

Affirming African American Boys

by KaaVonia Hinton

Preschool through high school

In 1969—just four years after Nancy Larrick’s landmark study “The All-White World of Children’s Books” appeared in the *Saturday Review*—John Steptoe, an 18-year-old author and illustrator, published his first picture book, *Stevie* (HarperCollins, 1969). This book introduced Robert, a witty, sensitive, and as it turned out, caring young African American boy, who is forced to share his parents, toys, and playtime with Stevie. This important story about jealousy is one of the first picture books that offered empowering images of African American males, African American communities, and Black English vernacular. *Stevie* received critical attention; it was named an ALA Notable Children’s Book in 1969 and won a Society of Illustrators’ Gold Medal in 1970. Steptoe went on to write other realistic stories about African American boys, as well as books in other genres, including folklore.

The recent publication of professional materials such as David Booth’s *Even Hockey Players Read: Boys, Literacy, and Learning* (Stenhouse, 2002), Michael Smith and Jeffrey Wilhelm’s *Reading Don’t Fix No Chevys: Literacy in the Lives of Young Men* (Heinemann, 2002), and a number of articles in professional journals confirm that the correlation between gender and literacy continues to be a concern for educators. Research indicates that African Ameri-

can boys seem to be trailing other children in literacy acquisition. With the current focus on teaching literature that affirms students’ cultural experiences, educators need to make a variety of books available to students.



Reminiscent of *Stevie*, the books in this bibliography have a universal quality. They are books about African American boys who are steeped in their culture, yet have concerns, issues, and interests common to all children. There is an African American boy at the center of each title, but the books will appeal to both male and female readers.

Picture Books

Battle-Lavert, Gwendolyn. *The Music in Derrick’s Heart*. Illus. by Colin Bootman. 2000. 32p. Holiday, \$16.95 (0-8234-1353-5).

Preschool–Gr. 3. Derrick wants to learn to play the harmonica, and this is the summer that Uncle Booker T. is going to teach him how to do it. The two share their music with family and friends as they dance around town. But when fall arrives, arthritis slows

John Steptoe’s *Stevie* tells what happens when the title character (shown here) comes to stay at Robert’s house.

Uncle Booker T. down, and Derrick decides to find out if practicing and sleeping with the harmonica every night has helped him learn to play it with passion.

Battle-Lavert, Gwendolyn. *Papa’s Mark*. Illus. by Colin Bootman. 2003. 32p. Holiday, \$16.95 (0-8234-1650-X).

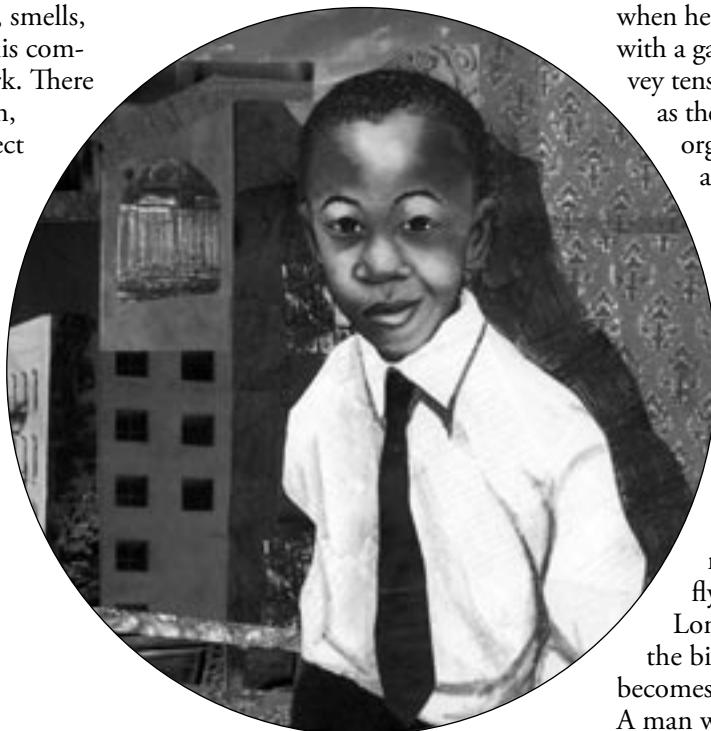
K–Gr. 3. Though Simms is too young to vote on the first election day in which black men are allowed to participate, he is determined to help. He makes signs encouraging voters to

