

Empowering the Voice of the Black Male in Children's and Teen Lit

B. A. Binns

[facebook.com/allthecolorsoflove](https://www.facebook.com/allthecolorsoflove)

<http://babinns.com>



Objectives

- Participants will:
 - become aware of issues in publishing as they relate to African Americans
 - learn about some of the contemporary black authors who are writing children's literature featuring black male characters
 - identify strategies libraries can use to promote reading and writing with young black males

About me

- My qualifications
- I know, female talking about males
 - B. A. Binns is a Chicago Area author who writes stories about “real boys growing into real men,” and finds writing the perfect follow-up to life as the eldest of five, an adoptive parent, and a cancer survivor.
 - I have been a researcher, earning masters degrees in both Biochemistry and Computer Science. This led her to work in the clinical chemistry laboratory at the University of Chicago hospitals, and as a computer architect at AT&T.
 - I have worked, and now volunteer, at the Arlington Heights Memorial Library in Illinois
 - Her first YA novel called Pull, won the 2010 Golden Rose award in Portland, Oregon, the 2011 Oklahoma Romance Writers National Reader’s choice award, was named one of YALSA’s 2012 Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Readers. Pull was also nominated for the 2012-2013 Eliot Rosewater Indiana High School Book Award.
 - Contact info – email – binns@babinns.com website – <http://babinns.com>
 - Facebook – <http://facebook.com/allthecolorsoflove>

Reading Crisis

- Boys in general
- Black boys in particular
- Many reasons, including:
 - Small number of ethnic authors signed by publishers
 - Scarcity of ethnic editors and agents
 - Difficulty in discovering those who exist
- Not just an African American issue

Not Just a Black/African American Issue

- I asked why the kid in the wheelchair was not on the front cover of Pinned? Answer – it would have hurt sales



Why Diversify Your Collections?

- It would be great if **all** teens, and not just the white, straight, educated, middle-class ones, could go to a library anytime and find themselves represented on the pages in any number of narratives on the shelves.



Why Diversify Your Collections?

- “To succeed in today’s workplace, young people need **more** than basic reading and math skills. They need substantial content knowledge and information technology skills, advanced thinking skills, **flexibility to adapt to change and interpersonal skills to succeed in multi-cultural cross-functional teams**”
 - Willard Marriott, Jr. Chairman and CEO, Marriott International, Inc.
- “...reading more fiction enables you to understand other people better. **Fiction is about exploring a range of circumstances and interactions and characters you’re likely to meet.** Fiction is not a description of ordinary life; it’s a simulation.”
 - Keith Oatley, professor emeritus of cognitive psychology at the University of Toronto.

Why Diversify Your Collections?

"I was asked by some teachers, 'What's the effect of video games on reading?' At first I was thinking it's not that much, but a video game will give you more self-esteem than a book [especially a book that you don't see yourself in], so you go for the video games. Air Jordans will give you even more esteem.

“At 13 or 14, you’ve assessed yourself. You know if you’re good-looking, you know if you’re hip. Your coolness quotient (or whatever kids call it these days) So many black kids are looking at themselves and saying, 'I ain't much.’”

- Walter Dean Myers 2012 National Ambassador for Young People's Literature

Important For All

- Important to have a diverse collection whether or not you have Kids of Color visiting your library.
 - Children and Young Adults are rarely given the opportunity to view concepts, events, and issues from more than one perspective, and this perspective is usually that of the mainstream group. The result may be a limited view of the world.
 - When the world is viewed from more than one perspective, students' views are broadened and they gain insight into their own behavior

What do your shelf displays say?

Truth time – how welcome would you feel if these were the ONLY books on the shelf in your bookstore or library?



What do your shelf displays say?

How welcome do you think Kids Of Color feel when these are the ONLY books on the shelf in your bookstore or library?



Diversity

LACK OF DIVERSITY

Diverse characters are scarce in kids' books. In a survey of 3,600 titles:

3.3% were about African-Americans

2.1% were about Asian-Pacific Americans

1.5% were about Latinos

0.6% were about American Indians

Source: Cooperative Children's Book Center, 2012

Diversity



Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors

- Rudine Sims Bishop, Professor Emerita of Education at Ohio State University, argues that children's books should serve as a “mirror, a window, and a sliding glass door,”
 - Young readers should be able to observe themselves, observe others, and interact with those others as a result of their reading experiences.
- Don't assume white readers are too xenophobic to *consider* reading a book written by someone of another race, so such books shouldn't even be allowed into their sight.

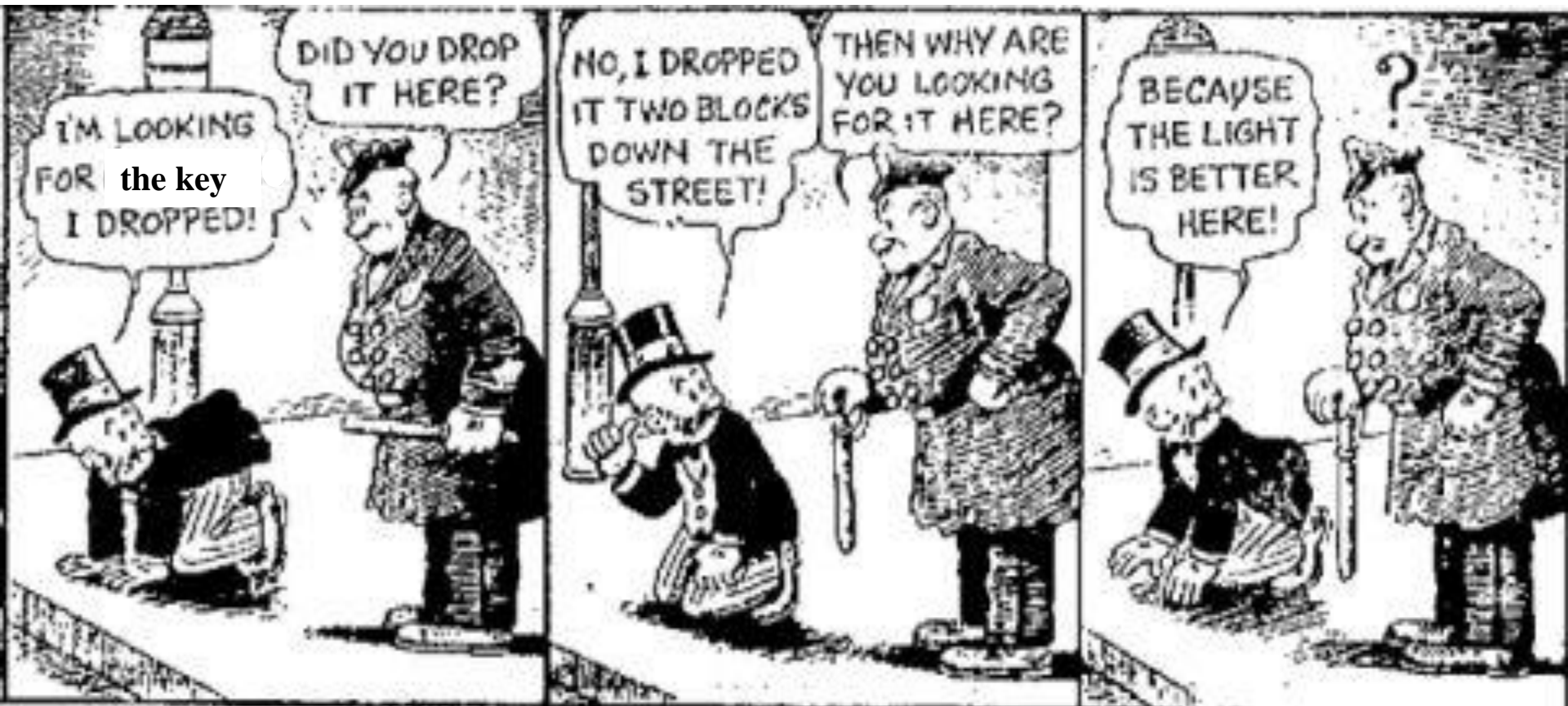
Why Are so Few Black Authors Being Published in the Children's Book World?

- Different expectations
 - Books written by white authors are more likely to conform to “mainstream” expectations of what books featuring ethnically diverse characters should be about, how the characters should behave, and how their stories should be told.
- One former white editor:
 - I think I was unconsciously looking for books that focused on problems or issues around race. That, perhaps, felt more comfortable or obvious than books where race wasn't the central issue.
- We do write, and have stories to tell

Black Authors

- Choosing books written by black authors can help open the largely self-enclosed system that publishes most children's books in the US
 - Unofficial quota
 - Market & Sales driven
 - Historical data

The Search for Diversity



Absence Sends A Message

- What you don't see can hurt you
 - There is a danger that kids of color who never get to see people like themselves books might think they are not important enough, that maybe they are even invisible . . .
 - For members of the dominant culture, this often means “If I can't find the ‘the other’ in books, they must be less valuable”



Teens & Young Adults are inherently Solipsistic

- Feeling that your own existence is the only thing that is real
 - Unique
 - Alone
 - “the OTHER”
- Frequently a cause for angst.
 - For a young man of color, seeing himself in the pages of a young adult book can provide reassurance that he is not alone after all, not “other” but instead a viable part of a larger community who shares a common humanity.

