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OPINION

Reflecting on the Black Experience

Books all children should read

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

I encourage parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and adults everywhere to give children the gift of books. The right book can spark a lifelong love of reading and open up a whole new world for a child or teenager.



Children of color and children born with a rich diversity of special characteristics and needs must be able to see themselves in the books they read and be exposed to a wide range of books reflective of the nation and world we all share.

The Children's Defense Fund has a special list to share of books that every black child and, in fact, every child should read. They reflect the black experience and reflecting the full rainbow of our children's faces, cultures, and needs, including the history that still shapes the present.

The books are part of the Children Defense Fund's Freedom Schools programs. They come from diverse authors and illustrators, including Latino, Native American, Asian American and white characters, those from other countries and cultures and all mixes in between. Giving a book can give a child a chance to understand and step into the shoes of those who share our nation and world.

Theresa Venable, librarian at the Children Defense Fund's Langston Hughes Library, assembled the list with the help of other academics representing the African American community. They were chosen for meeting the following criteria:

Giving children a sense of self; encouraging children to develop positive attitudes about themselves and others; reinforcing a sense of black heritage and black history; providing a platform by which children can learn about and fall in love with characters that look like themselves; inspiring children to be the best they can be; assisting children in seeing the beauty, humor, and strength in their families

and in others around them; inspiring children to seek new ways of problem solving; and encouraging pride in African heritage.

Primary Fiction:

- **Aunt Flossie's Hats (and Crab Cakes Later)** by Elizabeth Fitzgerald Howard
- **Mirandy and Brother Wind** by Patricia C. McKissack
- **Uncle Jed's Barbershop** by Margaree King Mitchell
- **Tar Beach** by Faith Ringgold
- **Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters: An African Tale** by John Steptoe
- **I Love My Hair!** by Natasha Anastasia Tarpley

Primary Nonfiction:

- **Duke Ellington** by Andrea Davis Pinkney

Primary Poetry:

- **Meet Danitra Brown** by Nikki Grimes
- **In Daddy's Arms I Am Tall** illustrated by Javaka Steptoe

Primary Sing-a-Long:

- **Let It Shine** by Ashley Bryan

Intermediate Fiction:

- **The Watsons Go to Birmingham** by Christopher Paul Curtis
- **Zeely** by Virginia Hamilton
- **M.C. Higgins, the Great** by Virginia Hamilton
- **Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry** by Mildred D. Taylor
- **Justin and the Best Biscuits in the World** by Mildred Pitts Walter
- **One Crazy Summer** by Rita Williams-Garcia
- **P.S. Be Eleven** by Rita Williams-Garcia
- **Gone Crazy in Alabama** by Rita Williams-Garcia

Intermediate Nonfiction:

- **We Are the Ship: The Story of Negro League Baseball** by Kadir Nelson
- **Heart and Soul: The Story of America and African Americans** by Kadir Nelson
- **Let It Shine: Stories of Black Women Freedom Fighters** by Andrea Davis Pinkney
- **Voice of Freedom: Fannie Lou**

Hamer, Spirit of the Civil Rights Movement by Carole Boston Weatherford

Intermediate Poetry:

- **Honey, I Love** by Eloise Greenfield

Young Adult Fiction:

- **The Crossover** by Kwame Alexander
- **Like Sisters on the Homefront** by Rita Williams-Garcia
- **Toning the Sweep** by Angela Johnson

Adult Non-Fiction:

- **March: Book One** by John Lewis
- **March: Book Two** by John Lewis
- **March: Book Three** by John Lewis
- **Brown Girl Dreaming** by Jacqueline Woodson

All Ages:

- **Many Thousand Gone: African Americans from Slavery to Freedom** by Virginia Hamilton
- **The People Could Fly: American Black Folktales** told by Virginia Hamilton

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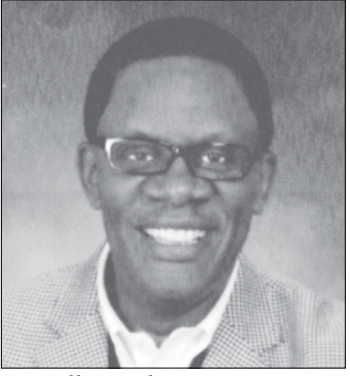
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Dr. Billy R. Flowers

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