

African-American Literature for the Young Child:

A Selected Annotated Bibliography

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Abstract

A lack of books published reflecting African-American culture and identity has led to the whitewashing of children's literature. School curriculum lacks proper attribution to the African-American experience due to the lack of books published in the field appropriate for children. In addition, African-American children are subject to psychological issues concerning lack of self-esteem and are presented with the idea that they are not important or do not exist in society. In acknowledging the lack of African-American characters, the implicit racism in children's literature can begin to be addressed. This selective annotated subject bibliography includes twenty titles of children's literature that feature an African-American character prominently in the story or a story that authentically describes African-American history. The books included are suited for children in kindergarten through second grade. While the reading level of some books on the list might be higher than a second grade reading level, children can always listen at a higher level than they can read and these books were included with that in mind.

Introduction

Race in America has been a subject of discourse in multiple political and educational arenas. Vilson (2015) finds that the racial conversation has shifted from an “incident-by-incident tally to a maelstrom of discussions about race and the executive branch, inserting ‘Black Lives Matter’ into the national zeitgeist” (para. 8). Furthermore, Vilson (2015) finds that even with the creation of Black History Month, the curriculum is often still “bereft of people of color as anything more than slaves, indentured servants, victims of forefathers and freedom fighters from half a century ago” (para. 10). African-Americans may be missing from the curriculum because of the lack of books published reflecting African-American culture and identity. Horning (2014) reviewed children’s books and found that there seems to be an unwritten rule that no more than 100 books may be published in a given year by black authors and illustrators, which accounts for only 3% of the published books (para. 4). In an effort to draw attention to African-American literature and reach black readers, Renea Arnold and Nell Colburn (2012) offer a Black Storytime in their Multnomah County Library as a way to foster children’s knowledge and pride in their cultural identity, every child needs to feel that his culture is respected and valued (para. 3). Self-concept and self-esteem are developed from interactions with parents and society and often racial prejudices often make it difficult for children of color to develop positive self-worth (Hughes-Hassell & Cox, 2010, p. 214).

With the world of children’s books whitewashed, it is nearly impossible for an African-American child to see themselves depicted in the books they read and conversely for a young white child to see African-American children in similar situations and circumstances as their own. Berlatsky (2014) finds that “smart, thoughtful books with

non-white protagonists can also give white children a chance to see black people and people of color as something other than anxiety-producing others or stereotypes” (para. 9). Myers (2013) similarly expresses a responsibility as a black author to provide books in which black people are not the “flat emblems of our divided nation but instead humans full of laughter and love and care...” (p. 13). It is important for African-American children to see themselves depicted in literature, especially as the main character. Increased representation of African-American characters in literature is needed to provide a sense of self. According to Kurz (2012), “if children do not see themselves portrayed authentically in the books they read, they are presented with a vision of society in which they either do not exist or do not matter” (p. 132). This bibliography will highlight children’s books which authentically show African-American characters or authentically portray African-American culture. Following the widespread recent cry for respect in the black community, mentioned earlier by Vilson (2015), “Black Lives Matter,” it is time to highlight African-American culture in literature to give young black children the chance to develop self-worth and self-esteem.

Scope

This selective annotated subject bibliography will include twenty titles of children’s literature that authentically describe African-American history or feature an African-American character prominently in the story. For the purpose of accurately portraying authentic African-American history from an ethnographic and emic perspective, if the book focused on African-American history only African-American authors were selected for the list. This decision was made following Sims (1984), who claimed “that white authors fail to accurately reflect black experience because they have

not been socialized into the ways of living, believing, and valuing that are unique to the perspective of that ethnic culture (as cited in Bista, 2012, p. 319). Stories told from this insider perspective are more accurate at portraying real-life situations of the characters (Bista, 2012, p. 320). Some books written by white authors portrayed a watered-down version of African-American history and tended to downplay the severity of racism and segregation, meanwhile white characters were portrayed as wholly innocent and freed from responsibility for the situation. In an education system that is predominately white-minded, it is especially important that African-American children are receiving authentic information from the perspective of their own culture.