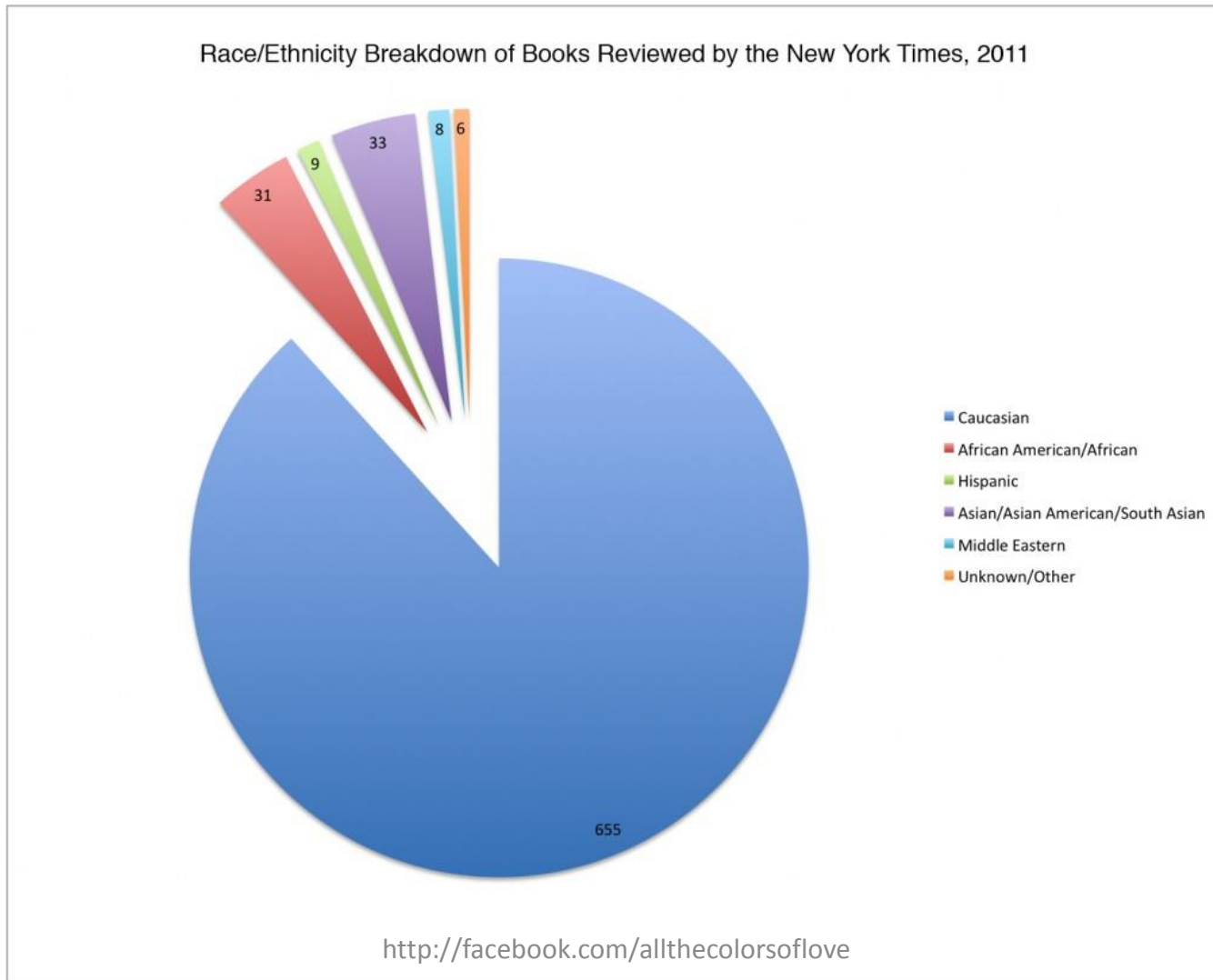


Comments from kids

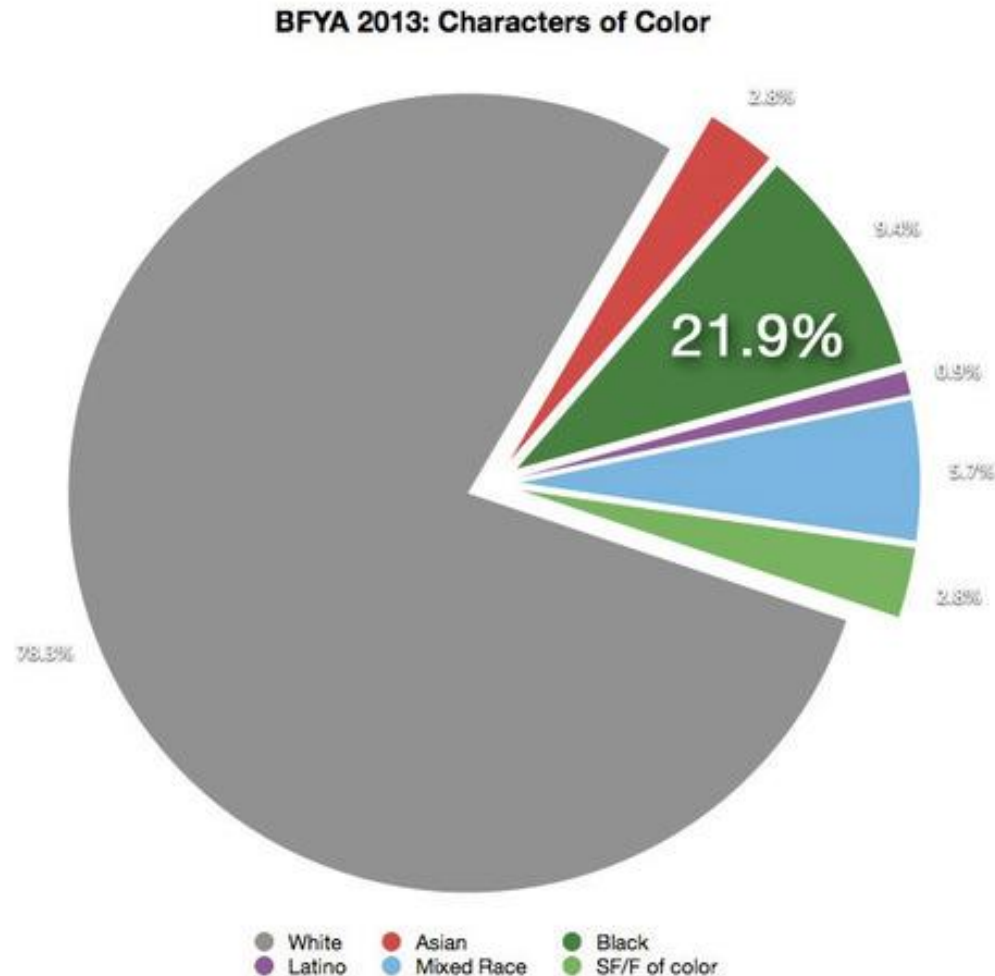


- Why can't there be any black people who solve mysteries?
- Aren't there any black people in this book at all?
- I love books like The Hunger Games and many of the YA books out now. But at the end of the day...I wish I could see a girl of color who can save the world Katniss-style or have two hot love interests like Bella.

Books by authors of color are largely ignored by reviewers and don't make "most anticipated" lists



The books that do find a way past the publishing gatekeepers have exceptional quality. Although less than 10% of traditionally published books feature Kids Of Color, they make up almost 22% of BFYA list



Data from ALA's 2013 Best Fiction for Young Adults | Chart by Malinda Lo | diversityinyaya.tumblr.com
<http://facebook.com/allthecolorsoflove>

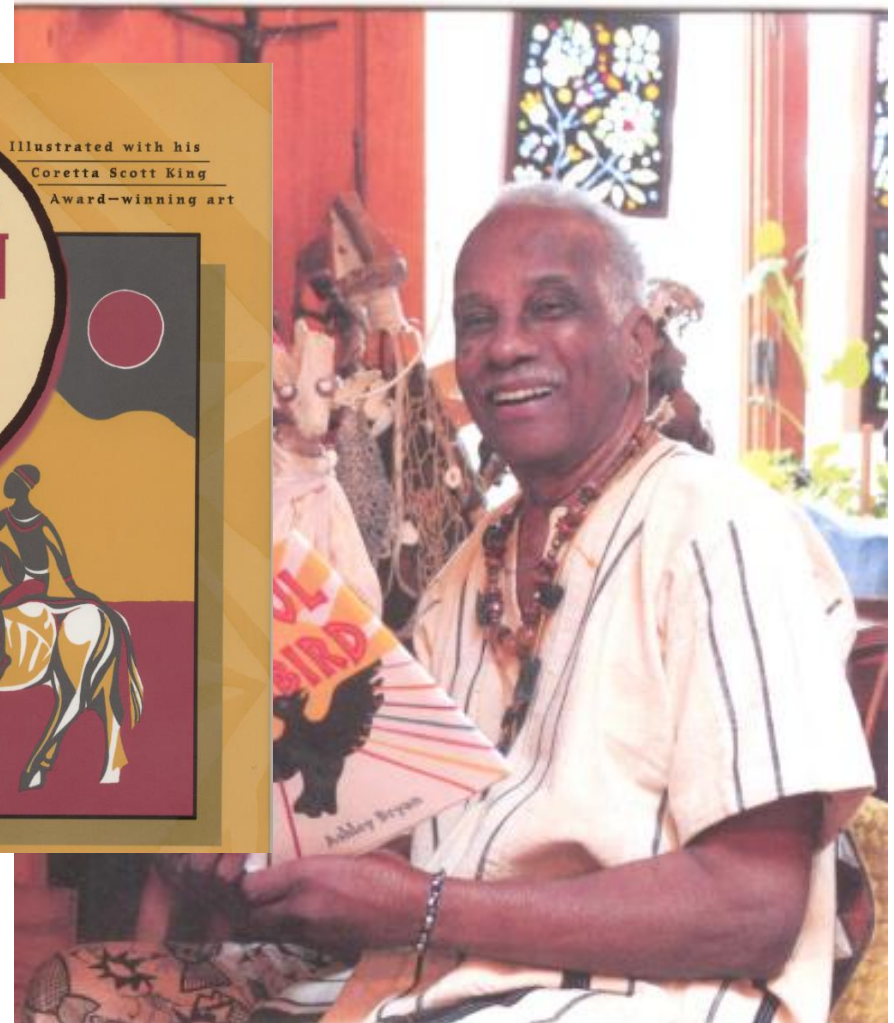
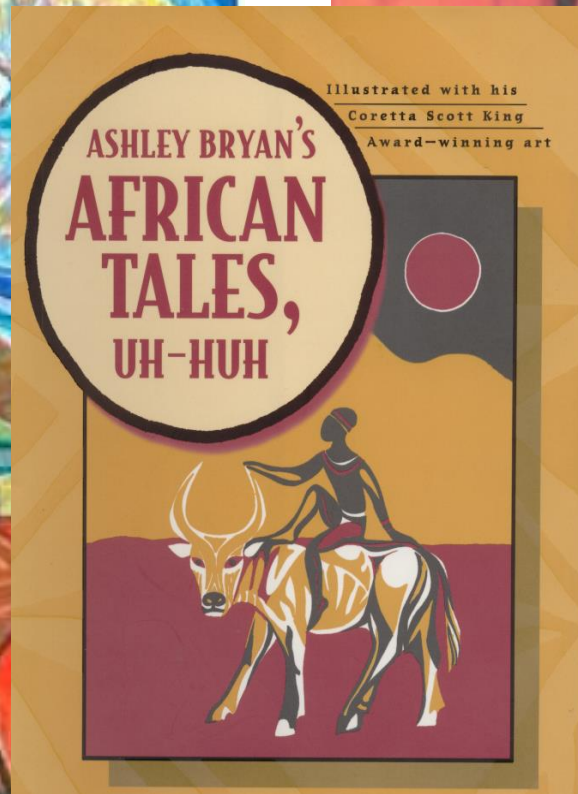
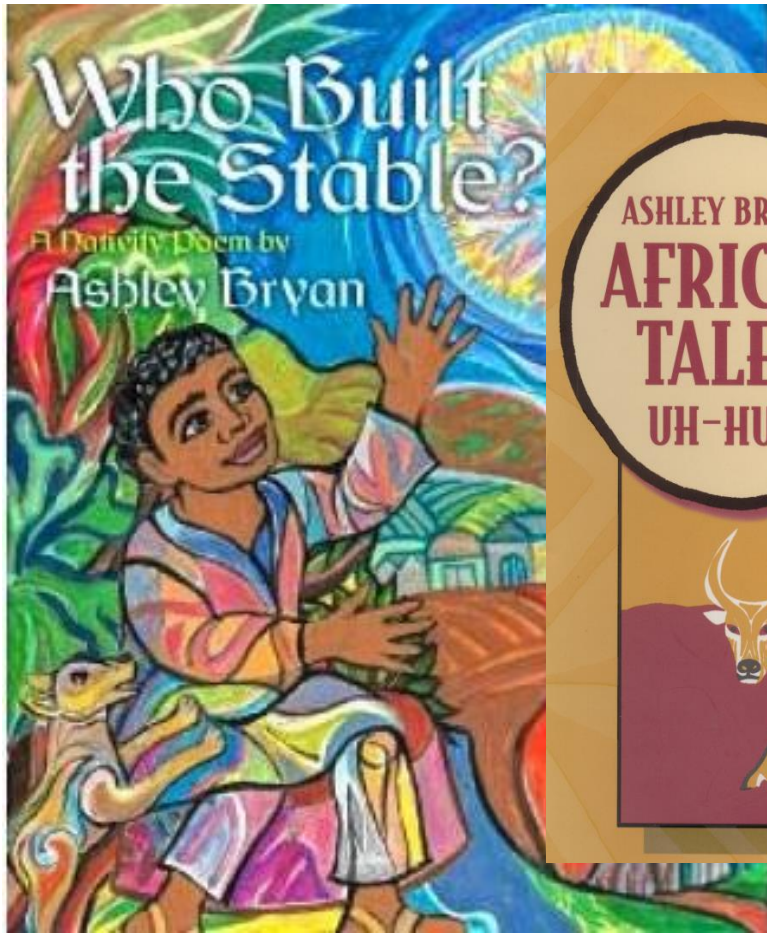
Where can you find these books for your library?



