children's books that celebrate the African-American experience

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**ages birth to three**

Bang, Molly. *Ten Nine Eight* (7)
A little girl and her dad engage in a simple countdown before bed that is warm and comforting. E/BB

Cooke, Trish. *So Much*
When relatives begin arriving for Daddy’s surprise party, they are unable to resist kissing, hugging and playing with the baby. EPIC

**ages 3 to 5 picture books**

Buckley, Helen. *Grandfather and I*
While everyone else in the family always seems to be in a rush, a loving grandfather understands the importance of spending unhurried time with his grandson. EPIC

Carter, Don. *Heaven’s All-Star Jazz Band*
A little boy imagines that his jazz loving grandpa is in heaven making music with all the legendary jazz greats. EPIC

Daly, Nikki. *The Boy on the Beach*
Instead of jumping waves with his parents, a little boy goes off by himself and finds his own fun on the beach—until he realizes that he is lost. EPIC

Dillon, Leo, and Diane Dillon. *Rap A Tap Tap: Here’s Bojangles—Think of That!*
In this artistic tribute, legendary dancer Bill “Bojangles” Robinson seems to tap across the pages along with the words. EPIC

Diouf, Sylviane. *Bintou’s Braids*
Bintou desperately wants to wear her hair in long braids but is not old enough according to village tradition. Her wise grandmother, however, finds a way to make her ordinary hairstyle extraordinary. EPIC

Hoffman, Mary. *Amazing Grace*
When two classmates try to discourage her from auditioning for the lead role in a class play, Grace triumphantly shows them that gender and color have nothing to do with being the best. EPIC

Howard, Elizabeth Fitzgerald. *Lulu’s Birthday*
Although Aunt Lulu is having trouble deciding how to spend her birthday, her young niece and nephew know exactly what to do. EPIC

Nolen, Jerdine. *Harvey Potter’s Balloon Farm*
If you want to learn the secret to growing balloons, just take a few tips from a mysterious farmer named Harvey Potter. EPIC

Parker, Toni. *Hugs and Hearts*
Charming photographs and simple rhymes celebrate the sweetest day of the year. EPIC

Steptoe, John. *Mufaro’s Beautiful Daughters* (3, 7)
Everyone says that Mufaro has two equally beautiful daughters. So when the king announces his wish to marry the most beautiful and worthy maiden in the land, he is delighted. But is their beauty truly equal? EPIC
Siegelson, Kim. *In the Time of the Drums*
When a group of newly captured slaves arrives at Sea Island, they are greeted by drums and led back home by a mysterious conjure woman. EPIC

Williams, Sheron. *Imani’s Music*
When an African grasshopper finds himself aboard a slave ship, the only thing he has to offer the captives is his music which they take with them to the new world. EPIC

**ages 9 to 12 fiction**

Burns, Khephra. *Mansa Musa: The Lion of Mali*
The early life of Mali’s great 14th century leader is told through this lavishly illustrated fictionalized account. JBEGL

Kenny and the “weird Watsons” (his family) head south to visit grandma and unexpectedly witness history. JFIC

English, Karen. *Francie (1)*
Life isn’t easy for Francie, a quiet, smart girl, who loves trains and scooter pies and who is growing up in rural Alabama during the 1930s. JFIC

Fenner, Carol. *Yolonda’s Genius* (2)
While most people view Yolonda’s little brother as being “slow,” she believes that he is musically gifted and decides to show the world. JFIC

Flake, Sharon. *The Skin I’m In*
Teased because of her extremely dark skin, thirteen-year-old Maleeka slowly learns a lesson in self acceptance when a new teacher (with a prominent birthmark on her face) arrives at her school. JFIC

Grimes, Nikki. *Jazmin’s Notebook* (2)
While growing up in Harlem during the 1960s, a fourteen-year-old girl discovers that writing can be empowering. JFIC

Hamilton, Virginia. *The House of Dies Drear*
After moving into a house that was once used as part of the Underground Railroad, the Small family experiences a series of strange happenings and sense danger. JFIC

Johnson, Angela. *When Mules Flew on Magnolia Street*
Charlie spends her summer fishing, solving a mystery and making new friends. JFIC

