

AMPLIFY BLACK STORIES

YEARBOOK

RENÉE WATSON											
											
											
											





INDUSTRY CALL TO ACTION

AUGUST 2020

Recognizing that children's literature is among the most influential literary genres of all, the publishing industry and broader children's literature community must look at their infrastructure and operations and change policies, practices, and beliefs that negatively impact the careers of Black creatives.

As authors and illustrators, we know that our books can and must play an important role in that transformation. The board books, picture books, chapter books, middle-grade, and young-adult novels that we create serve the most noble of purposes: to inform, entertain, motivate, inspire, and encourage critical thinking. Within our pages, seeds of wisdom and possibility are sown. In the fight to ensure that Black people are humanized, our books are strikingly crucial.

But, as Black people have been dehumanized and marginalized by systemic racism, our books have as well.

White writers regularly receive higher advances and better contracts from publishers. Their books are promoted more vigorously. Booksellers are more receiving of their works, and those books dominate their shelf space. The works of white book creators are more readily reviewed. Many libraries and schools are more welcoming of books by white book creators, even when the school population or community is significantly Black. Our books, in general, are treated as if they don't belong, and, too often, so are we.

Publishers and the entire children's literature community should partner with entities from the vibrant and active network of Black organizations, companies, and professionals to share the many stories representing the Black experience with all children.

We, Black creators of books for young readers, urge the children's literature community to imagine a new way of doing business, and abandon anti-Black and racist practices that perpetuate a system that marginalizes our work.

Therefore, we call on you to commit to the following:

- Prioritize the work of midlist Black authors/illustrators by providing significant and sustained investment of financial and other resources.
- Map out concrete marketing strategies that include valuable input from Black book creators.
- Collaborate with multiple constituencies in the Black children's lit community, including but not limited to Black media/social media influencers, conference coordinators, festival directors, Black booksellers, Black educators/librarians, Black marketing professionals, and reviewers.
- Expand hiring practices to increase the number of Black professionals in publishing at every level.

THE BROWN BOOKSHELF

Dear Amplify Cohort and Industry Professionals,

It has been a pleasure to work with you on the Amplify Black Stories inaugural program.

In November 2016, in the wake of the American Presidential election and an already deeply divided country, members of The Brown Bookshelf declared our commitment to using our talents and artistic expression to help allay the fear that takes root in the human heart amid lack of familiarity and understanding of others, the type of fear that feeds stereotypes, bitterness, racism, and hatred, and often leads to violence.

As children's book creators, we felt a responsibility to our young readers whose voices often go unheard and for whom trauma remains long after the newsfeeds have moved on to new items. We recommitted ourselves to creating authentic stories, ones that fostered empathy, fairness, and empowerment, and to do so with honesty and in the spirit of hope and love. We never intended to complete this mission on our own, and found nearly 700 kindred spirits who signed our Declaration in Support of Children. As instances of racism continued to rise in the United States and worldwide, culminating in the very public murder of George Floyd in the summer of 2020 amid a global pandemic, many in our industry were looking for ways to address institutionalized racism.

For years, our industry has been subject to the same ingrained racism as any other. We have watched as the annual numbers reported by the Cooperative Children's Book Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison showed an industry that, despite understanding the existence of racial inequity, was still mostly white at both the editorial level and in the creatives that get published. The #publishingpaidme hashtag further illuminated the economic inequities for Black creatives. ***We at The Brown Bookshelf recognized that to effect change, we would have to bring creatives and publishing industry professionals together for a deep dive into the issues that uniquely affect Black creatives in children's literature and to showcase how we can all work together to break the practices that have kept racial inequity a regular part of our industry.***

The result has been this inaugural Amplify Black Stories program.

We expected to learn from one other. We expected that the stellar lineup of speakers would illuminate, inform, and inspire us. We expected that our hosts and partners at The Highlights Foundation would make an ambitious program work beautifully. What we did not expect was the level of engagement, camaraderie, community, love, and support that flowed throughout this program from every member of our community.

