

Coretta Scott King Awards Celebrate Forty Years

Where the Coretta Scott King Book Awards Meet YALSA's Best Books for Young Adults and the Michael L. Printz Award

By Deborah Taylor

This year, the Coretta Scott King Book Awards will celebrate forty years of recognizing outstanding books by African American

writers and illustrators. Many of those honored especially for text were also important contributions to young adult literature. As we mark this milestone

year, it is interesting to take a look at some of the unique and trailblazing titles that resonated with the Coretta Scott King Committee and YALSA's Best Books for Young Adults (BBYA) and Michael L. Printz Award

Committees. While this selection does not include all of the titles recognized by multiple committees, it does seek to highlight some of the works that represent the scope and variety of the choices over the years.

The Coretta Scott King Book Awards Committee also seek to encourage new African American writers and illustrators in the world of publishing for young readers. The establishment of the Coretta Scott King/John Steptoe Award for New Talent gives the awards a way to spotlight promising writers and artists.

DEBORAH TAYLOR is the Coordinator of School and Student Services for the Enoch Pratt Free Library. Ms. Taylor is the current chair of the Coretta Scott King Book Awards Committee. She was a member of the 2004 Michael L. Printz Award Committee, the 2006 Printz Committee, and the 2007 Best Books for Young Adults Committee. She was a member of the 2002 Newbery Award Committee and Chair of the 2000 Coretta Scott King Award Jury. She has also served on the Boston Globe-Horn Book Award Committee and has reviewed for Horn Book. She was the 1996–1997 President of YALSA.

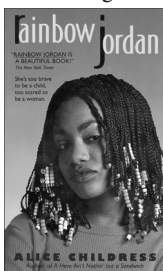
The 1970s and 1980s



The Young Landlords by Walter Dean Myers (Viking 1979)

This early novel by Myers was the first of many from this trailblazing author to receive recognition by both committees. This

humorous novel celebrates the ability of inner city teens to face and triumph over community challenges. (1980 Coretta Scott King Author Award, 1979 BBYA)



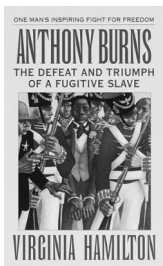
Rainbow Jordan by Alice Childress (Coward-McCann 1981)

Childress effectively uses multiple points of view in this affecting novel of a teen struggling with the

difficulties brought on by a parent unable or unwilling to provide the guidance young Rainbow needs. (1982 Coretta Scott King Author Honor, 1981 BBYA)

Black Child by Peter Magubane (Knopf 1982)

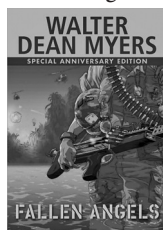
This collection of thoughtful photographs of life in South Africa before the end of apartheid was a rare illustrator award winner to find a place on the BBYA list. Magubane's arresting shots illuminate the hope and despair of young people during this difficult period in history. (1983 Coretta Scott King Illustrator Award, 1982 BBYA)



Anthony Burns: The Defeat and Triumph of a Fugitive Slave by Virginia Hamilton (Knopf 1988)

This decade in publishing for teen readers included a number of powerful

novels by Virginia Hamilton that received recognition from both the Coretta Scott King Book Awards and BBYA. However, Hamilton delivers equally powerful storytelling skills in this nonfiction title that relates the dramatic tale of the 1854 resistance of Boston's antislavery community to returning runaway Anthony Burns to slavery. Her use of primary source documentation and source notes provide immediacy to the work. (1989 Coretta Scott King Author Honor, 1988 BBYA)

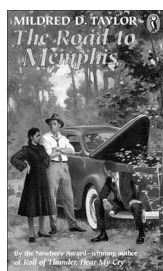


Fallen Angels by Walter Dean Myers (Scholastic 1988)

Myers continues to demonstrate his mastery of the young adult novel in this work many still consider to be

among his best. Seventeen-year-old Richie Perry has to grow up quickly as he confronts the brutality of the war in Vietnam. (1989 Coretta Scott King Author Award Winner, 1988 BBYA)

The 1990s



The Road to Memphis by Mildred D. Taylor (Dial 1991)