McGill, Alice. *Here We Go Round*
When her mother is put on bed rest during the last month of her pregnancy, seven-year-old Roberta is sent to stay with her grandparents in the country. She is already feeling ambivalent about the new baby; will this separation make matters worse? JFIC

Mead, Alice. *Junebug in Trouble*
After moving away from a tough housing project, Junebug discovers that one of his old buddies is showing an interest in gangs. Wanting to help, Junebug finds himself reaching out to his troubled friend and surprisingly to his own imprisoned dad as well. JFIC

Myers, Walter Dean. *Slam! (1)*
A talented high school basketball player realizes the need to improve his “off court” skills just as much as his ball playing skills. JFIC

Pearsall, Shelley. *Trouble Don’t Last*
Being a slave is the only life that eleven-year-old Samuel knows. Unexpectedly awakened one night by his old friend Harrison, he is forced to leave behind his miserable familiar life in exchange for a perilous journey and a faint hope of freedom. JFIC

Taylor, Mildred. *The Land (1)*
Paul Edward, son of a white plantation owner and a slave, is determined to succeed on his own in post-Civil War Mississippi. A prequel to the Newbery Award-winning *Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry*. JFIC YA FIC

Wesley, Valerie Wilson. *Willimena and the Cookie Money*
In her attempt to help the less fortunate, Willimena spends the money that she has collected selling girl scout cookies. Now she and her sister must find a way to raise the money before anyone finds out. JFIC

Woodson, Jacqueline. *Locomotion.*
An eleven year old orphan living in foster care, finds a new way to express himself when he is encouraged to write poetry. JFIC

Wyeth, Sharon. *A Piece of Heaven*
Despite having an unstable home life, thirteen-year-old
nonfiction for older children

Clinton, Catherine. *I, Too, Sing America: Three Centuries of African-American Poetry*  
In this anthology, twenty-five poets are represented by their poems and described in short biographical sketches.  
J 821.08I

Curry, Barbara K. *Sweet Words So Brave: The Story of African-American Literature*  
A grandfather enthusiastically shares the history and literature of African Americans with his granddaughter.  
J 820.9C

Duggleby, John. *Story Painter: The Life of Jacob Lawrence*  
Jacob Lawrence’s life, the culture of Harlem in the 1930’s, and his colorful art are all introduced in this biography, illustrated with numerous prints of the artist’s works.  
JB LAWRENCE

Green, Michelle Y. *A Strong Right Arm: The Story of Mamie “Peanut” Johnson*  
Johnson played professional baseball in the Negro Leagues, facing prejudice against both her race and her gender.  
J 796.357G

Hamilton, Virginia. *Her Stories: African-American Folktales, Fairy Tales and True Tales (1)*  
A wonderful, award-winning collection of stories, in a variety of styles, that feature strong African-American women.  
J 398.2H

The graves in an African burial site, uncovered by archaeologists in Manhattan in 1991, tell the story of how African Americans lived in New York during the colonial period.  
J 305.567H

Hoobler, Dorothy and Thomas Hoobler. *The African-American Family Album*  
The stories of individual African Americans are told through interviews, letters and other original documents, and in pictures.  
J 973.049H

Igus, Toyomì. *I See the Rhythm (3)*  
A survey of African-American music from African and slave songs to rap and hip-hop, told in text and paintings.  
J780.89I

Jemison, Mae. *Find Where the Wind Goes: Moments from My Life*  
Funny and inspirational anecdotes from the life of America’s first female African-American astronaut.  
JB JEMISON

Lasky, Kathryn. *Vision of Beauty: The Story of Sarah Breedlove Walker*  
A richly illustrated biography of Madame C.J. Walker, the daughter of freed slaves who became an entrepreneur at the turn of the 20th century.  
JB WALKER

McKissack, Fredrick. *Black Hoops: The History of African Americans in Basketball*  
Basketball’s history from an African-American perspective, from the game’s beginning in 1891, through the era of segregated teams, to the many black stars of the NBA and WNBA in the 1990’s.  
J796.323M

McKissack, Patricia C. and Frederick McKissack. *Black Hands, White Sails (2)*  
This story of African-American men who worked in the whaling industry in the 18th and 19th centuries explores the connections between whaling and the abolitionist movement.  
J 639.28M

