Jacqueline Woodson
What Gets Left Behind: Stories from the Great Migration
Welcome to the first Children & Libraries (CAL) digital supplement, featuring Jacqueline Woodson's 2017 May Hill Arbuthnot Honor Lecture!

Published in addition to the four quarterly issues of CAL, this new digital supplement allows for the Arbuthnot Lecture to be released in a timely fashion following the live event. Readers no longer must wait for the fall or winter issue of CAL to enjoy the annual lecture.

Each year an Arbuthnot lecturer is chosen to prepare a paper considered to be a significant contribution to the field of children's literature. The paper is delivered as a lecture in the spring, and subsequently published via Children & Libraries.

Look for the CAL digital supplement each spring following the Arbuthnot Honor Lecture. The release date will depend on the lecture date, which varies from year to year.

Happy Reading!
Sharon Verbeten
CAL Editor
Introduction

The 2017 May Hill Arbuthnot Honor Lecture, “What Gets Left Behind: Stories from the Great Migration,” was delivered by Jacqueline Woodson on April 1, at the W. W. Hootie Johnson Performance Hall, in the Darla Moore School of Business, at the University of South Carolina.

Jacqueline Woodson is the 2014 National Book Award winner for her New York Times bestselling memoir, Brown Girl Dreaming. The author of more than two dozen books for young readers, she is a four-time Newbery Honor winner, a recipient of the NAACP Image Award, a two-time Coretta Scott King Award winner, and served a term as the Young People’s Poet Laureate for the Poetry Foundation.

Woodson writes about characters from a variety of races, ethnicities, and social classes. Her books feature strong female characters and she often writes about friendship between girls.

Born on February 12, 1963, in Columbus, Ohio, Woodson grew up in Greenville, S.C., and Brooklyn, N.Y., and graduated from college with a B.A. in English. She lives with her family in Brooklyn, New York.

The 2017 May Hill Arbuthnot Honor Lecture Committee selected the South Carolina State Library and the city of Columbia, South Carolina, to serve as the host site for the lecture.

In the application to host the lecture, Denise Lyons, deputy director of the South Carolina State Library observed, “Ms. Woodson...writes about situations and people...involving serious issues. The issues are not easy; they involve race, ethnicity, sexual abuse, and sexual orientation. Woodson herself stated, ‘I can’t write about nice, easy topics because that won’t change the world.’"

Members of ALSC’s 2017 Arbuthnot Honor Lecture Committee were: Ellen Hunter Ruffin, chair, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, Mississippi; Barbara A. Genco, Brooklyn, New York; Jessica Tackett MacDonald, Boston Public Library; Susan Person, Mamie Doud Eisenhower Public Library, Broomfield, Colorado; and Danielle A. Shapiro, Brooklyn (New York) Public Library.
Lecture

What Gets Left Behind: Stories from the Great Migration

JACQUELINE WOODSON

“There is a balm in Gilead, to make the wounded whole.
There is a balm in Gilead, to heal the sick soul . . .”

What happens to a dream deferred?
Does it dry up
Like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore –
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over –
Like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
Like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?
—Langston Hughes

It is April 1, 2017, and I stand before you on this first evening of National Poetry Month as someone’s mother, someone’s daughter, someone’s life-partner, another woman’s grandchild, niece, cousin, friend—this list goes on. I stand before you as a poet, a novelist, a gatherer of memories. I stand before you with all of my many selves in one place—South Carolina. A state (and state of mind) I have always loved, have always called home. But it is a home that, like millions of African Americans, I left a long time ago.

So many of us know the story. How from the early 1900s to the mid- to late 1970s, millions of us left the only home not only we, but our ancestors, could ever remember knowing. We left by train—riding in Jim Crow cars until we were far enough north that there were no Jim Crow cars. We left in over-burdened, second-hand station wagons. We scraped money together and bought tickets on Greyhound buses. Sometimes we left in the cover of night, for fear of getting found out. Sometimes, we told no one we were going. We were the foundation of this state, the workforce. We were the planters and pickers of cotton, the horse-drawn carriage drivers turned chauffeurs. We were the wet nurses turned nannies. We were the enslaved turned maids and butlers. We were the ones not allowed to read turned teachers, the ones turned away from white hospitals turned roots women and midwives and doctors. We were the doctors not allowed to practice here, the teachers in book-less schools, the sharecroppers eternally ‘in debt’ to landowners. What would the south be without us?

