The CORETTA SCOTT KING AWARDS
1970–2014
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CORETTA SCOTT KING AWARDS
1970–2014

Fifth Edition
45th Anniversary

Edited by Carole J. McCollough and Adelaide Poniatowski Phelps

The Coretta Scott King Book Awards Committee
Ethnic and Multicultural Information Exchange Round Table

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Photograph of Leo Dillon by Chester Higgins Jr., chesterhiggins.com. Photograph of Fredrick L. McKissack Sr., shown with his wife Patricia C. McKissack, by John McKissack.

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Contents

Preface by Jonda C. McNair   ix
Acknowledgments   xi
History   xiii

Author Awards   ........................................ 1

Profile: Gabrielle Douglas   .................................. 57

Illustrator Awards   ........................................ 59

Illustrations from award-winning books follow page 136

Selected Biographies   ....................................... 89

Contributors   ........................................ 123
Coretta Scott King Award–Winning Authors, 1970–2014   ........................................ 127
Coretta Scott King Author Award and Honor Books by Title   ........................................ 131
Coretta Scott King Award–Winning Illustrators, 1974–2014   ........................................ 135
Coretta Scott King Illustrator Award and Honor Books by Title   ........................................ 137

Subject Index   141
General Index   151

Additional content can be found at alaeditions.org/webextras  WEB

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SINCE ITS INCEPTION IN 1969, THE CORETTA SCOTT KING AWARD HAS INCREASED THE VISIBILITY of children’s literature about the black experience and accentuated the work of numerous African American authors and illustrators. For many of these artists the Coretta Scott King Award has served as a means by which to introduce them to the larger children’s literature world—something that will benefit all readers, including children and adults. The John Steptoe New Talent Award has provided an outlet specifically for up-and-coming African American authors and illustrators to establish themselves and sustain their careers in the field of children’s literature.

This fifth edition of *The Coretta Scott King Awards* features reviews of all award and honor books selected during the five years since the last edition was published, as well as biographies of awardees and full-color images from select titles. Grade-level indicators are also included with the reviews to assist educators and librarians in successfully matching texts to readers. In addition, nonfiction books are noted with an asterisk for those seeking out this particular genre. The index (by author, title, illustrator, and subject) makes it easy to navigate the book and quickly access information. Many thanks to the members of the Coretta Scott King Book Awards Committee for writing reviews of titles, to the OLOS staff at the American Library Association, and to the coeditors of this volume, Carole J. McCollough and Adelaide Poniatowski Phelps, for their dedication and hard work.

JONDA C. McNAIR
Chair, Coretta Scott King Book Awards Committee, 2012–2015
THE CORETTA SCOTT KING BOOK AWARD AND ITS ASSOCIATION WITH ALA ORIGINATED IN 1969.

It came as the result of a discussion between two librarians, Glyndon Flynt Greer and Mabel McKissick, and the publisher John Carroll. The impetus flowed from the observation that no African American author or illustrator had ever been honored by the prestigious Newbery and Caldecott awards, established in 1922 and 1938, respectively, and sponsored by what was then the ALA Children’s Service Division. It was thought that the establishment of a special award would bring attention to the fine work produced by African American authors and illustrators in books for children and young people. The first award was presented during the New Jersey Library Association meeting in May 1970. The first winner was the late Lillie Patterson, who was honored for her young readers edition of the life of Martin Luther King Jr., written shortly after his assassination. Over the next twelve years, without official recognition from the executive board of ALA, the presentations continued, and in 1974 an illustrator award category was added. The first to receive that award was George Ford, for the illustrations in Sharon Mathis’s biography Ray Charles.

In 1982, through the efforts of E. J. Josey, an ALA councilor, the awards committee, chaired by Effie Lee Morris, was named the Coretta Scott King Task Force and became a part of the ALA Social Responsibilities Round Table (SRRT). This congenial union remained in place until the ALA midwinter meeting in January 2004 in San Diego. Under the leadership of chairperson Fran Ware and past chairs Carole McCollough and Barbara Jones Clark, the task force’s affiliation was changed from the Social Responsibilities Round Table to the Ethnic and Multicultural Information Exchange Round Table (EMIERT)—the rationale being that the goals and missions of the task force were more closely aligned with those of EMIERT. All was done with the approval and blessings of the action council of SRRT. The Coretta Scott King Task Force expressed appreciation to SRRT for its twenty-four years of working together.

In a continuous process of growth and visionary expansion, the task force functions under well-constructed bylaws. Included in this organizational pattern is the clear definition of the makeup, length of terms, and responsibilities of the seven-member awards jury. Also included are established criteria for the selection of the award-winning titles:

Thematicallly the material (text or illustration) must speak to some aspect of African American culture, with an awareness of Martin Luther King Jr.’s sense of the brotherhood of all cultures.
The author or illustrator must be African American. The content (illustration or text) must be of high literary or visual quality, with a theme that has the potential for long-term, meaningful significance. Only books published the year preceding a jury’s period of deliberation are eligible for consideration. Books must be published in the United States. The winner of the Coretta Scott King/John Steptoe New Talent Award must meet the same standards as winners of the other awards, but eligibility is limited to works of those who have had no more than three books published.

Since 1972, the awards have been presented at a gala breakfast. The breakfast, held during the ALA annual conference, is marked by ever-increasing attendance. Each winner in art and text receives an honorarium, the value of which continues to grow. The honorarium for the winners has been a gift from the Johnson Publishing Company since the award’s inception in 1970. The winners also receive a plaque and a set of encyclopedias, one from Encyclopedia Britannica and the other from World Book, Inc. In keeping with the times, the encyclopedias are now on discs. In 1995, the first Genesis Award for new talent was presented. This award, which was later officially renamed the Coretta Scott King/John Steptoe New Talent Award, recognizes a writer or illustrator whose early potential speaks of things to come. The first recipient, Sharon M. Draper, the author of *Tears of a Tiger*, went on to become a Coretta Scott King award winner in 1998 for her novel *Forged by Fire*. She continues to be recognized not only for novels about contemporary young adults (*November Blues*) received a Coretta Scott King author honor in 2008) but also for her monumental, thoroughly researched historical novel *Copper Sun*, which won the Coretta Scott King author award in 2007.

Since 1984, among the special highlights at each breakfast is the presence of children, the ones to whom the books are designed to speak. These young guests, sponsored by generous donors, come from the geographical area of ALA’s annual conference. For some of the young people attending the breakfast there is a moment of special individual recognition. Each year, starting in 1999, Disney/Jump at the Sun has sponsored an essay contest for students who live in the area of the conference. From papers written by elementary and middle school students, judges choose the best paper about a preselected book. The audience is always delighted with the poise with which the young winners read their essays and graciously thank the award sponsors and the Coretta Scott King Book Awards Committee for their special opportunity and the scholarship check. Other support comes from the publishing houses of the winning titles. Each young guest goes home with a selection from the winning and honor books for his/her personal collection. The publishers further collaborate on the design and production of the study guides created by each awards jury. The guides are distributed at the breakfast and are available through the ALA Office of Library Outreach Services (OLOS) as long as the supply lasts.

As the Coretta Scott King Book Awards Committee looked forward to the commemoration of its fortieth anniversary, the members celebrated the life of its last surviving founder, Mabel McKissick, whose early works ended in 2009 after her twenty-seven years as a school librarian in Connecticut and elsewhere. 2009 was also the time to remember the late Basil Phillips, photographic editor for *Ebony* magazine. Phillips was instrumental in establishing the author honorarium through the largesse of John Johnson, founder of Johnson Publishing. The memory of our stalwart leaders will be a permanent part of the Coretta Scott King Book Awards history.

Coretta Scott King award-winning books can be recognized by a seal designed in 1974 by the internationally known artist Lev Mills, who at the time was artist-in-residence at Atlanta University. The elements of this official seal convey the principles to which Martin Luther King Jr. was dedicated. Within a circle, which represents continuity, sits a child reading a book. The five religious symbols below the image of the child represent non-sectarianism: star and crescent (Islam), om (Hinduism), cross (Christianity), Star of David (Judaism), yin-yang (Taoism). The seal also includes a dove of peace and a superimposed pyramid, a tribute to human strength and to the strength of Atlanta University, where the award was headquartered at the time the seal was designed.
The original seals for the winners were printed in bronze, which represented the earth tones of Mother Africa, and the seals for the honor books were printed in tones of silver. In the late 1990s, without a change in the design, the seals were produced in a more environmentally friendly format—a black background with character details superimposed in bronze for winners or in pewter for honor books. The seal for the Coretta Scott King/John Steptoe New Talent Award is detailed in green, a color symbolic of new beginnings.

Among the many highlights in the history of the Coretta Scott King Book Awards is Legends, Folklore, and Real Life Stories: The Coretta Scott King Award Books, a special exhibit of illustrations from award winners mounted by the Art Institute of Chicago from July 2000 to February 2001. In addition, educational programs and workshops were conducted by some of the illustrators whose works were on display.

During the tenure of chair Barbara Jones Clark, the task force launched a national awareness campaign to acquaint a wider audience with the role the Coretta Scott King Book Awards play in showcasing the valuable and informative works of African American authors and illustrators. The late Virginia Hamilton served as honorary chairperson of the committee that spearheaded this endeavor in 1998. In 2008–2009, chair Deborah Taylor, working with author and editor Andrea Pinkney, widened the visibility of the Coretta Scott King Book Awards by launching a broad-based Fortieth Anniversary Public Awareness Program, which showcased a handsome broadside by award-winning artist Kadir Nelson and a celebratory poem by Arnold Adoff.

The first edition of The Coretta Scott King Awards was published in 1994. It presented the history of the award, biographical sketches of winners and honor recipients, annotations of each title, and handsome reproductions of illustrations from award winners published from 1974 to 1994. Following the same format, the second edition was published in 1999, the third in 2004, the fourth edition in 2009, and now the fifth edition in 2014. Each new edition is updated to make the material more relevant and more useful to a wider audience. With an attitude of always looking forward and broadening the vision of the Coretta Scott King Committee, in 2010 a new award category was added. In appreciation and remembrance of the late Virginia Hamilton, the Coretta Scott King–Virginia Hamilton Award for Lifetime Achievement was established. Over each three-year cycle an author, illustrator, and librarian in the field will be recognized for their body of work. Each recipient will receive an honorarium, a medal emblazoned with his/her name, and a photograph of the late “word master” Virginia Hamilton. The first recipients were author Walter Dean Myers, illustrator Ashley Bryan, and librarian Henrietta M. Smith.