Medearis, Angela Shelf. *Dare to Dream: Coretta Scott King and the Civil Rights Movement*  
As a child in Alabama, Coretta Scott faced segregation and prejudice, and dreamed of racial equality. As an adult she helped her husband, the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., lead the Civil Rights Movement.  
JB KING

Nelson, Marilyn. *Carver: A Life in Poems (2,6)*  
A sophisticated collection of poems that eloquently tells the story of renowned educator and botanist George Washington Carver.  
TEEN 821 C332Ne
Stuve-Bodeen, Stephanie. *Elizabeth’s Doll*
While her mother tends to her baby brother, Elizabeti lovingly cares for her own baby, which happens to be a rock. EPIC

Tarpley, Natasha. *Bippity Bop Barbershop*
Miles is excited and a bit anxious about his first trip to the barbershop. Luckily for him, his dad has the perfect solution. EPIC

Wilson-Max, Ken. *Max’s Starry Night*
A little boy helps an elephant overcome his fear of the dark. EPIC

Zolotow, Charlotte. *Do You Know What I’ll Do?*
An old children’s favorite that shows the love between siblings, newly illustrated with striking collage art by Javaka Steptoe. EPIC

**easy nonfiction**

Adedjouma, Davida, editor. *The Palm of My Heart: Poetry by African-American Children*
A collection of twenty poems by children, celebrating “black” in their lives. J821.08P

Allen, Debbie. *Brothers of the Knight*
The classic tale of “The Twelve Dancing Princesses” gets a new setting, Harlem, and a new cast, twelve boys who dance holes in their hightops. J398.208A

Bolden, Tonya. *Rock of Ages: A Tribute to the Black Church*
The history and importance of the Black Church is thought-fully presented in poetic words and stirring pictures. E 821B

Bridges, Ruby. *Through My Eyes*
In 1960, when she was six, Ruby Bridges was the first black student at an all-white school in New Orleans. Here, she describes that experience and her life since. J 379.263B

Cline-Ransome, Lesa. *Satchel Paige*
Legendary pitcher Leroy (Satchel) Paige played in the Negro Leagues and the Major Leagues, and was the first African American inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame. J 796.357P

Cooper, Floyd. *Coming Home: From the Life of Langston Hughes*
In this story of the famous poet’s childhood, young Langston lives mainly with his grandmother and a foster family and dreams of a permanent home with his parents. EB Hughes

Greenfield, Eloise. *Rosa Parks*
An illustrated biography of the woman who, by bravely refusing to give her bus seat to a white person in 1955, is credited with beginning the Civil Rights Movement. JB PARKS

This collection, by an assortment of well-known African-American poets, conveys the pain and joy of the African-American experience. E 821.08P

Lester, Julius, Jerry Pinkney, illustrator. *John Henry (7)*
John Henry pits his strength against a steam drill in this award-winning picture book version of a classic black folk ballad. E398.21L

Kuklin, Susan. *Hoops with Swoopes*
A simple introduction to basketball becomes a one-woman show when WNBA star Cheryl Swoopes gets the ball. E796.323S

McKissack, Patricia C. and Fredrick L. McKissack. *Christmas in the Big House, Christmas in the Quarters (1)*
Holiday celebrations are very different for the slaves and the masters on a Southern plantation just before the Civil War. J 975.03M

Myers, Walter Dean. *Malcolm X: A Fire Burning Brightly*
A picture book biography of the well-known civil rights activist, written by an award-winning author. JBX, MALCOLM

Pinkney, Andrea Davis, Brian Pinkney, illustrator. *Duke Ellington: The Piano Prince and His Orchestra (4,7)*
There’s a sense of his music in both the writing and the illustration of this picture book about jazz great Duke Ellington. E 781.65E

Pinkney, Sandra L. *Shades of Black: A Celebration of Our Children*
True to its title, this book celebrates the physical beauty of a variety of African-American children in text and photographs. EPIC
Rappaport, Doreen, Brian Collier, illustrator. *Martin's Big Words: The Life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* (4,7) A combination of magnificent artwork, refreshing text and King’s own powerful words make this an outstanding tribute. EB KING