If the book featured a black character prominently in the story, it was considered for the list regardless of the ethnicity of the author. This decision was made following Myers (2013) and Berlatsky (2014), books that featured a black character as a prominent protagonist outside of a historical context help white children see black people as something other than stereotypes or historical slaves. The goal of the inclusion criteria was to showcase more children's literature that had non-white protagonists in normal childhood situations. The inclusion criteria also did not consider the ethnicity of the author because historical books were not included. African-American authors were only required for books that had a historical context to ensure accurate portrayal of the African-American experience.

These books will be best suited for children in kindergarten through second grade. While the reading level of some books on the list might be higher than a second grade reading level, children can always listen at a higher level than they can read and these books were chosen with that in mind.

Rationale and Audience

This bibliography was inspired by a young African-American girl, Kori. The author of this article is employed in a K-12 school library. In this library there is a mailbox where students can write to Skoob, a shelf elf, inspired by the children's book *The Shelf Elf* written by Jackie Hopkins. The students' letters are displayed on a bulletin board in the library and Skoob sends a written response back to the students through their homeroom teachers. In a letter to Skoob, Kori had drawn a self-portrait of herself, but she didn't have a brown crayon to color herself in. However, it was very important for her to let everyone know that she was 'a brown person' so she wrote the words "I'm a brown person" on her picture. This example of her positive self-image and pride in her own identity was the essence for why an up-to-date and culturally authentic list of African-American children's books is needed. Young black children need to see themselves represented in literature, in everyday situations, and as the hero to their own stories. As classrooms become more diverse, there needs to be a push for all people, not just people of color, to see different faces use their voices to make a better world (Wilson, 2015).

Librarians can use this list for ensuring that their collection has quality children's books that reflect positive experiences for black characters and that their collection contains authentic children's books that authentically portray the black experience from the black perspective. Teachers will find this list useful when planning curriculum for Black History Month activities or for introducing books into their classroom for everyday purposes. All children will benefit from reading books that portray African-American characters. Parents will also benefit from this list by being better able to identify and select reading materials for their children that will meet the individual needs of the

African-American child. Parents will be able to ensure that they actively help their children develop self-esteem and combat the implicit racism prevalent in children's books which when exposed to, young children internalize the images and form assumptions (Hughes-Hassell & Cox, 2010, p. 214).

This bibliography is not meant to exclude white children, but be inclusive of all children with a focus on African-American children. Therefore, it is beneficial for non-African American children to also be exposed to the books in this bibliography to help understand cultural differences among races. Racial inequality and injustice are at the focus of political discourse in America. The school librarian can positively affect change and understanding among children through the promotion of diverse books by helping non-African American individuals better understand the

Sources

In beginning to research African-American children's literature, bibliographies were reviewed because they contained a comprehensive list of African-American literature. The two bibliographies initially consulted for this project were the "African-American Voices in Children's Fiction" compiled by Arrowhead Library System and "African American Literature for Preschool through Adult" compiled by Buckingham and Johnson for the Iowa Department of Education. While the bibliographies provided a great starting place, after careful consideration they were determined to be less than useful. The books found through the use of the bibliographies were outdated and written in the cultural context of the past. Books that were listed ranged from the 60s, 70s, 80s, and 90s. The books in the bibliographies also were more focused on illustrating historical moments.

Award lists were consulted for African-American books, including the Coretta Scott King Award list and the Lee & Low New Voices Award. These lists provide a quick way of identifying quality, award-winning books that reflect African American culture and experience. However, these books were still reviewed to fit the criteria of this bibliography consistent with providing an authentic portrayal of African-American history, featuring a black main character, and suitable for a kindergarten through second grade audience.

Online lists were also accessed for the purpose of identifying quality African-American literature. “The Top 10 Books for Youth on Black History” list compiled Ann Kelley for the website Booklist Online was consulted. Books that appeared on multiple lists were highly considered for inclusion in this bibliography if they fit within the strict standards designated above. The majority of lists found were focused on great books that highlighted African-American history. However, this bibliography did not want to focus solely on African American history but, following Myers (2013), give young black readers “spaceships, clowns, and unicorns, to depict whole human beings, to allow the children in books to have the childhoods they ought to have, where surely there are lessons and context and history, but there is also fantasy and giggling and play” (p. 14).

Limitations

The books included in this book have all been personally viewed, researched, and selected from first-hand knowledge of the material. Books that specifically addressed historical topics were limited to African-American authors as previously detailed. Books that did not address a historical aspect but just showcased an African-American protagonist were accepted regardless of author if the book fit the other qualifications.

