how i discovered poetry

brown girl dreaming
The Coretta Scott King Book Awards Discussion Guide is prepared by the 2015 Coretta Scott King Book Awards Jury Chair Kim Patton, and members Rose Dawson, Christina Dorr, Ph.D., Ruth Newell, Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop, Emeritus, Barbara Spears, Ed.D., retired, and Martha Walke.

The activities and discussion topics are developed to encompass state school standards. These standards equally apply to students from all linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Students will demonstrate their proficiency, skills, and knowledge of subject matter in accordance with national and state standards. Please refer to the US Department of Education website, www.ed.gov, for detailed information.

THE CORETTA SCOTT KING BOOK AWARD: A LIVING LEGEND

The Coretta Scott King Book Awards have grown since their conception in the late 1960s. At a dinner gala of the New Jersey Library Association in May 1970, Lillie Patterson was honored for her biography *Martin Luther King, Jr., Man of Peace*. In 1972, the first Coretta Scott King Book Awards breakfast was held at an ALA conference site. Official affiliation with the Social Responsibilities Round Table (SRRT) came in 1980, and in 1982, the American Library Association recognized the Coretta Scott King Award as an association award.


For more than forty years, books by African American writers and artists have been honored by receiving the Coretta Scott King Book Award. This award promotes understanding and appreciation of African American culture and the culture of all peoples. The award is designed to commemorate the life and works of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and to honor Mrs. Coretta Scott King for her courage and determination to continue the work for peace and world brotherhood. The multidimensional characteristics of the authors' and illustrators' works reflect the African American experience from both the historical and contemporary perspectives. Opportunities to celebrate the rich and powerful experiences depicted in these books lie in the hands of the adults in children's and young adults' lives.

This discussion guide is, therefore, dedicated to those teachers, parents, librarians, booksellers, and caregivers who are committed to enriching the lives of children and young adults with quality literature. Among their many other functions, book awards provide a simple means for casual browsers in bookstores, libraries, and schools to find material that is engaging, well-crafted, and satisfying both emotionally and intellectually. The Coretta Scott King Book Awards particularly introduce the best in African American literature to all children. The award now graces dozens of titles, from picture books for the smallest children to novels and nonfiction for teenagers. In this guide, we have examined some of these titles from different angles and perspectives.
2015 AWARD WINNER & HONOR BOOKS

**CORETTA SCOTT KING BOOK AWARD AUTHOR WINNER**

**BROWN GIRL DREAMING**
Written by Jacqueline Woodson
Nancy Paulsen Books, an imprint of Penguin Group

**CORETTA SCOTT KING BOOK AWARD ILLUSTRATOR WINNER**

**FIREBIRD**
Illustrated by Christopher Myers
Written by Misty Copeland
G. P. Putnam’s Sons, an imprint of Penguin Group

**JOHN STEPTOE AWARD FOR NEW TALENT**

**WHEN I WAS THE GREATEST**
Written by Jason Reynolds
Atheneum Books for Young Readers, an imprint of Simon & Schuster Children’s Publishing Division

**CORETTA SCOTT KING BOOK AWARD AUTHOR HONOR**

**HOW I DISCOVERED POETRY**
Written by Marilyn Nelson
Illustrated by Hadley Hooper
Dial Books, an imprint of Penguin Group

**CORETTA SCOTT KING BOOK AWARD AUTHOR HONOR**

**HOW IT WENT DOWN**
Written by Kekla Magoon
Henry Holt and Company

**CORETTA SCOTT KING BOOK AWARD ILLUSTRATOR HONOR**

**JOSEPHINE: THE DAZZLING LIFE OF JOSEPHINE BAKER**
Illustrated by Christian Robinson
Written by Patricia Hruby Powell
Chronicle Books

**CORETTA SCOTT KING BOOK AWARD ILLUSTRATOR HONOR**

**LITTLE MELBA AND HER BIG TROMBONE**
Illustrated by Frank Morrison
Written by Katheryn Russell-Brown
Lee & Low Books, Inc.
Brown Girl Dreaming

Written by Jacqueline Woodson
Nancy Paulsen Books, an imprint of Penguin Group

This moving memoir describes the life of noted author, Jacqueline Woodson. She describes growing up in the 1960s and 1970s in the North as well as the South. Written in free verse, the novel addresses a variety of topics including Woodson growing up as a Jehovah’s Witness, family love, and finding her voice as a writer.