When he was in his twenties, my great uncle Talmus left Aiken, South Carolina. He moved to the Upper West Side of Manhattan, drove a rented medallion cab until he was able to buy his own medallion—which for those of you who don’t know is a literal medallion that gets placed on a taxi one owns. The difference being more money gets made, more job flexibility and security as you are then your own boss. My great uncle had left the south in the cover of night. He had been accused of mouthing off to a white boss or maybe it was looking at a white woman or maybe it was defending himself against a beating by a white man and, as the story goes, the lynch mob was on its way. Why do I say, “as the story goes?” The story of my great uncle was one that remained whispered, or worse, only alluded to. It was a story cradled in PTSD. The people who fled were afraid of what had happened—happening again. So while the adults tried to hold on to their history, that history was often too painful to say out loud. While they tried to give us lessons in survival, there were so many words and stories they were afraid to tell. So the stories were side-mouthed as in, “Well we know about that white man and Uncle Thomas” or “Thomas’ name was Talmus before he fled the south” and “Shoot, he’d be hanging from that rope they were coming with for him, not driving a taxi if . . .

If . . .

If . . .
With the help of relatives, Talmus was able to escape the south, change his name, and start a new life. As a child, I knew only shadows of this story. Mostly I knew Uncle Thomas as my rich uncle living on the posh upper west side of Manhattan. He had made it. He had escaped. With his life. So many didn’t. Between 1882 and 1963, three thousand four hundred and forty-six Black people were lynched in the south. They were men. They were boys. They were young women. 15 lynchings happened in Greenwood, South Carolina. 14 in Aiken. 13 in Barnwell. 11 in Laurens. 10 in Colleton. 9 in Florence. 9 in York. 8 in Lexington. 8 in Orangeburg. 6 in Edgefield. My uncle had lived in Aiken, where the state’s second highest number of lynchings took place.

On lynching days, white crowds gathered to watch Black people hang from trees. They drank beer, smoked cigarettes, photographed themselves with their children on their shoulders smiling beside the hanging bodies.

And so we fled.

We each wore our one good outfit; gloved and hatted, we packed our own food for the journey—there was often nowhere for us to stop along the way—no bathrooms we were legally allowed to use, no restaurants in which we were allowed to eat. And even if there were, the money we’d saved was for the trip—and for the promise that awaited us at the end of the journey—a deep freedom we could imagine—finally. Still—If we were lucky, tucked into our purses or slipped inside our suitcoat pockets was a copy of The Green Book, or rather, as it was officially titled, The Negro Motorist Green Book. First published by Victor H. Green in 1936, the book listed hotels, restaurants, nightclubs, barber and beauty shops, tourists homes, and gas stations from Alabama to Wyoming where it was safe for us to stop.

Here in Columbia, the list was long—from tourists homes on Wayne and Pine Streets to Holman’s Barber Shop and Count’s Drug store.

My uncle Talmus passed away in March. Only now that he is gone do I feel safe enough to tell his story.

I wear memory like a warm coat protecting me from the deep chill of erasure. My mother’s been dead for eight years now. My grandmother long gone too. Still, they are with me in memory—the soft lift of the words curling from their mouths as the south reminded them again and again, You can leave me but I will never leave you. This, I remember. Their feet—like my own would become one day—were planted one in each world. This, I remember. I was a child when my mother first went to investigate New York City—its list of places in The Green Book long and inviting as a southern breeze. My siblings and I stayed behind with our grandparents. My mother would return for us. We knew. We hoped. This, I remember. A year ago, I wrote this poem:

The Great Migration

I knew the story long before I knew
the reason for my mother leaving
South Carolina. Her black
pumps, leather and new, bought a
size too small —A sale
or vanity—(She’s gone now too late
for the asking)

One shoe and then the other and
then the first again and then and
then

small steps

onto a bus already filled with The
Leavers
people heading north from a South
Carolina slipping
like silk from their mouths You got
people up there and

Where y’ all planning on staying
and the quiet Yes, Ma’ams from
children.