Organization of the Bibliography

The bibliography is arranged alphabetically by last name of the author. Each title is cited using a full APA citation followed by the original list of the book in hardcover if available, the ISBN, and awards won. The ISBN is included to aid users in finding material easy for purchase or curation. The citations are followed by descriptive annotations which provide a synopsis of the book.

Total Cost of Collection

The books in this collection are available through library purchasing platforms, like Follett or Mackin, or through online retailers, such as Amazon or Barnes and Noble. The total cost for purchasing these books for a library collection in new condition is \$274.02.

Conclusion

This selective bibliography is important for all those involved in library curation or retail booksellers to be made aware. The lack of children's literature for people of color has been proven (Horning, 2014; Hughes-Hassell & Cox, 2010; Kurz, 2012). Children's literature in modern society portrays white characters as normal and black characters as slaves, indentured servants, or secondary characters. According to Hughes-Hassell and Cox (2010), "whiteness is normalized, and children of color not only get the message from books that their lives and their stories are not important but also that white is better" (p. 225). Furthermore, Hughes-Hassell and Cox (2010) found that countering the story of white superiority is critical to the positive growth and development of self-esteem and self-concept in children of color. After reading or hearing the books listed in this bibliography, African-American children will realize that their lives are important.

References

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Vison, J. (2015, Feb. 18). *During Black History Month, helping students understand their role in history* [Web log post]. Retrieved from <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/black-history-month-helping-students-understand-role-history/>

Annotated Bibliography

Beaty, D. (2013). *Knock: My dad's dream for me*. New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company.

Hardcover: \$15.35. ISBN 978-0-316-20917-5.

Award(s): 2014 Boston Globe Horn Book Honor Winner-Picture Book, 2014 Coretta Scott King Book Awards Illustrator Winner (Bryan Collier), 2013 Parent's Choice Award Winner for Picture Books

Winner of the 2014 Coretta Scott King Illustrator award, this book features exquisite pictures of an African-American family. A young African-American boy pretends to be asleep every morning when his father comes and knocks at his door and playfully springs up to surprise him. One morning that knock never comes and the young boy wonders what happened to his father. He just isn't there to do all the things they used do together. The young boy feels a sincere loss. Then, one day he gets a letter from his father with advice that will hopefully fill the void in his young life.

Bennett, K. (2005). *Not Norman: A goldfish story*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press.

Hardcover not available, Paperback: \$6.99. ISBN 978-0-7636-2763-8.

Award(s): none.

This book features an African-American character in the role of the main character. A young, African-American boy receives a pet goldfish named Norman for his birthday present. But he wanted anything else, not Norman. He wanted a furry pet, not Norman. Other goldfish swim around their tank, not Norman, so he decides to trade him for a better pet. But when he cleans Norman's tank to make him look pretty before giving him away, Norman starts flipping and flopping around; he looks so goofy he makes the young boy laugh. The young boy takes Norman to school to show him off at Show-and-

Tell; maybe someone else will want him. The young boy continues to tell Norman that he is getting rid of him the first chance he gets, but he keeps missing all his chances. This book provides a childhood situation normal to black and white children alike. By showing an African-American protagonist in this children's book it helps young black children develop positive self-esteem and introduces white children to diverse others.

Bullard, L. (2003). *Marvelous me*. Minneapolis, MN: Picture Window Books. Hardcover not available, Paperback: \$7.99. ISBN 978-1-40480-157-8.

Award(s): none.

This book features an African-American boy as the main character, Alex. Alex is a little boy who loves books and movies about superheroes. His favorite superhero is himself, Marvelous Me. Marvelous Me can do super cool things, like run real fast for a football, and see far across the field. It is because he eats his broccoli. His brain does super cool things as well. He can read, count, and remember. The book shows the young boy as an astronaut in space, a pirate on a ship, and just cleaning his room. Even though Alex has a twin brother, Andy, he still is his own special "Marvelous Me." This book is included in the bibliography because it provides an African-American character in the context of a normal children's picture book. In addition, this book also provides a positive message that black children can grow up to be anything they want to be, including an astronaut!

Cook, T. (1994). *So much*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press. Hardcover, not available, Library Binding: \$14.04. ISBN 978-0-329-80272-1.