We are truly honored to have been a part of this program, and we hope to extend this opportunity to more creatives and publishing professionals in the future, while continuing to grow the community we have already built.

Sincerely,

The Brown Bookshelf Contributors

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THE HIGHLIGHTS FOUNDATION
POSITIVELY IMPACTS CHILDREN BY
AMPLIFYING THE VOICES OF STORYTELLERS
WHO INFORM, EDUCATE, AND INSPIRE
CHILDREN TO BECOME THEIR BEST SELVES.



THE KICKOFF:

AN OPENING CELEBRATION OF STORIES, PROGRAMS, AND COMMITMENT
OPEN TO COMMUNITY

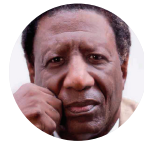
PANELISTS



KELLY STARLING
LYONS



CHERYL WILLIS
HUDSON



WADE
HUDSON



OLUGBEMISOLA
RHUDAY-PERKOVICH



TRACEY
BAPTISTE



CRYSTAL
ALLEN



RENÉE
WATSON



PAULA
CHASE HYMAN

TOPICS COVERED:

- Kelly Starling Lyons gave an overview of the history of The Brown Bookshelf and celebrated the 2021 honorees of their 28 Days Later campaign.
- Just Us Books publishers Cheryl and Wade Hudson reaffirmed The Brown Bookshelf's 2020 kidlit industry Call to Action.
- Olugbemisola Rhuday-Perkovich introduced the Black Storytellers Cohort of the program.
- Tracey Baptiste introduced the Publishing Cohort of the program.
- Fellow panelists and program committee members Crystal Allen, Renée Watson, and Paula Chase Hyman were in attendance to answer questions and offer support.

OUTCOME:

- Debut, midlist, and published Black storytellers were invited to apply for the program, and publishers were called to action to support and join the program. Nearly 100 authors and illustrators applied, and 21 publishing groups and professionals signed on.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS



“Even today in 2021, when people are talking about ‘classic children’s literature,’ they aren’t talking about Black creators—and that has to change.”

—KELLY STARLING LYONS

“We find ourselves here today at this place at an important period for all of us. All the efforts and the commitment of the past coalesce here now. What a propitious time to create transformative change. Change that moves us much closer to...an industry where we are all welcome at the table, and all have a viable voice at that table, and all have much to contribute to the meal, the literature that should feed all of us, but especially the children—ALL of the children.” —WADE HUDSON

“The meaning of Black storytelling is deep and wide. All of the Black children’s book creators that I know have had this experience of our stories being marginalized, of being minimized, of being dismissed. Along with the work of creating and crafting our stories, we’re also having to do this work of fighting to be recognized, to fight against the denial of our very existence, and we’re too often working within that system that devalues our voices or sends us this message that we should just be happy to be here.”

—OLUGBEMISOLA RHUDAY-PERKOVICH

“This is an opportunity for publishers to take actionable steps to increase opportunities not only for Black creatives but also for other Black publishing professionals.” —TRACEY BAPTISTE

“Amplify Black Stories is both a call and the action. It’s a recognition about how valuable and how influential Black creators are.” —OLUGBEMISOLA RHUDAY-PERKOVICH

THE BROWN BOOKSHELF’S KIDLIT CALL TO ACTION

Recognizing that children’s literature is among the most influential literary genres of all, the publishing industry and broader children’s literature community must look at their infrastructure and operations and change policies, practices, and beliefs that negatively impact the careers of Black creatives.

A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE AND HOPE-FILLED FUTURE

PUBLISHING COHORT

PANELISTS



EDITH CAMPBELL



CHERYL WILLIS HUDSON



WADE HUDSON



DR. KIM PARKER



DR. EBONY E. THOMAS



DR. NANCY TOLSON

TOPICS COVERED:

- Dr. Nancy Tolson gave an overview of the history of Black publishing.
- Cheryl and Wade Hudson shared their thoughts on the long push for Black creators to tell their own stories.
- Dr. Ebony Elizabeth Thomas reflected on the long tradition of Black librarianship and the Black publishing movement with hope that it can be sustained.
- Edith Campbell looked ahead with hope that this work we're doing will continue into the future.
- Dr. Kim Parker talked about what makes excellence in Black literature and how to make these books available to children, families, and teachers.