New York a dream in the palms of
sweaty hands, the pinch
of too tight shoes. A fierce wave

Goodbye to ol’ Jim Crow

I knew the story long before I knew

The story—My mother’s brown
hands
on her purse, her three children
left behind
for now her forehead pressed
against the Greyhound window.

I don’t know the story, never asked

Did you ever consider not coming
back for us It was a story
I didn’t want to know.

How did she come to believe in a
place
she’d never seen? When did she
know that home
wasn’t home anymore? I thought

I knew

the story.

But, for a moment, let’s return to ol’ Jim Crow. After Lincoln’s death in 1865, we got President Andrew Johnson. Enslavement was over. Lincoln had been trying to do some things to help some black folks out. Johnson wasn’t having it. He supported white supremacy in the south and with this support, the conditions of slavery were all but restored. See, Andrew Johnson, like a lot of the old boys, had this idea that under enslavement America was a great place. And he had plans. Big plans. My boy was thinking, well, maybe he’d make America great again.

I knew the story long before I knew the story . . .

President after president after president refused to endorse anything related to the civil rights of African Americans, allowing Jim Crow and the Ku Klux Klan to thrive. In 1935, an anti-lynching bill was met with a six-day, gentlemanly discussion before it died.

What was discussed by these “gentlemen?” How did they not see that fathers and brothers and sons and uncles and grandfathers—were being ruthlessly, violently killed. How did they not see . . . Us?

So the status quo was maintained by this so-called “gentleman’s agreement” up until the decade I was born.
From *Brown Girl Dreaming*:

February 12, 1963.
I am born as the south explodes,
too many people too many years
enslaved, then emancipated
but not free, the people
who look like me
keep fighting
and marching
and getting killed
so that today—
February 12, 1963
and every day from this moment on,
brown children like me can grow up
free. Can grow up
learning and voting and walking
and riding
wherever we want.

If my grandmother were still alive, today
would be her birthday. She was born
April 1, 1914 (or 1915). She claimed my
aunt Lucinda was older. My aunt Lucinda
claimed my grandmother was older. They
were both vain and because they were
very close in age, even into their 70s,
they possessed a fierce sibling rivalry.
My grandmother had left the south. Aunt
Lucinda had stayed. Aunt Lucinda, like
so many cousins and aunts and uncles,
ever once came to visit us in New York
City. But most summers, we returned to
South Carolina and, as newly forming city
children, my siblings and I suffered under
the ridiculing we got from our southern
peers. They thought we talked too fast
and were snobby. They couldn't believe
my sister thought herself cute. In Toni
Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, when the other
kids chide the character Maureen Peal
and tell her she thinks she's cute, she says,
"I AM cute." My sister was academically
brighter than most kids her age—in both
New York and South Carolina. It was just
a fact that we lived with and, if you were
me, a child who was SO not excelling aca-
demically, you just walked through your
life with this information being as deeply
understood as the color of your own hair.
But the kids back home in South Carolina
were having none of it. When my sis-
ter, like Morrison's Maureen Peal said,
"I AM cute," some grown women had to
pull those children off of my sister. As a
child, I didn't understand who we were
to the children of the south. We were
*other* in what we thought was our own
hometown; in our grandparents' house,
our candy lady's house, our Dime Store
and fabric store and Kingdom Hall. We
had left, and with us, we had taken our
belonging.

We had also taken our religion with us
to New York City and as I grew older and
moved from the world of South Carolina
to the world of Brooklyn and then back
again, I began to internalize a deep and
important lesson from the religion I was
being raised inside of—I was in the world
but I wasn't of the world. And from this
vantage, I began to understand the deeper
truths about this place—there was those
who left and those who stayed. Years
later, when the Great Migration would
be named as a movement, as the names
of those who were children of the great
migration were ticked off—from Michael
Jackson to Michael Jordan, from James
Baldwin to James Brown, from Davis to
Dunbar, I was proud to be of both a peo-
ple who left and a people who stayed.