The Coretta Scott King Book Awards Committee is indebted to Henrietta M. Smith for her many contributions, including as editor of the first four editions of The Coretta Scott King Awards and as author of the history. We begin a new era with a discussion guide commissioned by ALA, published in 2014, and written and edited by Carole J. McCollough and Adelaide Poniatowski Phelps: Coretta Scott King Award Books Discussion Guide: Pathways to Democracy.

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Sisters Delphine, Vonetta, and Fern are back from their life-changing summer in Oakland with their mother, Nzila, in this new adventure that follows up on Williams-Garcia’s award-winning One Crazy Summer. It’s the late 1960s in Bedford-Stuyvesant and a lot is going on there and in the country. The Gaither girls return to some changes, the biggest of which is that their father now has a girlfriend, Miss Marva Hendrix. The civil rights movement is on everyone’s mind, the Vietnam War is raging… and the Jackson 5 are coming to town! These are exciting and challenging personal times as Delphine negotiates the changes in her family and begins to lose her leadership role with her sisters. Woven through the narrative are letters between Delphine and Nzila, which allow the readers a front-row seat on their developing relationship. Each letter from Nzila responds to Delphine’s questions and challenges honestly, but ends with the snappy “be eleven” when she feels her daughter pushes too hard. Nzila’s wisdom comes through in these letters and, in the end, she drops the warning and trusts her eldest daughter. Though this story is made richer by reading One Crazy Summer, the story stands on its own two strong feet, just like Delphine is learning to do. —Robin Smith

From P.S. Be Eleven

For me, the sixth-grade dance meant trying to match steps with boys I’d slugged. Boys I’d said “Your mama” to in the school yard because they’d said it to me first in a battle of the Dozens. For me, and me alone, it meant waiting to be asked to dance when no one would ask because they’d have to look way up at me and now I was even taller than when I’d left for Oakland.

—Rita Williams-Garcia

2014 Winner

WILLIAMS-GARCIA, RITA.

2014 Honors

LEWIS, JOHN, ANDREW AYDIN, AND NATE POWELL.

Congressman John Lewis (GA), one of the legendary and iconic figures from the civil rights movement, uses the graphic novel format to recount his personal story in March: Book One. From growing up on a farm in Alabama to participating in the sit-ins and freedom rides across the South, this recollection of life for African Americans in the mid-1960s is compelling. The book begins with the inauguration of President Barack Obama on January 20, 2009. As the congressman prepares to leave his office on Capitol Hill to attend this historical event, he is visited by a mother and her two sons who begin to ask the congressman questions that take him “back down memory lane.” As in his life, Lewis shares his humorous side as he recalls his early
days of preaching to the chickens; not to be overshadowed by the more serious events of being beaten and attacked by dogs for standing up for his civil rights. The retelling of his story in a graphic novel format makes this history lesson not only more effective, but more accessible. This descriptive autobiographical account grips the reader as you realize that the image of them spitting in his face actually happened. The Nate Powell artwork, combined with Lewis’s text, vividly tells the story. Congressman Lewis credits a 1958 comic book, Martin Luther King and the Montgomery Story, as the reason he decided to share his own telling of this time period in a modern-day comic book format that allows the story of the civil rights movement to travel through different generations. —Rose Dawson

From March: Book One

This is an UNLAWFUL ASSEMBLY! YOUR MARCH IS NOT CONDUCTIVE TO THE PUBLIC SAFETY—YOU ARE ORDERED TO DISPERSE AND GO BACK TO YOUR CHURCH OR TO YOUR HOMES!
YOU HAVE TWO MINUTES TO TURN AROUND AND GO BACK TO YOUR CHURCH.
—John Lewis, Andrew Aydin, and Nate Powell


Two friends—one African American, one Dominican—navigate their young lives in Harlem amidst a jumble of obstacles, including race, violence, family expectations, and personal choice. Darius is the dreamer and the writer of the pair; he rises over the streets of Harlem in his daydreams as Fury, a peregrine falcon who soars and strikes out while Darius cannot. Twig, a star runner, uses his gift of speed to free him from his family’s expectations and the bullying by peers who won’t accept his dream. Darius and Twig fiercely defend their ambitions for a better life through their friendship, all the while living in a climate where even the slightest misstep could send either of them down the wrong path and shatter the hopes for the future they so strongly hold.

Myers captures the realities of life in Harlem in this short novel that focuses on two believable contemporary characters. He offers a glimpse into the achievable dreams of today’s youth—bringing forth a much-needed perspective in contrast to the stereotypes abundant in media reports today. He documents the bravery of two young men from different backgrounds coming together in a strong friendship made even stronger by their differences and in spite of the prejudices that surround them. Myers also offers a perspective of the negative associations inherent in the sports industry, and the dangers our youth face in seemingly positive opportunities. The distinctive teen voices of Darius and Twig make the novel an admirable and important inclusion to young adult fiction. As always, Myers populates this novel with characters that we might know, teens who live in the real world, and, who in the case of Darius and Twig, find their way with sensitivity, friendship, and even grace. —Sue Sherif

From Darius & Twig

Fury sits on my wrist, and I can feel the power of his talons as he grips the thick leather glove. I am breathing hard but he barely moves, only rocking slightly as he anticipates the hunt. I reach for the string that covers his mask, and taking the other string in my teeth, I loosen it. He turns his head quickly and sees it is me.

—Walter Dean Myers


Grimes’s spare, concise poetry masterfully conveys the emotions and inner life of a young girl coping with important life changes—divorcing parents, a new school, moving away from her best friend. Daydreaming becomes her refuge. In portraying Gabriella’s daydreams, Grimes celebrates the power of words and the importance of imagination. The poems also fill in the “back story” that explains why Gaby has withdrawn so heavily into daydreaming, and the importance of an understanding new teacher who finds a way to creatively support Gaby and invite the whole class to harness their daydreams in a productive way.

The poems not only convey the storyline, they do so with vivid imagery and the skillful use of other poetic devices. The poems themselves are well crafted. Grimes uses a variety of poetic forms, including haiku and shape poems. She also makes effective use of poetic devices such as alliteration and assonance. Her poems are clear and accessible to a youthful audience. Some lines are memorable, such as the following haiku: Mom names me for a /creature with wings. Then wonders /what makes my thoughts fly. The poems also paint a realistic portrait of a girl gaining confidence in her own power to be resilient in the face of adversity. —Rudine Sims Bishop

From Words with Wings

Some words
sit still on the page
holding a story steady.
Those words never get me into trouble.
But other words have wings
that wake my daydreams.
They fly in, silent as sunrise,
tickle my imagination,
and carry my thoughts away.
I can’t help
but buckle up
for the ride!
—Nikki Grimes

2013 Winner


Hand in Hand: Ten Black Men Who Changed America highlights the legacy of ten brave men who saw a need for change in the lives of black Americans. Each in his own courageous way dared to make a difference. The history is told chronologically from colonial times to the twenty-first century. With the author’s unique writing style, each individual is introduced with narration describing how the use of his HANDS was instrumental in reaching his goal in the fight for justice. A full-page watercolor image of the individual, a contribution from the palette of artist Brian Pinkney, follows the narration. The biographical sketch gives a chronological report of each man’s life from childhood until his goal was reached. Those whose stories are included are: Benjamin Banneker, Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois, A. Philip Randolph, Thurgood Marshall, Jackie Robinson, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Barack H. Obama II. —Cora P. Dunkley

From Hand in Hand: Ten Black Men Who Changed America

These are the stories of ten bold men
who built a chain called hand in hand.
Each a link in this mighty strand:
Reaching
Pulling
Believing
Achieving
Working toward freedom
Hand in hand.
—Andrea Davis Pinkney

2013 Honors


One winter’s day Ms. Albert introduces her class to Maya, a new student who is assigned the desk next to Chloe. After spending the winter ignoring Maya’s overtures of friendship, Chloe learns the meaning of kindness and the regrets that come from not being kind.

A wonderful updating of Eleanor Estes’s The Hundred Dresses, Each Kindness is an outstanding example of a “purposeful” book in the hands of a skilled writer. Woodson lets the story unfold without mentally stopping the narrative to point to the lesson. Instead, she trusts that the child reader will understand it. The story is enhanced by E. B. Lewis’s illustrations that add to the power of the narrative. Chloe comes to understand her varying emotions from pouty face to regrets in the light of Ms. Albert’s lesson on kindness. A strong story for classroom sharing that illuminates the power of each kindness. —Therese Bigelow

From Each Kindness

Our teacher Ms. Albert said,
Say good morning to our new student.
But most of us were silent.
The only empty seat was next to me.
That’s where our teacher put Maya.
And on that first day, Maya turned to me and smiled.
But I didn’t smile back.
I moved my chair, myself and my books
a little farther away from her.
When she looked my way, I turned to the window
and stared out at the snow.
And every day after that,
when Maya came into the classroom,
I looked away and didn’t smile back.
—Jacqueline Woodson


Some of the language in this fictionalized history may shock contemporary readers (“Negro,” “colored,” and so on), and that’s as it should be in this realistic portrait of black American life in the early to mid-1900s. The story begins in 1906 in Newport News, Virginia, when Lewis was about ten. His wry humor comes through when he learns a lesson about Jesus helping those who make an effort, www.alastore.ala.org
Illustrations from Award-Winning Books

PLATE 1 From Dave the Potter: Artist, Poet, Slave, by Laban Carrick Hill; illustrated by Bryan Collier (Little, Brown and Company, a division of Hachette Book Group, Inc., 2010). Illustration © 2010 by Bryan Collier. Reprinted with permission from Little, Brown and Company. 2011 Illustrator Award