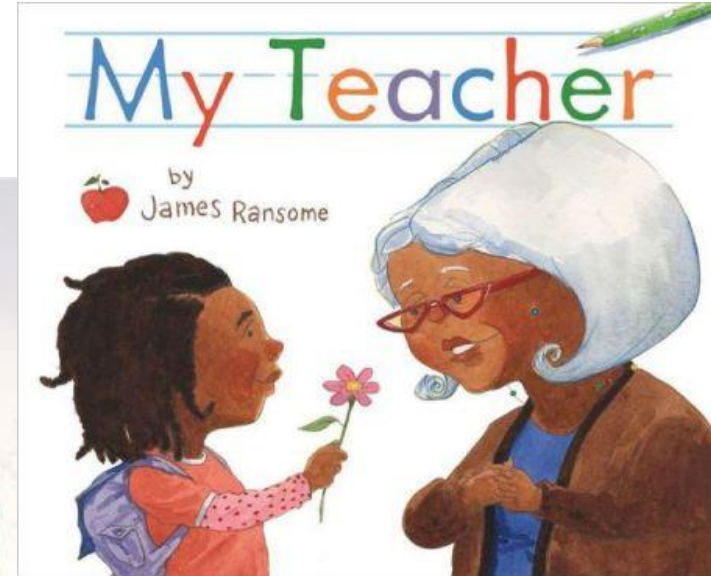
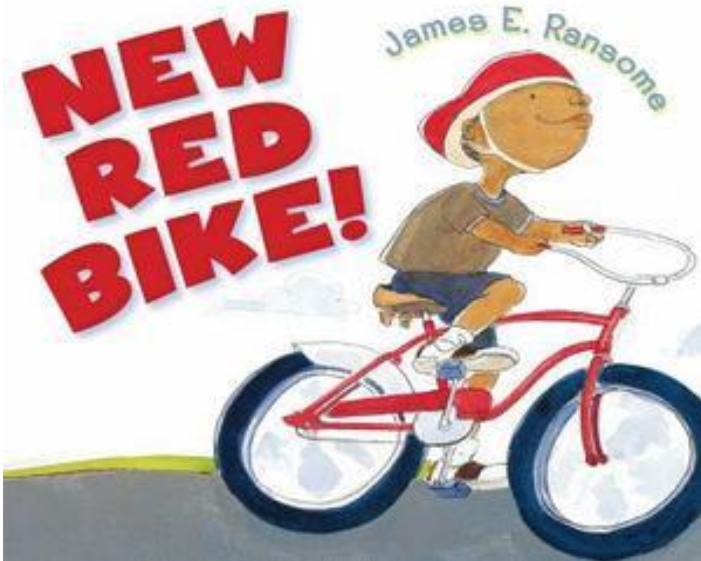
Try looking directly at the authors!!

<http://babinn.com/classes/Empowering-CLA-handout.pdf>

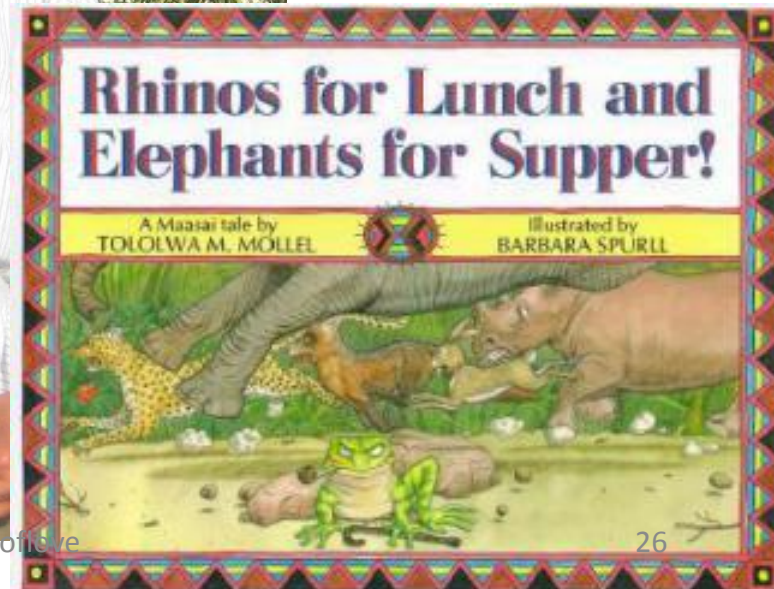
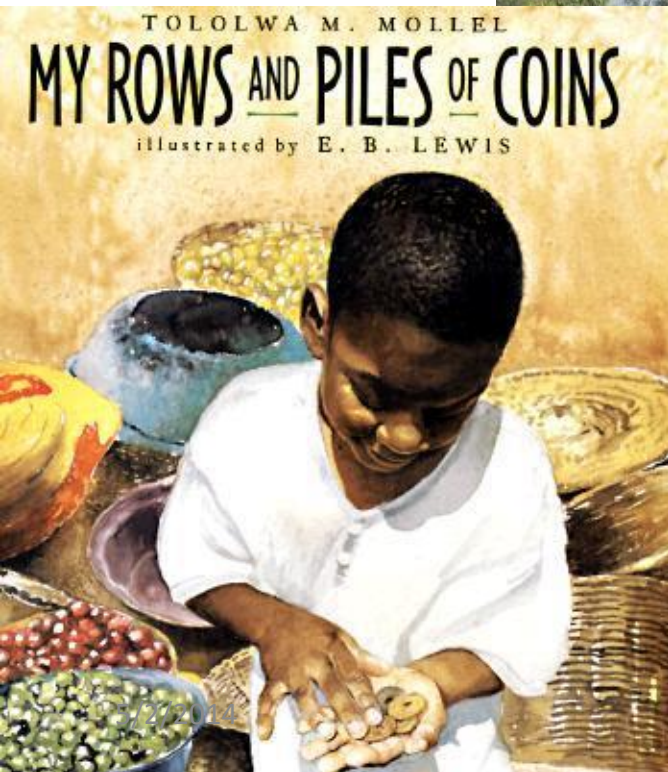
Ashley Bryan



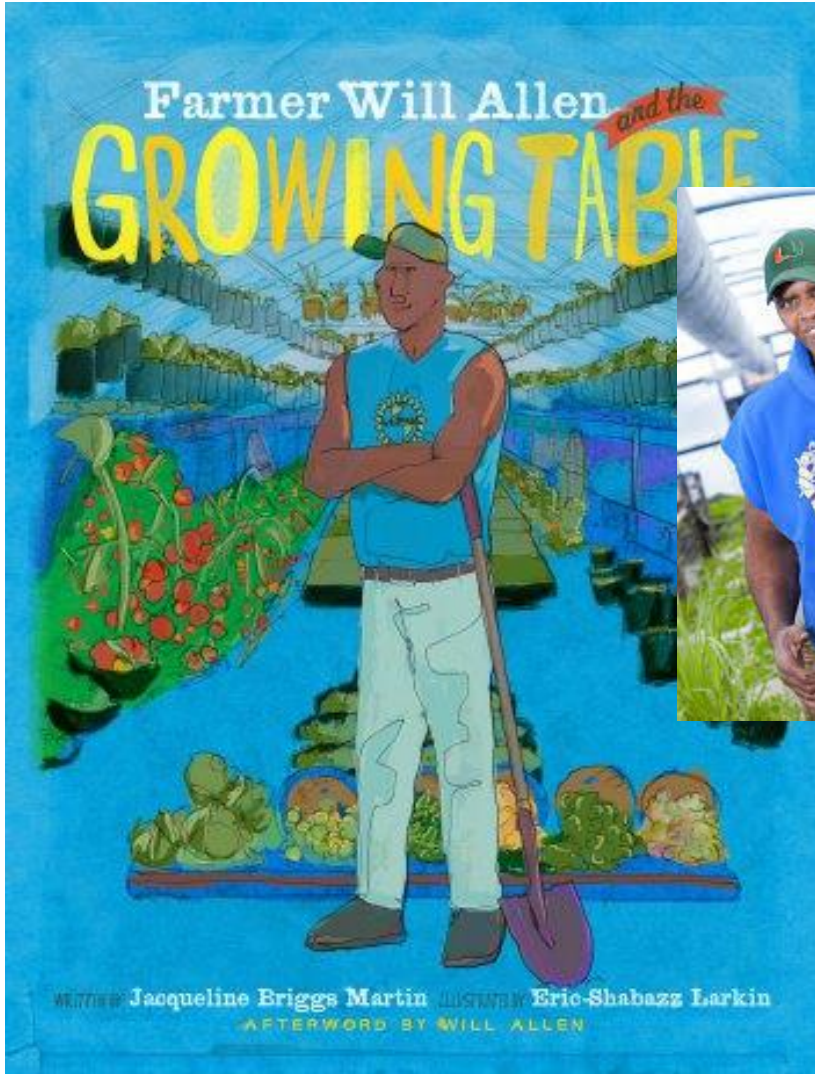
James E. Ransome



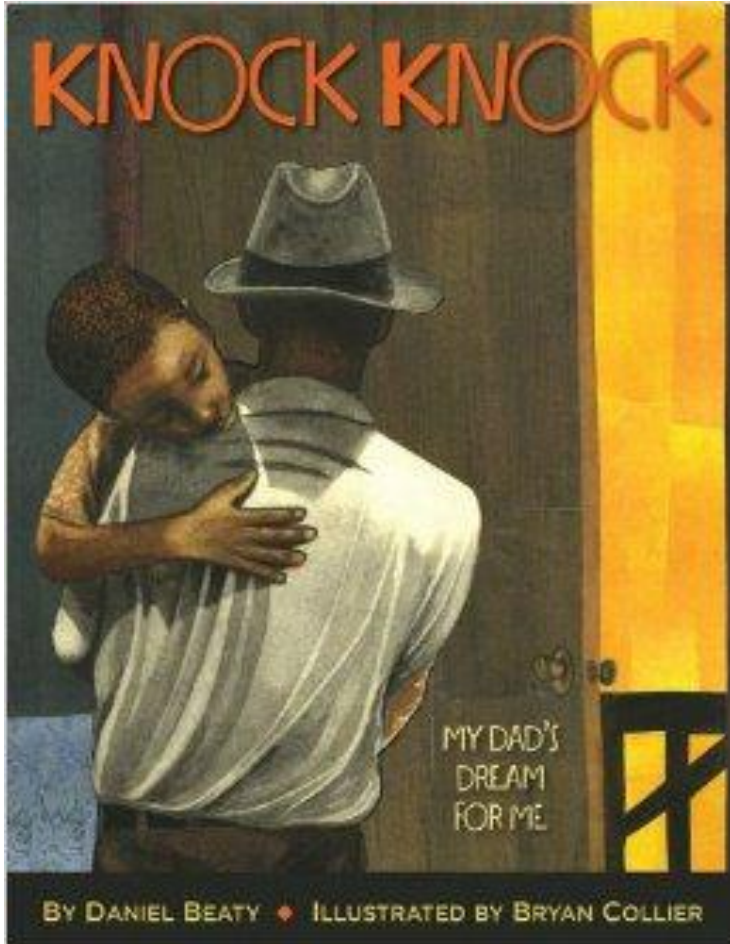
Tololwa M. Mollel



Eric-Shabazz Larkin - illustrator



Daniel Beaty



Daniel gives a performance based on this book on YouTube at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9eYH0AFx6yI>