Activities and Discussion Topics
1. Jacqueline Woodson likely interviewed many relatives for her book. Pretend you are an author and interview your relatives. Ask them to tell you a funny, or sad, or happy story from their childhood. Use a writing pad and pencil, cell phone, or a digital recorder to document their memories.
2. Go to the public library and learn how to make your family tree. Look at the Woodson Family Tree and the Irby Family Tree in the book, and note how the lines of the two family trees are connected. With the help of your relatives, create your own family tree and connect the lines.
3. Interview people from your church, neighborhood, or community that are between 80 and 90 years old. 80 year olds were born in 1935 and 90 year olds were born in 1925. Be sure to make a list of questions first. Ask them how they feel about the world today, and to talk about historical events that happened during their lifetime.
4. Write a free verse stanza based on something that has happened to you or a relative and share it with a friend or teacher.

Related CSK Titles
**FIREBIRD**
Illustrated by Christopher Myers
Written by Misty Copeland
G. P. Putnam’s Sons, an imprint of Penguin Group

Christopher Myers’s illustrations depict the brilliant, colorful world of the ballerina. The vibrant lines and colors mirror the movement of Misty Copeland’s famous performance as “Firebird.” Encased in gorgeous collages and endpaper, adorned with balletic poses, and filled with the breathtaking energy of the art form, this book spurs the imagination as it depicts a young girl’s hopes and dreams, this book spurs the imagination as it depicts a young girl’s hopes and dreams. This book is full of vibrant color and movement for the young reader. Many young children have visions of growing up to be a star on stage, in theatre, or even in the movies. In this book, Copeland supports a young girl who dreams of becoming a ballerina.

**ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION TOPICS**
1. Misty Copeland wrote this story about a ballerina inspired to greatness by an older dancer whom she considers a role model. Write a short essay about someone you consider a role model. How does this person inspire you?
2. Take a moment and dream about something you feel is unattainable. Now say to yourself, “I can do it.” Close your eyes and imagine yourself doing the unattainable. You can do it. Share what your dreams are.
3. Misty Copeland is one famous African American ballet dancer, but there are others such as Raven Wilkinson, Janet Collins, and Michaela Prince. Go to the library or search online for information about other famous African American ballet dancers and their life stories.

**RELATED CSK TITLES**
When I Was The Greatest
Written by Jason Reynolds
Atheneum Books for Young Readers, an imprint of Simon & Schuster Children’s Publishing Division

Living in a rough neighborhood in Brooklyn, Allen/Ali befriends next-door neighbors Noodles and Needles, nicknamed by Ali’s younger sister. Needles has Tourette syndrome, and Ali’s mother, Doris, teaches him to knit as a way to calm himself. Noodles often courts minor trouble, but Ali is usually able to make things right. But when the boys attend an illicit adult party, they find themselves in serious trouble. In an authentic contemporary urban voice, Reynolds describes their misadventures while focusing on the importance of family, the acceptance of responsibility, and the obligations of friendship.

Activities and Discussion Topics
1. Needles is living with Tourette syndrome. Research this illness to learn how it manifests itself and whether knitting is actually considered by medical professionals to have a calming effect.

2. Why do you think the author decided to create a character with Tourette syndrome? How does he use this character to move the action? Does this syndrome/character act as a foil? In literature, a foil is a character that shows qualities that contrast to the qualities of another character in order to highlight the traits of the other character. Cite specific scenes to support your responses.

3. The book cover shows a gun wrapped in colorful stitched yarn. What do you think the cover artist was trying to say with that image?

4. What do you think is the main theme of this book? Is the title related to this theme? How do you think the author succeeds, or not, in reflecting this theme in the plot? The characters? The setting?

