

2021 BEST OF THE BEST BOOKLIST

PRE-K THROUGH 4TH GRADE

A Day for Rememberin' by Leah Henderson

-Young Eli gathers with other emancipated enslaved people to honor those who lost their lives in the Civil War, on the first Memorial Day in 1865.

The ABC's of Black Wall Street by Claudia Walker

-The ABCs of Black Wall Street takes readers on a nostalgic trip through the heart of Tulsa's historic Greenwood District. In the first ABC book dedicated to Black Wall Street, children quickly realize that "A" isn't always for "apple." From Madam C.J. Walker and O.W. Gurley, to Williams Dreamland Theater and Osborne Monroe's Roller Skating Rink, children learn about the innovators, activists, and establishments that created one of America's wealthiest Black communities.

Alaina and the Great Play by Eloise Greenfield

-Kindergartener Alaina has been chosen to thank the audience at the end of the second grade play. She is so excited about the play that she shares her excitement with the audience.

Born Ready by Jodi Patterson

-When you know who you are, you want everyone else to recognize it as well. That's all Penelope wants. He wants his family, friends, and classmates to recognize him as a boy. Once that happens, he also plans on competing in a ninja tournament. Companion book to Jodie Patterson's adult memoir, *The Bold World*.

Count to Love! by Andrea Davis Pinkney & Brian Pinkney

-How many ways can you count to love? On fingers and toes, on legs and arms, with belly kisses? Award-winning Andrea Davis and Brian Pinkney bring this sweet board book read-aloud to life with joyful text and exuberant illustrations, capturing that vivacity and energy so familiar to the parents of toddlers.

****Books that appear on this definitive list are written and illustrated by Black authors and artists with a copyright date of 2021. Through stories and informational text, these books celebrate the black experience and most importantly the black community. These selections will be enjoyed by students, families and caregivers alike. Feel free to share this list with teachers, fellow librarians and community members within your networks.**

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Chef Toussaint by David Miller

-Chef Toussaint makes magic in the kitchen! From fried chicken to apple cinnamon french toast, this 9-year-old master chef turns his grandmother's old recipes into award-winning dishes. Experience the power of literacy through a great storyline and memorable images; complete with recipes and a message for parents in the back of the book.

Daddy Let's Play! by Rodney Freeman Jr.

-A father and his daughter bond over video game every night, until one night he doesn't come home and she finds herself jumping into action to bring him home.

Dream Street by Tricia Elam Walker

-Cousins take readers on a neighborhood tour and introduce them to the wonderful people who call Dream Street home.

Dreams for a Daughter by Carole Boston Weatherford

-Weatherford and Pinkney team up once again for this moving, heartwarming tribute to the bond between Black mothers and their daughters. A loving mother follows her daughter from babyhood to adolescence, describing the dreams and hopes that she has for her future while celebrating the things that make her unique

Everybody in the Red, Brick Building by Anne Wynter and Oge Mora

-A cute story about the sounds you hear at night when it is bedtime in an apartment building. This story connects the child living in an urban area with the sense of normalcy when calling an apartment their home. It extends from the sounds of the creaks in the floor to the pets throughout the building.

Game, Set, Sisters!: The Story of Venus and Serena Williams by Jay Leslie

-This biography for young readers highlights the bond between the Williams sisters on their journey to becoming tennis superstars.

I Move A Lot and That's Okay: Axel's Story by Shermaine Perry-Knight

-Axel, an energetic boy, who moves a lot because of his mom's job in the Army. Although he loves new adventures, Axel struggles with leaving everything and everyone behind. He has to adapt quickly to a different culture and make the best out of life far away from home. While this book features a military child, its message of resilience and hope are universal themes that help all children to overcome obstacles more easily.

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J.D. and the Great Barber Battle by J. Dillard

-Pre-teen JD's hairline is well aware of the hardships faced in Meridian, MS. Then he realizes he may just have a supernatural gift for the perfect line up, but long standing community barber is ready to battle any competition.