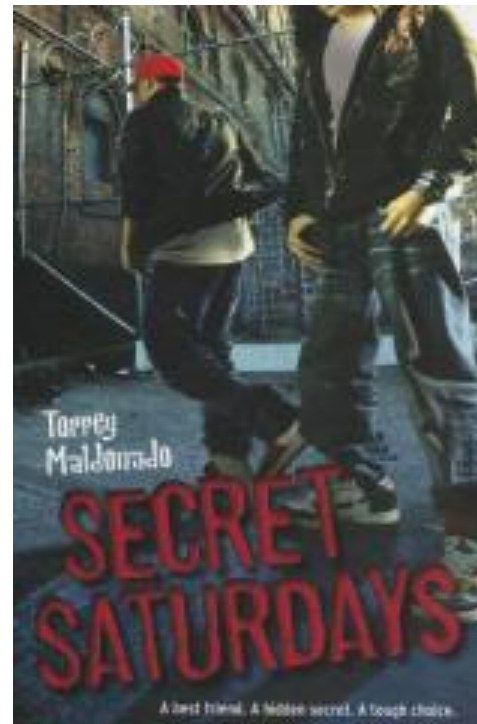
Tiki and Ronde Barber



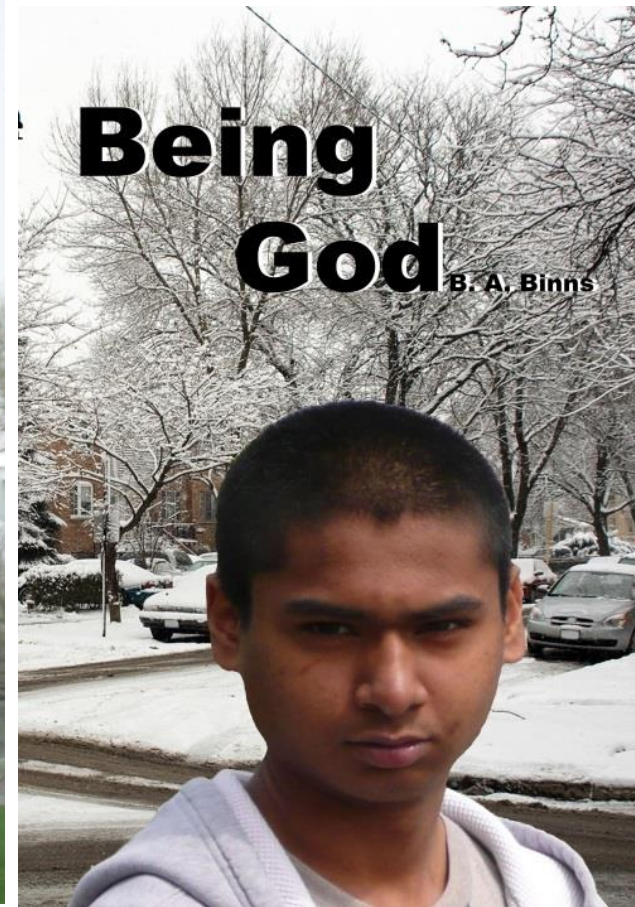
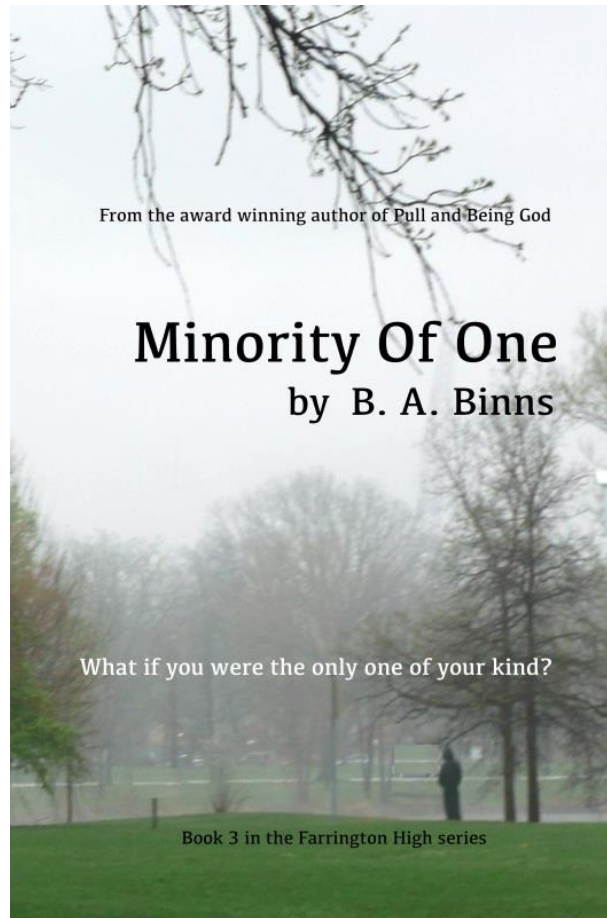
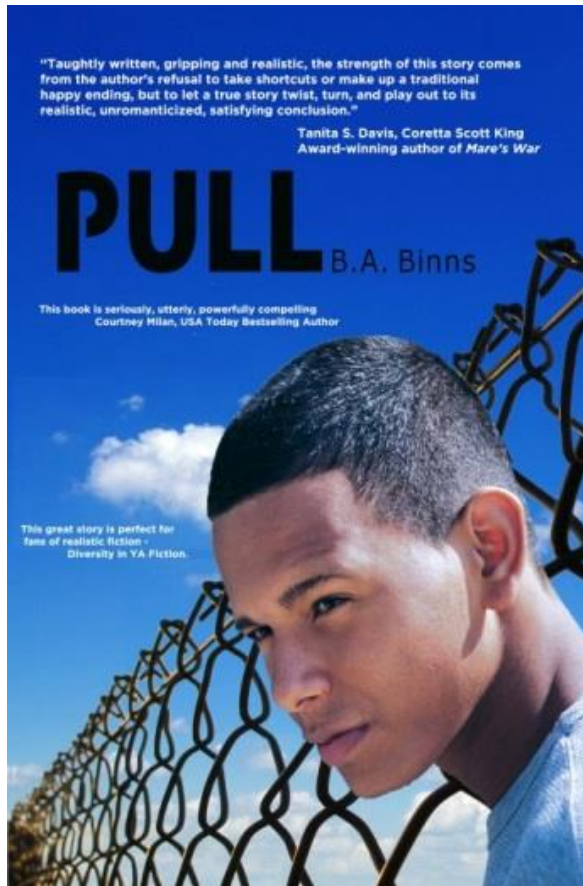
Amar'e Stoudemire