go to the polls, and he stands firmly by his father's side when the other men have second thoughts about exercising their voting rights. But most important, Simms teaches his father how to sign his name, and for that, Papa invites Simms to join him as he puts his ballot into the box.

Collier, Bryan. *Uptown*. 2000. 32p. Holt, \$16.95 (0-8050-5721-8); paper, \$6.95 (0-8050-7399-X).

Preschool–Gr. 3. A boy uses metaphors to celebrate the sights, smells, sounds, and uniqueness of his community in Harlem, New York. There is much to say about Harlem, but the most important aspect

Bryan Collier's energetic text and collages depict Harlem from a boy's perspective in *Uptown*.



of the neighborhood is that it is the boy's home. The energy conveyed by Collier's watercolor-and-collage illustrations mirrors the mood of the text.

Cooke, Trish. *Full, Full, Full of Love*. Illus. by Paul Howard. 2003. 32p. Candlewick, \$15.99 (0-7636-1851-9).

Preschool–Gr. 1. Reminiscent of Cooke's first title, *So Much* (Candlewick, 1994), this book features Jay Jay and his family. The setting is Grandma's house, and the occasion is Sunday dinner. Though she tries to distract him, an impatient Jay Jay repeatedly asks Gran if it is time to eat. When aunts, uncles, cousins, and friends finally arrive, Jay Jay knows it's time to sit down to their weekly family dinner.

Coy, John. *Strong to the Hoop*. Illus. by Leslie Jean-Bart. 1999. 32p. Lee & Low, \$16.95 (1-880000-80-6).

Gr. 2–5. Jean-Bart's collage illustrations, composed of photographs and scratchboard drawings, give this universal story an urban setting. Anyone who has ever been told he or she is too young to play will cheer for James as he makes the best of an opportunity to join the older guys in a basketball game.

hooks, bell. *Be Boy Buzz*. Illus. by Chris Raschka. 2002. 32p. Hyperion/Jump at the Sun, \$16.99 (0-7868-0814-4); paper, \$6.99 (0-7868-1643-0).

Preschool–K. Raschka's vibrant illustrations in shades of brown dance about the pages, portraying a lively boy running, jumping, and acting up. The words provide a rhythmic beat in celebration of boyhood.

Johnson, Angela. *I Dream of Trains*. Illus. by Loren Long. 2003. 32p. Simon & Schuster, \$16.95 (0-689-82609-5).

Preschool–Gr. 2. The narrator's father is a sharecropper, but he knows there is more to life than picking

cotton and living in Mississippi. He clings to his dream of taking a train ride far away from the South with legendary Casey Jones and his fireman, Sim Webb. Powerful acrylic paintings portray the thrill of the mighty trains.

Joose, Barbara. *Stars in the Darkness*. Illus. by R. Gregory Christie. 2001. 36p. Chronicle, \$14.95 (0-8118-2168-4).

Gr. 1–3. The narrator reveres his big brother, Richard, and is disappointed when he discovers Richard is involved with a gang. Acrylic illustrations convey tension, turmoil, and then hope as the protagonist and his mother organize neighbors to fight against gang-related violence. A moving note reveals authorial intent and inspiration behind the story.

Myers, Christopher. *Fly!* 2001. 32p. Hyperion/Jump at the Sun, \$15.99 (0-7868-0652-4).

Gr. 1–3. From his window, Jawanza watches as the people in his community roam and the birds fly from building to building. Lonely, he attempts to decipher the birds' messages, but instead becomes frustrated and yells at them. A man who lives in the community named Roderick Jackson Montgomery the Three challenges Jawanza to learn to communicate with the birds. Jawanza accepts the challenge, and before long, the birds become his friends.