Jump at the Sun: The True Life Tale of Unstoppable Story Catcher Zora Neale Hurston by Alicia D. Williams

-The life of Harlem Renaissance author and folklorist Zora Neale Hurston jumps at the reader from the pages of this wonderful picturebook. Williams and Alcántara lay out Zora's journey as its own piece of folkloric legend, incorporating the same traditional dialect and characters featured in much of Hurston's work.

Many Shapes of Clay: A Story of Healing by Kenesha Sneed

-This is a story of a little girl who experienced the loss of her father. Her mother is a ceramic artist who teaches her a life lesson by helping her design a special shape out of clay. As the clay hardens and pieces chip away the lesson focuses on the courage to carry on even with the challenges of the absence of a loved one.

Michelle's Garden: How the First Lady Planted Seeds of Change by Sharee Miller

-Follow along as we learn about First Lady Obama's introduction to healthy living from an early age and her work in creating the largest kitchen garden at the White House. The First Lady had never gardened, so she called on several people to make the garden a community effort. This tribute to Michelle Obama is full of illustrations detailing the tools and work required to maintain a garden.

Nina: A Story of Nina Simone by Traci N. Todd

-A beautiful picture book biography worthy of its monumental subject, written with a timeless lyricism reminiscent of Simone's own work. While themes of racism and the Civil Rights Movement play a central role and are handled with remarkable nuance, Simone's talent and determination make up the book's core thesis. The visuals are stunning collages of diverse materials used in perfect concert, and Robinson's interpretations of the text tremendously augment the already stellar storytelling.

Song in a Rainstorm: The Story of Musical Prodigy Thomas "Blind Tom" Wiggins by Glenda Armand

-This picture book biography focuses on the little-known and unusual story of Tom Wiggins. Born enslaved, blind, and before the understanding of autism as a condition, Wiggins possessed a remarkable ability to mimic sounds and play any song on the piano by ear. The book details his life from childhood to adulthood as he traveled all over the world, while emphasizing his family's love and determination to keep him safe under such unusual circumstances.

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One Step Further: My Story of Math, the Moon, and a Lifelong Mission by Katherine Johnson, with Joylette Hylick and Katherine Moore

-This picture book autobiography reveals what it was like for a young African-American mother of three to traverse the difficult world of the 1950s and 60s and to succeed in a very unwelcoming and at times hostile industry to become one of the now legendary "hidden figures" of NASA computing, space research and mathematician.

Paradise on Fire by Jewell Parker Rhodes

-Paradise for Adaugo or Addy as she prefers, happens to be a Wilderness Adventures program in California. Navigating a sea of nightmares plaguing Addy since her parents' death by fire, these mountainous terrains may be the perfect backdrop to be encompassed by the pure power and energy of nature. Will this serene landscape overlooking an eagle's nest be more than a place for flight but also create a need for escape? Read on to discover Addy's plight!

Parker Shines On: Another Extraordinary Moment by Parker Curry and Jessica Curry

-Dance-loving Parker Curry returns in this sweet story about the importance of patience and helping others. The protagonist of Parker Looks Up enjoys spending time with her siblings (even when they bug her a bit) and is excited to meet a new friend in her ballet class. As they practice, Parker puts her skills to use as she helps her friend out of a jam during a recital.

Ruby's Reunion Day Dinner by Angela Dalton

-Each year at their family reunion, everyone in Ruby's family contributes a special dish. Everyone but Ruby, that is. The "crack and sizzle of chicken and catfish frying" and Momma's peach cobbler "bubbling up the sides of her favorite baking dish" convince Ruby that there has to be something she can contribute-- but what? Ruby finds her place and a signature dish of her own in this mouth-watering picture book that celebrates familial love.

Runaway: The Daring Escape of Ona Judge by Ray Anthony Shepard

-Told in free verse, this book spotlights brave Ona Judge, one of the more famous enslaved people in George Washington's household, as she successfully executed her escape from slavery while still a youth. Prompted by the imminent sale to Martha Washington's ill-tempered granddaughter, Shepard cleverly uses repetitive language to contrast the different treatment Ona seemingly gets as a mixed-race house slave with the reality of being in bondage to another person. The celebration of Ona's strength and courage is present throughout.