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Subject Index

Adoption
Heaven (Johnson)

Africa
Africa Dream (Greenfield)
Beat the Story-Drum, Pum-Pum (Bryan)
Beautiful Blackbird (Bryan)
Black Child (Magubane)
Brothers in Hope: The Story of the Lost Boys of Sudan (Christie)
The Captive (Hansen)
Copper Sun (Draper)
Cornrows (Yarbrough)
Count on Your Fingers African Style (Zaslavsky)
The Hunterman and the Crocodile: A West African Folktale (Diakite')
Julius K. Nyerere: Teacher of Africa (Graham)
The Legend of Africania (Robinson)
Lion and the Ostrich Chicks: And Other African Folk Tales (Bryan)
Mother Crocodile: An Uncle Amadou Tale From Senegal (Diop)
Ms. Africa: Profiles of Modern African Women (Crane)
Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters: An African Tale (Steptoe)
Mukasa (Nagenda)
My Rows and Piles of Coins (Mollel)
The Negro Speaks of Rivers (Hughes)
Nelson Mandela (Nelson)
Never Forgotten (McKissack)
The Origin of Life on Earth: An African Creation Myth (Anderson)
Seeds of Change (Johnson)
The Singing Man (Medearis)

African Methodist Episcopal Church
I Thought My Soul Would Rise and Fly: The Diary of Patsy, A Freed Girl (Hansen)

Apartheid
Nelson Mandela (Nelson)

Art
Bird (Elliott)
17 Black Artists (Fax)

Baseball
Black Diamond: The Story of the Negro Baseball Leagues (McKissack & McKissack)
I Never Had It Made: The Autobiography of Jackie Robinson (Duckett)
We Are the Ship: The Story of Negro League Baseball (Nelson)

Biblical Stories
Every Man Heart Lay Down (Graham)

Biography
Andrew Young: Young Man with a Mission (Haskins)
Anthony Burns: The Defeat and Triumph of a Fugitive Slave (Hamilton)
Bad News for Outlaws: The Remarkable Life of Bass Reeves, Deputy U.S. Marshal (Nelson)
Barbara Jordan (Haskins)
Bayard Rustin: Behind the Scenes of the Civil Rights Movement (Haskins)
Becoming Billie Holiday (Weatherford)
Benjamin Banneker: Genius of Early America (Patterson)
Black Troubadour: Langston Hughes (Rollins)
Carver: A Life in Poems (Nelson)
Childtimes: A Three Generation Memoir (Greenfield and Little)
Coretta Scott King (Patterson)
Dave the Potter: Artist, Poet, Slave (Hill)
Don't Explain: A Song of Billie Holiday (De Veaux)
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.: Man of Peace (Patterson)
The Ebony Book of Black Achievement (Peters)
Escape to Freedom: A Play About Young Frederick Douglass (Davis)
God Bless the Child (Holiday and Herzog)
Hand in Hand: Ten Black Men Who Changed America (Pinkney)
I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings (Angelou)
Subject Index

Biography (cont’d)
I Never Had It Made: The Autobiography of Jackie Robinson (Duckett)
James Van DerZee: The Picture Takin’ Man (Haskins)
Julius K. Nyerere: Teacher of Africa (Graham)
Lena Horne (Haskins)
Let It Shine! Stories of Black Women Freedoms Fighters (Pinkney)
Malcolm X: By Any Means Necessary (Myers)
March: Book One (Lewis and Aydin)
Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Freedom Movement (Patterson)
Mary: An Autobiography (Mebane)
Mary McLeod Bethune (Greenfield)
Minty: A Story of Young Harriet Tubman (Schroeder)
Moses: When Harriet Tubman Led Her People to Freedom (Weatherford)
Movin’ on Up: Pop Gordy Tells His Story (Gordy)
Ms. Africa: Profiles of Modern African Women (Carrick)
Mukasa (Nagenda)
Nelson Mandela (Nelson)
No Crystal Stair: A Documentary Novel of the Life and Work of Lewis Michaux (Nelson)
Only Passing Through: The Story of Sojourner Truth (Rockwell)
Paul Robeson (Greenfield)
Portia: The Life of Portia Washington Pittman, the Daughter of Booker T. Washington (Stewart)
Ray Charles (Mathis)
Rosa (Giovanni)
Seeds of Change (Johnson)
17 Black Artists (Fax)
Sojourner Truth: Ain’t I a Woman (McKissack)
The Story of Stevie Wonder (Haskins)
Talkin’ about Bessie: The Story of Aviator Elizabeth Coleman (Grimes)
This Life (Poitier)
Unbought and Unbossed (Chisholm)
When the Beat Was Born: DJ Cool Herc and the Creation of Hip-Hop (Carrick)
Yummy: the Last Days of a Southside Shorty (Neri)

Biracial Identity
The Blacker the Berry (Thomas)
Brendan Buckley’s Universe and Everything in It (Frazier)
Jimi & Me (Adoff)
The Land (Taylor)
The Road to Paris (Grimes)

Birmingham, Alabama
The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963 (Curtis)

Black Cowboys
Bad News for Outlaws: The Remarkable Life of Bass Reeves, Deputy U.S. Marshal (Nelson)
Justin and the Best Biscuits in the World (Walter)

Black Panther Party
One Crazy Summer (Williams-Garcia)
The Other Side: Shorter Poems (Johnson)
The Rock and the River (Magoon)

Blindness
The Story of Stevie Wonder (Haskins)

Bullying
An Enchanted Hair Tale (De Veaux)
The Battle of Jericho (Draper)
Circle of Gold (Boyd)
Darius & Twig (Myers)
Each Kindness (Woodson)
Lockdown (Myers)
The Skin I’m In (Flake)
Who Am I Without Him? Short Stories About Girls and the Boys in Their Lives (Flake)

Caribbean
The Friendship (Taylor)
Junius over Far (Hamilton)
Neeny Coming, Neeny Going (English)
Running to the Road to ABC (Lauture)
A Thief in the Village and Other Stories (Berry)
Under the Sunday Tree (Greenfield)
When the Beat Was Born: DJ Cool Herc and the Creation of Hip-Hop (Carrick)

Child Abuse
Forged by Fire (Draper)

Civil Rights Movement
Andrew Young: Young Man with a Mission (Haskins)
Bayard Rustin: Behind the Scenes of the Civil Rights Movement (Haskins)
Coretta Scott King (Patterson)
Ellington Was Not a Street (Shange)
Freedom Summer (Wiles)
Heart and Soul (Nelson)
I Have a Dream: Martin Luther King, Jr. (Nelson)
Let It Shine: Stories of Black Women Freedom Fighters (Pinkney)
Malcolm X: By Any Means Necessary (Myers)
March: Book One (Lewis and Aydin)
Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Freedom Movement (Patterson)
Martin’s Big Words: The Life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (Rappaport)
One Crazy Summer (Williams-Garcia)
Paul Robeson (Greenfield)
P.S.: Be Eleven (Williams-Garcia)
Remember: The Journey to School Integration (Morrison)
The Rock and the River (Magoon)
Rosa (Giovanni)
This Life (Poitier)
The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963 (Curtis)

Colonial America

Coming of Age
Elijah of Buxton (Curtis)
Forged by Fire (Draper)
From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun: A Novel (Woodson)
Jazmin’s Notebook (Grimes)
Justice and Her Brothers (Hamilton)
The Land (Taylor)
Let the Lion Eat Straw (Southerland)
Like Sisters on the Homefront (Williams-Garcia)
November Blues (Draper)
The Red Rose Box (Woods)

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Common Good (core democratic value)
The Bells of Christmas (Hamilton)
Black Hands, White Sails: The Story of African-American Whalers (Mckissack)
Brothers in Hope: The Story of the Lost Boys of Sudan (Williams)
Circle of Gold (Boyd)
Corrosion (Yarbrough)
Count on Your Fingers African Style (Zaslavsky)
Every Man Heart Lay Down (Graham)
Freedom River (Rappaport)
The Hunterman and the Crocodile: A West African Folktales (Diakite’)
I Have Heard of a Land (Thomas)
Justin and the Best Biscuits in the World (Walter)
Mother Crocodile: An Uncle Amadou Tale From Senegal (Diop)
My Mama Needs Me (Walter)
My Rows and Piles of Coins (Molllel)
Neeny Coming, Neeny Going (English)
The Patchwork Quilt (Flournoy)
Seeds of Change (Johnson)
Storm in the Night (Stolz)
The Talking Eggs (San Souci)
Thunder Rose (Nolen)
Uptown (Collier)
Working Cotton (Williams)
The Young Landlords (Myers)

Death
Circle of Gold (Boyd)
Everett Anderson’s Goodbye (Clifton)
Fast Sam, Cool Clyde, and Stuff (Myers)
Fortune’s Bones (Nelson)
I Hadn’t Meant to Tell You This (Woodson)
Jazmin’s Notebook (Grimes)
Jimi & Me (Adoff)
Locomotion (Woodson)
Miracle’s Boys (Woodson)
The Red Rose Box (Woods)
Tears of a Tiger (Draper)
Toning the Sweep (Johnson)
A Wreath for Emmett Till (Nelson)
Yummy: the Last Days of a Southside Shorty (Neri)

Depression Era
Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry (Taylor)

Diversity (core democratic value)
Africa Dream (Greenfield)
Beautiful Blackbird (Bryan)
Black Cat (Myers)
The Blacker the Berry (Thomas)
Brendan Buckley’s Universe and Everything In It (Frazier)
Bronx Masquerade (Grimes)
Duye’s Tale (Bailey)
The Ebony Book of Black Achievement (Peters)
Everett Anderson’s Friend (Clifton)
Her Stories: African American Folktales, Fairy Tales, and True Tales (Hamilton)
Jazz (Myers)
Jimi & Me (Adoff)
The Magical Adventures of Pretty Pearl (Hamilton)
My Family Plays Music (Cox)
The Piano Man (Chocolate)
The Singing Man (Medearis)

Draft Riots
Maritcha: A Nineteenth-Century American Girl (Bolden)