OUTCOME:

- The publishing professionals in the program heard from Black publishing experts and creatives about the continuing traditions of Black publishing and Black literature, supporting Black storytellers, and strategies for lifting up everyday Black stories, all with an eye toward the question "What are we going to do next?"

MEMORABLE MOMENTS



"I am Black 365 days...it's amazing that our books are not shining every day. That's something we really have to do. We have to let people know that Black experience is every day...and we have to talk about it." —DR. NANCY TOLSON

"This push to tell our own stories, to have our own voice, has been ongoing. That's important because often people think we're just starting this movement, or this started 20 years ago, 30 years ago. No! We have been trying to tell our own stories, to have our own voice, since we've been here in this country."

—WADE HUDSON

"I now see that the landscape itself is designed in certain ways to not only push Black authors and illustrators to the side, but also to keep Black children and teens unaware of what has happened before." —DR. EBONY ELIZABETH THOMAS

"We see a real need for equity. And equity doesn't just mean you are bringing in new Black authors. It means that you are maintaining ones that you already have. It means that you are marketing a little bit differently...sometimes the way we've always done it is not the best way to keep doing things." —EDITH CAMPBELL

"I want a Black illustrator and I want a Black author. It's not too much to demand that. We deserve it. We deserve to tell our stories, and we deserve to illustrate our stories, too." —DR. KIM PARKER

"In order for our new and debut authors and illustrators to sustain, they have to connect with the larger tradition." —DR. EBONY ELIZABETH THOMAS

"Black literature is coming from OUR experience and it is literature and it is excellence and I think that the sooner editors and gatekeepers and marketers in publishing companies recognize Black literature as literature, as universal, then it is not marginalized in a setting only for Black History Month." —CHERYL WILLIS HUDSON

"There is a lot of work to do and this isn't going to be easy. But we all must agree that it's necessary. We're trying to achieve something we've never had before. So that means we're going to have to do things we've never done before, and that's going to get uncomfortable. But we need to get comfortable being uncomfortable. That is the only way progress can happen. Brown Bookshelf is ready. Highlights: ready. What about you? Are you ready to get uncomfortable? I've got an idea. Let's get uncomfortable together. Let's bring about some change that is not just relevant, not just serious but intentional. We can do this." —CRYSTAL ALLEN

SHARING DREAMS

STORYTELLER COHORT

PANELIST



VANESSA
BRANTLEY-NEWTON

TOPICS COVERED:

- Vanessa Brantley-Newton’s meditation for enlightenment and knowledge, visualizing success.
- Questions about the program.
- How to change the lack of community and connection.
- How to prepare in advance for a book release, especially for a debut book.
- Belonging to debut groups; being on panels together as creators.
- Using social media, and using it to help one other.
- Having frank, necessary conversations with publishers.
- Independent publishing as an alternative to traditional publishing: advantages and challenges.

OUTCOME:

- While participants in the publishing track worked internally to gather materials to prepare for work sessions, the Storytellers reflected on ways to build community via tech tools, groups, and genuine connection and learned ways to gain knowledge about the publishing industry and interface with publishers.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS



“I have found that when I share with my fans of my books, they’re looking for other books after they’re read mine, so they will pick up on that. And as our collective group working together, we can make a huge impact by sharing our works with our own following.”

