
“African American Literature: Books to Stoke Dreams”

By Jane M. Gangi and Aimee Ferguson

The tragedy of life doesn't lie in not reaching your goal. The tragedy lies in having no goal to reach. It isn't a calamity to die with dreams unfilled, but it is a calamity not to dream. It is not disgrace to reach the stars, but it is a disgrace to have no stars to reach for.

—Benjamin Mays

Times have never been better for the quality and abundance of newly-published multicultural literature. Unfortunately, times have never been worse for getting that literature into the hands of children. In addition to market forces, unconsciously damaging trends in many textbooks for teacher education have resulted in classroom trade book collections that represent children who are primarily white and middle class. While all children—whether from Argentina, Afghanistan, or Algeria—deserve to see themselves and their families in books, the focus of this article is on new publications that depict African Americans.

The Bad News

There are hindrances in making multicultural literature available to students. School book fairs and book order forms limit children's choices. While Scholastic, which has a near monopoly on book fairs, does publish some high quality multicultural literature, those books do not always find their way into the hands of children. McNair (2005) looked at Scholastic book order forms for a period of six months (September 2004 through February 2005) and determined that, “approximately 1,200 books were made available for purchase during this six month period and yet only two books written by Latin Americans were available for purchase. Likewise, there was only one book written by an Asian American and no books by Native Americans. Books written by African Americans were included more frequently than books about other racial groups, but the numbers were still small” (p. 8). Particularly disturbing is that McNair

looked at the *Firefly* and *Seesaw* books—aimed at the youngest children, preschool through first grade. At the moment in their lives when they can be most engaged in learning, children of color often find themselves left out and irrelevant.

Similarly, Scroggins and Gangi (2004) looked at recently published children's literature textbooks (books used in teacher education programs), where multicultural literature is often excluded or marginalized. One example is a chart of a number touchstone books from 500 years of children's literature, in which there are *two* authors of color. This is not because authors of color are not plentiful—they are (see Appendix D in Gangi 2004 for a listing of authors and illustrators of color). In another children's literature textbook there is a list of books on American Indians, yet none by an American Indian author. In addition, literacy textbooks most often default to whiteness (Gangi 2005). I invite readers to examine the most popular professional books on word study, vocabulary, guided reading and leveled books, writing process, writer's craft, and the proficient reader research and ask themselves these questions: Where are authors and illustrators of color in these books? Where are *authentic* multicultural books used to demonstrate strategies and craft? I italicize “authentic” because, too often, inauthentic books like *Knots on a Counting Rope*—a book by white authors that purports to be about American Indians—are featured as model texts for teachers to use (see Oyate 2006 for a list of “Books to Avoid”). Even in literacy textbooks published during the early years of the twenty-first century, it is not uncommon to find long

lists of children's literature which contain only a few, or no, authors and illustrators of color.

The proficient reader research has taught us that, to develop comprehension, children must be able to activate their prior knowledge. When trade book collections are primarily white collections, white children are distinctly advantaged. They have opportunities to make connections between the known and the unknown far more often than children of color, who are left behind because they do not have the privilege or educational right of seeing people who look like themselves in books nearly as often. In a scientific study that should satisfy the guidelines of Reading First, Bell and Clark (1998) established that culturally relevant reading material enhanced the reading comprehension of African American children. For children of color to grow as readers at the same pace as white children, they *must* have books that enable them to make text-to-self and text-to-world connections as frequently as white children.

In the spring of 2006, after discussion of these issues in our Emergent Literacy class at Manhattanville College, Aimee Ferguson decided to examine the classroom collection where she was student teaching in a diverse northeastern city of about 50,000 people. In a response paper she wrote, "I was shocked that most of the books featured white families. The only books that had black people in them were books about Rosa Parks and Dr. Martin Luther King."

I asked Aimee if she would be willing to share with children recent books by and about African Americans, and she was more than willing. She made two visits with two very different populations.

Aimee's Report from the Field

Both of my visits were with children who live in the same city where I did my student teaching. My first visit was with four African American boys in an elementary program called "Passages". The teacher referred to the boys in this program as "emotionally disturbed." I read aloud *Visiting Langston* by Willie Perdomo, illustrated by Bryan Collier, and *Max Found Two Sticks*, written and illustrated by Brian Pinkney. I was surprised that they were

engaged and well-behaved throughout; the teacher had warned me that, because of their short attention spans, I would only be able to read one book. On the contrary, they wanted more books read to them. I was really surprised by how excited they were to hear the books and how much discussion there was.

After I read *Visiting Langston* (Perdomo 2002), one student noted that he liked the book because it brought up things such as Harlem and hip-hop—things that he enjoys.

The other students agreed they could connect with it. They really liked the artwork. The artwork was amazing and they were even more amazed with the collage technique used. I then read *Max Found Two Sticks* (Pinkney 1994). They discussed how they could relate to Max. Two students noted that they sometimes use certain objects to make music, such as sticks.

They asked me to come back. The teacher pulled me aside and thanked me for doing this. She even said that Scholastic has a limited number of multicultural books. She was upset with this because all of her students are African American boys. She said that maybe if there were more books that she could access with African American representation it would

be better for her classroom. She wants to include these books and the books that I showed her from Dr. Gangi's collection to her classroom library.

On my second visit, I went to a homeless shelter in the same northeastern city. I was invited to read to twelve children, ages nine to seventeen. This was too broad an age range, but I had no choice. The audience did not react to *Visiting Langston*, although, when I asked if they liked the illustrations, they said that they did. With the second reading they responded more. I read poems from *In Daddy's Arms I Am Tall*, collected and illustrated by Javaka Steptoe. After I had read five poems I asked each of them to volunteer to read a poem. I noticed that they were more interested in this book than in the first book that I read to them and had more to say.