Drugs
Bird (Elliott)
Don’t Explain: A Song of Billie Holiday (De Veaux)
Fast Sam, Cool Clyde, and Stuff (Myers)
A Hero Ain’t Nothin’ but a Sandwich (Childress)
Lou In the Limelight (Hunter)
Motown and Didi: A Love Story (Myers)
Slam! (Myers)

Drunk Driving
Tears of a Tiger (Draper)

Education
Because We Are (Walter)
Bronx Masquerade (Grimes)
Circle of Gold (Boyd)
Count on Your Fingers African Style (Zaslavsky)
Goin’ Someplace Special (Mckissack)
I Thought My Soul Would Rise and Fly: The Diary of Patsy, A Freed Girl (Hansen)
Mary McLeod Bethune (Greenfield)
Mukasa (Nagenda)
Neeny Coming, Neeny Going (English)
Remember: The Journey to School Integration (Morrison)
The Road to Memphis (Taylor)
Running the Road to ABC (Lauture)
Trouble’s Child (Walter)
Virgie Goes to School with Us Boys (Howard)

Emancipation Proclamation
Days of Jubilee: The End of Slavery in the United States (Mckissack)
I Thought My Soul Would Rise and Fly: The Diary of Patsy, A Freed Girl (Hansen)

Equality (core democratic value)
An Enchanted Hair Tale (De Veaux)
Another Way to Dance (Southgate)
Bayard Rustin: Behind the Scenes of the Civil Rights Movement (Haskins)
Because We Are (Walter)
Black Child (Magubane)
Black Means... (Grossman, Barney & Groom)
The Blacker the Berry (Thomas)
Fallen Angels (Myers)
Freedom Summer (Wiles)
The Friendship (Taylor)
From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun: A Novel (Woodson)
Goin’ Someplace Special (Mckissack)
Guests in the Promised Land (Hunter)
Heart and Soul (Nelson)
I Never Had It Made: The Autobiography of Jackie Robinson (Duckett)

Emancipation Proclamation
Days of Jubilee: The End of Slavery in the United States (Mckissack)
I Thought My Soul Would Rise and Fly: The Diary of Patsy, A Freed Girl (Hansen)

Equality (core democratic value)
An Enchanted Hair Tale (De Veaux)
Another Way to Dance (Southgate)
Bayard Rustin: Behind the Scenes of the Civil Rights Movement (Haskins)
Because We Are (Walter)
Black Child (Magubane)
Black Means... (Grossman, Barney & Groom)
The Blacker the Berry (Thomas)
Fallen Angels (Myers)
Freedom Summer (Wiles)
The Friendship (Taylor)
From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun: A Novel (Woodson)
Goin’ Someplace Special (Mckissack)
Guests in the Promised Land (Hunter)
Heart and Soul (Nelson)
I Never Had It Made: The Autobiography of Jackie Robinson (Duckett)

Equality (core democratic value)
An Enchanted Hair Tale (De Veaux)
Another Way to Dance (Southgate)
Bayard Rustin: Behind the Scenes of the Civil Rights Movement (Haskins)
Because We Are (Walter)
Black Child (Magubane)
Black Means... (Grossman, Barney & Groom)
The Blacker the Berry (Thomas)
Fallen Angels (Myers)
Freedom Summer (Wiles)
The Friendship (Taylor)
From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun: A Novel (Woodson)
Goin’ Someplace Special (Mckissack)
Guests in the Promised Land (Hunter)
Heart and Soul (Nelson)
I Never Had It Made: The Autobiography of Jackie Robinson (Duckett)

Equality (core democratic value)
An Enchanted Hair Tale (De Veaux)
Another Way to Dance (Southgate)
Bayard Rustin: Behind the Scenes of the Civil Rights Movement (Haskins)
Because We Are (Walter)
Black Child (Magubane)
Black Means... (Grossman, Barney & Groom)
The Blacker the Berry (Thomas)
Fallen Angels (Myers)
Freedom Summer (Wiles)
The Friendship (Taylor)
From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun: A Novel (Woodson)
Goin’ Someplace Special (Mckissack)
Guests in the Promised Land (Hunter)
Heart and Soul (Nelson)
I Never Had It Made: The Autobiography of Jackie Robinson (Duckett)

Equality (core democratic value)
An Enchanted Hair Tale (De Veaux)
Another Way to Dance (Southgate)
Bayard Rustin: Behind the Scenes of the Civil Rights Movement (Haskins)
Because We Are (Walter)
Black Child (Magubane)
Black Means... (Grossman, Barney & Groom)
The Blacker the Berry (Thomas)
Fallen Angels (Myers)
Freedom Summer (Wiles)
The Friendship (Taylor)
From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun: A Novel (Woodson)
Goin’ Someplace Special (Mckissack)
Guests in the Promised Land (Hunter)
Heart and Soul (Nelson)
I Never Had It Made: The Autobiography of Jackie Robinson (Duckett)

Equality (core democratic value)
An Enchanted Hair Tale (De Veaux)
Another Way to Dance (Southgate)
Bayard Rustin: Behind the Scenes of the Civil Rights Movement (Haskins)
Because We Are (Walter)
Black Child (Magubane)
Black Means... (Grossman, Barney & Groom)
The Blacker the Berry (Thomas)
Fallen Angels (Myers)
Freedom Summer (Wiles)
The Friendship (Taylor)
From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun: A Novel (Woodson)
Goin’ Someplace Special (Mckissack)
Guests in the Promised Land (Hunter)
Heart and Soul (Nelson)
I Never Had It Made: The Autobiography of Jackie Robinson (Duckett)

Equality (core democratic value)
An Enchanted Hair Tale (De Veaux)
Another Way to Dance (Southgate)
Bayard Rustin: Behind the Scenes of the Civil Rights Movement (Haskins)
Because We Are (Walter)
Black Child (Magubane)
Black Means... (Grossman, Barney & Groom)
The Blacker the Berry (Thomas)
Fallen Angels (Myers)
Freedom Summer (Wiles)
The Friendship (Taylor)
From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun: A Novel (Woodson)
Goin’ Someplace Special (Mckissack)
Guests in the Promised Land (Hunter)
Heart and Soul (Nelson)
I Never Had It Made: The Autobiography of Jackie Robinson (Duckett)

Equality (core democratic value)
An Enchanted Hair Tale (De Veaux)
Another Way to Dance (Southgate)
Bayard Rustin: Behind the Scenes of the Civil Rights Movement (Haskins)
Because We Are (Walter)
Black Child (Magubane)
Black Means... (Grossman, Barney & Groom)
The Blacker the Berry (Thomas)
Fallen Angels (Myers)
Freedom Summer (Wiles)
The Friendship (Taylor)
From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun: A Novel (Woodson)
Goin’ Someplace Special (Mckissack)
Guests in the Promised Land (Hunter)
Heart and Soul (Nelson)
I Never Had It Made: The Autobiography of Jackie Robinson (Duckett)

Equality (core democratic value)
An Enchanted Hair Tale (De Veaux)
Another Way to Dance (Southgate)
Bayard Rustin: Behind the Scenes of the Civil Rights Movement (Haskins)
Because We Are (Walter)
Black Child (Magubane)
Black Means... (Grossman, Barney & Groom)
The Blacker the Berry (Thomas)
Fallen Angels (Myers)
Freedom Summer (Wiles)
The Friendship (Taylor)
From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun: A Novel (Woodson)
Goin’ Someplace Special (Mckissack)
Guests in the Promised Land (Hunter)
Heart and Soul (Nelson)
I Never Had It Made: The Autobiography of Jackie Robinson (Duckett)

Equality (core democratic value)
An Enchanted Hair Tale (De Veaux)
Another Way to Dance (Southgate)
Bayard Rustin: Behind the Scenes of the Civil Rights Movement (Haskins)
Because We Are (Walter)
Black Child (Magubane)
Black Means... (Grossman, Barney & Groom)
The Blacker the Berry (Thomas)
Fallen Angels (Myers)
Freedom Summer (Wiles)
The Friendship (Taylor)
From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun: A Novel (Woodson)
Goin’ Someplace Special (Mckissack)
Guests in the Promised Land (Hunter)
Heart and Soul (Nelson)
I Never Had It Made: The Autobiography of Jackie Robinson (Duckett)

Equality (core democratic value)
An Enchanted Hair Tale (De Veaux)
Another Way to Dance (Southgate)
Bayard Rustin: Behind the Scenes of the Civil Rights Movement (Haskins)
Because We Are (Walter)
Black Child (Magubane)
Black Means... (Grossman, Barney & Groom)
The Blacker the Berry (Thomas)
Fallen Angels (Myers)
Freedom Summer (Wiles)
The Friendship (Taylor)
From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun: A Novel (Woodson)
Goin’ Someplace Special (Mckissack)
Guests in the Promised Land (Hunter)
Heart and Soul (Nelson)
I Never Had It Made: The Autobiography of Jackie Robinson (Duckett)
### Equality
- (core democratic value) (cont’d)
- 17 Black Artists (Fax)
- The Skin I’m In (Flake)
- Somewhere in the Darkness (Myers)
- This Strange New Feeling (Lester)
- Virgie Goes to School With Us Boys (Howard)
- The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963 (Curtis)
- We Are the Ship: The Story of Negro League Baseball (Nelson)
- Which Way Freedom? (Hansen)

### Family Relationships
- All the Colors of the Race (Adoff)
- Because We Are (Walter)
- Bird (Elliott)
- Brendan Buckley’s Universe and Everything In It (Frazier)
- Bright Shadow (Thomas)
- Childlitmes: A Three-Generation Memoir (Greenfield and Little)
- Chill Wind (McDonald)
- Circle of Gold (Boyd)
- Coretta Scott King (Peterson)
- Cornrows (Yarbrough)
- Dark Sons (Grimes)
- Don’t You Remember? (Clifton)
- Duey’s Tale (Bailey)
- Ellen’s Broom (Lyons)
- Everett Anderson’s Goodbye (Clifton)
- Forged by Fire (Draper)
- Grandma’s Joy (Greenfield)
- Heaven (Johnson)
- A Hero Ain’t Nothin’ but a Sandwich (Childress)
- I Hadn’t Meant to Tell You This (Woodson)
- I Have a Sister, My Sister Is Deaf (Peterson)
- I Have Heard of a Land (Thomas)
- I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings (Angelou)
- Jimi & Me (Adoff)
- Junius Over Far (Hamilton)
- Just Us Women (Caines)
- Justice and Her Brothers (Hamilton)
- Justin and the Best Biscuits in the World (Walter)
- Keeping the Night Watch (Smith)
- Knock Knock: My Dad’s Dream for Me (Beaty)
- The Land (Taylor)
- The Legend of Buddy Bush (Moses)