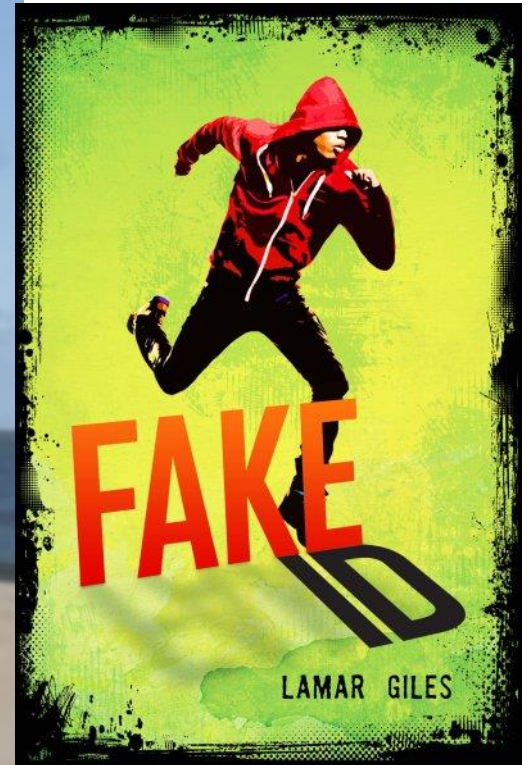
Torrey Maldonado



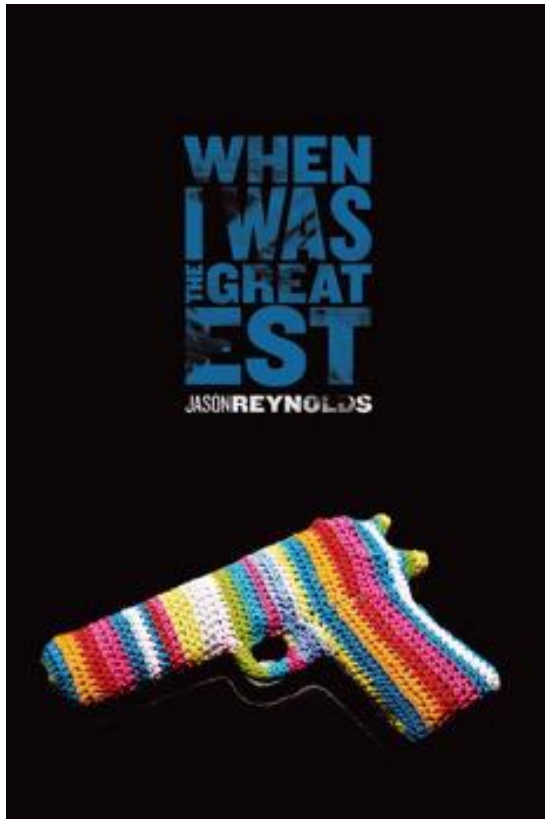
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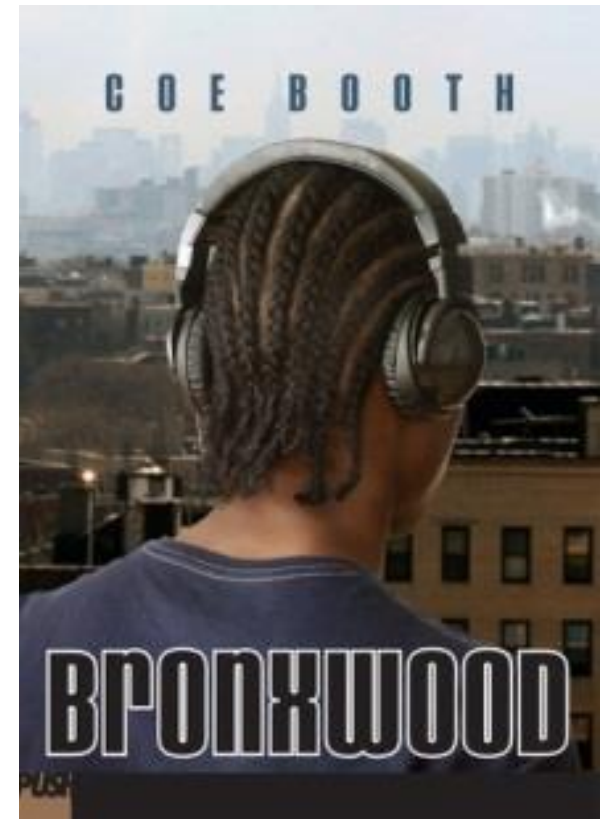
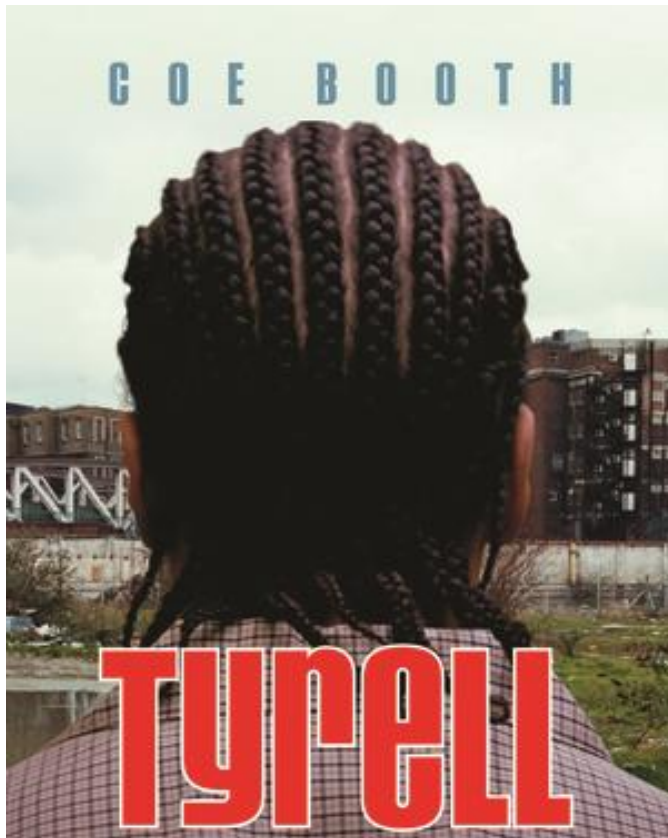
Lamar Giles



Jason Reynolds

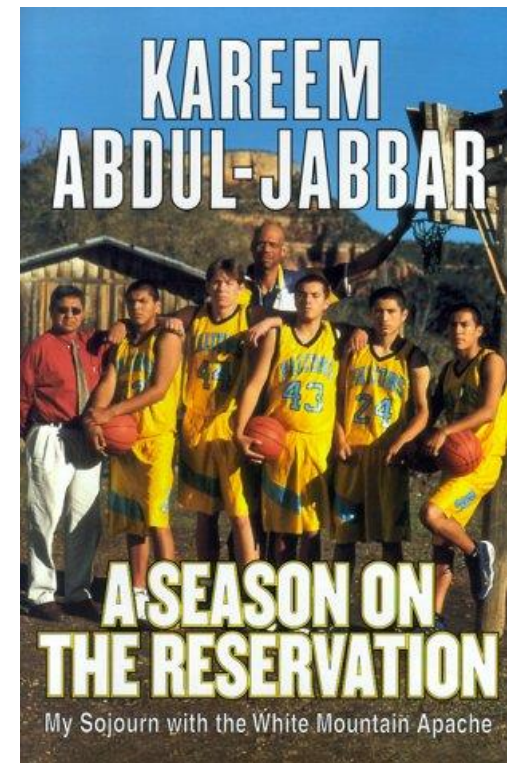
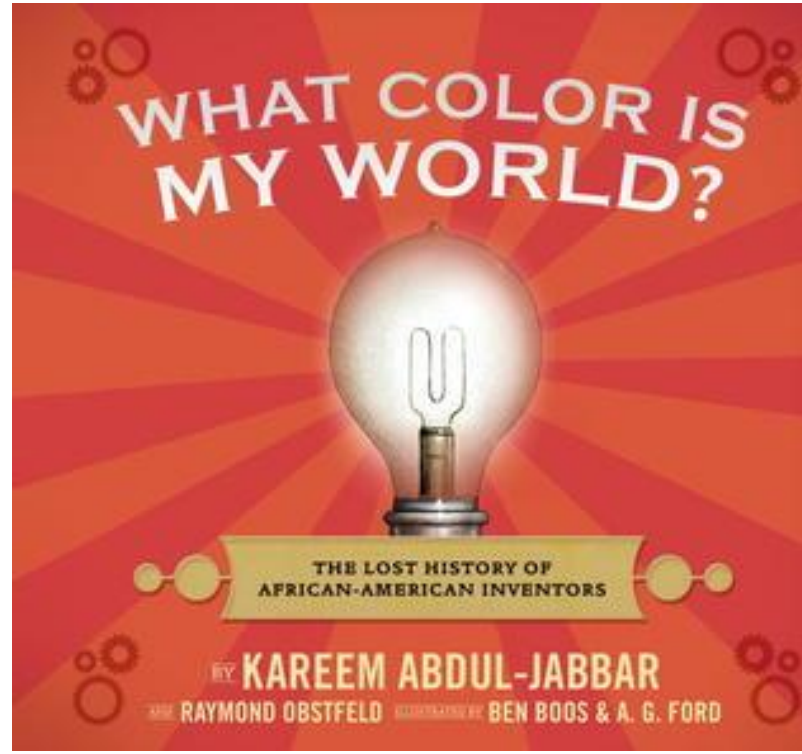
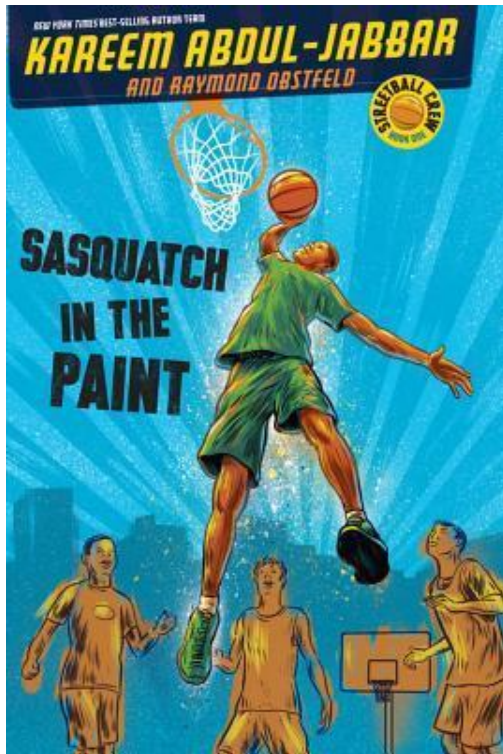