After the reading the children seemingly could not wait to get out of the room. The majority of the children, especially the boys, acted as though they thought that the entire experience was funny. All of the students had a hard time expressing themselves and connecting with the two texts I read to them. The sad reality of my second visit



was that these children were not readers. Then I asked them, "What types of books do you like to read?" The majority of children said things relating to their lives, such as football and basketball. All of the children who read the poems aloud struggled with reading.

Because of my visit the people at this center seemed to become more aware of the issue, and want to begin a summer reading program. They explained that they hoped that the room where I read to them (which contains only couches) will one day be a library with books and comfortable seating.

The Plight of African American Boys

We cannot continue to ignore the serious risk a young African American boy faces simply by being born black and male. The most recent statistics (Edelman 2006) show that the chances are one in three that a black boy will spend time in prison. While educators alone cannot ameliorate contributing factors such as a lack of health care, unemployment, underemployment, and low wages, they *can* ensure that black boys see themselves in books, and introduce them to "mentors on paper" (Thompson 1996). Black boys, perhaps more than any other group of children, need access to what Rudine Sims Bishop calls "mirror" books. Their growth as readers depends on their ability to make connections with what they read. Currently, children of color have far too many "window" books into an all-white world, and far too few books that mirror who they are. Conversely, white children have far too many mirror books, and not nearly enough window books into worlds beyond their own. That fifty percent of black boys drop out of high school in urban areas (Eckholm 2006) is a tragedy. Surely the highly Eurocentric, classroom book collections, which children experience from their first day of school to their last, contribute to that statistic.

Towards a Gregarious Literacy

Boys also need active, interactive, and gregarious ways to share these books. Newkirk (2002) has described the problems with an "ungregarious" literacy. Gurion and Stevens (2005) report troubling trends concerning boys in schools: They make up 80 percent of discipline problems, 70 percent of identified learning disabilities, 80 percent of behavioral disorders, 80 percent of high school dropouts, and 80 percent of children on Ritalin (p. 22). Among other suggestions to teachers for helping boys, Gurion and Stevens recommend using music to help them retain knowledge, the visual arts for expression, brainstorming, and kinesthetic learning. They suggested that:

The physical body is not separate from the brain. The physical body can be a strength center for boys, and in

fact for any child's brain. The male brain has more spinal fluid in the brain stem than does the female. This is one of the reasons boys are 'so physical.' (p. 150)

Independent reading is often a centerpiece of the Reading Workshop, yet to ask boys to sit quietly and alone to read a book independently may not be in the realm of possibility. Literature can be encountered in ways that promote joy, including pantomime, choral readings, readers' theater, mask-making, puppetry, storytelling, and improvisation (Gangi 2004, Rasinski, 2003). In addition to being kinesthetic and visual, these arts approaches also tap into the social aspects

of literacy. Heath (1983) found in her now classic work, *Ways with Words*, that literacy is more socially experienced in African American communities than in white communities.

White audiences have seen captured on film and tele-

vision the joy and verve of African American churches; imagine the child who has had such adventures in Bible-reading and hymn-singing (literate experiences) showing up at school only to be asked to sit quietly and alone either with paper-and-pencil tasks or independent reading. Simply put, the literate experiences they are offered in school are too boring and too isolated in comparison to what they have experienced in their communities. Heath (2004) determined that, "Those within literacy research will best serve the interests and integrity and the future of learning if they attend to those points where the arts and literacy meet. Those points are abundant: drawing in collaboration with writing, creative writing for production or complement to the visual arts, and dramatic renderings of children's literature and young adult publications." Heath's research, which consistently affirms the role of the arts in literacy achievement, should also satisfy the demands of Reading First.

**James Ransome, Bryan Collier,
Javaka Steptoe, R. Gregory Christie,
E.B. Lewis, Jerry Pinkney, and Brian
Pinkney**

Some of the most exciting visual art in the world is being created in contemporary children's picture books because of these brilliant African American men: Ransome, Collier, Steptoe, Christie, Lewis, the Pinkneys (and others). I've met most of them, and they are not only superb artists, they are inspiring human beings as well, with

Simply put, the literate experiences they are offered in school are too boring and too isolated in comparison to what they have experienced in their communities.

powerful, positive messages for children. For example, Collier (2006) thinks of collage art as a metaphor for life. Using his own work, Collier shows the back of collage art; it seems like random pieces that don't fit together. Turning it over, you see the pieces fit into an artistic whole. Collier urges his audiences to "hang on to the pieces of their lives," that eventually the pieces will come together, citing his childhood experiences growing up in Pocomoke, Maryland. His seven years of rejection slips before any success also point to persistence, a necessary trait for achievement. Visit Collier's and other artist's web sites; invite them into your classrooms in person or virtually (see webliography and bibliographies at the end of this article).