Award(s): none.

This book is designed for the learning-to-read young child, with an easy rhythmic

pattern of text that creates a sing-song effect to the book. This book shows vivid, detailed illustrations of a large African-American family; Auntie Bibba, Uncle Didi, Nannie, Gran-Gran, Cousin Kay-Kay, Big Cousin Ross, and finally Daddy all come home to see the baby and play. An excellent and honest portrayal of the everyday situations that are common among African-American culture, this book offers multiple variations on African-American characters for a diverse reading audience to relate to.

Dillion, L. & Dillion, D. (2002). *Rap a tap tap: Here's Bojangles-Think of that!* New York, NY: The Blue Sky Press. Hardcover: \$15.34. ISBN 978-0-590-47883-0.

Award(s): 2003 ALA Notable Children's Book, 2003 Coretta Scott King Illustrator Honor

A simple rhyming technique brings a musical feel to this book about a musical African-American tap dancer, probably the best tap dancer of all time. The rhythm of the book has the reader singing along with the words, rather than reading, about Bojangles as he taps his way through the city, passing open and closed doors, people of all kinds, even going through the "skids." The book is reflective of the time in which Bojangles lived, showing him dancing past African-Americans in the street and in the skids, but in the theatre when he becomes famous, the audience is predominantly white. This book is an excellent introduction in to an African-American legend, Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, and the authors include an afterword with more facts on Bojangles' life to add to the knowledge of the readers after catching their attention with the rhythmic story.

DiPucchio, K. (2008). *Grace for president*. New York, NY: Hyperion Books for Children.

Hardcover: \$14.49. ISBN 978-1-42313-999-7.

Award(s): none.

This book has made the list because it features a prominent main character that is African-American. Young African-American children need to see examples of themselves in the literature they read, and *Grace* is an example of a young black girl who runs for class president. Mrs. Barrington shows her class a poster with all the presidents' pictures, and Grace cannot believe that they are all men. After contemplating the situation, Grace decides that she will be president. Mrs. Barrington holds an election between their candidate, Grace, and Mrs. Waller's class candidate, Thomas Cobb. In true American style, the classes use the Electoral College system of voting, and each child gets to be a state. After a close class election, Grace is elected class president. This book offers African American children a chance to see themselves not only reflected in children's literature but also as successful participants in their classrooms.

Falwell, C. (2001). *David's drawings*. New York, NY: Lee & Low Books, Inc. Hardcover:

\$17.95. ISBN 978-1-58430-031-1.

Award(s): none.

This book is included in this bibliography because it features a main African-American character in a normal situation. African-American children will be able to see themselves reflected in this book. David, a young African-American boy, is on his way to school when he notices a beautiful tree. As soon as he gets to school, David gets out paper and pencil to draw his tree. His classmates like his tree, but each offers something to add to the tree. David lets all of his classmates add on to his tree. He titles the drawing,

“Our Class Picture,” and hangs it on the bulletin board. On his way home from school, David sees another beautiful tree. David finds paper and pencil when he gets home and starts to draw his tree again. The diverse friendships David forms in his classroom will help African-American readers and non-African-American readers see diversity as something to welcome and not fear.

Flourney, V. (1985). *The patchwork quilt*. New York, NY: Dial Books for Young Readers.

Hardcover: \$15.34. ISBN 978-0-8037-0097-0.

Award(s): 1995 ALA Notable Children’s Books, 1986 Coretta Scott King Illustrator Award.

This book beautifully illustrates a multi-generational African-American family through both picture and text. The main character is a young African-American girl, Tanya, who is forced to stay inside and rest due to a cold. Tanya spends time talking with her grandmother, who is sewing a patchwork quilt. The grandmother tells Tanya how special a patchwork quilt is, even though Tanya’s own mother just doesn't seem to understand. Tanya helps her grandmother with the quilt, and her grandmother collects bits of cloth from their favorite clothes, their Halloween costumes, and even Tanya’s mother’s homemade gold dress. One day when the whole family is outside playing, Tanya’s mother expresses that Grandmother is probably lonely, and Tanya informs her that the quilt is keeping her company. Intrigued by the power of this quilt, Mama starts to hang out with Grandma and hears the stories of patchwork quilts and begins to see why this one is so special. This book is included in this bibliography because it provides a meaningful depiction of a strong African-American custom, the patchwork quilt. In addition, African-American readers will see themselves reflected upon the pages of this

beautifully illustrated picture book.