Coe Booth

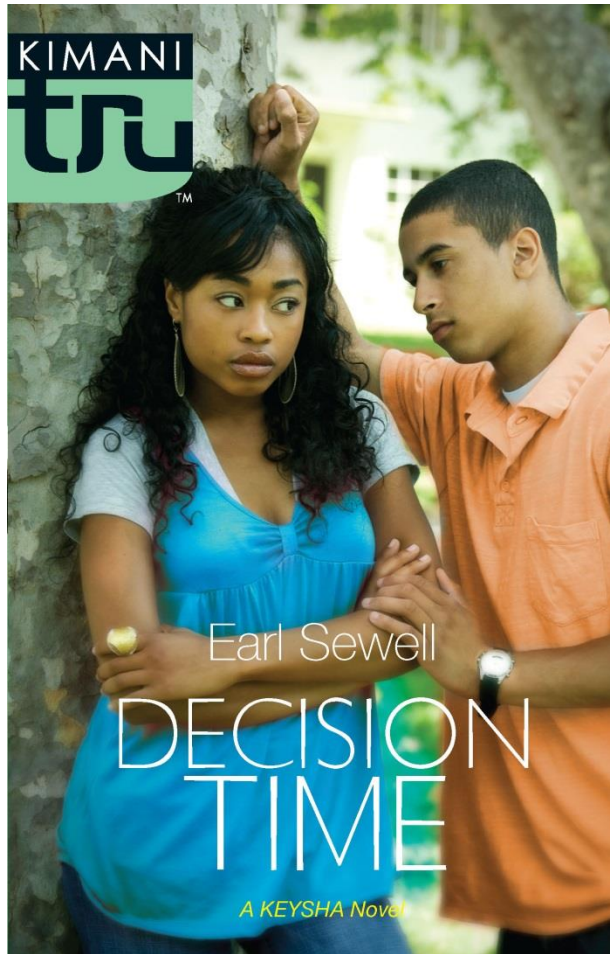


Kareem Abdul-Jabbar

- MG fiction and non-fiction

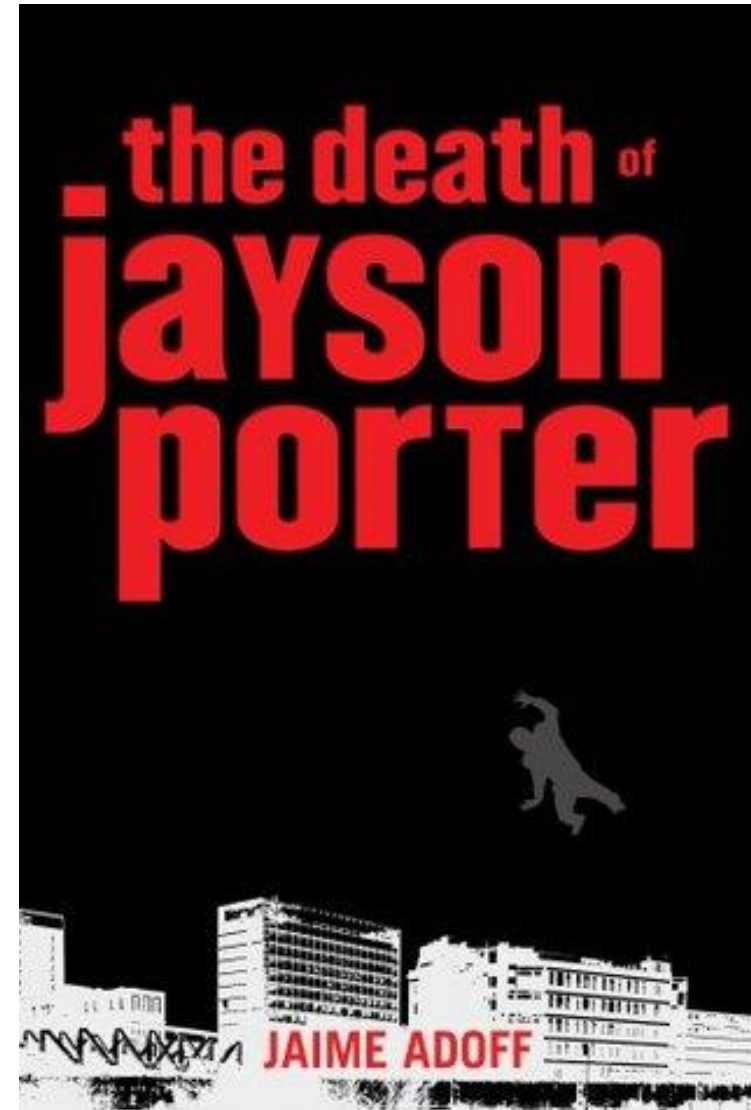


Earl Sewell

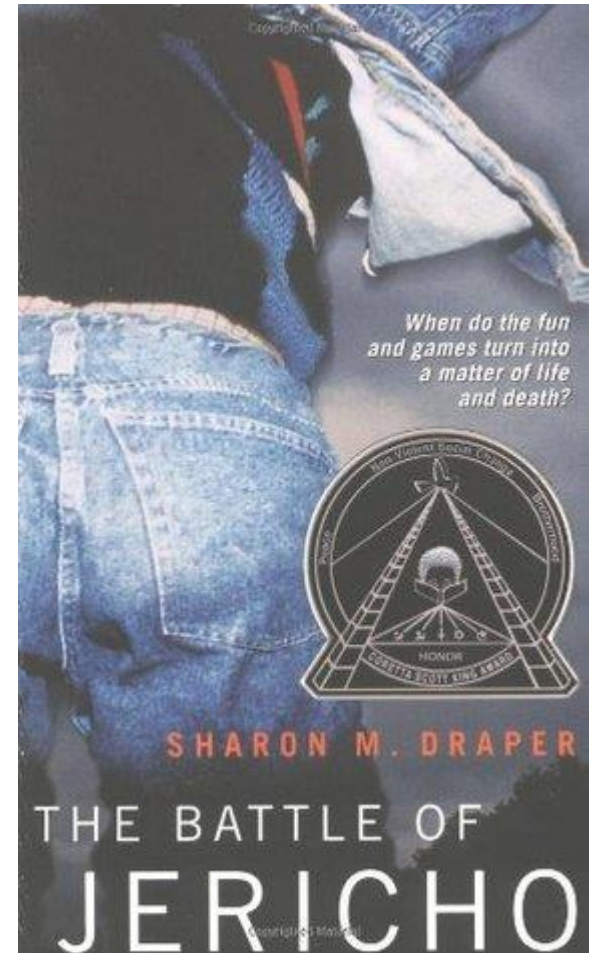


Romance isn't just for girls.

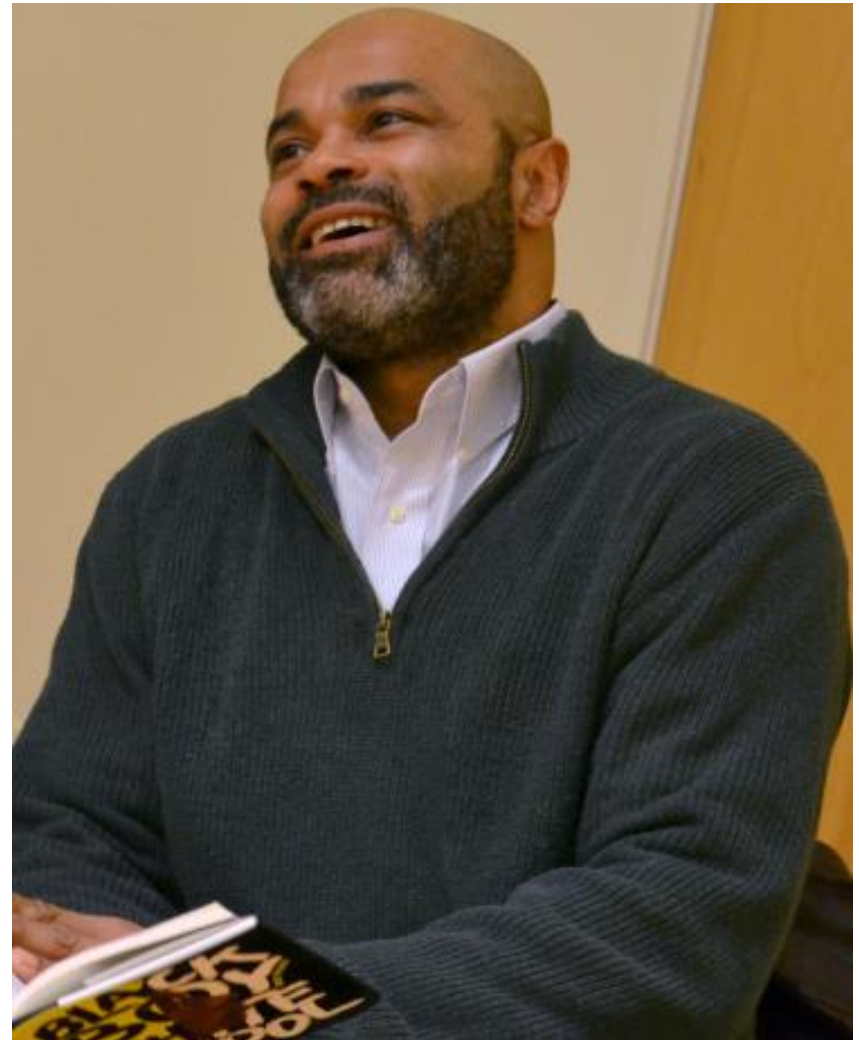
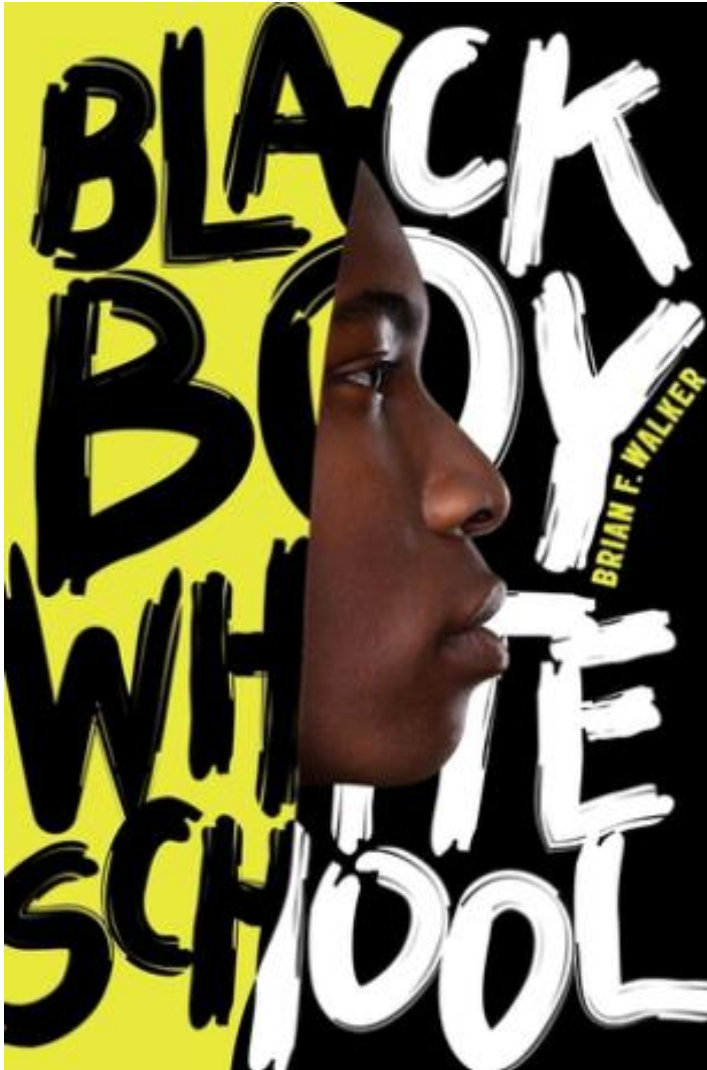
Jaime Adoff