Myers, Christopher. *Wings*. 2000. 40p. Scholastic, \$16.95 (0-590-03377-8).

Gr. 1–3. A nameless young female narrator secretly observes Ikarus Jackson as classmates taunt him because his ability to fly makes him different. Immediately, she identifies with Ikarus, defends and encourages him, and a new friendship takes flight as she learns to overcome her own shyness.

Stephoe, Javaka. *The Jones Family Express*. 2003. 40p. Lee & Low, \$17.95 (1-58430-047-7).

Gr. 1–3. Aunt Carolyn is coming for a visit, and Steven wants to find just the right gift for her. He goes from store to store on Nostrand Avenue until he finds the perfect gift in the last place he expected—Uncle Charles' house. Aunt Carolyn loves Steven's gift and has a wonderful gift of her own to offer—an invitation to travel with her.

Tarpley, Natasha Anastasia. *Joe-Joe's First Flight*. Illus. by E. B. Lewis. 2003. 40p. Knopf, \$15.95 (0-375-81053-6).

Preschool–Gr. 2. Due to discrimination in the 1920s, African Americans were not allowed to fly airplanes. That does not stop Joe-Joe's father and the All-Original Flying Men, employees of the Blind Eye airport, from

hoping for the opportunity to become pilots. Joe-Joe dreams of flying too. In his dream, he flies to the moon and lures it back to Blind Eye along with the hope that one day black aviators will soar.

Novels

Cameron, Ann. *The Stories Huey Tells*. Illus. by Roberta Smith. 1995. 112p. Yearling, paper, \$4.99 (0-679-88559-5).

Gr. 1–3. Illustrated with black-and-white art, this warm, friendly chapter book is one of several about Huey, his older brother, Julian, and the rest of their family and the everyday adventures they share.

Curtis, Christopher Paul. *Bucking the Sarge*. 2004. 240p. Random/Wendy Lamb, \$15.95 (0-385-32307-7).

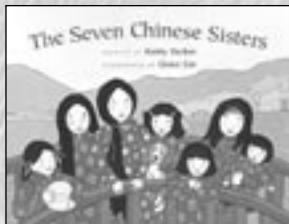
Gr. 5–9. In this hilarious, an-

guished novel, 15-year-old Luther cares for four men in the adult rehabilitation home run by his scheming mother in Flint, Michigan, as he strives to win the school science fair and beat out Shayla Patrick, his secret love. The triumphant ending is a little far-fetched, but the farce is so enjoyable that readers will be rooting for Luther throughout.

Curtis, Christopher Paul. *Bud, Not Buddy*. 1999. 256p. Delacorte, \$16.95 (0-385-32306-9); Yearling, paper, \$5.99 (0-440-41328-1).

Gr. 4–6. Set in Michigan during the Depression era, this novel follows the journey of 10-year-old orphan Bud Caldwell as he applies his "Rules and Things for Having a Funner Life and Making a Better Liar Out of Yourself" while looking for jazz musician Herman E. Calloway, the man he believes to be his father.

TALES FROM AROUND THE WORLD



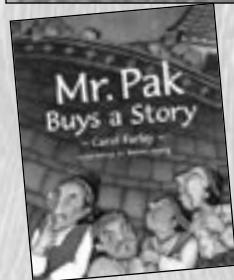
The Seven Chinese Sisters

by Kathy Tucker • Illus. by Grace Lin
"Good old-fashioned storytelling distinguishes Tucker's thoroughly engaging tale of courage, individual talent, and teamwork. Lin...expertly captures the drama and humor of the story with delightful paintings that reveal lovely Chinese landscapes and a quirky, not-too scary dragon." Starred, *Booklist*
Ages 5–8 • ISBN 0-8075-7309-4 • \$15.95