Related CSK Titles
THE Crossover

Written by Kwame Alexander
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company

This fast-paced, action-packed novel—told in creative, rhythmic, rhyming free verse poetry, with liberal use of onomatopoeia and assonance—will keep readers totally engaged. The book is laid out in sections like a basketball game, with a graceful progression of plot. It deals with everyday occurrences poignantly, employing dialect and basketball jargon, almost in the style of a journal. Words and situations have multiple layers of meaning, and can pull in even a reluctant reader.

ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. What is the purpose of employing the structure and language of basketball in the book?
2. How does Josh’s relationship change with his family as the book progresses?
3. What do you think of the ending?
4. At the beginning of the story, the twins are very close and share a tight bond. What happens to unravel their relationship? Describe how you would feel if someone you were once very close to suddenly began to pull away and you were no longer close friends.
5. Tragedy strikes the family when Josh’s father suddenly takes ill. Describe a time when your family was faced with tragedy. How did you cope with the difficult circumstances?

RELATED CSK TITLES

How I Discovered Poetry

Written by Marilyn Nelson
Illustrated by Hadley Hooper
Dial Books, an imprint of Penguin Group

Marilyn Nelson reflects on her life from age four to thirteen, at different military bases during the 1950s, a time of tremendous upheaval. In fifty poems, she speaks of her upbringing on these bases, the racism she faced, her siblings and friends, as well as the pivotal role her parents played in helping her surmount prejudice. She ends with her realization that poetry will be the medium that will allow her to express herself.

Activities and Discussion Topics
1. Describe what you think the author means by the title of this book. Is she discovering poetry or herself? Use specific lines to support your response.
2. The book depicts a ten-year span, from 1950 through 1959. How do the laws and social conventions of the time affect Nelson?
3. In the poem “Sputnik”, Nelson mentions Little Rock. Find out what happened there in 1957. Why do you think she compares that with Sputnik?
4. Draw a time line of your life from age four to your present age. How, and why, did you select the incidents, places, and people you chose to illustrate?

Related CSK Titles
HOW IT WENT DOWN
Written by Kekla Magoon
Henry Holt and Company

Everyone thinks they know what occurred on the tragic night of the shooting death of Tariq Johnson. The author skillfully dissects Tariq’s story by allowing the people closest to him, and some not so close, to reveal their perceptions regarding the truth. As community members discuss what they thought they saw the night of the incident, the results are stark. Tensions run high, as people appear to be dazed, hurt, and angry. For Tariq and a few others, it is too late, but some make courageous decisions and move on with their lives. It is never clear how it really went down.

ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. Underhill, the community where the shooting death of Tariq takes place, is in crisis and is confronted with various issues. Research and write a short essay on issues that your neighborhood or community is experiencing, such as gang membership, graffiti/tagging of community property, emotional/sexual abuse between dating couples, bullying, or race-based violence.

2. Has your perception of wearing a “hoodie” changed? Discuss with your parents or friends concerning the wearing of this kind of sweatshirt.

3. When Kimberly became Reverend Alabaster Sloan’s assistant, she had no experience, but she quickly learned community organizing skills. Organize an event for your neighborhood or community. Remember to write a press release, invite speakers or performers, post flyers, and publicize through social media.

RELATED CSK TITLES


CORETTA SCOTT KING BOOK AWARD
ILLUSTRATOR HONOR

JOSEPHINE: THE DAZZLING LIFE OF JOSEPHINE BAKER
Illustrated by Christian Robinson
Written by Patricia Hruby Powell
Chronicle Books

In free verse Patricia Hruby Powell depicts the life of the truly dazzling entertainer Josephine Baker. Born poor in St. Louis, but gifted and irrepresible, Josephine danced and sang her way to international fame. She took Paris by storm, adopted twelve diverse children, fought for civil rights, spent generously but unwisely, and died as she had wished, at the end of a dance. Robinson’s fluid acrylic paintings, full of bold color, reveal Josephine’s life as theater, a curtain opening at each stage, portraying specific incidents as well as her exuberance for life. The verbal and visual art are perfect complements to one another.

ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION TOPICS
1. Find photographs of Josephine Baker. What aspects of Josephine do you think the illustrations captured?
2. “Josephine danced a sizzling flapper dance—the Charleston.” Find out what a “flapper” was and what the “Charleston” was and when they were popular.
3. Throughout the book, the author has included quotes from Josephine, such as this one: “Life is a series of summits and behind each crest looms another peak to be scaled.” What do you think that means? List some of the “peaks” that Josephine had to scale.
4. At the beginning of each section of Josephine’s life, the illustrator shows an open theater curtain and some hint about what will happen during that time. Look at the first (1906–1917) and the last (1947–1975). What is pictured in each of them, and what meanings or connections to Josephine’s life can you find?

RELATED CSK TITLES
Weatherford, Carole Boston. Becoming Billie Holiday. Illustrated by Floyd Cooper.
Copeland, Misty. Firebird. Illustrated by Christopher Myers.
LITTLE MELBA AND HER BIG TROMBONE
Illustrated by Frank Morrison
Written by Katheryn Russell-Brown
Lee & Low Books, Inc.

Melba Doretta Liston has always loved the sounds of music. As a child, she daydreamed about beats and lyrics, and hummed along with the music from her family’s Majestic radio. When Melba was seven years old she got her first trombone and simply fell in love. She quickly taught herself to play and before long she was sharing her extraordinary musical gift with the world. She was so good that she toured the country, playing with famous jazz bands and with people such as Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Billie Holiday, and Quincy Jones.

ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION TOPICS
1. Melba’s family had always been surrounded by music. Make a list of some of your favorite songs from your early childhood days. How does the music you listened to back then compare with the music you love to listen to now?
2. Choose your favorite genre of music and write a brief essay about a famous musician.
3. Touring with a famous band sounds like fun, but musicians are often away from their families for many months at a time. Do you think you would enjoy such travel? Make a list of things you would bring with you so you wouldn’t get homesick. How would you keep in touch with your family back home?

RELATED CSK TITLES
2015 WINNER
CORETTA SCOTT KING—VIRGINIA HAMILTON AWARD
FOR LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT

DEBORAH D. TAYLOR
Deborah D. Taylor, coordinator of School and Student Services, Enoch Pratt Free Library, Baltimore, is the recipient of the 2015 Coretta Scott King—Virginia Hamilton Practitioner Award for Lifetime Achievement. Taylor’s career in public service began more than 40 years ago with the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore, where she is currently coordinator of School and Student Services. Her career has been spent as mentor, educator and literacy advocate for young adults. As an inspiring young adult librarian, leader in national associations and university instructor, she has been distinctly effective in introducing young people and her professional colleagues to the outstanding work of African American authors.

ABOUT THE CORETTA SCOTT KING—
VIRGINIA HAMILTON AWARD FOR LIFETIME
ACHIEVEMENT

The Coretta Scott King—Virginia Hamilton Award for Lifetime Achievement is named in memory of beloved children’s author Virginia Hamilton. The annual award is presented in even years to an African American author, illustrator or author/illustrator for a body of his or her published books for children and/or young adults, and who has made a significant and lasting literary contribution. In odd years, the award is presented to a practitioner for substantial contributions through active engagement with youth using award winning African American literature for children and/or young adults, via implementation of reading and reading related activities or programs.

Virginia Hamilton was an award-winning author of children’s books. She wrote more than 35 books throughout her career, including M. C. Higgins, the Great, for which she won the 1975 Newbery Medal. During her lifetime, Ms. Hamilton received numerous awards, including the Coretta Scott King Book Award, the Edgar Allan Poe Award, the Boston Globe-Horn Book Award, and the Hans Christian Andersen Award.

THE CORETTA SCOTT KING
BOOK AWARDS SEAL

The Coretta Scott King Book Awards seal was designed by artist Lev Mills in 1974. The symbolism in the seal reflects both Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s philosophy and the ideals of the award. The basic circle represents continuity in movement, resolving from one idea to another. Within the circle is the image of an African American child reading a book. The five main religious symbols below the image of the child represent nonsectarianism. The superimposed pyramid symbolizes both strength and Atlanta University, the award’s headquarters when the seal was designed. At the apex of the pyramid is the dove, symbolic of peace. The rays shine toward peace and brotherhood.

The Coretta Scott King Book Awards seal image and award name are solely and exclusively owned by the American Library Association.