Cassie Logan's story, begun in the Newbery award-winning *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, concludes with this dramatic

depiction of the South during World War II. Here readers watch Cassie on the verge of adulthood and see glimpses of the struggles that will develop into the beginnings of the Civil Rights Movement a decade and a half later. (1991 Coretta Scott King Author Award Winner, 1991 BBYA) *The Middle Passage: White Ships Black Cargo* by Tom Feelings (Dial Books for Young Readers 1995)



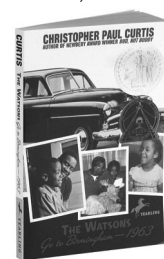
Feelings' stunning black and white illustrations provide one of the most dramatic depictions of the horrors of the Middle Passage. Determined to let the images tell the story, Feelings uses words only when absolutely necessary to add more power to his visual narrative. (1996 Coretta Scott King Illustrator Winner, 1996 BBYA)



Her Stories by Virginia Hamilton (Scholastic/Blue Sky Press 1995)

This completely authenticated collection of tales from many genres celebrates the

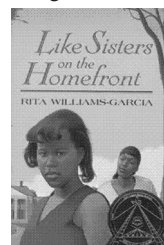
powerful voices of women while providing highly entertaining storytelling. The collection is enhanced by the affecting illustrations of Leo and Diane Dillon, who received illustrator honor recognition. (1996 Coretta Scott King Author Award Winner and Illustrator Honor, 1996 BBYA)



The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963 by Christopher Paul Curtis (Delacorte 1995)

Curtis' debut novel successfully manages the difficult task of weaving a humorous family story with the

poignancy of one of the hallmark tragedies of the Civil Rights era. (1996 Coretta Scott King Author Honor, 1996 BBYA)

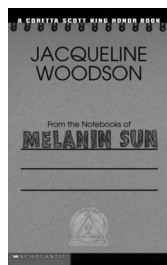


Like Sisters on the Homefront by Rita Williams-Garcia (Dutton/Lodestar 1995)

Gayle's tough bravado, so effective on the streets of New

York, is severely challenged when she is shipped off, with her toddler son, Jose, to

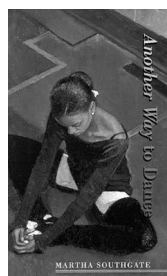
stay with her minister uncle and his family. The power of family to reclaim a young life on the wrong path is fully explored in this novel. (1996 Coretta Scott King Author Honor, 1996 BBYA)



From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun by Jacqueline Woodson (Scholastic/Blue Sky Press 1995)

Issues of family, race, and sexual orientation are on full display in this

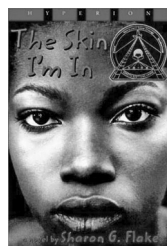
compelling story of thirteen-year-old Melanin Sun, who must confront the knowledge that his mother is gay at the same time he is coming to grips with his own identity. (1996 Coretta Scott King Author Honor, 1996 BBYA)



Another Way to Dance by Martha Southgate (Delacorte 1996)

Fourteen-year-old Vicki Harris must navigate the equally difficult waters of competition and racial

tensions as she becomes one of two African American teens at the prestigious summer program of the New York School of American Ballet. (1997 Coretta Scott King/John Steptoe Award for New Talent, 1997 BBYA)



The Skin I'm In by Sharon Flake (Jump at the Sun/Hyperion 1998)

Flake boldly tackles the sensitive issue of the role skin hue plays within the African

American community and its impact on the self-esteem of African American girls. Maleeka Madison is like most middle school girls, desperate to fit in but sure her dark skin will make her a target of her

peers. (1999 Coretta Scott King/John Steptoe Award for New Talent, 1999 BBYA)

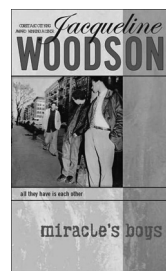
2000 to 2009



Monster by Walter Dean Myers (HarperCollins 1999)