Greenfield, E. (1977). *African dream*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Children's Books.

Hardcover not available, Paperback: \$6.99. ISBN 978-0-06-443277-1.

Award(s): 1978 Coretta Scott King Award (Author and Illustrator Award)

A young African-American girl travels to Africa in a dream one night and experiences the long-ago Africa. She is able to see wild animals, travel to the city marketplace, see old books, and appreciate the extravagant buildings of long-ago Africa. In her dream, she visits with her ancestors, her long-ago granddaddy and her long-ago grandma. She dances and sings and meets new-old friends. Written in a rhythmic style that will attract readers of all ages and ethnicities, this story imparts the cultural experiences of long-ago Africa.

Harris, T. (2011). *Summer Jackson grown up*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers.

Hardcover: \$14.49. ISBN 978-0-06-185757-7.

Award(s): none.

Summer Jackson is the star of this children's picture book. She is a 7-year-old African-American child. Summer is tired of being seven. She wants to be grown up; she doesn't find hand puppets funny anymore, and eight o'clock is too early for bed. Summer's parents tell her she can be anything she wants to be when she grows up: a truck driver, a lawyer, or a circus juggler. But all Summer wants is to be grown up. Summer wants to wear heels, a blazer, and sunglasses everywhere - even the bath! Summer acts grown-up at school eating with a knife and fork and making a to-do list. However, when Summer starts charging her classmates for her services as a consultant the Principal calls home. Summer Jackson's parents decide that if she wants to act like

the grown-up then they will act like the children. Summer Jackson soon realizes that maybe being a kid isn't all that bad. This book provides African-American readers a chance to see themselves reflected in the stories they read. This book also allows non-African-American readers to view an African-American protagonist in a normal childhood context helping to embrace diversity.

Keats, E.J. (1962). *The snowy day*. New York, NY: Viking Penguin, Inc. Hardcover: \$17.04.
ISBN: 978-0-670-01270-1.

Award(s): 1963 Caldecott Medal

This book features a main African-American character at the center of a normal narrative. It provides African-American readers to see themselves reflected in the illustrations and allow positive self-worth to develop. By providing a classic portrayal of a young African-American boy having fun on a snowy day, Keats also provides a nonthreatening depiction of African-Americans for white readers to form positive cultural assumptions. The book beautifully illustrates a young African-American boy, Peter, waking up to see snow outside his window. He hurries up after breakfast to put on a red snowsuit and run outside to play. He walked with his feet pointing out and saw the funny pattern, so he pointed his feet in, and then he dragged his feet along. Peter made a snowman and snow angels. He had so many wonderful, snowy adventures that when he went inside he told his mother all about them. He thought about all the snow before he went to bed, but dreamed that the sun had melted all the snow.

Lester, J. (1994). *John Henry*. New York, NY: Puffin Books. Hardcover: \$16.19. ISBN 978-0-8037-1606-3.

Award(s): 1995 Caldecott Honor Award, 1995 ALA Notable Children's Books.

This story retells the tall-tale of African-American legend, John Henry. Portrayed in handsome detail from his first illustration, John Henry is an excellent visual for young African-American children. The detailed illustrations in this book provide African-American readers a vivid introduction to African-American folklore. Soon after he was born, John Henry jumped right out of his mom's arms and grew to be big and tall, very, very big and tall. He was so good and so fast at everything he did, from chopping wood and building on to his house to using his sledgehammer to demolition rocks. John Henry helped a group of tired workers build a railroad and to drill a tunnel through the biggest boulders. John Henry enters into and wins a race against a steam drill in a battle of will power versus machine. Shortly after winning, John Henry dies, but his lesson remains. It is not about how or when you die, but how you chose to live your life while you still can. This book not only serves as an introduction to African-American folklore, but John Henry serves as a role model to African-American children to live their lives to the fullest.

Lyons, K.S. (2012). *Ellen's broom*. New York, NY: G.P. Putnam's Sons. Hardcover: \$14.49. ISBN 978-0-399-25003-3.

Award(s): 2013 Coretta Scott King Illustrator Honors (Daniel Minter, Illustrator).