### Subject Index

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Equality</td>
<td>Let the Circle Be Unbroken (Taylor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Let the Lion Eat Straw (Southerland)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Like Sisters on the Homefront (Williams-Garcia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A Little Love (Hamilton)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Locomotion (Woodson)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Malcolm X: By Any Means Necessary (Myers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mare’s War (Davis)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marvin and Tige (Glass)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Miracle’s Boys (Woodson)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Money Hungry (Flake)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Movin’ Up: Pop Gordy Tells His Story (Gordy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My Mama Needs Me (Walter)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My Family Plays Music (Cox)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nathaniel Taiking (Greenfield)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neeny Coming, Neeny Going (English)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Night on Neighborhood Street (Greenfield)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>November Blues (Draper)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One Crazy Summer (Williams-Garcia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Other Side: Shorter Poems (Johnson)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Patchwork Quilt (Flournoy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Piano Man (Chocolate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P.S.: Be Eleven (Williams-Garcia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rainbow Jordan (Childress)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Red Rose Box (Woods)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Road to Paris (Grimes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry (Taylor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Skates of Uncle Richard (Fenner)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sojourner Truth: Ain’t I a Woman (McKissack)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Something On My Mind (Grimes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Somewhere in the Darkness (Myers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Song of the Trees (Taylor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Standing against the Wind (Jones)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush (Hamilton)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Talking Eggs (Souci)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Toning the Sweep (Johnson)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trouble’s Child (Walter)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963 (Curtis)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Way a Door Closes (Smith)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>When I Am Old with You (Johnson)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Words with Wings (Grimes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Working Cotton (Williams)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Fantasy
- Bright Shadow (Thomas)
- C.L.O.U.D.S. (Cummings)
- Duey’s Tale (Bailey)
- An Enchanted Hair Tale (De Veaux)
- The Friendship (Souci)
- Justice and Her Brothers (Hamilton)
- The Magical Adventures of Pretty Pearl (Hamilton)
- The Moon Ring (DuBurke)
- Tar Beach (Ringgold)
- Zora and Me (Bond and Simon)

### Father/Daughter Relationships
- The First Part Last (Johnson)
- Sukey and the Mermaid (Souci)

### Father/Son Relationships
- Bud, Not Buddy (Curtis)
- Dark Sons (Grimes)
- In Daddy’s Arms I Am Tall: African Americans Celebrating Fathers (Steptoe)
- Keeping the Night Watch (Smith)
- Knock Knock: My Dad’s Dream for Me (Beaty)
- The Land (Taylor)
- The Rock and the River (Magoon)
- Somewhere in the Darkness (Myers)
- The Way a Door Closes (Smith)

### Fathers
- In Daddy’s Arms I Am Tall: African Americans Celebrating Fathers (Steptoe)

### Folktales/Folklore
- Beat the Story-Drum, Pum-Pum (Bryan)
- Beautiful Blackbird (Bryan)
- The Dark Thirty: Southern Tales of the Supernatural (McKissack)
- The Days When the Animals Talked: Black American Folktales and How They Came to Be (Faulkner)
- Every Man Heart Lay Down (Graham)
- The Faithful Friend (San Souci)
- Her Stories: African American Folktales, Fairy Tales and True Tales (Hamilton)
- The Hunterman and the Crocodile: A West African Folktales (Daikité)
- The Invisible Hunters: A Legend from the Miskito Indians of Nicaragua (Rohmer, Chow, and Vidaure)
- The Legend of Africana (Robinson)
- Lion and the Ostrich Chicks and Other African Folk Tales (Bryan)
- Little Eight John (Wahl)
- The Magical Adventures of Pretty Pearl (Hamilton)
Mother Crocodile (Diop)
Mirandy and Brother Wind (McKissack)
Mufaro’s Beautiful Daughters: An African Tale (Steptoe)
The Origin of Life on Earth: An African Creation Myth (Anderson)
The People Could Fly: American Black Folktales (Hamilton)
The Singing Man (Medearis)
Sukey and the Mermaid (San Souci)
The Tales of Uncle Remus: The Adventures of Brer Rabbit (Lester)
The Talking Eggs (San Souci)
Thunder Rose (Nolen)
The Tales of Olum Beautiful Daughters: An African Tale

Grandparents
Brendan Buckley’s Universe and Everything in It (Frazier)
Grandma’s Joy (Greenfield)
Justin and the Best Biscuits in the World (Walter)
A Little Love (Hamilton)
Mare’s War (Davis)
Mary Jo’s Grandmother (DuBurke)
The Moon Ring (DuBurke)
The Piano Man (Chocolate)
Storm in the Night (Stolz)
Toning the Sweep (Johnson)
Trouble’s Child (Walter)
When I Am Old with You (Johnson)

Graphic Novel
Yummy: the Last Days of a Southside Shorty (Neri)

Great Migration, The
God Bless the Child (Holiday and Herzog)
The Great Migration: Journey to the North (Greenfield)

Green Belt Movement
Seeds of Change (Johnson)

Hip-Hop
When the Beat Was Born: DJ Cool Herc and the Creation of Hip-Hop (Carrick)

History
Bad News for Outlaws: The Remarkable Life of Bass Reeves, Deputy U.S. Marshal (Nelson)
Becoming Billie Holiday (Weatherford)
Black Dance in America: A History through Its People (Haskins)
Black Hands, White Sails: The Story of African-American Whalers (McKissack)
Childtimes: A Three-Generation Memoir (Greenfield and Little)
Copper Sun (Draper)

Fugitive Slave Act 1793
Anthony Burns: The Defeat and Triumph of a Fugitive Slave (Hamilton)

Gangs
Monster (Myers)
Yummy: the Last Days of a Southside Shorty (Neri)

Geology
Brendan Buckley’s Universe and Everything in It (Frazier)

GLBT
From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun: A Novel (Woodson)

Grandparents
Brendan Buckley’s Universe and Everything in It (Frazier)
Grandma’s Joy (Greenfield)
Justin and the Best Biscuits in the World (Walter)
A Little Love (Hamilton)
Mare’s War (Davis)
Mary Jo’s Grandmother (DuBurke)
The Moon Ring (DuBurke)
The Piano Man (Chocolate)
Storm in the Night (Stolz)
Toning the Sweep (Johnson)
Trouble’s Child (Walter)
When I Am Old with You (Johnson)

Graphic Novel
Yummy: the Last Days of a Southside Shorty (Neri)

Great Migration, The
God Bless the Child (Holiday and Herzog)
The Great Migration: Journey to the North (Greenfield)

Green Belt Movement
Seeds of Change (Johnson)

Hip-Hop
When the Beat Was Born: DJ Cool Herc and the Creation of Hip-Hop (Carrick)

History
Bad News for Outlaws: The Remarkable Life of Bass Reeves, Deputy U.S. Marshal (Nelson)
Becoming Billie Holiday (Weatherford)
Black Dance in America: A History through Its People (Haskins)
Black Hands, White Sails: The Story of African-American Whalers (McKissack)
Childtimes: A Three-Generation Memoir (Greenfield and Little)
Copper Sun (Draper)

Fugitive Slave Act 1793
Anthony Burns: The Defeat and Triumph of a Fugitive Slave (Hamilton)

Gangs
Monster (Myers)
Yummy: the Last Days of a Southside Shorty (Neri)

Geology
Brendan Buckley’s Universe and Everything in It (Frazier)
Subject Index

Jamaica (cont’d)
When the Beat Was Born: DJ Cool Herc and the Creation of Hip-Hop (Carrick)

Jim Crow Laws
The Friendship (Taylor)
The Great Migration: Journey to the North (Greenfield)
The Land (Taylor)
The Red Rose Box (Woods)
The Road to Memphis (Taylor)
The Legend of Buddy Bush (Moses)
We Are the Ship: The Story of Negro League Baseball (Nelson)
Wreath for Emmett Till (Nelson)

Justice (core democratic value)
Andrew Young: Young Man with a Mission (Haskins)
Anthony Burns: The Defeat and Triumph of a Fugitive Slave (Hamilton)
Black Diamond: The Story of the Negro Baseball Leagues (McKissack)
The Captive (Hansen)
Don’t Explain: A Song of Billie Holiday (De Veaux)
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.: Man of Peace (Patterson)
Fast Sam, Cool Clyde, and Stuff (Myers)
Francie (English)
Hand in Hand: Ten Black Men Who Changed America (Pinkney)
I Thought My Soul Would Rise and Fly: The Diary of Patsy, A Freed Girl (Hansen)
I, Too, Am America (Hughes)
Let It Shine: Stories of Black Women Freedom Fighters (Pinkney)
Let the Circle Be Unbroken (Taylor)
Lockdown (Myers)
A Long Hard Journey: The Story of the Pullman Porter (McKissack)
Malcolm X: By Any Means Necessary (Myers)
March: Book One (Lewis and Aydin)
Maritcha: A Nineteenth-Century American Girl (Bolden)
Monster (Myers)
Nelson Mandela (Nelson)
Now Is Your Time! The African-American Struggle for Freedom (Myers)
Paul Robeson (Greenfield)
The People Could Fly: American Black Folktales (Hamilton)

Twelve Rounds to Glory: The Story of Muhammad Ali (Smith)
We Are the Ship: The Story of Negro League Baseball (Nelson)
Zora and Me (Bond and Simon)

Life (core democratic value)
Jazmin’s Notebook (Grimes)
Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush (Hamilton)
Tears of a Tiger (Draper)
A Wreathe for Emmett Till (Nelson)
Yummy: the Last Days of a Southside Shorty (Neri)