An enormous opportunity exists to build pride and hope in black children in books by black artists. Jacqueline Irvine (2004) tells this story:

Several years ago, I was sitting on the steps of my church, located in a poor Atlanta neighborhood, waiting for the locksmith to open my car, when an inquisitive little boy spotted me and jumped on his bike to get a closer look. After he was persuaded that he did not have to break into my car to retrieve my keys, I asked my newly made friend, Darius, to sit down to talk. I asked him the usual boring questions that adults ask children: What's your name? How old are you? Where do you go to school? What's your teacher's name? And finally, I asked, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" After responding quickly to the other questions, he stalled on the last, and then said, "I don't wanna be nothing." "Oh, come on," I coaxed. "There are so many wonderful and exciting things to dream about being: a teacher, an astronaut, a businessman, a mechanic, a policeman. Just close your eyes and let me know what you see yourself doing when you get to be all grown up." Darius hesitantly followed my directions. He closed his eyes, folded his arms over his chest, and lifted his head toward the sky, as if he needed divine inspiration for such a difficult task. After 15 seconds of what appeared to be a very painful exercise, I interrupted Darius's concentration. "What do you see?" I asked impatiently. "Tell me about your dreams." The young man mumbled, "Lady, I don't see nothing and I don't have no dreams." Stunned by his remark, I sat speechless as Darius jumped on his bike and rode away.

Darius, this bright, energetic, handsome young man, is not likely to end up in a college or university. In fact, statistical data predict that Darius has a better chance ending up in a state prison. (120-121)

To Teach Darius to Dream:

- to be an astronaut, share *Black Stars in Orbit: NASA's African American Astronauts* (Burns and Miles 1995)
- to be a businessman, share *Uncle Jed's Barber Shop* (Mitchell 1993, illustrated by James Ransome)
- to be a dancer, share *Savion: My Life in Tap* (Glover and Weber 2000)
- to be an activist, share *Rosa* (Giovanni 2005, illustrated by Bryan Collier)
- to be a singer, share *A Band of Angels: A Story Inspired by the Jubilee Singers* (Hopkinson 1999, illustrated by Raúl Cólón)
- to be a jazz player, share *Duke Ellington* (Pinkney 1998, illustrated by Brian Pinkney)
- to be a minister and leader, share *Martin's Big Words* (Rappaport 2001, illustrated by Bryan Collier)
- to be a chef, share *George Crum and the Saratoga Chip* (Taylor 2006, illustrated by Frank Morrison). Crum also shared American Indian roots.
- to be a mathematician or astronomer, share *Benjamin Banneker: Mathematician and Stargazer* (Blue and Nadeen 2001)
- to be a historian, share *Carter G. Woodson: The Man Who Put "Black" in American History* (Haskins 2000)
- to become compassionate, share *Brothers in Hope: The Story of the Lost Boys of Sudan* (Williams, 2005, illustrated by R. Gregory Christie)
- to experience courage and beauty in the life of African Americans in Nashville in the 1950s share *Goin' Someplace Special* (McKissack 2002, illustrated by Jerry Pinkney)
- to be writers, poets, playwrights, storytellers, and visual artists, share the wonderful multicultural books available, and show who is on the back flap of the book jacket so that black artists become mentors for children.

Elementary school teachers, in particular, have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to help young black students experience literacy in such ways that they can dream.

Create a Different Future

If we do not consciously diversify our classroom collections, historic injustices will continue unabated. White children will continue to be unfairly privileged, which

brings its own set of problems for white children, who can become narcissistic. Children of color will continue to be unfairly disadvantaged, the consequences for which, as prison rates rise, have never been more disturbing. Irvine, who notes the sad irony of the parallel between prison costs and college tuition, concluded that, "We will not and cannot achieve our vision of providing all children with an education and a future by ignoring children who have none. It is not enough to think of a child such as Darius as a research subject, a service project, or just another child who is doomed to fail. Somehow we should start to think of him and our future as inextricably linked. I am convinced, however, that eager, well-educated, committed teachers can and do make a difference." Teachers who are committed to learning all they can about multicultural literature and culturally and gender relevant pedagogy become agents of change.

Irvine is right; our futures are inextricably linked. Children need teachers who help them find stars to reach. Thankfully, there is a star-studded cast of books from which to choose.

References

- Bell, Y.R., & Clark, T. R. (1998). Culturally relevant reading material as related to comprehension and recall in African American children. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 24(4), 455-475.
- Bishop, R. S. (1990). Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. *Perspectives*, 6, ix-xi.
- Collier, B. (April, 2006). Saturday symposium. Presentation at the Rabbit Hill Festival of Literature, Westport, CT.
- Eckholm, E. (2006, March 20). Plight deepens for black men, studies warn. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/20national/20blackmnet.html>>.
- Edelman, M. (2006, May). Keynote address. Paper presented at the 51st Annual International Reading Association Convention, Chicago, IL.
- Gangi, J. M. (2004). *Encountering children's literature: An arts approach*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Gangi, J. M. (2005). Inclusive aesthetics: The vanguard of small, multicultural presses. *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 30 (3), 243-264.
- Gurion, M., & Stevens, K. (2005). *The minds of boys: Saving our sons from falling behind in school and life*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Heath, S. (2004). Learning language and strategic thinking through the arts. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 39 (3), 338-341.
- Heath, S. B. (1983). *Ways with words: Language, life, and work in communities and classrooms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Irvine, J. (2004). Teaching Darius to dream. In C. Glickman (Ed.) *Letters to the next president: What we can do about the real crisis in public education*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- McNair, J. (December, 2005). Innocent though they may seem ... A critical race theory analysis of Firefly and Seesaw Scholastic book club order forms. Paper presented at the meeting of the National Reading Conference, Miami, FL.
- Newkirk, T. (2002). Misreading violence. In *Misreading masculinity: Boys, literacy, and popular culture*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Oyate. (2006). Books to avoid. <<http://www.oyate.org/books-to-avoid/index.html>>. Retrired 24 May 2006.
- Rasinski, T. (2003) *The fluent reader*. New York: Scholastic.
- Scroggins, M. J. & Gangi, J. M. (2004). Paul Laurence who? Invisibility and misrepresentation in children's literature and reading and language arts textbooks. *MultiCultural Review*, 13.3: pp. 34-43.
- Thompson, M. C. (1996). Mentors on paper: How classics develop verbal ability. In J. Van Tassel-Baska, D. T. Johnson, & L. N. Boyce (Eds.), *Developing verbal talent: Ideas and strategies for teachers of elementary and middle school students*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Resources