—TONYA DUNCAN ELLIS

“What we have been told from the books that we get and in our creative writing programs and by white agents and white editors is that stories have a beginning, middle, [and] end, that there is a very particular type of upward arc, resolution to the ending. But there are as many kinds of story structures as there are cultures on this planet. So the idea that there is only one acceptable story structure that you can use to tell a story dismisses the majority of the world and the majority of the world’s storytelling.” —TRACEY BAPTISTE, *on exploring other paradigms of storytelling*

“This is a really good time to be Black. What we have to do is start thinking more positively than we’ve ever done before. We’ve got to get busy doing what has been given to us to do: tell stories that enlighten, that lift, that celebrate who we are.” —VANESSA BRANTLEY-NEWTON

MARKETING YOUR BOOK

STORYTELLER COHORT

PANELISTS



VANESSE
LLOYD-SGAMBATI



REGINA
BROOKS



SARACIEA
FENNELL

TOPICS COVERED:

- Overview of publisher marketing and publicity—what’s the difference?
- Marketing advice: when to start getting your marketing hat on, what to ask the publisher for, how to reach Black buyers.
- Strategic partnerships for marketing.
- Publicity is non-paid coverage.
- Where do publishers market books?
- Marketing gatekeepers and how to work with them.

OUTCOME:

- While participants in the publishing track completed a working session, the Storytellers talked resources for marketing their books, including working with agents and publishers, navigating social media and other outlets like radio and media interviews, and planning author tours.

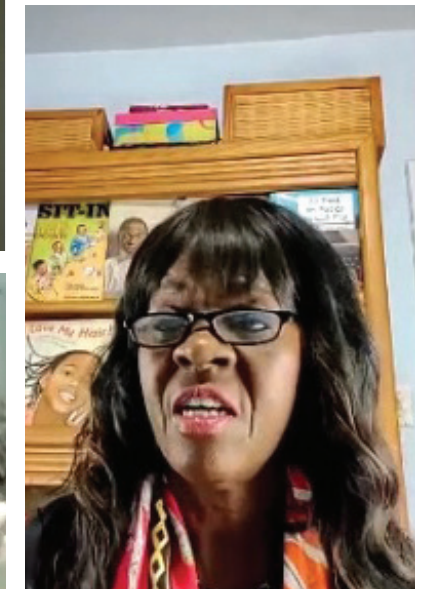
MEMORABLE MOMENTS



Saraciea Fennell



Regina Brooks



“Especially for those of us who come from marginalized communities, I don’t read *The New York Times* to get my book recommendations. I know that lots of writers want to be in *The New York Times*, but I don’t go there, as a Black woman, to look for book recommendations. I’m usually looking on blogs, or *Essence*, or other Black media.” —SARACIEA FENNELL

“I usually like to encourage writers to think about strategically who is the reader that you are writing for and where do you KNOW they will discover your book if the publisher has placement there.” —SARACIEA FENNELL

“If your book becomes a hit, you will rise to the top. So never get defeated. Never give up. Never, ever give up because you have to always remember: this was something you were passionate about, and you took time to write that book. So please don’t ever give up – no matter how hard it gets, no matter how many times somebody rejects – you never, ever give up.”

—VANESSE LLOYD-SGAMBATI

BEST PRACTICES FOR MARKETING BLACK CREATORS

PUBLISHING COHORT

PANELISTS



KELLY STARLING
LYONS



VANESSE
LLOYD-SGAMBATI



REGINA
BROOKS



SARACIEA
FENNELL

TOPICS COVERED:

- Marketing books with more intention, innovation, and cultural understanding.
- Black media outlets.
- Publisher biases when marketing children's books.
- Virtual book events vs. in-person events.
- Looking outside traditional marketing plans, looking at marketing through a Black community lens, and thinking about the notion of kinship as publishers are creating campaigns.

OUTCOME:

Publishers spent this session learning strategies for becoming thought partners with Black storytellers in marketing their books, avenues and channels for reaching Black audiences, and new ways of thinking about general marketing strategies for Black stories.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS

"Thank you for investing your time and treasure into Amplify Black Stories. This program has already created lots of connections and revelations, building upon the work of literary changemakers of the past. We're honored to be forging a future with all of you. We're here because we care about getting outstanding books by Black creators into the hands of kids. Strong marketing can make the difference between having an excellent book that is floundering or goes out of print before it finds its market, to having a book that breaks out in incredible ways." —KELLY STARLING LYONS

