

## MICHELLE MARTIN'S "TOP PICKS" in African-American Children's Literature

Dr. Martin offers the following beginning resource to teachers, early care providers, parents, youth development specialists and librarians in guiding their selection of children's books. The discussion questions in Neal Lester's *Once Upon a Time in a Different World*<sup>14</sup> can help guide classroom discussions on race in children's literature. This list, organized by themes described more fully below, includes some older and some newer children's literature that represent African-American children positively. Some are written by black authors; others are not. Some are for younger children; some are middle grade and a few are for older youth. This list is presented by publication date and is by no means exhaustive. All of the books included in this list are available through the Cleveland Public Library, and many are available through the Cuyahoga County Public Library system as well.

### BOOK RESOURCE KEY:

- Early Childhood Picture Books
- Kindergarten through Middle Elementary Picture Books
- ▲ Chapter Books

### EVERYDAY BLACKNESS

These books examine everyday experiences of Black Americans. They document diversity in daily life. Within this category is a subgenre of books focused on celebrating Black families.

- ■ *The Snowy Day*, Ezra Jack Keats, 1962
- *My Daddy is a Monster... Sometimes*, John Steptoe, 1980
- *The Patchwork Quilt*, Valerie Flournoy and Jerry Pinkney, 1985
- *Mirandy and Brother Wind*, Patricia McKissack, 1988
- *Aunt Flossie's Hats... and Crab Cakes Later*, Elizabeth Fitzgerald Howard and James Ransome, 1990
- *Let's Count Baby*, Cheryl Willis Hudson and George Ford, 1995
- *In Daddy's Arms I am Tall: African Americans Celebrating Fathers*, Javaka Steptoe, 1997
- *DeShawn Days*, Tony Medina and R. Gregory Christie, 2001
- *Visiting Day*, Jacqueline Woodson and E. B. Lewis, 2002
- ▲ *One Crazy Summer; P.S. Be Eleven; Gone Crazy in Alabama*, Rita Williams-Garcia, 2010, 2013, 2015
- *The Hula Hoopin' Queen*, Thelma Lynne Godin and Vanessa Branley Newton, 2014
- *One Word From Sophia*, Jim Averbeck and Yasmeen Ismail, 2015

- *How to Find Gold*, Vivian Schwartz, 2015

- *Little Robot*, Ben Hatke, 2015
- *Little Dee and the Penguin*, Christopher Baldwin, April 2016

### BLACK HISTORY & IMPORTANT PEOPLE

Books in this category provide children with knowledge about African-American history and examples of prominent Black Americans. Books depicting the harsh realities of slavery can serve to introduce children to the truth of the past and counter images of "happy slaves." Biographical picture books can provide children with African-American role models and reinforce their importance in American history.

- ▲ *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry; Let the Circle Be Unbroken; The Road to Memphis*, Mildred Taylor, 1976, 1981, 1990
- *Li'l Sis and Uncle Willie: Story Based on the Paintings of William H. Johnson*, Gwen Everett, 1991
- *Coming Home: From the Life of Langston Hughes*, Floyd Cooper, 1994
- *Zora Hurston and the Chinaberry Tree*, William Miller, Cornelius Van Wright and Ying-Hwa Hu, 1994
- *The Middle Passage*, Tom Feelings, 1995
- *More than Anything Else*, Marie Bradby and Chris K. Soentpiet, 1995

- *Ebony Sea*, Irene Smalls and Jon Onye Lockard, 1995
- *Minty: A Story of Young Harriet Tubman*, Alan Schroeder and Jerry Pinkney, 1996
- ▲ *Nightjohn and Sarny, A Life Remembered*, Gary Paulsen, 1993, 1997
- *Richard Wright and the Library Card*, William Miller and R. Gregory Christie, 1997
- *Through My Eyes*, Ruby Bridges and Margo Lundell, 1999
- *Martin's Big Words: The Life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*, Doreen Rappaport and Bryan Collier, 2001
- *Love to Langston*, Tony Medina, 2002
- *Ellington Was Not a Street*, Ntozake Shange and Kadir Nelson, 2004
- ▲ *A Wish After Midnight*, Zetta Elliott, 2010
- *Martin & Mahalia*, Andrea Davis Pinkney & Brian Pinkney, 2013
- ▲ *Brown Girl Dreaming*, Jacqueline Woodson, 2014
- *Marvelous Cornelius: Hurricane Katrina and the Spirit of New Orleans*, Phil Bildner and John Parra, 2015
- *Trombone Shorty*, Troy Andrews, Bill Taylor and Bryan Collier, 2015
- ▲ *Voice of Freedom: Fannie Lou Hamer, Spirit of the Civil Rights Movement*, Carole Boston Weatherford and Eku Holmes, 2015

## AFROCENTRIC PICTURE BOOKS

These books introduce children to African cultures and can provide a grounding for discussions of African-American heritage.

- *Moja Means One: Swahili Counting Book*, Muriel L. and Tom Feelings, 1971
- *Anansi the Spider: A Tale from the Ashanti*, Gerald McDermott, 1972
- *Jambo Means Hello: Swahili Alphabet Book*, Muriel L. and Tom Feelings, 1974
- *Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears: A West African Tale*, Verna Aardema, 1975
- *Ashanti to Zulu: African Traditions*, Margaret Musgrove, Leo and Diane Dillon, 1976
- *Afro-Bets ABC Book*, Cheryl Hudson, 1987
- *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters: An African Tale*, John Steptoe, 1987
- *The Talking Eggs: A Folktale from the American South*, Robert D. San Souci and Jerry Pinkney, 1989
- *Aida*, Leontyne Price and Leo and Diane Dillon, 1990
- *Africa Dream*, Eloise Greenfield and Carole Byard, 1992
- *A is for Africa*, Ifeoma Onyefulu, 1993
- *Cendrillon: A Caribbean Cinderella*, Robert D. San Souci and Brian Pinkney, 1998
- *My Painted House, My Friendly Chicken, and Me*, Maya Angelou and Margaret Courtney-Clark, 1994
- *Pretty Salma: A Little Red Riding Hood Story from Africa*, Niki Daly, 2007
- *Beauty and the Beast*, H. Chuku Lee and Pat Cummings, 2014

## CELEBRATIONS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN BEAUTY

These books challenge White supremacist beauty narratives by celebrating African-American physical appearance. They can be used as a starting point for discussions with children about physical appearance.

- *Black is Brown is Tan*, Arnold Adoff, 1973
- *Cornrows*, Camille Yarbrough, 1979
- *An Enchanted Hair Tale*, Alexis De Veaux and Cheryl Hanna, 1991
- *Something on my Mind*, Nikki Grimes and Tom Feelings, 1995
- *Sam and the Tigers: A New Telling of Little Black Sambo*, Julius Lester and Jerry Pinkney, 1996
- *Nappy Hair*, Carolivia Herron and Joe Cepeda, 1997
- *No Mirrors in My Nana's House*, Ysaye M. Barnwell and Synthia Saint James, 1998
- *Happy to be Nappy*, bell hooks and Chris Raschka, 1999
- *Shades of Black*, Sandra L. Pinkney and Myles C. Pinkney, 2000
- *I Love My Hair*, Natasha Anastasia Tarpley and E. B. Lewis, 2001
- *Be Boy Buzz*, bell hooks and Chris Raschka, 2002
- *Bippity Bop Barbershop*, Natasha Anastasia Tarpley, 2002
- *Please, Baby Please*, Spike Lee & Tony Lewis Lee, 2002
- *I Like Myself*, Karen Beaumont, 2004
- *Mixed Me*, Taye Diggs & Shane Evans, 2015

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