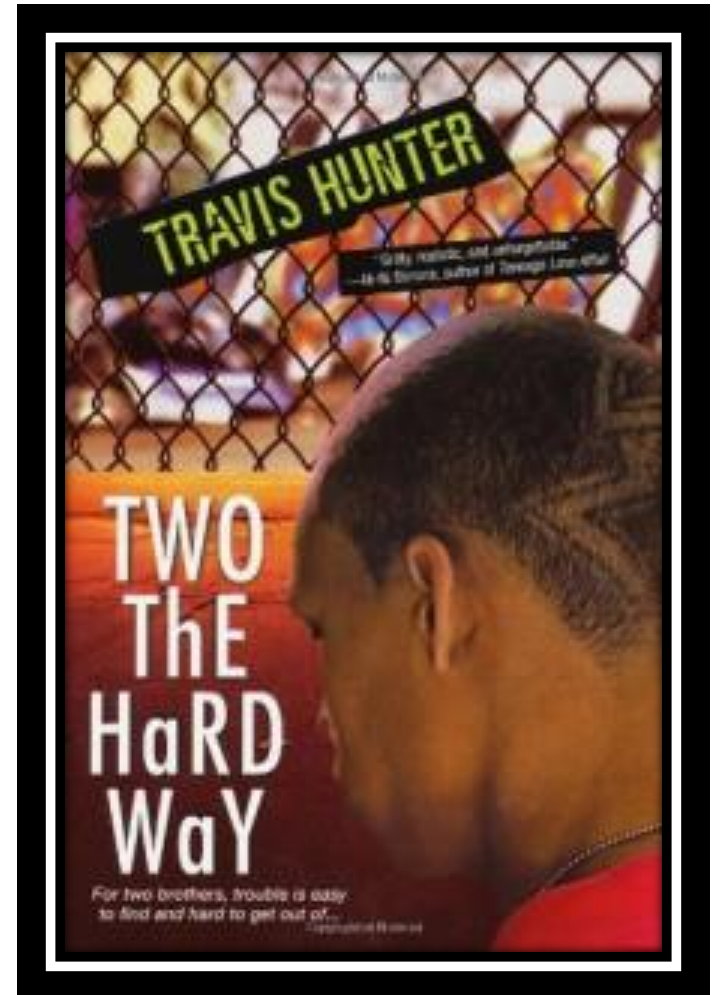
Sharon Draper



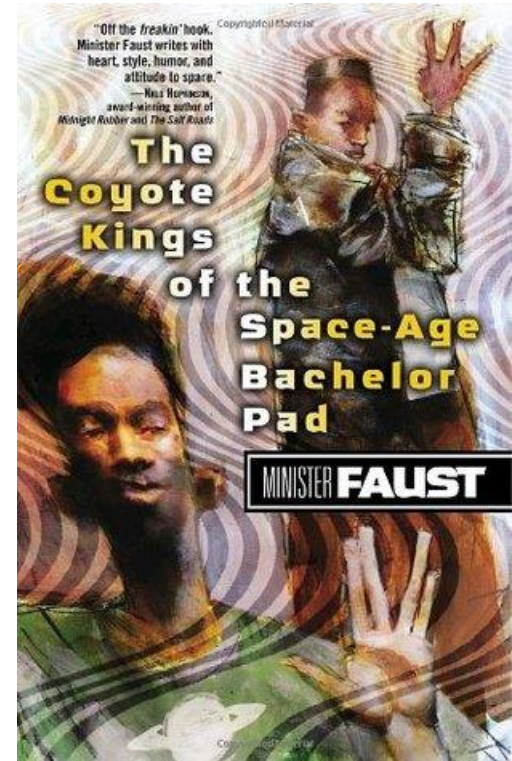
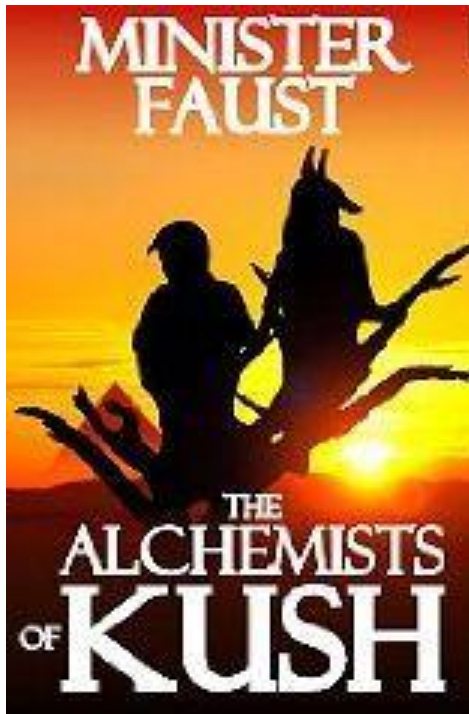
Brian F. Walker



Travis Hunter

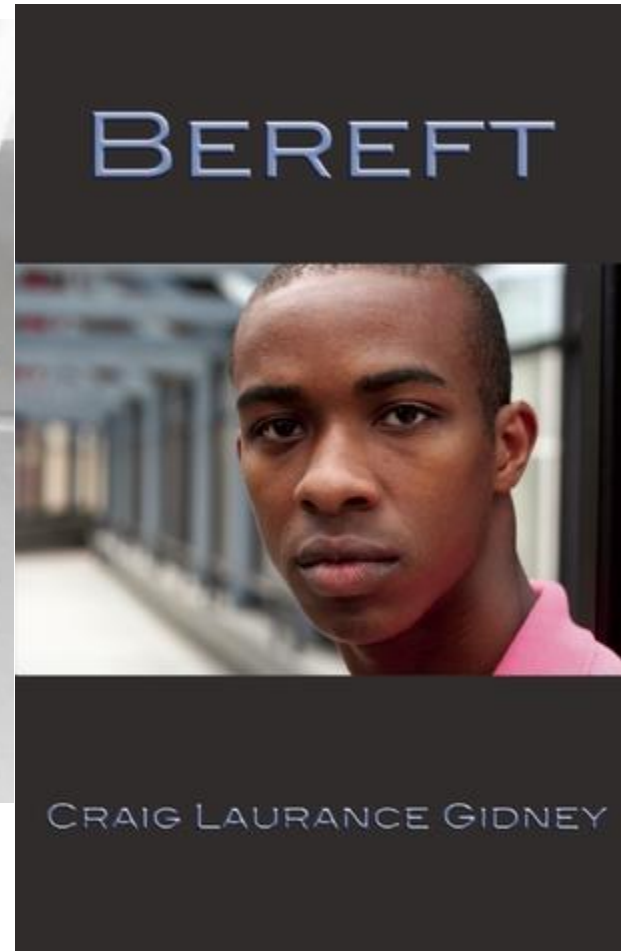
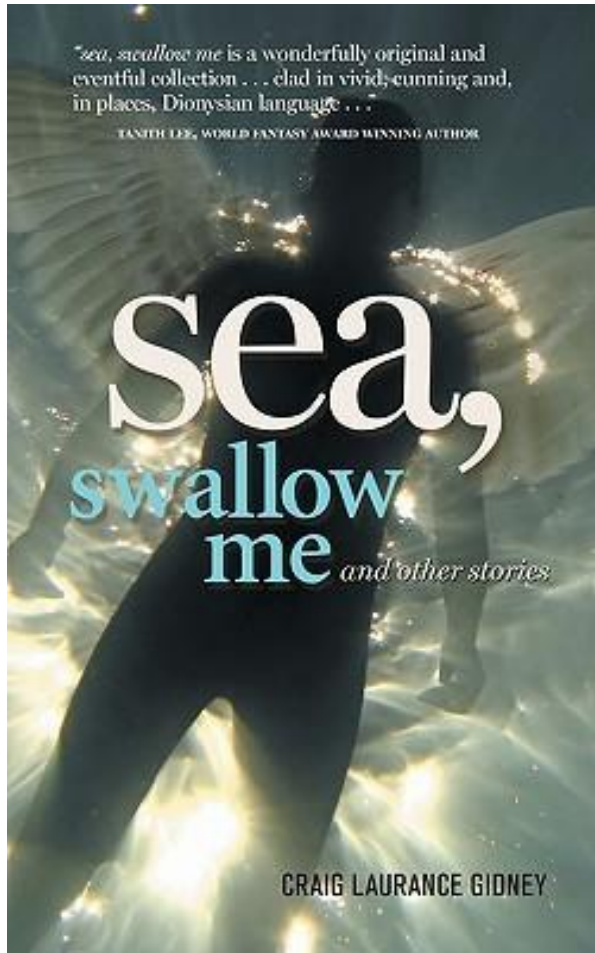


Minister Faust

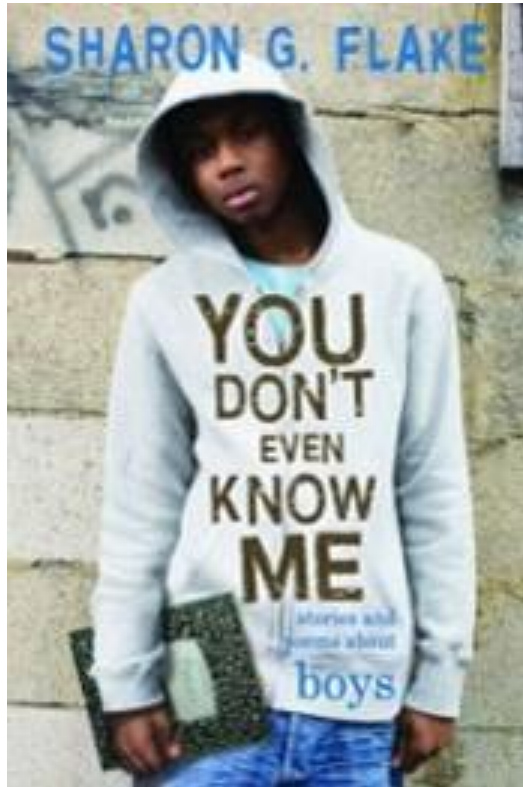


Independently published

Craig Laurance Gidney



Short Stories and Poetry

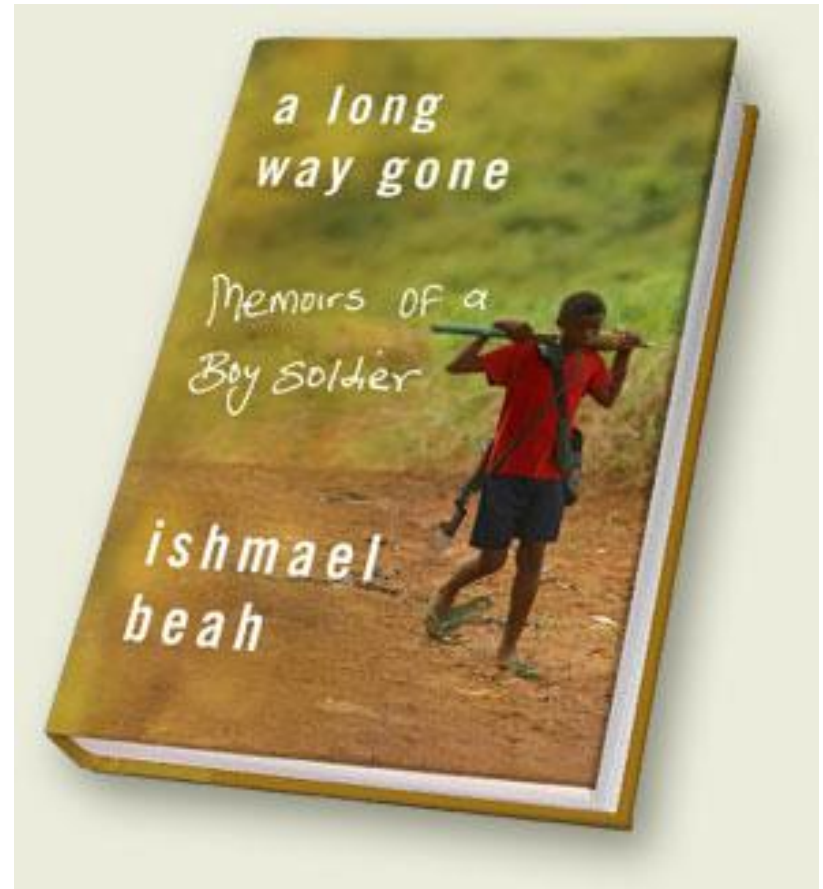
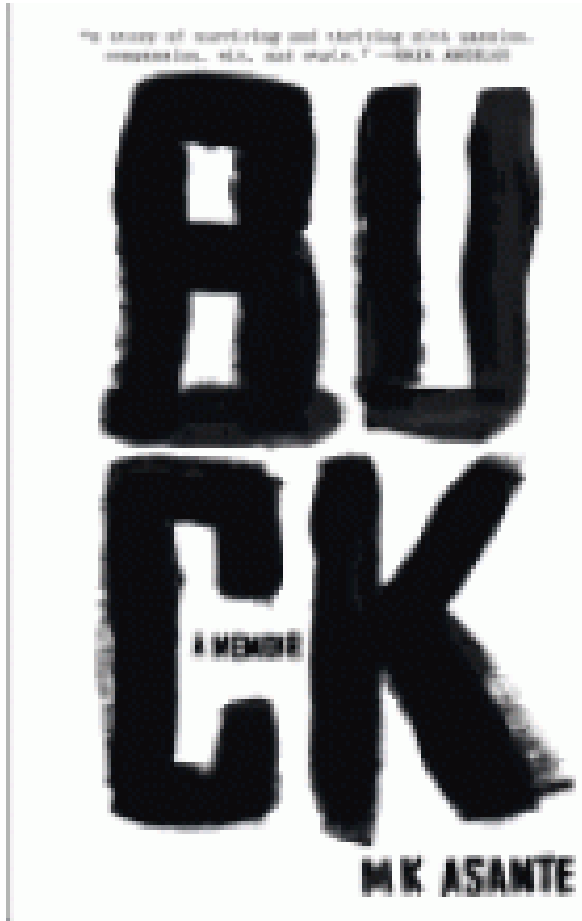