My aunt Lucinda stayed. As did my Uncle
Vertie and Aunt Annie Mae and cousins
Sam and Janice and Michael. The list goes
on. They stayed and they fought. It is the
question I ask myself daily now—do I stay
in this country and fight for those who
can't leave. Or do I leave for the safety of
myself and my family? What would I have
done in the 1960s? What will I do now?

Only a few years after my uncle Robert
arrived in New York City, he was locked
up for a crime I never knew. *It would have
been worse in South Carolina*, my grand-
mother would say again and again. *He
would have been put on the chain gang.*
Years and years before I understood the
school to prison pipeline or prison pri-
vatization or mass incarceration, I under-
stood that my uncle was walking, as my
grandmother called it, *the wide road*.
In both Greenville and New York, he hung
out with beautiful black men I was always
crushed out on; who wore wide-brimmed
hats and were always asking each other
for "a little taste of that"—whatever "that"
was in the silver flask appearing from
back pockets. They shot dice (which was
against every rule my family had ever written, and trust me, in my family,
there were a lot of rules!), played cards
(another no-no). My uncle and the guys
he hung out with would probably be
rappers today. Or Spoken Word Artists.
Or they may have been coders or dot.
commers or doing something in business.
that made a lot of money but was only legal because of some capitalist loophole in government. But my uncle was born in a different place in time. So often, I celebrate this moment that I’m in now; even with the hardship of it, I know each of us is exactly where we need to be and in the body we need to be in for the work that has to be done. For my mother, what she didn’t know, was she was creating a writer. From Ohio to Greenville to Brownsville to Jamaica Queens to Bushwick and back to Greenville again, I was moving through the world, watching the people in it, listening hard for the stories hidden inside the fear of telling the story . . .

[Woodson reads pages 104–109 from Brown Girl Dreaming.]

There is a balm in Gilead.

In the early 70s, my younger brother along with hundreds of other economically poor young people of color in this country were poisoned by lead-based paint. Today, history is repeating itself with the water in Flint, Michigan. During the Jim Crow era, they came for people of color via our bathrooms. Today, they’re coming for our trans sisters and brothers the same way. Our water, our air, our land, our bodies. This is what the Great Migration has taught me—that the strength of all people lies in our ability to both leave for better opportunity—and stay to fight.

From the time I was a young child, I have always loved stories—the way they empower both teller and listener, how they allow us to leave the world then float right back down into it but different somehow. Wiser. Freer. For myself, fiction has always been a way to ask questions of the world—through my own writing and through the writers I read. I am grateful to all of you for being here, for showing up, for leaving, for staying. I am grateful for all of our particular bodies working together at this moment in time. Recently, I began a new book about a boy, his two brothers, and his single dad. When I write, I often don’t know where the book is going to take me. Like my mother, I get on the bus and hope for the best on the other side. And like so many who came before me, I am grateful for the opportunity to have the journey.

This is from my forthcoming novel, Something There.

In the early evening, the house has a certain light
Slanting in through the dark wood blinds. It hits the couch then slides across the floor. Bright gold it is. And then orange and finally, silver gray then gone. You watch your father on the couch in that light, watch from the doorway, the baby asleep across his lap, his tiny arms dangling over one leg, his tiny feet—the other. The nap is a good one, your father softly snoring, the baby sighing deep from the back of his baby throat. And the light like a cover over them, darkness coming on. This is the room where your mother pulled you into her lap, kissed the top of your head a million times until you laughed so hard your stomach hurt. Until you begged, then demanded that she stop.

Stop!

and see how the light wraps everyone up now
In sleep, in dreams, in memory.

How the light moves like a hand
Or your mother’s long gone eyes over all of you.

“Without memory, our existence would be barren and opaque, like a prison cell into which no light penetrates; like a tomb which rejects the living. . . . If anything can, it is memory that will save humanity. For me, hope without memory is like memory without hope.” I wish it was me who wrote that. It was the Romanian-born, Nobel Laureate, political activist, holocaust survivor, deeply thoughtful Elie Wiesel.