Rockwell, Anne, Gregory Christie, illustrator. *Only Passing Through* (4) Isabella was born a slave in New York, but after being freed in 1826, she became Sojourner Truth and traveled around the country telling people about the horrors of slavery. EB TRUTH

Ryan, Pam Munoz. *When Marian Sang: The True Recital of Marian Anderson* Marian Anderson was an acclaimed singer in Europe, but she had to overcome racism before she could sing with the Metropolitan Opera in the United States. EB ANDERSON

San Souci, Robert D., Jerry Pinkney, illustrator. *The Talking Eggs: A Folktale from the American South* (4) In long-ago Louisiana, two sisters with very different personalities meet an old woman who has a chicken house full of magical talking eggs. E 398.2S

Schroeder, Alan, Jerry Pinkney, illustrator. *Minty: A Story of Young Harriet Tubman* (3) A fictionalized account of the childhood of Harriet Tubman, who is famous for her work helping slaves escape to freedom on the Underground Railroad. EB TUBMAN

Steptoe, Javaka, illustrator. *In Daddy's Arms I Am Tall: African Americans Celebrating Fathers* (3) This collection of poems about African-American fathers is enhanced by Steptoe’s award-winning mixed media illustrations. E 821.08I

**ages 6 to 8 easy fiction**

Bledsoe, Lucy Jane. *The Big Bike Race* When he receives a big clunky used bike for his tenth birthday, Ernie’s dream of being a bike racer seems beyond his reach at first. JBEG

Cameron, Ann. *Gloria Rising* Gloria’s chance meeting with a famous astronaut makes a big impression on her and helps her cope with a difficult teacher. JBEG

Cummings, Pat. *Ananse and the Lizard: A West African Tale* Ananse, the tricky little spider, gets out tricked by a clever lizard in this folktale from Ghana. E398.2 C

Grifalconi, Ann. *The Village that Vanished* In order to save their village from the approaching slave traders, the Yao people set aside their fears and devise a plan that requires them to use their heads as well as their hearts to survive. JBEG

Herman, Gail. *Just Like Mike* When his mother remarries, Michael’s last name is changed from Brown to Jordan and the kids at his new school can’t seem to stop comparing his poor basketball skills to the “other Michael”. JBEG

Howard, Elizabeth Fitzgerald. *Virgie Goes to School with Us Boys* (4) Following the Civil War a little girl named Virgie is determined to go to school along with her brothers, despite the seven mile walk and their reluctance to take her. JBEG

McKissack, Patricia. *Goin’ Someplace Special* (7) During the era of segregation, Tricia Ann pays a visit to the one place in town that is open to all. JBEG

Nolen, Jerdine. *Big Jabe* While fishing, a young slave named Addy finds a little boy in a basket floating down the river and life on the plantation is never the same again. JBEG

Pinkney, Brian. *Cosmo and the Robot* What is a kid on Mars suppose to do when his beloved robot starts acting like a monster and must be cast off to the asteroid dump? Cosmo’s brand new solar system utility belt may help. EPIC

Ringgold, Faith. *Tar Beach* (3) On warm nights Cassie escapes to tar beach (her rooftop) and envisions herself flying over the George Washington Bridge. EPIC
books for parents

Murphy, Barbara Thrash. *Black Authors and Illustrators of Books for Children and Young Adults*  
Each entry in this biographical dictionary tells briefly about the author’s or illustrator’s life, lists his or her publications and often contains a photograph of the subject.  
R-J 011.62M 1999

This fourth book in an illustrated, award-winning series can help parents identify quality African-American books for their children.  
J 015.73R PROF. COLL.

An exploration of the books that have won the coveted Coretta Scott King Award, which includes author interviews, book quotes, and illustrations from award winners.  
J 929.81C 1999 PARENTS COLL.

Toussaint, Pamela. *Great Books for African-American Children*  
This useful source of introductions to great African-American children’s books also suggests book discussion questions for each entry.  
R-J 028.162T

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1 Coretta Scott King Author Award  
2 Coretta Scott King Author Honor  
3 Coretta Scott King Illustrator Award  
4 Coretta Scott King Illustrator Honor  
5 Newbery Medal Winner  
6 Newbery Honor  
7 Caldecott Honor
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