Shirley Chisholm Dared: The Story of the First Black Woman in Congress by Alicia D. Williams

-Meet Shirley, a little girl who asks way too many questions! After spending her early years on her grandparents' farm in Barbados, she returns home to Brooklyn and immediately makes herself known. Shirley kicks butt in school; she breaks her mother's curfew; she plays jazz piano instead of classical. And as a young adult, she fights against the injustice she sees around her, against women and black people. Soon she is running for state assembly...and winning in a landslide. Three years later, she is on the campaign trail again, as the first black woman to run for Congress. Her slogan? "Fighting Shirley Chisholm--Unbought and Unbossed!" Does she win? You bet she does.

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Santa in the City by Tiffany Jackson

-A city girl is assured that Santa's magic can reach even places that seems impossible to visit.

Sky Watcher (Jada Jones #5) by Kelly Starling Lyons

-Jada is excited to do a school project about her hero Dr. Mae Jemison, a former NASA astronaut and the first Black woman to travel to outer space. She even gets to pretend to be her for the presentation in front of her teacher, parents, and friends! But when Jada's research reminds her how accomplished her hero truly is, she suddenly feels like she's made a mistake. How can she portray someone who seems to have everything together when she feels like she's falling apart?

Stella's Stellar Hair by Yesenia Moises

-Black girl magic takes the solar system in Stella's Stellar Hair, a celebration of hair, family, and self-love from debut author-illustrator Yesenia Moises! It's the day of the Big Star Little Gala, and Stella's hair just isn't acting right! What's a girl to do?

The Electric Slide and Kai by Kelly J. Baptist & Darnell Johnson

-This quirky and loving tribute to the ultimate Black party dance is perfect for everyone who's ever felt out of place while trying their best. Kai is excited for his aunt's upcoming wedding, but is anxious about his inability to master the Electric Slide, unlike everyone else in his family. Looking to earn his own dance nickname, Kai tries nonstop with mixed results. But a little encouragement from his new uncle leads to a surprising, and rewarding, ending with his own unique spin.

The Me I Chose To Be by Natasha Tarpley

-“I Love My Hair!” author Natasha Tarpley and the husband/wife team behind CreativeSoul Photography, Regis and Kahran Bethencourt, join forces to bring us a beautiful ode to the endless possibilities of childhood. Whimsical, futuristic photographs of Black children accompany moving text that acts as both poem and affirmation in this breath-taking testament to the power of visual-storytelling.

When My Cousins Came to Town by Angela Shante

-This book follows a young girl's excitement over her cousins' upcoming visit to the city, planning the time that they will spend together while hoping to fulfill her quest to get her own nickname just as the others' have. The uniqueness of each cousin's personality, as well as the special relationship that Black children have with extended family members, make this a relatable and enjoyable read.

Why Am I Here? by Naomi Dunsen-White

-Two children of color are encouraged to consider their unique path and place in the world, and where the future will lead them. As they consider possibilities, the answers go from whimsical to meaningful, as they are guided into fun considerations and positive realizations.

Your Legacy: A Bold Reclaiming of Our Enslaved History by Schele Williams

-A beautiful remembrance and a celebratory look at the African-American history, from Africa through the slave trade, innovators to civil rights fighters and numerous famous cultural icons to unknown names.

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CONTRIBUTORS

School Library

KC Boyd
Kathy Carroll
Aleea Davey-Price
Sandra Michelle Echols
Donna Gray
Karen Lemmons
Mitzi Mack
Cherese McKnight
Pamela Moore
Stacey Nunn

Public Library

Ritse Adefalolu
Richard Ashby Jr.
Tamela Chambers
Sandra Farag
Taryn Fouche
Tiffany James
Jordan McKenna
Mariel Matthews
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Fallon White