- Available on Jane Gangi's web site:** <<http://faculty.mville.edu/gangij/bibliographies.htm>> *Comprehensive Children's Literature Bibliography*: compiled in consultation with over a dozen experts and a companion to the book *Encountering Children's Literature: An Arts Approach*
- Multicultural Children's Literature Bibliography*
- Resources for Children's Literature*: Links to awards and other resources are easily followed. Also, information on Oyate, which is the best source for American Indian criticism. For example,
- African Studies Association Children's Book Award: <<http://www.uflib.ufl.edu/cm/africana/award.htm>>
- American Library Association Coretta Scott King Award: <<http://www.ala.org/ala/srrt/corettascottking/corettascott.htm>>
- Children's Africana Book Award: <http://www.africanstudies.org/asa_childbook.html>

Resources for Reading and Language Arts

- Christie, R. Gregory. The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books: Rising Star. <<http://bccb.lis.uiuc.edu/0304focus.html>>
- Collier, Bryan. <<http://www.bryancoolier.com/>>
- Lewis, E. B. <<http://www.eblewis.com/>>
- Pinkney, Brian. <<http://www.loc.gov/bookfest/2002/bpinkney.html>>
- Pinkney, Jerry. <http://www.loc.gov/bookfest/pinkney_j.html>
- Ransome, James. <<http://www.jamesransome.com/>>
- Step toe, Javaka. <<http://www.javaka.com/>>

Small Publishers with a Multicultural Focus

- Children's Book Press – <<http://www.childrensbookpress.org/>>
Has teacher's guides and lesson plans related to standards. Readers theater scripts available.
- Cinco Puntos – <<http://www.cincopuntos.com/>> Has teacher resources with lesson plans.
- Groundwood Books – <<http://www.groundwoodbooks.com/>>
- Just Us Books – <<http://www.justusbooks.com/>>
- Lee and Low – <<http://www.leeandlow.com/home/index.html>>
Has a teacher resource center.
- Northland Press/Rising Moon – <<http://www.northlandpub.com/>>

Select Bibliography: Children's Literature That Picture Children of African Descent

Picture books and novels are annotated. Ways of teaching about the 'Writer's Craft' are presented throughout this article and are contained in parentheses. Not annotated are poetry, drama, folklore, informational books, and chapter-length biographies; the titles themselves often serve as annotations. Thanks to Mary Ellen Levin, who helped annotate the picture books.

Picture Books Biographies

- Cline-Ransome, Lesa. 2004. *Major Taylor, Champion Cyclist*. Illustrated by James Ransome. New York: Atheneum. Taylor won the 1899 World Championship title.
- Cline-Ransome, Lesa. 2000. *Satchel Paige*. Illustrated by James E. Ransome. New York: Simon & Schuster. Beautifully illustrated biography of the great baseball player.
- Giovanni, Nikki. 2005. *Rosa*. Illustrated by Bryan Collier. New York: Holt. This new picture book biography is a welcome addition to the Rosa Parks biographies. To create the illustrations, Collier traveled to Montgomery to speak with Rosa Parks's friends. (Writer's Craft: passage of time, varying sentence length, and allusion)
- Grimes, Nikki. 2002. *Talkin' about Bessie: The Story of Aviator Elizabeth Coleman*. Illustrated by E. B. Lewis. New York: Orchard. The story of the first African American woman aviator.
- Hopkinson, Deborah. 1999. *A Band of Angels: A Story Inspired by the Jubilee Singers*. Illustrated by Raúl Cólton. New York: Atheneum. In post-Civil War days a band of freed slaves, now music students, keep open their school (later Fisk University) by singing spirituals or "jubilee songs" in concert all over the world. (Writer's Craft: story within a story)
- Hubbard, Crystal. 2005. *Catching the Moon: The Story of a Young Girl's Baseball Dream*. Illustrated by Randy DuBurke. New York: Lee & Low. A biography of the legendary Marcenia Lyle, who overcame the obstacles of race and gender to pursue her dream of becoming a baseball player.

(Writer's Craft: sensory images, and when one sentence paragraphs are effective)

- Myers, Walter Dean. 2000. *Malcolm X: A Fire Burning Brightly*. Illustrated by Leonard Jenkins. New York: HarperCollins. The Black Muslim leader who began efforts towards unification toward the end of his life.
- Pinkney, Andrea Davis. 1998. *Duke Ellington: The Piano Prince and His Orchestra*. Illustrated by Brian Pinkney. New York: Hyperion. The Harlem Renaissance musician.
- Pinkney, Andrea Davis with Scat Cat Monroe. 2002. *Ella Fitzgerald: The Tale of a Vocal Virtuoso*. Illustrated by Brian Pinkney. New York: Hyperion.
- Rappaport, Doreen. 2001. *Martin's Big Words: The Life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* Illustrated by Bryan Collier. New York: Hyperion. This book put Collier's amazing collage work in the national spotlight.
- Raschka, Chris. 1992. *Charlie Parker Played Be Bop*. New York: Orchard. The talented bebop saxophonist is portrayed in a playful and inventive manner.
- Rockwell, Anne. 2000. *Only Passing Through: The Story of Sojourner Truth*. Illustrated by R. Gregory Christie. New York: Knopf. Christie's brilliant expressionistic art conveys the life of the abolitionist.
- Ryan, Pam Muñoz. 2002. *When Marian Sang: The True Recital of Marian Anderson*. Illustrated by Brian Selznick. New York: Scholastic. The inspiring story of a singer who, though hurt by racism, did not let injustice keep her from doing what she was born to do. Denied performing in Constitution Hall because of the color of her skin, she sang instead in front of the Lincoln Memorial to a crowd of over 75,000.
- Taylor, Gaylia. 2006. *George Crum and the Saratoga Chip*. Illustrated by Frank Morrison. New York: Lee & Low. The story of inventor of the potato chip is told in an inventive and playful manner. (Writer's Craft: irony and characterization)