Grandma Lena's Big Ol' Turnip

Retold by Denia Lewis Hester
Illus. by Jackie Urbanovic
NEW! Grandma Lena's turnip grows to an enormous size and won't come out of the ground. It takes this entire African-American family to pull together in this adaptation of an old Russian tale sure to delight one and all.
Ages 3–8 • ISBN 0-8075-3027-1 • \$15.95



Mr. Pak Buys a Story

Retold by Carol Farley
Illus. by Benrei Huang
"In this Korean folktale, Mr. and Mrs. Kim, a wealthy but bored couple, send their faithful servant to buy a story to enliven their quiet evenings." Recommend, *The Bulletin*
Ages 4–7 • ISBN 0-8075-5179-1 • \$6.95



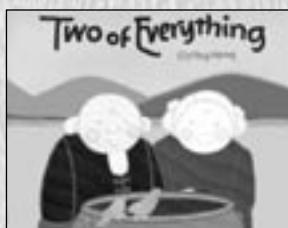
The Barking Mouse

Retold by Antonio Sacre
Illus. by Alfredo Aguirre
"Two Spanish-speaking mouse siblings provoke a cat, who chases them back to their picnic site, where Papa, who has earlier bragged about his muscles, turns coward. Peppered with Spanish words and phrases, this tale shows predictability to the end..." *The Horn Book Guide*
Ages 5–8 • ISBN 0-8075-0571-4 • \$15.95



Mabela the Clever

Retold by Margaret Read MacDonald
Illus. by Tim Coffey
"The energetic text is trademark MacDonald, written purely to be read aloud, and punctuated by a chant that invites children to join in...children will respond to...this plucky little heroine who saves herself by her wits." *Kirkus Reviews*
Ages 4–7 • ISBN 0-8075-4902-9 • \$15.95



Two of Everything

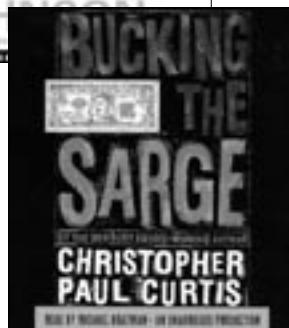
Retold and Illus. by Lily Toy Hong
"There's a pleasing wholeness about this book that's characteristic of the best picture books...Retold with verve and gentle humor this Chinese folktale could become a read-aloud favorite." Starred, *Booklist*
Ages 5–8 • ISBN 0-8075-8157-7 • \$15.95

ALBERT WHITMAN & COMPANY • 6340 DAKTON STREET • MORTON GROVE, ILLINOIS 60053

Audio Connections

The following titles in this bibliography are also available in an audiobook format.

- ***Bucking the Sarge***. By Christopher Paul Curtis. Read by Michael Boatman. 2004. Listening Library. 4 cassettes (6 hrs.), \$32 (1-4000-9036-9); 5 CDs, \$40 (1-4000-9484-4).
- ***Bud, Not Buddy***. By Christopher Paul Curtis. Read by James Avery. 2000. Listening Library. 3 cassettes (5¼ hrs.), \$27 (0-8072-8209-X).
- ***Darnell Rock Reporting***. By Walter Dean Myers. Read by Peter Francis James. 1995. Recorded Books. 3 cassettes (3½ hrs.), \$24.95 (0-7887-0205-X).
- ***The First Part Last***. By Angela Johnson. Read by Khalipa Oldjohn. 2004. Listening Library. 1 cassette (1½ hrs.), \$15 (1-4000-9066-0); 2 CDs (1¾ hrs.), \$24 (1-4000-9115-2).



- ***Handbook for Boys***. By Walter Dean Myers. Read by Peter Francis James. 2002. HarperAudio. 3 cassettes (4 hrs.), \$24 (0-06-008968-7).
- ***Locomotion***. By Jacqueline Woodson. Read by J. D. Jackson. 2003. Recorded Books. 1 cassette (1 hr.), \$9.95 (1-4025-3949-5).
- ***Miracle's Boys***. By Jacqueline Woodson. Read by Dulé Hill. 2001. Listening Library. 2 cassettes (2½ hrs.), \$23 (0-8072-0525-7).
- ***The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963***. By Christopher Paul Curtis. Read by LeVar Burton. 1996. Listening Library. 4 cassettes (5 hrs.), \$32 (0-8072-8334-7).