This colorfully illustrated children's picture book shows the history behind the African-American tradition of broom jumping at weddings, a practice still common today. Ellen is the daughter of an African-American couple freed from the days of

slavery. Deacon announced that all former slaves who lived as husband and wife were able to now register with the law and be recognized. Ellen's mother and father were excited. They recounted the story of the broom as a symbol for slave weddings, called "broom weddings," where the couple would join hands and jump over the broom together and into life. Now that their marriage could be recognized by the law, Ellen's mother and father took their whole family on a journey to the courthouse. Ellen brought the broom with her and decorated it with flowers for her mother to hold. After their marriage was legally recognized, Ellen still wanted to see her parents jump the broom, and carry on the traditions of the past.

Pilkey, D. (1996). *The paperboy*. New York, NY: Orchard books. Hardcover: \$15.45. ISBN: 978-0756979102.

Award(s): 1997 ALA Notable Children's Book, 1997 Caldecott Honor Book

This book features a prominent African-American character in a normal, everyday situation. The detailed illustrations reflect the image of an African-American boy that readers will connect with. Providing African-American protagonists, such as this, help African-American children develop a positive self-image and help non-African-Americans see diversity as less threatening. The mornings of the paperboy are cold, and it is hard for him to get out of bed while everyone is still sleeping. But, the paperboy must wake up, and tip-toe past sleeping sisters to get to his breakfast in the kitchen. The paperboy knows his route by heart and doesn't even have to think about what house to pedal to; he just does. This lets him think about other things or nothing at all. After the last paper is delivered, the paperboy heads home while the world begins to wake up.

Ringgold, F. (1991). *Tar beach*. New York, NY: Crown Publishers, Inc. Hardcover: \$15.35.
ISBN 978-0-517-58030-1.

Award(s): 1992 Caldecott Honor, 1992 Coretta Scott King Illustrator Award.

The book is set in 1939 in New York. The pictures draw the attention of young African-American children who recognize themselves or their culture portrayed through the carefully crafted artwork. This book received a Caldecott honor and a Coretta Scott King Illustrator award for its vivid portrayal of the characters and the culture. A young African-American girl, Cassie Louise Lightfoot, dreams of flying over New York City, above the George Washington Bridge, and soaring through the sky. Cassie is 8 years old and in the third grade, and she is able to fly. Cassie imagines that all she has to do is fly over something and claim it for it to be hers. She flies over the George Washington Bridge, which her father helped build by hoisting cables, and claims it for him. Cassie wants to fly over all the buildings for her father and for her mother, and for her family.

Step toe, J. (1987). *Mufaro's beautiful daughters: An African tale*. New York, NY: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Books. Hardcover: \$15.34. ISBN 978-0-688-04045-1.

Award(s): 1995 ALA Notable Children's Book, 1988 Caldecott Honor Award, 1988 Coretta Scott King Illustrator Award

This is a beautifully illustrated picture book portraying an African inspired fairytale of Mufaro's daughters. The pictures in this story will captivate any reader; they are simply breathtaking. *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters* introduces children to an African tale which reflects a cultural variation to the classic Cinderella fairytale. Mufaro had two beautiful daughters, Nyasha who was kind and sweet and Manyara who was always in a bad temper. Manyara was rarely kind to Nyasha, but Nyasha did not complain and

continued to sow her garden and be kind to everyone. When an announcement comes that the King is looking for a wife, Mufaro tells his beautiful girls to prepare for a trip to the city. However, in the middle of the night Manyara sneaks out in an effort to beat Nyasha to the city and introduce herself to the King first. Nyasha heads for the city in the morning as planned and goes to meet the King, too. Manyara and Nyasha are both beautiful, but the King must pick only one wife. The King chooses Nyasha because she was so kind and patient. In addition to introducing African-American children to an African fairy tale, this book also teaches children of all colors the importance of kindness.

Tate, D. (2012). *It jes' happened*. New York, NY: Lee & Low Books, Inc. Hardcover: \$17.95. ISBN 978-1-60060-260-3.