Contemporary Realism

- Gunning, Monica. 2004. *A Shelter in Our Car*. Illustrated by Elaine Pedlar. San Francisco: Children's Book Press. Expressionistic art combines seamlessly with a moving narrative of a homeless Jamaican mother and her daughter. (Writer's Craft: writing in the present tense. Also, Manhattanville student Emily Traycheff has written a lesson plan on Nettie's varied emotions, helping children make text-to-self connections; contact <gangij@mville.edu> if you would like a copy of this lesson plan)
- Collier, Bryan. 2000. *Uptown*. New York: Holt. Collier is a wonderful collage artist; this book that captures the sensory images of Harlem, is a breakthrough book.
- Holman, Sandy. 1998/2000. *Grandpa, Is Everything Black Bad?* Illustrated by Lela Komeiani. Davis, CA: Culture Co-op. A grandfather teaches his grandson the amazing beauty and strength of African culture.

Pinkney, Brian. 1994. *Max Found Two Sticks*. New York: Simon & Schuster. A young boy creatively makes music with items in his neighborhood for the people in his neighborhood.

Raschka, Chris. 1993. *Yo! Yes!* New York: Orchard. A biracial friendship develops between two boys. (Writer's Craft: punctuation)

Stuve-Bodeen, Stephanie. 2002. *Elizabeth's School*. Illustrated by Christy Kale. New York: Lee and Low. A Tanzanian girl's first day of school.

Williams, Mary. 2005. *Brothers in Hope: The Story of the Lost Boys of Sudan*. Illustrated by R. Gregory Christie. New York: Lee & Low. Written by the founder of The Lost Boys Foundation and based on a true account, this book tells of orphan refugee boys fleeing a homeland torn by civil war. The boys face illness and starvation as they travel, but remain loyal to one another and to their dream of a better life. In order to survive, they organized themselves into smaller groups with some of older boys "adopting" a younger child. Written by Mary Williams, founder. (Writing: metaphor, simile, and word pictures)

Woodson, Jacqueline. 2002. *Visiting Day*. Illustrated by James E. Ransome. New York: Scholastic. A surprisingly upbeat picture book account of a girl's visit to her incarcerated father. (Writer's Craft: sensory images)

---. 2005. *Coming on Home Soon*. Illustrated by E. B. Lewis. New York: Scholastic.

Youme, 2004. *Sélavi: A Haitian Story of Hope*. El Paso, TX: Cinco Puntos. Homeless children create "family" through cooperative efforts and a radio show.

Historical Fiction

Hopkinson, Deborah. 2001. *Under the Quilt of the Night*. Illustrated by James E. Ransome. New York: Atheneum. A follow-up book to the previous, successful *Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt*.

McKissack, Patricia. 2000. *Goin' Someplace Special*. Illustrated by Jerry Pinkney. New York: Atheneum. In Nashville, Tennessee in the 1950s, the library was one of the few public places African Americans were allowed. A young girl endures racism to go there.

Pace, Lorenzo. 2001. *Jalani and the Lock*. New York: PowerKids. Jalani is captured in Africa, enslaved in America, and loses everything except his memories and his hope. When free, he keeps the lock that had bound him, and passes it to his

children. This is a true story from the life of author/illustrator. (Writer's Craft: Story starters of family heirlooms, and symbolism)

Tingle, Tom. 2006. *Crossing Bok Chito: A Choctaw Tale of Friendship and Freedom*. Illustrated by Jeanne Rorex Bridges. El Paso, TX: Cinco Puntos. A Choctaw girl helps an enslaved African American boy and his family escape

to freedom by leading them on a path of stones just under the surface of a river that only the Choctaw know. (Writer's Craft: metaphor and simile)

Howard, Elizabeth Fitzgerald. 2000. *Virgie Goes to School with Us Boys*. Illustrated by E. B. Lewis. New York: Simon & Schuster. A young girl is determined to walk the seven miles to school with her brothers.

Johnson, Angela. 2005. *A Sweet Smell of Roses*. Illustrated by Eric Velasquez. New York: Simon & Schuster. This book beautifully depicts children's contributions to the Civil Rights movement.

Mitchell, Margaree King. 1993. *Uncle Jed's Barber Shop*. Illustrated by James Ransome. New York: Simon & Schuster. An uncle postpones opening his own business to help a beloved niece with her medical bills.

Taylor, Debbie A. 2004. *Sweet Music in Harlem*. Illustrated by Frank Morrison.

New York: Lee & Low. This book began with a photograph of great artists in Harlem.

Woodson, Jacqueline. 2001. *The Other Side*. Illustrated by E. B. Lewis. New York: Putnam. Despite warnings from both sides, a black girl and a white girl start a growing friendship.