Curtis, Christopher Paul. *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963*. 1995. 224p. Delacorte, \$16.95 (0-385-32175-9); Yearling, paper, \$6.50 (0-440-41412-1).

Gr. 4–8. Kenny Watson's older brother, Byron, can't seem to stay out of trouble, so the family travels from Flint, Michigan, to Birmingham, Alabama, hoping his strong grandmother will teach him some sense. The children learn firsthand about Jim Crow laws in the South and the violence that accompanies the struggle for civil rights when Kenny's sister attends church the morning it is bombed and four little girls are killed.

Johnson, Angela. *The First Part Last*. 2003. 144p. Simon & Schuster, \$15.95 (0-689-84922-2); Simon Pulse, paper, \$5.99 (0-689-84923-0).

Gr. 7–up. Bobby, the sensitive single father who first appeared in *Heaven* (Simon & Schuster, 1998), describes the details that led to his daughter Feather's birth, his beloved

girlfriend Nia's postpartum illness, and his love for the newborn baby.

Myers, Walter Dean. *Darnell Rock Reporting*. 1994. 144p. Yearling, paper, \$4.99 (0-440-41157-2).

Gr. 4–7. Distractions surround Darnell Rock: gangs, friends, peer pressure, and mischief. But he finds an extracurricular activity at school that changes the direction of his life. Darnell's work on the school paper provides him the opportunity to observe his surroundings, commit to social action, and mature.

Myers, Walter Dean. *Handbook for Boys: A Novel*. 2002. 192p. HarperCollins, \$15.95 (0-06-029146-X); HarperTrophy, paper, \$5.99 (0-06-440930-9).

Gr. 7–up. After being charged with assault, Jimmy is given the opportunity to avoid a jail sentence in exchange for working with Duke Wilson, the neighborhood barber. Once there, Jimmy meets Kevin, and together the

boys encounter a community of black men willing to share their life experiences and what they have learned from them.

Woodson, Jacqueline. *From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun*. 1995. 160p. Scholastic/Blue Sky, paper, \$5.99 (0-590-45881-7).

Gr. 7–10. Melanin Sun is not like the other teenage boys he knows. He writes in his notebook and still enjoys spending quiet time with his mother. Things seem simple, until he becomes interested in a girl in his neighborhood and his mother tells him she's in love with Kristin, a white woman. The passing of time and writing in his notebook help him realize he has to give Kristin and his mother a chance.

Woodson, Jacqueline. *Miracle's Boys*. 2000. 192p. Putnam, \$15.99 (0-399-23113-7); Puffin, paper, \$5.99 (0-698-11916-9).

Gr. 7–10. Lafayette lives with his

brothers now that both of his parents are dead. Being without parents has been difficult for all of the boys, but Lafayette slowly comes to realize that the brother who appears to be the toughest feels the greatest pain. Unconditional love and forgiveness keep the boys together during difficult times, and by the book's end, it is clear that things will only get better for them.

Poetry

Cummings, Pat. *Angel Baby*. 2000. 24p. HarperCollins, \$15.95 (0-688-14821-2).

Preschool–Gr. 2. From sunrise to sunset, Amanda Lynne's baby brother keeps both her and her mother busy. Vibrant, colorful illustrations show the energetic baby being less than angelic: yanking shoelaces from his pet cat's mouth, throwing bath toys out of the tub, and trying to finger-paint his kitty. Repetition, rhythm, and rhyme make this book a poetic read.

Grimes, Nikki. *My Man Blue*. Illus. by Jerome Lagarrigue. 1999. 32p. Dial, \$16.99 (0-8037-2326-1); Puffin, paper, \$6.99 (0-14-230197-3).

