

Beginning in the 1940s and beyond, books by white authors started to depict equality of African-American and White children, such as Lorraine and Jerrold Beim's *Two is a Team* (1945) and Ezra Jack Keats' *The Snowy Day* (1962), the first picture book featuring an African-American child to receive the Caldecott Medal.¹¹

F • U , B U : Beginning in the 1920s, African-American authors began to slowly gain traction in their efforts to publish works for Black audiences directly challenging racist depictions of African Americans.¹¹ One of the earliest examples of this is *The Brownies' Book Magazine* published by the NAACP beginning in January 1920.^{11, 12} Though not a picture book, this periodical featured positive representations of African Americans to help Black children develop pride in their history and prepare them for the future by focusing on prominent Black literary figures such as Langston Hughes, resisting racist depictions of Black life.¹¹

Follo ing the rise of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s, Black authors began to find success in publishing children's books about the Black experience in the early 1960s.¹¹ As authors felt the impact of the Civil Rights Movement, they depicted themes of positive everyday Blackness, Black history, prominent Black figures and African folk tales and history throughout the 1960s and 1970s.¹¹ Authors during this period provided Black children with positive images of themselves and their history, discussing historical events and role models often not covered in mainstream history and resisting previously racist depictions of African Americans.¹¹

In the 1970s, books such as Muriel L. and Tom Feelings' *Moja Means One* (1971) introduced children to their African heritage while interest in Africa spread throughout the Black American community.¹¹ Books published during the 1980s and 1990s often included retellings of previously published racist children's books, as well as depictions of the everyday lives of Black children.¹¹ Even as Black authors toward the end of this period began to move away from writing primarily for Black audiences, the work of some continued to diverge from and resist themes of traditional picture books by depicting sometimes harsh realities of Black history and Black life, including accurate depictions of slavery, poverty and incarceration.¹¹

F • E , P , U : In the 1990s and 2000s, Black authors began to move away from writing for Black audiences and toward writing for general audiences.¹¹ Books during this period focused on themes such as everyday Black life, celebration of Black appearances and depictions of diversity among all children.¹¹ Still, during this period, authors continued to produce books resisting White superiority, such as those focusing on positive depictions of Black appearance and Afro hair.¹¹ Many books during this period went beyond just depicting Black characters; they engaged with Black culture, such as *What a Truly Cool World* (Julius Lester, 1999)¹¹ in portraying African-American church and religious culture.

LITERATURE AS POLITICAL: TEACHING AFRICAN-AMERICAN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Michelle Martin's work (2004) has highlighted the political role of African-American children's literature. African-

American children's literature speaks to two kinds of dual audiences: Black and White, and children and adults.¹¹ Black children's literature is in conversation with both the White and Black literary canons.¹¹ Some books, like *Sam and the Tigers* (Julius Lester and Jerry Pinkney 1997), reimagine racist narratives and remake stories from the White literary canon by using modes of Black discourse to reclaim them.¹¹ This remaking speaks differently to adults, who are presumably more aware of the racist history of the stories than are children, who are frequently experiencing the re-crafted narrative for the first time.¹¹

Teaching African-American children's literature in the classroom, the library, and in other community settings, in addition to the home, has key value for children of all races and backgrounds.¹¹ Historical accounts of prominent Black Americans provide role models and validate the importance of these figures to children.^{11, 12} Texts with Black protagonists teach children the importance of diversity and normalize positive depictions of Black characters.¹¹ Picture books also prepare Black children for Black adulthood, by for example, reinforcing the value of key conversational styles in the African-American community, through texts such as *Nappy Hair* (Carolivia Herron and Joe Cepeda, 1997).¹¹ This can be double edged, especially for Black boys who are often depicted in both literature and the media as miniature adults rather than children.¹³ **Highlighting African-American children's literature in the classroom, the library, after school program and camp, at each child's Black cultural knowledge is able and of being heard and recognized.**¹¹ ■

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MICHELLE MARTIN'S "TOP PICKS" in African-American Children's Literature

EVERYDAY BLACKNESS

These books examine everyday experiences of Black Americans. They document diversity in daily life. Within this category is a subgenre of books focused on celebrating Black families.

- **The Snow Day**, Ezra Jack Keats, 1962
- **My Daddy is a Monster... Sometimes**, John Steptoe, 1980
- **The Patchwork Quilt**, Valerie Flournoy and Jerry Pinkey, 1985
- **Mirandy and Brother Wind**, Patricia McKissack, 1988
- **Aunt Flossie's Hats... and Crab Cakes Later**, Elizabeth Fitzgerald Howard and James Ransome, 1990
- **Let's Count Baby**, Cheryl Willis Hudson and George Ford, 1995
- **In Daddy's Arms I am Tall: African Americans Celebrating Fathers**, Javaka Steptoe, 1997
- **DeShawn Days**, Tony Medina and R. Gregory C17 1 Tfe4tee

