engineer Inspires Kids Around the World

Evacuating during Hurricane Katrina led Courtney Kelly to pursue civil engineering

She shared her story through the children's book [Celeste Saves the City](#)

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As the world recognizes the 20th year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, self-published author and civil engineer Courtney Kelly, continues to share her story of resilience and finding purpose through the pages of her children's book, [Celeste Saves the City](#). Based on Courtney's life, the book follows the

journey of a young, Black girl growing up in New Orleans who is forced to evacuate due to Hurricane Katrina. Determined to make a difference, Celeste becomes a civil engineer who saves the city from flooding by building barrier islands that help to preserve and restore coastal

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Courtney Kelly

wetlands. Since its release in 2022, over 4,500 books have reached the hands of readers across the globe, and the story has been translated into French, German, and Spanish.

Inquisitive by nature, 14-year-old Courtney had a lot of questions as her family evacuated from their home in New Orleans East to Baton Rouge as Katrina churned in the Gulf of Mexico in August of 2005. The summers following, her parents enrolled her in STEM (science, technology,

engineering, and math) camps at Louisiana State University, Worcester Polytechnic Institute, and Elmhurst University. During the pre-college programs, Courtney was introduced to various engineering disciplines. Over time, civil engineering presented itself as a means of learning the



Author Courtney Kelly holding her book *Celeste Saves the City*

principles that could help New Orleans mitigate the risk of another devastating weather event like Katrina. This realization led Courtney to pursue bachelor's degrees in civil engineering and math at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas. While interning with the City of New Orleans' Department of Public Works in 2010, Courtney realized that her true passion was in construction. After completing her undergraduate studies, she started a career in construction project management and is now a project director at H.J. Russell & Company.

"Writing *Celeste Saves the City* was a way for me to pay homage to my hometown of New Orleans and create a tangible impact on the next generation so that they can grow up thinking about how they could make a difference in the cities around them. Today's kids will become tomorrow's leaders and if they already have it in their minds to consider things like the effect of wetland erosion on coastal cities, then maybe a disaster like Katrina can be prevented in the future," says author Courtney Kelly.

With a desire to share her story coupled with the recognition of a lack of female and minority representation in the AEC (architecture, construction, and engineering) industry, Courtney decided to create her first children's book, *Celeste Saves the City*. In addition to highlighting iconic landmarks like the St. Louis Cathedral and quintessential New Orleans elements, the book also provides a lesson on the significance of protecting coastal wetlands. As referenced in the



Author Courtney Kelly showcases imagery of St. Louis Cathedral seen in *Celeste Saves the City*



Author Courtney Kelly explains the use of barrier islands and teaches students how to build their own in Stuttgart, Germany

recently released National Geographic documentary, [Hurricane Katrina: Race Against Time](#), the erosion of the wetlands around the city weakened the natural barrier that once protected the city from storm surge. Through author events in New Orleans, cities across America, and in the countries of [Germany and Singapore](#), Courtney has been able to help further increase the understanding of barrier islands by leading kids in hands-on activities where they create their own version of the islands represented in the book. While the average self-published book sells around 250 copies, Celeste Saves the City has sold 18 times that amount, leaving a positive mark that celebrates New Orleans and educates readers from the experience a Katrina kid who strove to make a difference in a meaningful way.

About Courtney Kelly Books

Courtney Kelly Books is a children's book publisher offering diverse characters and educational content for kids ages 5-12. The Celeste Collection featuring a civil engineer consists of two titles, Celeste Saves the City and Celeste Tunnels Underground. Over 5,000 copies of the books have been sold in more than 15 countries. They are available in audiobook, eBook, hardback, or paperback and have also been translated into French, German, and Spanish.

To find out more, visit our website at www.courtneykellybooks.com

About Courtney Kelly

Award-winning civil engineer, Courtney Kelly, has made a name for herself both as a well-respected construction management professional and self-published children's book author. She earned bachelor's degrees in civil engineering and math as well as a master's degree in civil engineering from Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas. Courtney also holds an MBA from Lamar University and is a licensed professional engineer. In 2023, she was selected as an Engineering News-Record Texas and Louisiana Top Young Professional.

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