Let us remember that we are living in a country that was built on the blood of black bodies and poor white bodies, a country that was swindled away from our First Nation brothers and sisters. Let us remember that we are walking through a history where black bodies were traded alongside cotton and tobacco and gold.

And let us remember the blood in our veins has a history of resistance running through it.

From Emmett Till to Trayvon Martin—Let us remember.

From the March on Washington 1963 to the Women’s March on Washington 2017—Let us remember.

From Abraham to Obama, from Johnson to this one—Let us remember.

For those who came before us and for the young ones coming behind, let us remember and, more than anything, let us continue to be the balm.
In conjunction with this year’s May Hill Arbuthnot Honor Lecture, the South Carolina State Library held a “Young Minds Dreaming” poetry contest. More than 600 South Carolina students, grades 3–12, submitted original poems on the topic of a person, place, or experience that made an impression on the student’s life.

“The State Library was thrilled at the response to the poetry contest,” said Denise Lyons, deputy director of the South Carolina State Library. “It became clear that there is both interest and enthusiasm by many at all levels to celebrate poetry in a significant way across the state. . . . Our hope is that we will be able to continue the Young Minds Dreaming contest in some way even after the Arbuthnot events have ended.”

Nine winners, chosen by a panel of judges, were invited to meet Jacqueline Woodson and recite their work in a closed ceremony held on the day of the Arbuthnot Lecture.

CONTEST WINNERS

Elementary (grades 3–5)

1st Place
Sonia Baxter, 3rd grade: “The Beach”

2nd Place
Catie Coats, 5th grade: “My Grandma’s Death”

3rd Place
Michaela Grindstaff, 5th grade: “Up Main Street”

Middle (grades 6–8)

1st Place
Nada Rahal, 6th grade: “Beauty”

2nd Place
Charlotte Hughes, 8th grade: “The Cherry Blossom City”

3rd Place
Michaela Lanier, 7th grade: “Destructional Peace”

High (grades 9–12)

1st Place
Skye Robertson, 12th grade: “Dreams”

2nd Place
Gillian Moses, 9th grade: “Flight”

3rd Place
April Williams, 11th grade: “Dreaming of Innocence”
About May Hill Arbuthnot

The May Hill Arbuthnot Honor Lecture is an annual event featuring an author, critic, librarian, historian, or teacher of children’s literature, of any country, who shall prepare a paper considered to be a significant contribution to the field of children’s literature. This paper is delivered as a lecture each April or May, and is subsequently published in Children and Libraries, the journal of ALSC.

May Hill Arbuthnot (1884–1969) was born May Hill in Mason City, Iowa, and graduated from the University of Chicago in 1922, receiving her master’s degree in 1924 from Columbia University. Along with educator William Scott Gray, she created and wrote the Curriculum Foundation Readers—better known as the “Dick and Jane” series—for children, published by Scott, Foresman and Company (now Pearson Scott Foresman).

Her greatest contribution to children’s literature, however, was her authorship of Children and Books, the first edition of which was published in 1947. In 1927, she joined the faculty of Case Western Reserve University, and there she met and married Charles Arbuthnot, an economics professor. She also served as editor of both Childhood Education and Elementary English. Her other works include The Arbuthnot Anthology of Children’s Literature, Children’s Books Too Good to Miss, and Time for Fairy Tales, among others.

Arbuthnot received the Constance Lindsay Skinner Medal (now known as the WNBA Award) in 1959 from the Women’s National Book Association for her “meritorious work in the world of books.” In 1964, Arbuthnot was the recipient of the Regina Medal from the Catholic Library Association for excellence in the field of children’s literature.

To link Arbuthnot’s name with an oratory award makes perfect sense. When accepting the award in 1969, she recalled “that long stretch of years when I was dashing from one end of the country to the other, bringing children and books together by way of the spoken word.” She also affirmed, “I am a strong believer in the efficacy of direct speech. . . . a forthright vigorous lecture can set fire to a piece of literature that had failed to come to life from the printed page.” She was thrilled at the prospect of this award providing a forum for “new voices speaking with new insight and new emphasis in the field of children’s lectures.” (Quote from The Arbuthnot Lectures, 1970–79, ALA/ALSC, 1980.)