Medical Ethics
Fortune’s Bones: The Manumission Requiem (Nelson)

Mental Illness
Jazmin’s Notebook (Grimes)
Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush (Hamilton)

Midwifery
Missy Violet and Me (Hathaway)

Mother/Daughter Relationships
Like Sisters on the Homefront (Williams-Garcia)
Money Hungry (Flake)
November Blues (Draper)
One Crazy Summer (Williams-Garcia)
P.S.: Be Eleven (Williams-Garcia)
Rainbow Jordan (Childress)
Toning the Sweep (Johnson)
Words with Wings (Grimes)

Mother/Son Relationships
From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun: A Novel (Woodson)

Murder
The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963 (Curtis)
A Wreath for Emmett Till (Nelson)
Yummy: the Last Days of a Southside Shorty (Neri)

Music
Aïda (Price, adapter)
All Night, All Day: A Child’s First Book of African-American Spirituals (Bryan, selector)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Bat Boy and His Violin</strong> (Curtis)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Becoming Billie Holiday</strong> (Weatherford)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Before John Was a Jazz Giant</strong> (Weatherford)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Don’t Explain: A Song of Billie Holiday</strong> (DeVeaux)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Duke Ellington: The Piano Prince and His Orchestra</strong> (Pinkney)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ellington Was Not a Street</strong> (Shange)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>God Bless the Child</strong> (Holiday and Greenfield)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jimi: Sounds Like a Rainbow: A Story of Jimi &amp; Me</strong> (Adoff)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jazzy Miz Mozetta</strong> (Dillon)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jazz on a Saturday Night</strong> (Dillon)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jazz</strong> (Myers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jazz</strong> (Myers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I'm Going to Sing: Black American Spirituals</strong> (Bryan, selector)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I See the Rhythm</strong> (Igus)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I'm Going to Sing: Black American Spirituals</strong> (Greenfield)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jimi: Sounds Like a Rainbow: A Story of Young Jimi Hendri</strong> (Golio)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lena Horne</strong> (Haskins)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Let It Shine: Three Favorite Spirituals</strong> (Bryan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Let the Lion Eat Straw</strong> (Southerland)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lou in the Limelight</strong> (Hunter)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>My Family Plays Music</strong> (Cox)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paul Robeson</strong> (Greenfield)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Piano Man</strong> (Chocolate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rap a Tap Tap: Here's Bojangles—Think of That!</strong> (Dillon)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ray Charles</strong> (Mathis)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Story of Stevie Wonder</strong> (Haskins)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What a Morning! The Christmas Story in Black Spirituals</strong> (Langstaff, comp.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>When the Beat Was Born: DJ Cool Herc and the Creation of Hip-Hop</strong> (Carrick)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Negro Spirituals</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Night, All Day: A Child’s First Book of African American Spirituals (Bryan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'm Going to Sing: Black American Spirituals (Bryan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let It Shine: Three Favorite Spirituals (Bryan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What a Morning! The Christmas Story in Black Spirituals (Langstaff)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>New Orleans</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ninth Ward (Rhodes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>New York City</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ellington Was Not a Street</strong> (Shange)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Harlem</strong> (Myers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Maritza: A Nineteenth-Century American Girl</strong> (Bolden)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>No Crystal Stair: A Documentary Novel of the Life and Work of Lewis Michaux</strong> (Nelson)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Uptown</strong> (Collier)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Occupations</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becoming Billie Holiday (Weatherford)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Hands, White Sails: The Story of African-American Whalers (McKissack)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Long Hard Journey: The Story of the Pullman Porter (McKissack)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Moon Over Star (Aston)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Crystal Stair: A Documentary Novel of the Life and Work of Lewis Michaux (Nelson)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talkin' about Bessie: The Story of Aviator Elizabeth Coleman (Grimes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twelve Rounds to Glory: The Story of Muhammad Ali (Smith)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncle Jed’s Barbershop (Mitchell)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We Are the Ship: The Story of Negro League Baseball (Nelson)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Cotton (Williams)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parents/Loss of</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everett Anderson’s Goodbye (Clifton)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knock Knock: My Dad’s Dream for Me (Beatty)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locomotion (Woodson)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miracle’s Boys (Woodson)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Peer Relationships</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Battle of Jericho (Draper)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Hadn’t Meant to Tell You This (Woodson)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November Blues (Draper)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who Am I Without Him? Short Stories About Girls and the Boys in Their Lives (Flake)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal Growth and Development/Self-Concept</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Blacker the Berry (Thomas)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chill Wind (McDonald)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francie (English)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guests in the Promised Land (Hunter)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heaven (Johnson)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Am a Black Woman (Evans)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet Danitra Brown (Grimes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Photography</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Van DerZee: The Picture Takin’ Man (Haskins)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Poetry</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All the Colors of the Race (Adoff)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashley Bryan’s ABC of African American Poetry (Bryan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becoming Billie Holiday (Weatherford)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Cat (Myers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Blacker the Berry (Thomas)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bronx Masquerade (Grimes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brown Honey in Broomwheat Tea (Thomas)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carver: A Life in Poems (Nelson)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Creation (Johnson)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dave the Potter: Artist, Poet, Slave (Hill)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everett Anderson’s Goodbye (Clifton)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every Man Heart Lay Down (Graham)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fortune’s Bones (Nelson)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Great Migration: Journey to the North (Greenfield)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half a Moon and One Whole Star (Dragonwagon)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Am a Black Woman (Evans)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Daddy’s Arms I Am Tall: African Americans Celebrating Fathers (Steptoe)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jazz on a Saturday Night (Dillon)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping the Night Watch (Smith)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Langston Hughes (Hughes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locomotion (Woodson)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet Danitra Brown (Grimes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My People (Hughes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Negro Speaks of Rivers (Hughes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Night on Neighborhood Street (Greenfield)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject Index</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Poetry</strong> (cont’d)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Other Side: Shorter Poems (Johnson)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Palm of My Heart: Poetry by African American Children (Adedjouma, ed.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soul Looks Back In Wonder (Feelings)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under the Sunday Tree (Greenfield)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visiting Langston (Perdono)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Voice of the Children (Jordan and Bush)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words with Wings (Grimes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Wreath for Emmett Till (Nelson)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Politics</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara Jordan (Haskins)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julius K. Nyerere: Teacher of Africa (Graham)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let It Shine: Stories of Black Women Freedom Fighters (Pinkney)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi Challenge (Walter)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nelson Mandela (Nelson)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul Robeson (Greenfield)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unbought and Unbossed (Chisholm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pregnancy</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The First Part Last (Johnson)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like Sisters on the Home Front (Williams-Garcia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November Blues (Draper)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prejudice</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another Way to Dance (Southgate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom Summer (Wiles)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Land (Taylor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Legend of Buddy Bush (Moses)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let the Circle Be Unbroken (Taylor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi Challenge (Walter)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry (Taylor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brendan Buckley’s Universe and Everything In It (Frazier)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darius &amp; Twig (Myers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guests in the Promised Land (Hunter)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lena Horne (Haskins)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March: Book One (Lewis and Aydin)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We Are the Ship: The Story of Negro League Baseball (Nelson)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pullman Porters</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Long Hard Journey: The Story of the Pullman Porter (McKissack)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Origin of Life on Earth: An African Creation Myth (Anderson)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Thief in the Village and Other Stories (Berry)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Racial Identity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All the Colors of the Race (Adoff)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Am a Black Woman (Evans)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zora and Me (Bond and Simon)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Racism</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another Way to Dance (Southgate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Diamond: The Story of the Negro Baseball Leagues (McKissack)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coretta Scott King (Patterson)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast Sam, Cool Clyde, and Stuff (Myers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francie (English)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goin’ Someplace Special (McKissack)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Never Had It Made: The Autobiography of Jackie Robinson (Duckett)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Land (Taylor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lena Horne (Haskins)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let the Circle Be Unbroken (Taylor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malcolm X: By Any Means Necessary (Myers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movin’ Up: Pop Gordy Tells His Story (Gordy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Road to Memphis (Taylor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roll of Thunder; Hear My Cry (Taylor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Song of the Trees (Taylor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This Life (Poitier)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We Are the Ship: The Story of Negro League Baseball (Nelson)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reconstruction
Ellen’s Broom (Lyons)
I Thought My Soul Would Rise and Fly: The Diary of Patsy, A Freed Girl (Hansen)
The Land (Taylor)

Rituals
The Bells of Christmas (Hamilton)
Christmas in the Big House, Christmas in the Quarters (McKissack)
Mirandy and Brother Wind (McKissack)
Toning the Sweep (Johnson)
Zora and Me (Bond and Simon)

Rivers
The Negro Speaks of Rivers (Hughes)

Rock Collecting
Brendan Buckley’s Universe and Everything in It (Frazier)

Romance
A Little Love (Hamilton)
Motown and Didi: A Love Story (Myers)
Who Am I without Him? (Flake)

Rule of Law (core democratic value)
Bad News for Outlaws: The Remarkable Life of Bass Reeves, Deputy U.S. Marshal (Nelson)
Becoming Billie Holiday (Weatherford)
Elijah of Buxton (Curtis)
Nelson Mandela (Nelson)
One Crazy Summer (Williams-Garcia)
The Rock and the River (Magoon)

School Clubs
The Battle of Jericho (Draper)

School Integration
Remember: The Journey to School Integration (Morrison)

School Stories
The Battle of Jericho (Draper)
Because We Are (Walter)
Each Kindness (Woodson)
Locomotion (Woodson)
Tears of a Tiger (Draper)
Virgie Goes to School with Us Boys (Howard)
Words with Wings (Grimes)

Science
Carver: A Life in Poems (Nelson)

Segregation
Freedom Summer (Wiles)
The Friendship (Taylor)
Goin’ Someplace Special (McKissack)
I Have a Dream: Martin Luther King, Jr. (Nelson)
March: Book One (Lewis and Aydin)
Mary McLeod Bethune (Greenfield)
Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry (Taylor)
Rosa (Giovanni)
The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963 (Curtis)
We Are the Ship: The Story of Negro League Baseball (Nelson)

