



2022 BCALA Best of the Best Booklist

Pre-K through 4th Grade

Sing, Aretha, Sing! Aretha Franklin, “Respect,” and the Civil Rights Movement

by Hanif Abdurraqib, ill. Ashley Evans

In his picture-book debut, Hanif Abdurraqib traces Aretha Franklin’s groundbreaking career as a singer and her legacy as a civil rights activist. Beginning with her childhood singing gospel in her father’s church, the story covers her time traveling with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., her rise to international stardom, and the emergence of her iconic signature song “Respect” as a popular and powerful anthem of Black and female empowerment during the 1960s.

Black-Eyed Peas and Hoghead Cheese: A Story of Food, Family, and Freedom

by Glenda Armand, ill. Steffi Walthall

While visiting her grandma in Louisiana, nine-year-old Frances helps prepare the New Year’s Day meal. She listens as Grandma tells stories about the food for their feast. Through these stories, Frances learns not only about the ingredients and the dishes they are making but about her ancestors and their history as well.

Black Girl Rising

by Brynne Barnes, ill. Tatyana Fazlalizadeh

A love letter to and for Black girls everywhere, *Black Girl Rising* alchemizes the sorrow and strength of the past into the brilliant gold of the future, sweeping young readers of all backgrounds into a lyrical exploration of what it means to be Black, female, and glorious.

The Queen of Kindergarten

by Derrick Barnes, ill. Vanessa Brantley-Newton

The companion book to "The King of Kindergarten" follows a young Black girl who's excited about her first day of school. Encouraged by her loving family and brimming with self-confidence, MJ details all parts of her day from choosing the perfect outfit to meeting her teachers and making new friends for the first time. MJ's spunkiness and kindness are infectious, and the way that she encourages others around her makes this an enjoyable read.

Going Places: Victor Hugo Green and His Glorious Book

by Tonya Bolden, ill. Eric Velasquez

Enter the world of Victor Hugo Green and his famous ***Green Book*** for Black travelers. During the Great Depression, the combined developments of new interstate roadways and inexpensive car models were driving more families to own cars. Black travelers, however, had extra stress and danger to worry about when traveling through unfamiliar, often hostile terrain. Black-owned newspapers and word of mouth kept them informed on how to stay safe. Green, who worked as a mailman, “got busy problem-solving” and gathered information from people and publications into one pamphlet: the Green Book, a local guide that grew steadily to cover the entire nation. A richly layered, powerful introduction to an intuitive entrepreneur and the problems he solved.



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Opal Lee and What it Means to Be Free: The True Story of Juneteenth

by Alice Faye Duncan, ill. Keturah A. Bobo

This picture book tells the story of beloved, 96-year old former teacher Ms. Opal Lee. Growing up in Texas surrounded by a strong community, Juneteenth, and the history behind the holiday, were an integral part of her culture. As she speaks to the young children in her neighborhood, Ms. Opal tells them about the history and triumph of their enslaved ancestors in the region, and talks about her push to have Juneteenth as a federally-recognized holiday.

Stella Keeps the Sun Up

by Clothilde Ewing, ill. Lynn Gaines

When Stella's best friend moves to the other side of the world she is determined to stay awake to spend the day with her by doing morning activities all day long in efforts to keep the sun from going down. Yet along the way she realizes by keeping the sun up here her friend may never get to enjoy the daylight where she is.

Meet the Three Princesses

by Judith Annique François

Meet the Three Princesses is a heart-warming story about a loving family who live in Haiti. Readers will enjoy the bright, beautiful illustrations and interesting story, which highlights the unique, lovely charm of a small island town. Esther, Cassandra, and Rosa are happy girls, but they miss their father when he is away at work. They don't know he has a wonderful surprise in store! Will this surprise show his sweet daughters how much he thinks of them all throughout the day?

Kicks

by Van G. Garrett, ill. Reggie Brown

A young boy named Joshua experiences the happiness and excitement of finally obtaining that beloved accessory: a fresh pair of kicks. The picture book written in free verse follows his day as he uses his savings to buy the latest, most popular brand. Joshua's mood changes from excited to beaming as he walks down the street, describing the way that the shoes make him feel inside, while meeting up with his friends and neighbors wearing other styles of shoes.

Build A House

by Rhiannon Giddens, ill. Monica Mikai

In her picture book debut, Rhiannon Giddens depicts a family's resilience in the face of violence and sorrow. They are determined not just to survive, but also to tell their own story. *Build a House* confronts the history of slavery in America by telling the story of a courageous people who would not be moved, and the music that sustained them through untold challenges. Steeped in sorrow and joy, resilience and resolve, turmoil and transcendence, this dramatic debut offers a proud view of history and a vital message for readers of all ages: honor your heritage, express your truth, and let your voice soar, even when your heart is heaviest.



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A Library

by Nikki Giovanni, ill. Erin K. Robinson

Set in beautifully illustrated simple country town is a lyrical ode to loving, being transformed and transported through libraries and books.

When the Schools Shut Down: A Young Girl's Story of Virginia's "Lost Generation" and the Brown V. Board of Education of Topeka Decision

by Yolanda Gladden & Dr. Tamara Pizzoli, ill. Keisha Morris

This autobiographical picture book tells how Yolanda Gladden and her community overcame the inconceivably hateful measures taken by Virginia lawmakers to avoid integration after the 1954 Brown vs. Board ruling. Rather than accept that segregation had been rightfully stricken down, Prince Edward County chose to close all of its public schools for 5 years, denying an entire generation of children their right to an education. Gladden shares her memories of how families in Black neighborhoods came together to create their own schools, brought to vivid life by Keisha Morris's illustrations.