---. 2005. *Show Way*. Illustrated by Hudson Talbott. New York: Putnam's. The family heirlooms are the quilts that served as maps for the Underground Railroad.

Poetry and Song

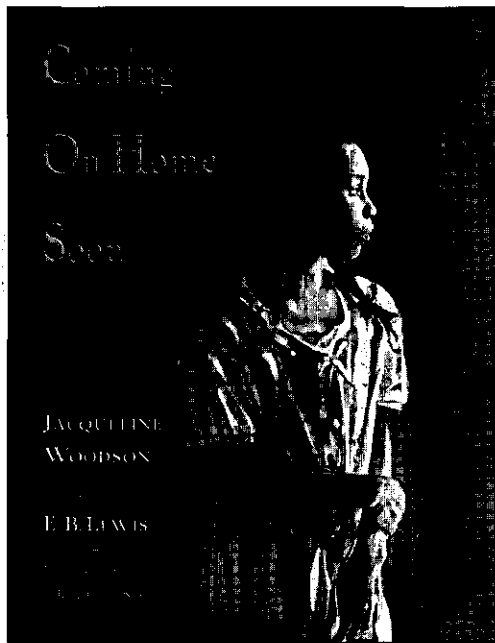
Dunbar, Paul. 1999. *Jump Back Honey: The Poems of Paul Laurence Dunbar*. Illustrated by Ashley Bryan, Carole Byard, Jan Spivey Gilchrist, Brian Pinkney, Jerry Pinkney, and Faith Ringgold. New York: Hyperion.

Grimes, Nikki. 2000. *Is It Far to Zanzibar?: Poems about Tanzania*. Illustrated by Betsy Lewin. New York: Lothrop.

---. 2001. *A Pocketful of Poems*. Illustrated by Javaka Steptoe. New York: Clarion.

Medina, Tony. 2002. *Love to Langston*. Illustrated by R. Gregory Christie. New York: Lee & Low.

McGill, Alice. 2000. *In the Hollow of Your Hand: Slave Lullabies*. Illustrated by Michael Cummings. Boston: Houghton. (CD included)



- Nikola-Lisa, W. 2002. *Summer Sun Risin'*. Illustrated by Don Tate. New York: Lee & Low.
- Perdomo, Willie. 2002. *Visiting Langston*. Illustrated by Bryan Collier. New York: Holt.
- Rochelle, Belinda, sel. 2001. *Words with Wings: A Treasury of African-American Poetry*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Smith, Charles R., Jr. 2002. *Perfect Harmony: A Musical Journey with the Boys Choir of Harlem*. New York: Hyperion.
- Sullivan, Charles. 1991. *Children of Promise: African-American Literature and Art for Young People*. New York: Abrams.
- Woodson, Jacqueline. 2003. *Locomotion*. New York: Putnam's.

Poetry By Children

- Adedjouma, Davida, Ed. 1996. *The Palm of My Heart: Poetry by African American Children*. Illustrated by Gregory Christie. New York: Lee & Low.

Screenplay/drama

- Bush, Max. 2001. *Ezigo the Spirit Child*. An Igbo Story as told by Adaora Nzelibe Schmiedel. Louisville, KY: Anchorage Press Plays.
- Jennings, Caleen Sinette. 2000. *Free Like Br'er Rabbit*. Woodstock, IL: Dramatic Publishing.
- Myers, Walter Dean. 1999. *Monster*. Illustrated by Christopher Myers. New York: HarperCollins.

Folklore

- Pinkney, Jerry. 2000. *Aesop's Fables*. New York: SeaStar.
- Bynum, Eboni and Roland Jackson. 2004. *Jamari's Drum*. Illustrated by Baba Wagué Diakité. Toronto: Groundwood.

Egypt

- Bower, Tamara. 2000. *The Shipwrecked Sailor: An Egyptian Tale with Hieroglyphs*. New York: Atheneum.

Liberia

- Paye, Won-Ldy, and Margaret H. Lippert. 2002. *Head, Body, Legs: A Story from Liberia*. New York: Holt.

Nigeria

- Olaleye, Isaac O. 2000. *In the Rainfield: Who Is the Greatest?* Illustrated by Ann Grifalconi. New York: Blue Sky.

Tanzania

- Mollel, Tololwa. 2000. *Subira, Subira*. Illustrated by Linda Saport. New York: Clarion.

North America

- Hooks, William H. 1996. *Freedom's Fruit*. Illustrated by James E. Ransome. New York: Knopf.
- San Souci, Robert. 2000. *The Secret of the Stones*. Illustrated by James E. Ransome. New York: Fogelman.