Self-Concept
Another Way to Dance (Southgate)
The Battle of Jericho (Draper)
Black Means . . . (Grossman)
The Blacker the Berry (Thomas)
Bronx Masquerade (Grimes)
Darius & Twig (Myers)
Daydreamers (Greenfield)
Guests in the Promised Land (Hunter)
Keeping the Night Watch (Smith)
Mare’s War (Davis)
Meet Danitra Brown (Grimes)
The Moon over Star (Aston)
One Crazy Summer (Williams-Garcia)
The Other Side: Shorter Poems (Johnson)
My People (Hughes)
The Road to Paris (Grimes)
The Skin I’m In (Flake)
Slam! (Myers)
Something on My Mind (Grimes)
Soul Looks Back in Wonder (Feelings)
Words with Wings (Grimes)

Sexual Orientation
From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun: A Novel (Woodson)

Single Parenthood
Chill Wind (McDonald)
Forged by Fire (Draper)
From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun: A Novel (Woodson)
Like Sisters on the Homefront (Williams-Garcia)

Slave Revolts
Rebels Against Slavery: American Slave Revolts (McKissack)

Slavery
The Captive (Hansen)
Copper Sun (Draper)
Dave the Potter: Artist, Poet, Slave (Hill)
Day of Tears: A Novel in Dialogue (Lester)
The Days When the Animals Talked: Black American Folktales and How They Came to Be (Faulkner)
Escape to Freedom: A Play About Young Frederick Douglass (Davis)
From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun: A Novel (Woodson)
Heart and Soul (Nelson)
In the Time of the Drums (Siegelson)
The Middle Passage: White Ships Black Cargo (Feelings)
Minty: A Story of Young Harriet Tubman (Schroeder)
Mississippi Challenge (Walter)
Never Forgotten (McKissack)
The People Could Fly: American Black Folktales (Hamilton)
Rebels Against Slavery: American Slave Revolts (McKissack)
Sojourner Truth: Ain’t I a Woman (McKissack)
Underground: Finding the Light to Freedom (Evans)

Slavery/Escape From
Almost to Freedom (Nelson)
Anthony Burns: The Defeat and Triumph of a Fugitive Slave (Hamilton)
The Captive (Hansen)
Copper Sun (Draper)
Days of Jubilee: The End of Slavery in the United States (McKissack)
Elijah of Buxton (Curtis)
Escape to Freedom: A Play about Young Frederick Douglass (Davis)
Freedom River (Rappaport)
I Thought My Soul Would Rise and Fly: The Diary of Patsy, a Freed Girl (Hansen)
Moses: When Harriet Tubman Led Her People to Freedom (Weatherford)
Only Passing Through: The Story of Sojourner Truth (Rockwell)
The People Could Fly: American Black Folktales (Hamilton)
Slavery/Escape From (cont’d)
Sojourner Truth: Ain’t I a Woman
(McKissack)
This Strange New Feeling (Lester)
Underground: Finding the Light to Freedom (Evans)
Which Way Freedom? (Hansen)

South Africa
Nelson Mandela (Nelson)

Sports
The Bat Boy and His Violin (Curtis)
Black Diamond: The Story of the Negro Baseball Leagues (McKissack)
H.O.R.S.E.: A Game of Basketball and Imagination (Myers)
I Never Had It Made: The Autobiography of Jackie Robinson (Duckett)
Slam! (Myers)
Twelve Rounds to Glory: The Story of Muhammad Ali (Smith)
We Are the Ship (Nelson)

Suicide
Tears of a Tiger (Draper)

Tanzania
Julius K. Nyerere: Teacher of Africa (Graham)

Teachers
Julius K. Nyerere: Teacher of Africa (Graham)
The Skin I’m In (Flake)

Teen Pregnancy
The First Part Last (Johnson)

Tuskegee Institute
Portia: The Life of Portia Washington Pittman: The Daughter of Booker T. Washington (Stewart)

Underground Railroad
Underground: Finding the Light to Freedom (Evans)

Urban Stories
Another Way to Dance (Southgate)
Bronx Masquerade (Grimes)
Chill Wind (McDonald)
Darius & Twig (Myers)
Don’t Explain: A Song of Billie Holiday (De Veaux)
Fast Sam, Cool Clyde, and Stuff (Myers)
A Hero Ain’t Nothin’ but a Sandwich (Childress)
James Van DerZee: The Picture Takin’ Man (Haskins)
Knock Knock: My Dad’s Dream for Me (Beatty)
Lockdown (Myers)
Lou In the Limelight (Hunter)
Marvin and Tige (Glass)
Miracle’s Boys (Woodson)
Money Hungry (Flake)
Motown and Didi: A Love Story (Myers)
Night on Neighborhood Street (Greenfield)

Teen Pregnancy
The First Part Last (Johnson)

Voting Rights Act
Heart and Soul (Nelson)
Monster (Myers)

War
Brothers In Hope: The Story of the Lost Boys of Sudan (Williams)
Days of Jubilee: The End of Slavery in the United States (McKissack)
Fallen Angels (Myers)
Mare’s War (Davis)
The Other Side: Shorter Poems (Johnson)
Which Way Freedom? (Hansen)

Whaling
Black Hands, White Sails: The Story of African-American Whalers (McKissack)
Index

Note: Page numbers in bold indicate main discussions for authors, illustrators, and titles.

A
Adedjouma, Davida, 77
Adoff, Arnold, 86
Adoff, Jaime, 16, 89
Africa Dream, 45, 88, 92, 102
Aïda, 82, 97
Alcorn, Stephen, 23–24
All Night, All Day: A Child's First Book of African-American Spirituals, 81
All the Colors of the Race, 86, 118
Almost to Freedom, 69, 91, 111
Anderson, David A., 80
Andrew Young: Young Man with a Mission, 43–44, 104
Andrews, Benny, 66, 89–90
Angelou, Maya, 53
Another Way to Dance, 28, 117
Anthony Burns: The Defeat and Triumph of a Fugitive Slave, 36, 103
Ashley Brown's ABC of African American Poetry, 76, 92
Aston, Dianna Hutts, 64
Aydin, Andrew, 1–2, 90

B
Bad News for Outlaws: The Remarkable Life of Bass Reeves, Deputy U.S. Marshal, 7–8
Bailey, Pearl, 48, 90
Baker, Augusta, 36
Barbara Jordan, 46–47, 104
The Bat Boy and His Violin, 74–75, 106
The Battle of Jericho, 19, 97
Bayard Rustin: Behind the Scenes of the Civil Rights Movement, 27, 104
Beat the Story-Drum, Pum-Pum, 87
Beaty, Daniel, 59
Beautiful Blackbird, 68–69
Because We Are, 40, 120
Becoming Billie Holiday, 10, 120
Before John Was a Jazz Giant: A Song of John Coltrane, 64
The Bells of Christmas, 35, 103
Benjamin Banneker: Genius of Early America, 45, 112
Berry, James, 36, 90
Bible, Charles, 55
Bird, 64–65, 118
Black Cat, 74, 110
Black Child, 85, 107
Black Dance in America: A History through Its People, 34, 104
Black Diamond: The Story of the Negro Baseball Leagues, 30–31, 108
Black Means . . ., 55
Black Troubadour: Langston Hughes, 53, 115
The Blacker the Berry: Poems, 10, 63–64, 95
Blake, Clarence N., 48, 90
Bolden, Tonya, 14–15, 90–91
Bond, Victoria, 7, 91
Bootman, Colin, 69, 91
Boyd, Candy Dawson, 39, 91
Brendan Buckley's Universe and Everything in It, 12–13, 101
Bright Shadow, 40, 119
Bronx Masquerade, 20, 103
Brothers in Hope: The Story of the Lost Boys of Sudan, 67
Brown, David Scott, 45
Brown, Elbrite, 69, 91–92
Brown Honey in Broomwheat Tea, 32, 79, 95, 119
Browning, Colleen, 54
Bryan, Ashley, 37, 65, 68–69, 76, 81, 83, 84, 85–86, 87, 92
Bud, Not Buddy, 24, 95, 101
Bush, Terri, 55
Byard, Carole, 45, 80, 87, 88, 92–93