Award(s): Ezra Jack Book Award Honor, Lee & Low New Voices Award Honor

This book is a great historical representation of growing up a slave on an Alabama cotton field. African-American readers will gain accurate knowledge of the cultural challenges faced in the South before and after the Civil War. In addition, it introduces African-American children to a lesser known black artist and serves as inspiration to children from all life situations. Set in Alabama in 1939, the main character Bill Traylor is 85 years old. The book goes back in time to look at Bill Traylor's life as baby born on a slave plantation, growing up playing in the Alabama River with other African-American children, and eventually his life as a sharecropper after emancipation. Bill started a family and his whole family, children and all, worked the land for food to eat. On Saturday nights, everyone would gather for festivities of music and singing, and all the children would run around playing. On Sunday morning, people would gather along the river for church services. By 1935, Bill's family had all moved and his wife has died,

so he moved to Montgomery, Alabama. After he was unable to make a living, he became homeless and wandered through downtown looking at the exciting places and bustling people, but at night when he slept on sidewalks or in alleyways. He began drawing and painting his experiences from his memories and became a popular artist. This is a true story of triumph that will inspire African-American children beyond the classroom.

Weatherford, C.B. (2006). *Moses: When Harriet Tubman led her people to freedom*. New York, NY: Hyperion Books for Children. Hardcover: \$13.64. ISBN 978-0-7868-5175-1.

Award(s): 2007 Caldecott Honor Book, 2007 Coretta Scott King Illustrator Award (Kadir Nelson, Illustrator).

Included in this book is a forward which describes the practice of slavery in a brief, yet thorough description to help provide the necessary background knowledge for the story of Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad. The book is expertly illustrated to portray Harriet Tubman in detail and the rigorous path that she took to the north. Harriet Tubman is led by the voice of God on her journey north and the book has an expressively religious theme; however, this is an accurate portrayal of Harriet Tubman's religiousness and the reliance on God by self-emancipated slaves to guide their journey. The title even likens Harriet Tubman to the religious figure, Moses, introducing the religious theme from the beginning. The book introduces the smallest details from the treacherous journey north, from relying on the North Star for directions, singing Negro spiritual hymns to announce your escape without letting the masters hear, to the reliance on friendly, white strangers to hide. The book is written with three distinct and distinguishable voices: the narrator, Harriet, and God. Unsure of whether she will make it to the north or ever see her family again, Harriet must continue on with the strength of

God alone.

Williams, S. (1992). *Working cotton*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers.

Hardcover: \$11.61. ISBN 978-0-7587-0168-8.

Award(s): 1993 Caldecott Honor Award, 1993 Coretta Scott King Illustrator Honor, 1995 ALA Notable Children's Books.

Working Cotton is the expressively simplistic, yet vivid description of an African-American family of migrant farm laborers picking cotton. It introduces children to concepts of migrant labor, cotton-picking, and has historical relevance. The daily life of migrant farm laborers is told from the point of view of a young African-American girl, Shelan. It is written in a southern diction that African-American children might recognize as being familiar in southern homes. The young girl discusses how she helps her parents pick cotton from sun-up to sundown. The children help collect piles of cotton for the adults to pick up and add to their sacks. When the sacks are full, they are weighed. When it's too dark to continue, all the workers are picked up by bus to go home.

Wyeth, S. (1998). *Something beautiful*. New York, NY: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc. Hardcover not available, Paperback: \$7.99. ISBN: 978-0-440-41210-6.

Award(s): none.

An artistic and realistic expression of art and narrative are mixed together to tell the story of a young African-American girl who lives in a city in an area filled with graffiti, homeless people, and trash. The young girl's mother said that everyone should have something beautiful in their life, but she just can't find her 'something beautiful.' After learning the word 'beautiful' in school, she goes in search of something that when you have it, your heart is happy. Miss Delphine at the diner gives her a fried fish

sandwich as something beautiful. The other children on the street say they have a jump rope or new shoes that are beautiful. Mr. Lee from the market says his fruit store is one beautiful store. From basketball moves, to dancing in the street, to Mr. Sims' smooth stone, everyone seems to have something beautiful, but her. She finally finds her own something beautiful by cleaning up around her home and appreciating the people in her life. African-American children will see themselves among the pages of this book. In addition, this book shows the little girl finding beauty in a place that is faced with real-life challenges, such as homelessness, poverty, and crime. She addresses an idea of beauty from a perspective different than middle or higher socioeconomic statuses and relates to readers from similar urban neighborhoods. It is a truly beautiful and inspiring story that will resonate with African-American readers.