Magnolia Flower

by Zore Neal Hurston & Ibram X. Kendi, ill. Loveis Wise

Born to parents who fled slavery and the Trail of Tears, Magnolia Flower is a girl with a vibrant spirit. Not to be deterred by rigid ways of the world, she longs to connect with others, who too long for freedom. She finds this in a young man of letters who her father disapproves of. In her quest to be free, Magnolia must make a choice and set off on a journey that will prove just how brave one can be when leading with one's heart.

Brown: The Many Shades of Love

by Nancy Johnson James, ill. Constance Moore

A colorfully whimsical perspective on just how varied skin tones can be in a single Black family. In this rhyming picture book, the protagonist describes the skin color of the whole family: mama, daddy, brother, sister, auntie, uncle, cousins, and grandparents. Some of these skin tones resemble copper, desert sand, and polished pine, and the narrator likens nearly half of the colors to flavorful foods such as chocolate, cinnamon, and brown sugar. Each double-page spread features two lines of simple verse on one side and a watercolor portrait of one of the family members on the other side, set against a white background.

Choosing Brave: How Mamie Till-Mobley and Emmett Till Sparked the Civil Rights Movement

by Angela Joy, ill. Janelle Washington

The brutal killing of a Black youth turns his mother into an activist for justice.

Keep Your Head Up

by Aliya S. King, ill. Charly Palmer

D wakes up on the wrong side of the bed, but discovers after a long day at school that while not every day will be a good day, the bad ones will pass.



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Curve & Flow: The Elegant Vision of L. A. Architect Paul R. Williams

by Andrea J. Loney, ill. Keith Mallett

A gorgeous picture book biography of Paul R. Williams' life as an architect in the early 1900s in Los Angeles. Both the challenges and successes of his life are presented in a way that is both uplifting and enlightening, all complimented by bright and semi-realistic illustrations.

My Hands Tell a Story

by Kelly Starling Lyons, ill. Tonya Engle

A little girl, baking bread with her grandmother, becomes transported by the tales her grandmother's hands tell -- those that spring from the rose-painted nails, a flower-banded wedding ring, and the way her fingers move and glide. These hands have many tales to tell.

The Legend of Gravity: A Tall Basketball Tale

by Charly Palmer

A tribute to the streetball legends who may not have made the NBA but are just as worthy as the allstars. The fictional hero of this tale is nicknamed Gravity because he could “jump so high that the team could go for icecream before he came back down.” But even with his standout skills, he teaches his friends a lesson on what it means to be a team player.

Peek-A-You

by Andrea Davis Pinkney, ill. Brian Pinkney

Cuddle up with your little one and play a happy game of peekaboo! With bouncing, rhythmic text and warm illustrations this joyful celebration of roly-poly, perfectly huggable, oh-so-lovable little ones is just right for the whole family all throughout the year.

Abdul's Story

by Jamila Thompkins-Bigelow, ill. Tiffany Rose

Abdul is a natural storyteller, but has trouble putting his ideas down on paper because his letters never seem to line up right or face the way they're supposed to. It doesn't help that the stories he reads in school are never about people like him or his neighbors, either. Just when he's feeling like giving up, his class gets a special visit from a writer who teaches him that it's alright to make mistakes as long as you keep trying your best. Shining a spotlight on numerous underrepresented identities, this touching and brilliantly illustrated story will be an inspiration to readers—and writers—of all kinds.

Hold Them Close: a Love Letter to Black Children

by Jamila Thompkins-Bigelow, ill. Patrick Dougher

Hold Them Close is a picture book celebration of Black past, present, and future—a joyful love letter to Black children. As affirming as it is touching and warm, *Hold Them Close* encourages young children to hold close their joy, the words of their ancestors and elders, as well as their power to change the world. A perfect book for shared story time, this book will inspire young people to march forth with pride, glow, and happiness.



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Annie and Juneteenth

by Aletta Seales, ill. Artkina Celest

When a young girl named Annie witnesses the arrival of Union troops in Galveston, Texas in 1865, she is frightened and confused, looking to her mother for answers. The arrival of the soldiers profoundly changes life for Annie and everyone she knows. Years later, she is able to celebrate Juneteenth with her family and community.

Stacey Abrams and the Fight to Vote

by Traci N. Todd, ill. Laura Freeman

This biography of politician and Nobel prize nominee Stacey Abrams focuses on her fight to make voting fair for all Americans. A modern day civil rights leader, Abrams continues the work carried out by generations before her with inspiring determination, perseverance, and courage. The stunning artwork of Coretta Scott King Honoree Laura Freeman further illuminates Abrams powerful story.

Standing in the Need of Prayer

by Carole Boston Weatherford, ill. Frank Morrison

Weatherford uses the words of this enduring and beloved Negro spiritual to highlight pivotal moments of the Black experience. The earnest plea of the song stays the same as it switches perspectives from the larger, emotional moments of Black history to more personal experiences.

The Talk

by Alicia D. Williams, ill. Briana Mukodiri Uchendu

Williams tackles the deadly serious topic of racial profiling through this honest and sensitive story of a young Black boy learning from his family that the world will see him and his friends differently as he gets older. The countless tragedies that have befallen innocent Black children are referenced without being explicitly detailed, and the narrative is written in a way that allows caregivers to naturally interject their own perspectives and experiences. Uchendu's illustrations balance hard realism and soft innocence, and also serve to prompt discussion.