Watch the You Don't Even Know Me video on YouTube:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gy4u44FZk94&feature=player_embedded

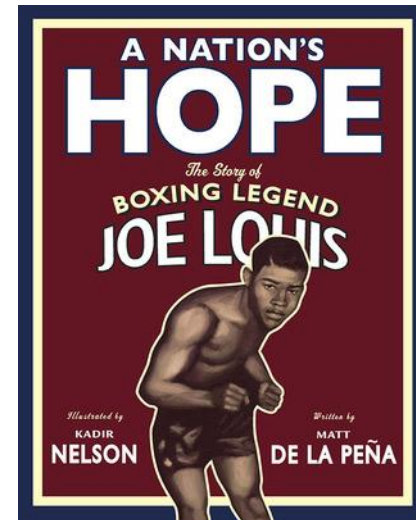
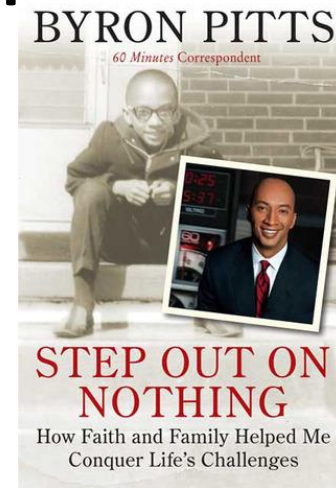
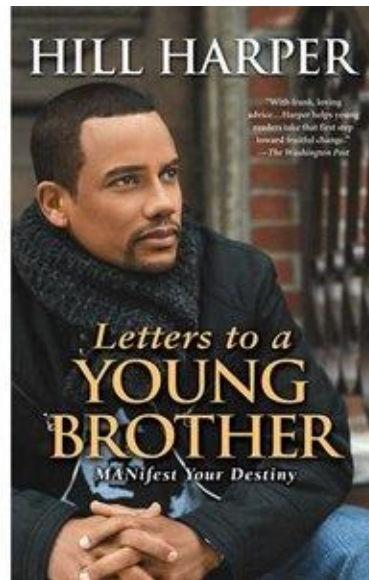
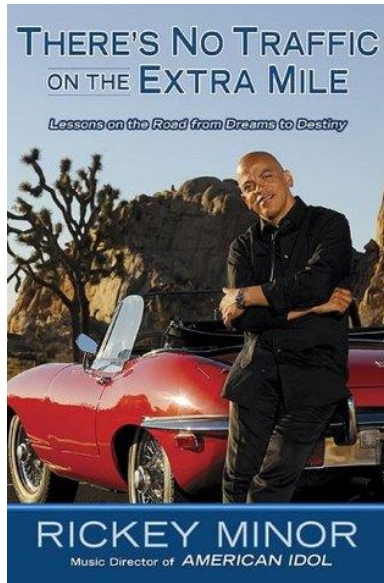
More Poetry/Novel in Verse



Memoir

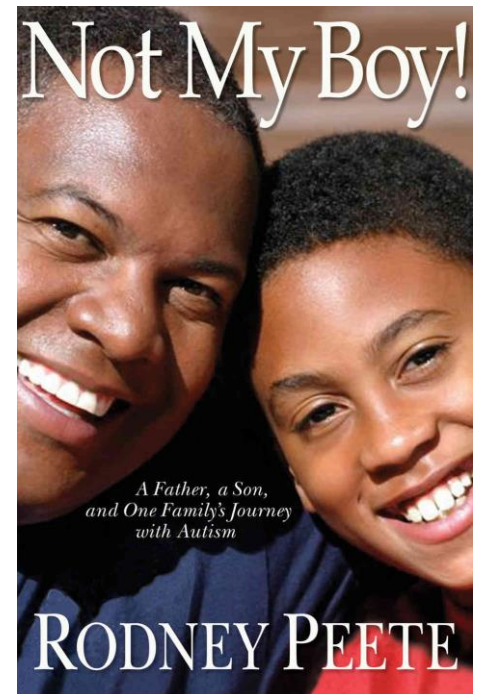
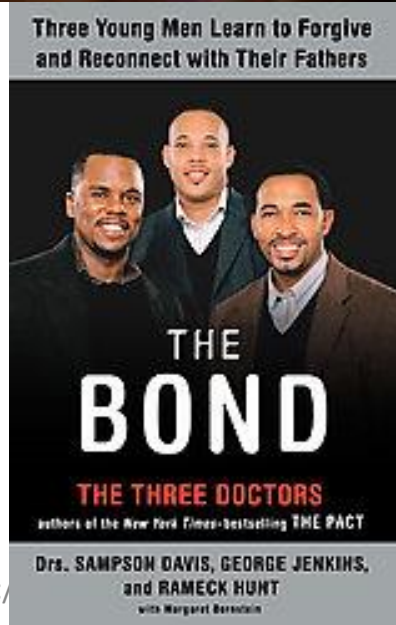
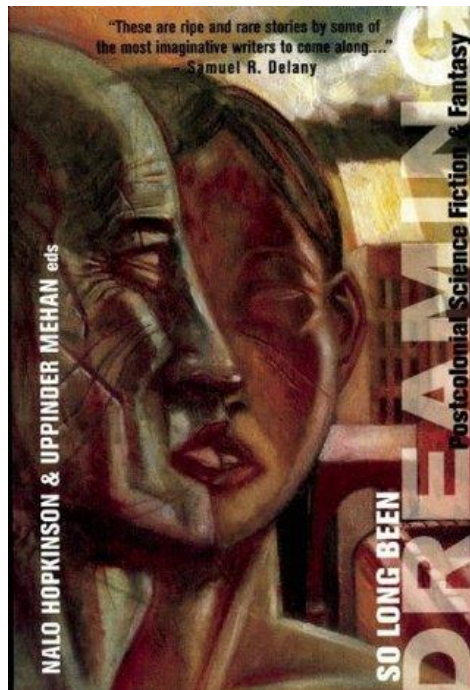


Non-Fiction



Adult Books Kids Of Color may like:

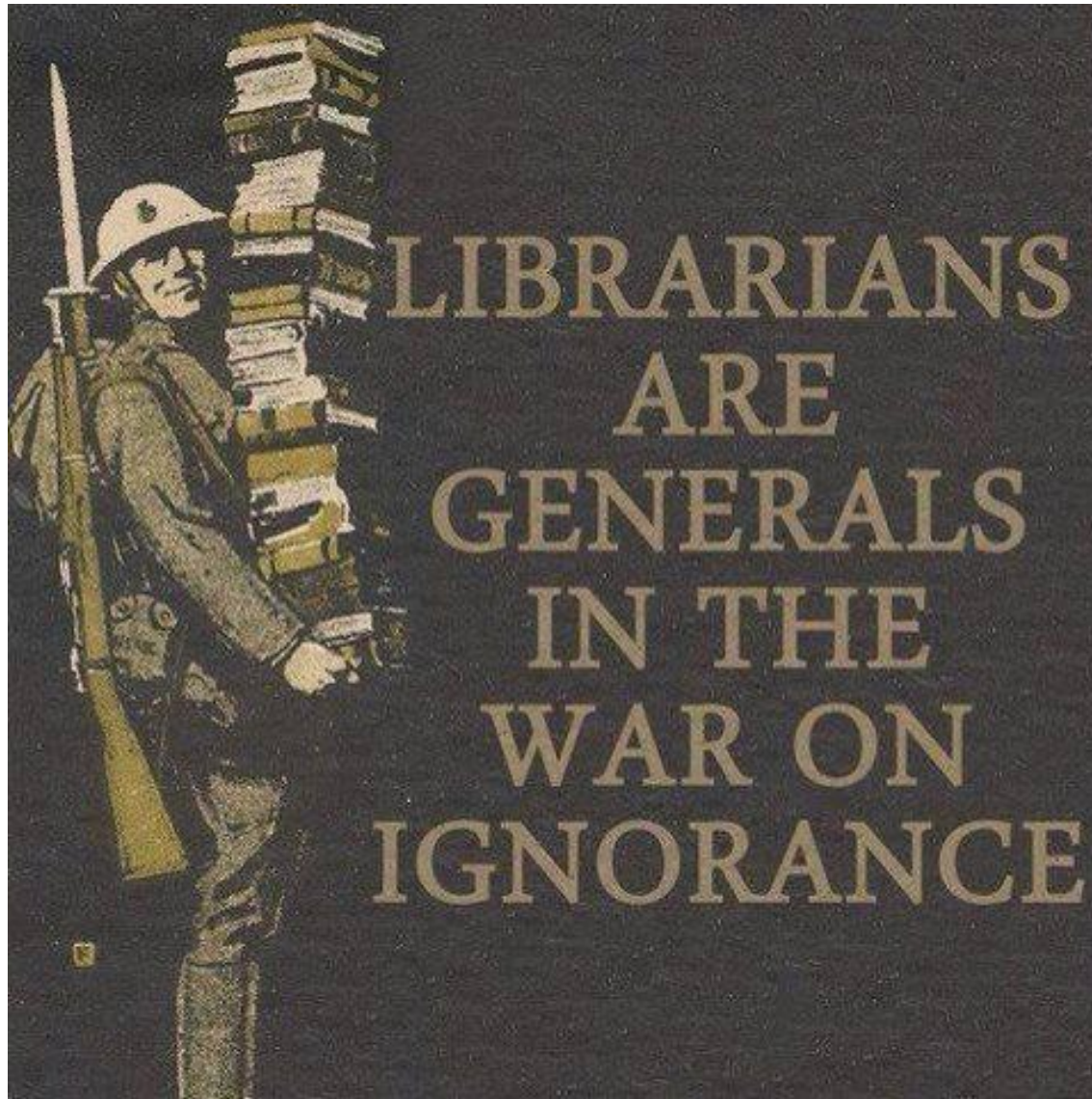
Mystery, Science Fiction, Non-Fiction



Your Next Steps

- Show that “universal” is not white by default
- Display CSK posters prominently
- Let publishers know you want these books
 - Ask about their new authors, especially about their African-American authors.
 - Buy books written by authors of color.
- Consciously think about featuring books with characters of different colors, ethnicities, and abilities in your displays and on your website
 - Buy them for your collections. Read them. Talk about them.
 - Have the authors in to talk to patrons
- Have a place where **all** kids can find pleasure, comfort, company, information, inspiration and empowerment in books.
 - The effort to encourage people to be better, broader readers begins by giving them a better, broader selection of books to choose from.
- Be part of changing the culture and making space for different voices.

Click [here for a downloadable pdf](#) of the authors mentioned



Publishers

- Lee and Low/Tu Books is doing a great job publishing science fiction, fantasy, and mystery YA with POC as main characters.
- Lorimar – source of Hi/Lo multicultural books
- Cinco Punto Press
- [All The Colors Of Love Press](#)