Informational Books

- Bolden, Toniya. 2001. *Tell All the Children Our Story: Memories and Mementoes of Being Young and Black in America*. New York: Abrams.
- Cooper, Michael L. 1997. *Hell Fighters: African American Soldiers in World War I*. New York: Lodestar.
- . 1998. *The Double V Campaign: African Americans and World War II*. New York: Lodestar.
- Hansen, Joyce, and Gary McGowan. 1998. *Breaking Ground, Breaking Silence: The Story of New York's African Burial Ground*. New York: Holt.
- . 2003. *Freedom Roads: Searching for the Underground Railroad*. Chicago: Cricket.
- Haskins, James, and Kathleen Benson. 2001. *Building a New Land: African Americans in Colonial America*. Illustrated by James E. Ransome. New York: HarperCollins.
- McKissack, Patricia, and Frederick McKissack, Jr. 1994. *Black Diamond: The Story of the Negro Baseball Leagues*. New York: Scholastic.
- . 1995. *Red-Tail Angels: The Story of the Tuskegee Airmen of World War II*. New York: Walker.
- Igus, Toyomi. 1998. *i see the rhythm*. Illustrated by Michele Wood. San Francisco: Children's Book Press.
- King, Casey and Linda Barrett Osborne. 1997. *Oh, Freedom! Kids Talk about the Civil Rights Movement with the People Who Made It Happen*. Illustrated with photographs. Portraits by Joe Brooks. New York: Knopf.
- Lawrence, Jacob. 1993. *The Great Migration: An American Story*. Illustrated by Jacob Lawrence. New York: HarperCollins/Museum of Modern Art/The Phillips Collection.
- Finlayson, Reggie. 2003. *We Shall Overcome: The History of the American Civil Rights Movement*. Minneapolis: Lerner.
- Levine, Ellen. 2000 [1993]. *Freedom's Children: Young Civil Rights Activists Tell Their Own Stories*. New York: Puffin.
- McKissack, Patricia C. and Frederick L. 2003. *Days of Jubilee: The End of Slavery in the United States*. New York: Scholastic.
- Myers, Walter Dean. 1998. *Amistad: A Long Road to Freedom*. New York: Dutton.
- . 1991. *Now Is Your Time! The African-American Struggle for Freedom*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Thomas, Velma Maia. 2001. *No Man Can Hinder Me: The Journey of Slavery to Emancipation through Song*. New York: Crown. (CD included)
- Wilson, Jackie Napoleon. 1999. *Hidden Witness: African-American Images from the Dawn of Photography to the Civil War*. New York: St. Martin's.

Biography and Autobiography

- Anderson, Joan. 2000. *Rookie: Tamika Whitmore's First Year in the WNBA*. Photographs by Michelle V. Agins. New York: Dutton.
- Blue, Rose, and Corinne J. Nadeen. 2001. *Benjamin Banneker: Mathematician and Stargazer*. Brookfield, CT: Millbrook.
- Bridges, Ruby. 1999. *Through My Eyes*. New York: Scholastic.
- Burns, Kephra. 2001. *Mansa Musa: The Lion of Mali*. Illustrated by Leo and Diane Dillon. San Diego: Harcourt.
- Burns, Khephra and William Miles. 1995. *Black Stars in Orbit: NASA's African American Astronauts*. San Diego: Harcourt.
- Coleman, Evelyn. 1998. *The Riches of Oseola McCarty*. Illustrated by Daniel Minter. Morton Grove, IL: Whitman.
- Diouf, Sylviane. 2000. *Kings and Queens of West Africa*. New York: Watts.
- Douglass, Frederick. 1994. *Escape from Slavery: The Boyhood of Frederick Douglass in His Own Words*. Edited and illustrated by Michael McCurdy. New York: Knopf.
- Fradin, Dennis Brindell. 2000. *Bound for the North Star: True Stories of Fugitive Slaves*. New York: Clarion.
- Fradin, Dennis Brindell, and Judith Bloom Fradin. 2003. *Fight On! Mary Church Terrell's Battle for Integration*. New York: Clarion.
- . 2000. *Ida B. Wells: Mother of the Civil Rights Movement*. New York: Clarion.
- Freedman, Russell. 2004. *The Voice that Challenged the Nation: Marian Anderson and the Struggle for Equal Rights*. New York: Clarion.
- Glover, Savion, and Bruce Weber. 2000. *Savion: My Life in Tap*. New York: Morrow. (Writer's Craft: varying sentence length, when one word sentence and sentence fragments are acceptable—see last paragraph)
- Govenar, Alan. 2001. *Osceola: Memories of a Sharecropper's Daughter*. Illustrated by Shane Evans. New York: Hyperion.
- Hansen, Joyce. 2004. *African Princess: The Amazing Lives of Africa's Royal Women*. New York: Jump at the Sun/Hyperion.
- . 1998. *Women of Hope: African Americans Who Made a Difference*. New York: Scholastic.
- Haskins, Jim. 2000. *Carter G. Woodson: The Man Who Put "Black" in American History*. Illustrated by Melanie Reim. Brookfield, CT: Millbrook.
- . 1992. *Thurgood Marshall: A Life for Justice*. New York: Holt.
- Hermence, Belinda. 1997. *Slavery Time: When I Was Chillun*. New York: Putnam's.
- Jemison, Mae. 2001. *Finding Where the Wind Goes: Moments from My Life*. New York: Scholastic.
- Lester, Julius. 2001. *The Blues Singers: Ten Who Rocked the World*. Illustrated by Lisa Cohen. New York: Hyperion.
- McKissack, Patricia, and Frederick McKissack. 1998. *Let My People Go: Bible Stories Told by a Freeman of Color to His Daughter, Charlotte, in Charleston, South Carolina, 1806-1816*. Illustrated by James E. Ransome. New York: Atheneum.
- Myers, Walter Dean. 2001. *Bad Boy: A Memoir*. New York: HarperCollins.
- . 2001. *The Greatest: Muhammad Ali*. New York: Scholastic.
- Pinkney, Andrea Davis. 2000. *Let It Shine! Stories of Black Women Freedom Fighters*. Illustrated by Stephen Alcorn. San Diego: Harcourt.
- Rappaport, Doreen. 2002. *No More!: Stories and Songs of Slave Resistance*. Illustrated by Shane W. Evans. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick.
- Robinson, Sharon. 2004. *Promises to Keep: How Jackie Robinson Changed America*. New York: Scholastic.
- Rochelle, Belinda. 1993. *Witnesses to Freedom: Young People Who Fought for Civil Rights*. New York: Lodestar.
- Walker, Alice. 2002 [1974]. *Langston Hughes: American Poet*. Illustrated by Catherine Deeter. New York: HarperCollins.
- Wilkinson, Brenda. 2000. *African American Women Writers*. New York: Wiley.
- Woodson, Jacqueline. 1996. *A Way Out of No Way: Writing about Growing Up Black in America*. New York: Holt.