"Black stories are so important, and I applaud all of you who are publishing books that show this important history of our country about a race of people who have so greatly contributed to make this country what it is. Without you, these stories would go untold. Applause, applause..." —VANESSE LLOYD-SGAMBATI

"The other thing about the Black community in part [is] we're very much, we're very much a mouth-to-ear type of spread. So we can see things in the general marketplace, but more than likely we're going to pick up a book because our friend told us to buy it [or] our minister told us to buy it—someone we trust has indicated that this is a book of interest." —REGINA BROOKS

"I think that there are so many ambassadors in the Black community that are interested in helping to promote and sell Black books...It's very important, in my opinion, to allow the people who can help you to help you. And that means being in community and being able to share both ways. If that happens, there's going to be a lot more opportunity for Black creators." —REGINA BROOKS

PUBLISHERS CONNECT:

PUBLISHING PROCESSES, PRACTICES, MARKETING, & PROMOTION

STORYTELLER COHORT

PANELISTS



KELLY STARLING
LYONS



PHOEBE
YEH



MARY
MCCUE



KELLY
MCGAULEY

TOPICS COVERED:

- The editor/author working relationship.
- Coming up with new ideas and moving them forward—so much is about community and connection.
- What expectations do publishers have of author partners? What are they looking for in an author partner? What are the collaboration opportunities?
- What publishers consider about authors while building out a campaign: do they have a platform? What audience are they trying to reach?
- School/library visibility, panels at conferences.

OUTCOME:

Storytellers learned more about strategies for partnering with Black booksellers and influencers to lift up Black stories, reach educators, help readers, and create a strong Black book ecosystem.

MARKETING WORK SESSION

PUBLISHING COHORT

PANELIST



KATURA HUDSON

TOPICS COVERED:

- The “best Black children’s books” vs. “the most successful Black children’s books.”
- What is the measure of success? What helps the successful books become successful?
- How are you honoring The Brown Bookshelf’s call to action?
- How publisher teams can affect each other for positive growth.
- Making up lost ground for previously published books.
- What opportunities are being created for Black professionals in the industry?
- Are you exploring new ways to find Black storytellers?

OUTCOME:

The publishing professionals learned and discussed new strategies for amplifying Black stories and increasing professional development opportunities.

“The challenge and joy [is] of taking all of those different parts of the diaspora that are part of moving and sort of living all of those parts and honoring all of those parts and knowing that all of those stories, while unique and separate, they are also intertwined, and I think that’s true for a lot of Black people. And thinking about how our stories, even in parallel, are very, very similar or just complement each other so well. And we don’t even realize that some of things that are happening in one part of the diaspora have either already happened or are also happening in other parts, and there’s so much that we can learn from each other and enrich ourselves by learning about, so I just find that personally, it means a lot to me, and I find it fascinating for all of us as a community.”

—OLUGBEMISOLA RHUDAY-PERKOVICH

“Individually and collectively, we are in a unique position to identify and nurture stories by and about Black people, to invest in those stories and their creators, to market and promote so that books reach more and more and more readers. The power in this virtual room is amazing. Let’s leverage it together to do what this workshop has charged us with: amplify Black stories.” —KATURA HUDSON

BLACK INFLUENCERS & BLACK BOOKSELLERS

PUBLISHING + STORYTELLER COHORTS

PANELISTS



RAMUNDA
LARK YOUNG



MEMPHIS
WASHINGTON



KWAME
MBALIA



TROY D.
JOSHSON

TOPICS COVERED:

- Connecting directly to your readers.
- The Black book ecosystem: people and organizations who get books into the hands of kids.
- Overview of the history of Black bookselling.
- Independent publishing's role in Black publishing.
- The pros and cons of bestseller lists.
- The relationship between booksellers, influencers, and the children's publishing industry.