This trailblazing novel, with its unique narrative style, not only received a Coretta Scott King author honor

award and a place on BBYA, it was the first recipient of the Michael L. Printz Award for Excellence in Young Adult Literature. Steve Harmon, the young narrator, uses the format of a screenplay script to make sense of the terrible predicament in which he finds himself: an accused accomplice to murder. (2000 Coretta Scott King Author Honor, 2000 Michael L. Printz Award, 2000 BBYA)



Miracle's Boys by Jacqueline Woodson (G.P. Putnam's Sons 2000)

With language both elegant and spare, Woodson examines the determination of three orphaned brothers to

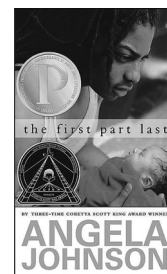
remain a family in the face of the emotional pain of loss and the middle brother's struggles with the lure of the streets and the ensuing confrontations with the justice system. (2001 Coretta Scott King Author Award Winner, 2001 BBYA)



Bronx Masquerade by Nikki Grimes (Dial 2002)

The power of poetry to illuminate and heal is skillfully revealed in this novel in verse about a high school

class that first resists and then embraces poetry as a way to understand and cope with the difficulties and questions in their young lives. (2003 Coretta Scott King Author Award Winner, 2003 BBYA)



The First Part Last by Angela Johnson (Simon & Schuster 2003)

Bobby learns he is to be a father on his sixteenth birthday and that is just the first of many surprises and

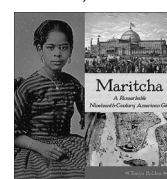
changes he has to endure that year. He finds himself the custodial parent of baby Feather and is quickly plunged into the concerns and responsibilities of parenthood. This literary tour-de-force became the first to receive both the Coretta Scott King Author Award and the Michael L. Printz Award. (2004 Coretta Scott King Author Award Winner, 2004 Michael L. Printz Award, 2004 BBYA)



Day of Tears: A Novel in Dialogue by Julius Lester (Jump at the Sun/Hyperion 2005)

The voices of the enslaved and their masters are powerfully

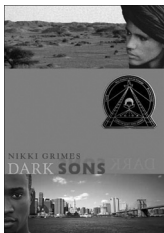
imagined in this series of dialogues set on the day of the largest slave auction held in United States history, in 1859 Savannah, Georgia. (2006 Coretta Scott King Author Award Winner, 2006 BBYA)



Maritcha: A Nineteenth-Century American Girl by Tonya Bolden (Abrams 2005)

Author Tonya Bolden uses an unpublished autobiography as the centerpiece of her research

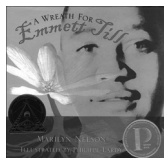
into the life and times of a free African American girl and her activist family in pre-Civil War New York. (2006 Coretta Scott King Author Honor, 2006 BBYA)



Dark Sons by Nikki Grimes (Jump at the Sun/Hyperion 2005)
Sam is distraught when his father leaves him and his mother for a new life and ultimately with a new

family. As Sam searches for answers in his religious faith, the parallel biblical story of Ishmael and Abraham also explores the dimensions of love between

father and sons. (2006 Coretta Scott King Author Honor, 2006 BBYA)



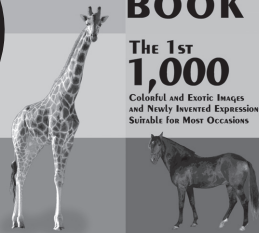
A Wreath for Emmett Till by Marilyn Nelson, illustrated by Philippe Lardy (Houghton Mifflin 2005)

A heroic crown of sonnets, breathtaking in its poetic form and language, serves as a memorial to the teenage martyr who served as a catalyst for the movement that changed America and the world. (2006 Coretta Scott King Author Honor, 2006 Michael L. Printz Honor, 2006 BBYA)



Becoming Billie Holiday by Carole Boston Weatherford, illustrated by Floyd Cooper (Wordsong/Boyd's Mills Press 2008)

The life of the legendary jazz singer began and continued in difficult circumstances. Despite her troubles, Eleanora Fagan Gough, aka, Billie Holiday, turned to her musical talent as a way to cope and give voice to her pain and joy. This elegantly illustrated biography in verse captures the spirit and mood of the early years of the young song stylist. (2009 Coretta Scott King Honor, 2009 BBYA) YALS

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