Historical Fiction Novels and Novellas

(For text sets grouped around specific time periods, see the Comprehensive Children's Literature Bibliography at <<http://faculty.mville.edu/gangij/bibliographies.htm>>.)

- Curtis, Christopher Paul. 1999. *Bud, Not Buddy*. New York: Delacorte. A young boy sets out to find his father during the Depression.
- . 1995. *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963*. New York: Delacorte. Humorous and poignant, this book tells the story of a family that travels during the Civil Rights era from Michigan to the South, where children first encounter racism.
- Hansen, Joyce. 1994. *The Captive*. New York: Scholastic. Kofi, the son of an Ashanti chief who is killed, is sold and taken to Massachusetts.
- . 1999. *The Heart Calls Home*. New York: Walker. The third in the trilogy (*Out from This Place* and *Which Way Freedom?*) Obi and Easter struggle to make a new life together in post-Civil War South Carolina.

- . 1997. *I Thought My Soul Would Rise and Fly: The Diary of Patsy, a Freed Girl*. New York: Scholastic. This book depicts the life of a black girl during Reconstruction.
- . 1988. *Out from This Place*. New York: Walker. The sequel to *Which Way Freedom?*, which takes place during Reconstruction when those with whom Obi has formed family ties seek to be reunited.
- . 1986. *Which Way Freedom?* New York: Walker. Obi escapes to join the Union during the Civil War. Like many other enslaved Africans, he finds family with those he is not biologically related to.
- Lester, Julius. 2005. *Day of Tears: A Novel in Dialogue*. New York: Hyperion. White girls have come to depend on Emma since their own mother has left. Their father wants to sell off Emma.
- . 2005. *The Old African*. Illustrated by Jerry Pinkney. New York: Dial. This exquisitely illustrated book powerfully tells the story of the old African who used his gifts to lighten the sufferings of fellow enslaved people.
- McKissack, Patricia. 2005. *Abby Takes a Stand*. Illustrated by Gordon James. New York: Viking. A grandmother tells her grand children the story of being a child during the Civil Rights movement in Nashville, Tennessee.
- Pearsall, Shelley. 2002. *Trouble Don't Last*. New York: Random House. Samuel, with his "stand-in" father, attempt escape on the Underground Railroad to Canada.
- Robinet, Harriette Gillem. 2003. *Twelve Travelers, Twenty Horses*. New York: Atheneum. Jacob and his mother, both enslaved, become involved in a plot to stop the South from seceding from the Union.
- . 2000. *Walking to the Bus-Rider Blues*. New York: Atheneum. A grandmother and her two grandchildren, despite the difficulties, take part in the Montgomery boycott in 1956.
- Taylor, Mildred. 1995. *The Well: David's Story*. New York: Dial. This is a prequel to Taylor's *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, published in 1976 and winner of the Newbery medal.

Contemporary Realistic Novels and Novellas

(For books grouped around theme and topic, see the Comprehensive Children's Literature Bibliography at <<http://faculty.mville.edu/gangij/bibliographies.htm>>.)

- Draper, Sharon. 1994. *Ziggy and the Black Dinosaurs*. Orange, NJ: Just Us. (series) This is one of the few transitional series

by an African American author about African American children.

- Evans, Mari. 1999. *Dear Corinne, Tell Somebody Love, Annie: A Book about Secrets*. Orange, NJ: Just Us. This sensitively told story deals with abuse.
- Fenner, Carol. 1995. *Yolanda's Genius*. New York: Simon and Schuster. Yolanda's genius is that she sees the genius of her younger brother where others do not.
- Hansen, Joyce. 2001. *One True Friend*. New York: Clarion. Two friends, one orphaned and living in Syracuse, the other living in the Bronx, cement their friendship and help each other grow through letters.
- Myers, Walter Dean. 2000. *145th Street: Short Stories*. New York: Delacorte. A collection of short stories.
- . 2003. *The Dream Bearer*. New York: HarperCollins/Amistad. The son of an abusive father finds help from his mother and an old man.
- Woodson, Jacqueline. 2002. *Hush*. New York: Putnam's. Life becomes complicated for a twelve year old girl when her family becomes part of the witness protection program.

Jane M. Gangi is an Associate Professor in the Department of Literacy at Manhattanville College in Purchase, NY. She has taught in both public schools and higher education since the 1970s, and is the author of *Encountering Children's Literature: An Arts Approach* (Allyn and Bacon, 2004), as well as numerous articles on literacy and literature. She can be reached at <gangij@mville.edu> and 914-798-2713.

Aimee Ferguson graduated in May 2006 with a B. A. from Manhattanville College, where she majored in Childhood Education and Psychology. In the fall she will begin studies towards a Master's Degree in Speech-Language Pathology at New York Medical College, in Valhalla, New York.

The authors thank Dr. Mary Ellen Levin and Dr. Mary Ann Reilly for their critical review of the article before publication, and Michelle Aquino for her inspiring speech as Senior Class President at the Manhattanville College Commencement ceremony on 13 May 2006.