C
Caines, Jeannette, 86
The Captive, 30, 103
Carver: A Life in Poems, 22–23, 111
Childress, Alice, 41, 50, 93
Childtimes: A Three-Generation Memoir, 43, 102, 106
Chill Wind, 21, 107
Chisholm, Shirley, 53–54, 93
Chocolate, Debbi, 75
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>I</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I, Too, Am America, 60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Am a Black Woman, 54, 98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Hadn’t Meant to Tell You This, 31, 121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Have a Dream: Martin Luther King, Jr., 61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Have a Sister, My Sister Is Deaf, 45, 112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Have Heard of a Land, 74, 95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, 53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Never Had It Made: The Autobiography of Jackie Robinson, 52, 98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I See the Rhythm, 74, 121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Thought My Soul Would Rise and Fly: The Diary of Patsy, a Freed Girl, 27, 103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Igus, Toyomi, 74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m Going to Sing: Black American Spirituals, 85–86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Daddy’s Arms I Am Tall: African Americans Celebrating Fathers, 75, 117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the Time of the Drums, 73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>K</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping the Night Watch, 9–10, 117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knock, Knock: My Dad’s Dream for Me, 59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagarrigue, Jerome, 72, 105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Langstaff, John, 83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Langston Hughes: Poetry for Young People series, 66, 90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lardy, Philippe, 15–16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauture, Denizé, 77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>L</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Legend of Africa, 50, 115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Legend of Buddy Bush, 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lena Horne, 40, 104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lester, Julius, 14, 36–37, 40–41, 105–106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let It Shine! Stories of Black Women Freedom Fighters, 23–24, 113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let It Shine: Three Favorite Spirituals, 65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let the Circle Be Unbroken, 41, 119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let the Lion Eat Straw, 44, 117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lewis, E. B., 3, 9–10, 20–21, 63, 70, 73, 73–74, 74–75, 106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lewis, John, 1–2, 106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like Sisters on the Home Front, 29, 121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lilly, Charles, 51–52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lion and the Ostrich Chicks: And Other African Folk Tales, 37, 84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little, Lessie Jones, 43, 106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Eight John, 80, 94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Little Love, 39, 103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lockdown, 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locomotion, 19, 122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Long Hard Journey: The Story of the Pullman Porter, 35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lou in the Limelight, 41–42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyons, Kelly Starling, 60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>M</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Magical Adventures of Pretty Pearl, 40, 103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magoon, Kekla, 8–9, 106–107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magubane, Peter, 85, 107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malcolm X: By Any Means Necessary, 32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March: Book One, 1–2, 90, 106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mare’s War, 8, 96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maritcha: A Nineteenth-Century American Girl, 14–15, 91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin, Donald F., 48, 107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Freedom Movement, 35, 112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin’s Big Words: The Life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 71–72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marvin and Tige, 46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary: An Autobiography, 42, 108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Jo’s Grandmother, 56, 120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary McLeod Bethune, 46, 102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathis, Sharon Bell, 50, 88, 107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McDonald, Janet, 21, 107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McGowan, Gary, 26, 107–108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McKissack, Fredrick, Jr., 30, 108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Megane, Mary E., 42, 108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medearis, Angela Shelf, 79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet Danitra Brown, 79, 95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Middle Passage: White Ships/Black Cargo, 77–78, 99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mill, Eleanor, 56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minter, Daniel, 60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minty: A Story of Young Harriet Tubman, 76, 109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miracle’s Boys, 23, 121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mirandy and Brother Wind, 83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi Challenge, 33, 120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missy Violet and Me, 18, 104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitchell, Margaree King, 80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molto, Tololiwa, 73–74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money Hungry, 22, 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monster, 25, 110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Moon Over Star, 64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Moon Ring, 71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morrison, Frank, 68, 109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morrison, Toni, 16, 109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moses, Sheila P., 17, 109–110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moses: When Harriet Tubman Led Her People to Freedom, 66, 111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother Crocodile: An Uncle Amadou Tale from Senegal, 86, 118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother Crocodile/Maman-Caiman, 86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motown and Didi: A Love Story, 38–39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movin’ Up: Pop Gordy Tells His Story, 43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Africa: Profiles of Modern African Women, 51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mufaro’s Beautiful Daughters: An African Tale, 83, 118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mukasa, 51–52, 110–111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Family Plays Music, 69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Mama Needs Me, 85, 95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My People, 63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Index

My Rows and Piles of Coins, 73–74, 106
Myers, Christopher, 60–61, 66, 74, 76, 110
Myers, Walter Dean, 2, 6, 25, 28, 32, 33, 34, 35–36, 38–39, 43, 49, 66, 76, 110

N
Nagenda, John, 51–52, 110–111
Nathaniel Talking, 35, 82, 101, 102
Neeny Coming, Neeny Going, 77, 116
The Negro Speaks of Rivers, 63
Nelson, Kadi, 4, 9, 59, 61–62, 64, 66, 67, 69, 111
Nelson, Marilyn, 15–16, 17–18, 22–23, 111
Nelson, Vaunda Micheaux, 3–4, 7–8, 69, 111
Nelson Mandela, 59
Neri, Greg, 7, 111–112
Ness, Eavaline, 51
Never Forgotten, 5
Night on Neighborhood Street, 34, 81–82, 101, 102
No Crystal Star: A Documentary Novel of the Life and Work of Lewis Michaux, Harlem Bookseller, 3–4
Nolen, Jeridine, 69
November Blues, 11
Now Is Your Time! The African American Struggle for Freedom, 34

O
One Crazy Summer, 5–6
Only Passing Through: The Story of Sojourner Truth, 72, 93
The Origin of Life on Earth: An African Creation Myth, 80, 121
The Other Side: Shorter Poems, 26, 105

P
The Palm of My Heart: Poetry by African American Children, 77, 93
The Patchwork Quilt, 84–85
Patterson, Lillie, 35, 45, 47, 56, 112
Paul Robeson, 49, 102
The People Could Fly: American Black Folktales, 38, 85, 97, 103
The People Could Fly: The Picture Book, 67–68
Perdomo, Willie, 70
Peters, Margaret, 55–56, 112

Peterson, Jeanne Whitehouse, 45, 112
The Piano Man, 75, 120
Pinkney, Andrea Davis, 3, 23–24, 75, 112–113
Pinkney, Brian, 3, 32–33, 73, 75, 78, 81, 113
Pinkney, Jerry, 36–37, 64, 68, 71, 76, 82, 83, 84–85, 87, 113
Poitier, Sidney, 42
Portia: The Life of Portia Washington Pittman, the Daughter of Booker T. Washington, 47, 118
Powell, Nate, 1–2
Price, Leontyne, 82
P.S. Be Eleven, 1

Q
Qualls, Sean, 64, 113–114
Quiz Book on Black America, 48, 90, 107

R
Rainbow Jordan, 41, 93
Rampersad, Arnold, 66
Ransome, James E., 78, 80, 114
Rap a Tap Tap: Here’s Bojangles—Think of That!, 70, 97
Rappaport, Doreen, 71–72, 72–73
Ray Charles, 50, 88, 100
Rebels Against Slavery: American Slave Revolts, 28
The Red Rose Box, 21
Remember: The Journey to School Integration, 16, 109
Rhodes, Jewell Parker, 6, 114
Ringgold, Faith, 52, 81, 114–115
The Road to Memphis, 34, 119
The Road to Paris, 13–14
Roberts, Brenda C., 68
Robinson, Dorothy, 50, 115
The Rock and the River, 8–9, 106–107
Rockwell, Anne, 72
Roessel, David, 66
Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry, 41, 48, 119
Rollins, Charles, 53, 115
Rosa, 66–67
Ruffins, Reynolds, 77, 115
Running the Road to ABC, 77, 115

S
Sadler, Sonia Lynn, 62–63, 115–116
Saint James, Synthia, 77, 116
San Souci, Robert, 78, 81, 82
Schroeder, Alan, 76

The Secret Olivia Told Me, 65, 96
Seeds of Change, 62–63, 116
17 Black Artists, 52, 99
Shaffer, Terea, 79, 116
Shange, Ntozake, 67
Siegelson, Kim, 73
Simon, Tayna R., 7, 116
The Singing Man, 79, 116
The Skates of Uncle Richard, 44–45, 100
The Skin I’m In, 26
Slam!, 28
Smith, Charles R., Jr., 12, 63, 116–117
Smith, Hope Anita, 9–10, 20, 117
Sojourner Truth: Ain’t I a Woman?, 33
Soman, David, 34–35
Something on My Mind, 88, 99
Somewhere in the Darkness, 33, 110
Song of the Trees, 41, 49, 118–119
Soul Brothers and Sister Lou, 41, 104
Soul Looks Back in Wonder, 79, 99
Southerland, Ellease, 44, 117
Southgate, Martha, 28, 117
Standing against the Wind, 14, 105
Steptoe, Javaka, 62, 75, 117
Steptoe, John, 83, 86, 117–118
Stewart, Ruth Ann, 47, 118
Stolz, Mary, 83
Storm in the Night, 83, 95
The Story of Stevie Wonder, 47–48, 104
Strickland, Shadra, 64–65, 118
Sukey and the Mermaid, 81
Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush, 40, 103

T
The Tales of Uncle Remus: The Adventures of Brer Rabbit, 36–37, 106
Talkin’ About Bessie: The Story of Aviator Elizabeth Coleman, 20–21, 70, 103, 106
The Talking Eggs, 82
Tar Beach, 52, 81, 115
Taylor, Mildred D., 22, 34, 36, 41, 48, 49, 118–119
Taylor, Theodore, III, 60, 119
Tears of a Tiger, 31, 97
Temple, Herbert, 50
A Thief in the Village and Other Stories, 36
This Life, 42
This Strange New Feeling, 40–41, 105–106
Thomas, Joyce Carol, 10, 32, 40, 63–64, 74, 79, 119
Thompson, John, 29–30
Toning the Sweep, 31–32, 105
Trouble’s Child, 38
Tucker, Demetria Renee, 119, 120
Twelve Rounds to Glory: The Story of Muhammad Ali, 12, 116

U
Udry, Janice May, 56
Unbought and Unbossed, 53–54, 93
Uncle Jed’s Barbershop, 80, 114
Under the Sunday Tree, 83, 100
Underground: Finding the Light to Freedom, 61
Uptown, 72, 94

V
Velasquez, Eric, 75, 120
Virgie Goes to School with Us Boys, 73, 106
Visiting Langston, 70, 94
The Voice of the Children, 55, 105

W
Wahl, Jan, 80
Walter, Mildred Pitts, 33, 37, 38, 40, 85, 120
The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963, 29, 95
The Way a Door Closes, 20, 98, 117
We Are the Ship: The Story of Negro League Baseball, 9, 64, 111
Weatherford, Carole Boston, 10, 64, 66, 120
What a Morning! The Christmas Story in Black Spirituals, 83
When I Am Old with You, 34–35, 105
When the Beat Was Born: DJ Kool Herc and the Creation of Hip Hop, 60, 119
Which Way Freedom? 103
Who Am I Without Him? Short Stories about Girls and the Boys in Their Lives, 17, 100
Wiles, Deborah, 72
Williams, Mary, 67
Williams, Sherley Anne, 80
Williams-Garcia, Rita, 1, 5–6, 29, 120
Wilson, Kathleen Atkins, 80, 121
Wood, Michele, 74, 121
Woods, Brenda, 21
Woodson, Jacqueline, 3, 19, 23, 29, 31, 121–122
Words with Wings, 2–3
Working Cotton, 80, 93
A Wreath for Emmett Till, 15–16, 111

Y
Yarbrough, Camille, 87
The Young Landlords, 43
Yummy: The Last Days of a Southside Shorty, 7, 111–112

Z
Zaslavsky, Claudia, 87
Zora and Me, 7, 91, 116