Gr. 2–5. At first Damon is suspicious of Blue, a neighbor who lost a son to street violence. But Blue's tough exterior is soon forgotten as his kindness and genuine concern for Damon are made clear. Grimes' poetry, enhanced by Lagarrigue's strong, realistic illustrations, depicts a budding relationship between two unlikely friends.

Grimes, Nikki. *When Daddy Prays*. Illus. by Tim Ladwig. 2002. 32p. Eerdmans, \$16 (0-8028-5152-5); paper, \$8 (0-8028-5266-1).

Preschool–K. Ladwig's warm illustrations depict both the physical strength and the humility of a man in constant conversation with God as his son looks on in admiration. The

14 poems reveal the man's love for his family and the comfort the narrator feels as a result of his father's fervent prayers.

Johnson, Angela. *Daddy Calls Me Man*. Illus. by Rhonda Mitchell. 1997. 32p. Orchard, paper, \$6.95 (0-531-07175-8).

Preschool–Gr. 3. Marveling at the artistic creations of his parents, a young boy is inspired to create a little art of his own. In four poems, he verbally paints vivid pictures of life with his family as he learns to help his parents care for his little sister. For that, his father offers him the ultimate compliment: he calls him man.

Medina, Tony. *DeShawn Days*. Illus. by R. Gregory Christie. 2001. 32p. Lee & Low, \$16.95 (1-58430-022-1).

Gr. 1–5. In 14 poems, 10-year-old DeShawn Williams makes observations about his family, neighborhood, society, and himself. The poems evoke a range of emotions, and readers will share DeShawn's joy and weep with him, too.

Smith, Charles R., Jr. *Hoop Kings*. 2004. 42p. Candlewick, \$14.99 (0-7636-1423-8).

Gr. 3–6. Poetry and professional basketball meet in this collection of 12 poems about some of today's greatest National Basketball Association stars. Players featured range from Allan Iverson to Shaquille O'Neal.

Smith, Charles R., Jr. *Perfect Harmony: A Musical Journey with the Boys Choir of Harlem*. 2002. 32p. Hyperion/Jump at the Sun, \$15.99 (0-7868-0758-X).

Gr. 4–7. This collection of 13 poems pays tribute to the Boys Choir of Harlem. Smith's photographs provide a glimpse of what it is like to be a part of this remarkable choir for boys of various ages. A glossary of poetic and musical terms is included.

Listed below are articles from past issues of *Book Links* about African American boys. For information on how to obtain back issues, see p.3.

- "Power Books: Books about African American Boys," January 1996, p.21
- "Seeing Themselves in What They Read," December 2001/January 2002, p.50

Smith, Hope Anita. *The Way a Door Closes*. Illus. by Shane W. Evans. 2003. 64p. Holt, \$18.95 (0-8050-6477-X).

Gr. 5–8. Through poetry, 13-year-old CJ tries to make sense of his family's journey from hope to despair and back after his father abandons them. The 34 narrative poems are heartfelt and emotional.

Smith, Will. *Just the Two of Us*. Illus. by Kadir Nelson. 2001. 32p. Scholastic, \$16.95 (0-439-08792-9).

Preschool–Gr. 1. Actor and musician Smith revisits his popular recording of the song in this tribute to fathers who actively participate in raising their children. Nelson's illustrations extend the lyrics, depicting a bond between father and son that increases as the child grows up.

Woodson, Jacqueline. *Locomotion*. 2003. 128p. Putnam, \$15.99 (0-399-23115-3); Puffin, paper, \$5.99 (0-14-240149-8).

Gr. 3–6. Lonnie Collins Motion, or Locomotion, is a foster child separated from his sister after the tragic death of their parents. Locomotion is also a budding poet, experimenting with different poetic forms under the tutelage of his teacher. Many of the revealing and emotional poems that make up this novel in verse are disheartening, yet ultimately hopeful.

KaaVonia Hinton is an assistant professor at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia.