

GO! read

LOCAL LITERARY HIGHLIGHTS

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Jackson, Coates continue Author! Author! series

BY DAVID JASPER • The Bulletin

Mitchell S. Jackson, 45, grew up in northeast Portland as the son of a drug-addicted single mother, a life that he opens up about in his piercing 2019 book, “Survival Math: Notes on an All-American Family,” which has been described as a mix of history, memoir and essay. The book earned a number of accolades, including being included on no fewer than 15 best-of-2019 lists from news and print organizations, including The Paris Review, National Public Radio and BuzzFeed.

On Sunday, Jackson will join acclaimed and award-winning journalist and novelist Ta-Nehisi Coates in a streaming conversation. The ticketed event is the second of the ninth annual Author! Author! series from Deschutes Public Library Foundation, which kicked off in January with Atlanta author Tayari Jones.

The two writers are both in their mid-40s and have conversed publicly once before, at a similar — albeit in-person — event in October 2019 in Boise. They had no contact before that event, and have had very little contact since.

For Deschutes Public Library, “He won’t know what I’ll be asking. I’m sure he can kind of predict, because it may be similar to the stuff that I asked him in Boise, but yeah, there’s no kind of warm-up or preview,” said Jackson, who saw him a couple of times in New York, where Jackson used to teach.

“I’ve read his work. I’ve taught his work, so I’m much more familiar with him than he is with me,” he added, laughing.

Though Jackson left the Rose City back in 2002, it’s there that he goes in his mind when he writes, he told GO! last week. That

includes “Survival Math” along with his award-winning debut, the 2013 novel “The Residue Years.”

“To me, it’s a lifelong mission to kind of tell the stories of home,” Jackson said. “I also wanted to write in a different genre, to show that I can do fiction and something else. And I also thought that writing essays was a way for people to engage with the way that I think. It’s clearer than in a novel, where the intellectual work that goes into a novel is supposed to fall away, right? ... With an essay, you have to confront the way that this person is thinking.”

Jackson likes writing non-fiction and journalism more and more. His work for magazines includes a 2020 deep dive into the murder of Ahmaud Arbery, who was gunned down in Georgia

while running.

“More and more I like it because, for example, that Runner’s World piece is something that I not have ever wrote, but because I was assigned that, it gave me a place to go. What I like is assignments that push me into places that I wouldn’t ordinarily go,

Continued on next page



Formerly of Portland, Mitchell S. Jackson will join fellow writer Ta-Nehisi Coates in a virtual conversation Sunday, the second installment of Deschutes Public Library Foundation’s Author! Author! series.
Photo: John Ricard

If You Go

What: Author! Author! featuring Ta-Nehisi Coates in an online conversation with Mitchell S. Jackson

When: 4 p.m. Sunday

Cost: \$25

Contact: dplfoundation.org

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