OUTCOMES:

- It's important for Black creators to support Black booksellers.
- Try to create something exclusive and special for Black bookstores.
- Provide signed bookplates to Black bookstores.
- The quality and quantity of Black books has exploded.
- Link to Black bookseller sites instead of big box sites from your creator website.
- Creators can make sure their publishers know how important it is to promote them to Black booksellers.
- Unique ways influencers can connect the creator and their readers.
- Resources for finding Black kidlit.
- Publishers should change how they measure success, not depending only on bestseller lists. Bestselling doesn't always mean the best quality books.
- Blogs and resources that help reach educators of color.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS

"The number of books has exploded, the variety of books has exploded, the stories that are told has increased dramatically. The challenges, however, are getting the word out about these books." —TROY D. JOHNSON

"I love the way you talked about our children, including our community of readers and our children around the world and I think that's how so many of us as Black creators think about our work, and think about the purpose and the meaning behind what we do. No matter what kinds of stories we're telling, we really are always thinking about our readers and how we can best serve them and best serve our communities." —OLUGBEMISOLA RHUDAY-PERKOVICH

"We have to open up a dialogue between ourselves and the publisher, saying... there's no excuse. There is no excuse not to select and be intentional with the bookstores we are selecting for events." —KWAME MBALIA

"I love that the way all of you are so generous in the ways that you shout out each other, shout out to the pioneers and colleagues in the field who are doing the work and look for ways to support and lift each other up. I think that's a very special thing that we do in this community that I really want to celebrate." —OLUGBEMISOLA RHUDAY-PERKOVICH

ORGANIZATIONS WORKING TO AMPLIFY BLACK STORIES

PUBLISHING + STORYTELLER COHORTS

PANELISTS



PAULA
CHASE HYMAN



BREANNA J.
MCDANIEL



LAURA
PEGRAM



ANTWAN
EADY



VERA
WARREN

TOPICS COVERED:

- ARTivist – the intersection of arts and activism.
- How arts and activism intersect for organizations like The Brown Bookshelf, Kweli, The Color of Children’s Literature Conference, Black Creators in Kidlit, and Researchers Exploring Inclusive Youth Literature.
- Discovering the opportunities that the publishing industry is missing out on.

OUTCOME:

- Storytellers left this session with best practices for partnering with organizations to not only market their books, but use their art to support the community and advocate for Black voices while maintaining self-care.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS

“We [The Brown Bookshelf] have grown from purely amplification to a little bit more advocacy. It’s not something we ever thought we would do. When I think in terms of art and how it intersects with activism, they intersect at voice. We are very much about having as many voices at the table as possible.”

—PAULA CHASE HYMAN

“I’m going to start with a quote from Toni Cade Bambara because it’s one that I live with. She said: ‘The role of the artist is to make revolution irresistible.’ So as an artist, and by extension through my role as Kweli’s founder, I’m trying to make revolution irresistible in the publishing industry...I don’t see art ‘here’ and activism ‘here.’ I don’t see them as separate entities. I see them as a single unit: an artist creating with an activist mindset.”—LAURA PEGRAM

“We’re trying to get people safe passage through these institutions...they were not necessarily made to support these folks, but if we can find ways to provide safe passage through a master’s degree in publishing or safe passage through a Ph.D. program by providing resources, then that’s what we’re going to do.”—

BREANNA J. MCDANIEL

“I think when you look at the whole picture, [publishers] are missing out on the stories that are generally relegated as sideline footnotes – unimportant. You’re missing the healing that is brought to our community through our stories. You’re missing out on encouraging and uplifting not only readers but parents, teachers, librarians. You’re missing out on the possibilities of what art can do.”—LAURA PEGRAM

SCHOOL VISITS & CONNECTING WITH EDUCATORS

STORYTELLER COHORT

PANELISTS



TORREY MALDONADO



JULIA E. TORRES



VERA WARREN

TOPICS COVERED:

- Engaging with readers and supporters at schools and libraries.
- What works when designing school visits.
- What's the language teachers are looking for?
- What the administration is looking for.
- Talking to educators and librarians before the presentations.
- Getting past the stigmas that have been attached to literacy and reading in the past.
- Creating discussion guides that align with curriculum standards.
- Pros and cons of curriculum standards.
- Are booking agents worthwhile?

OUTCOME:

Storytellers learned how to get more comfortable in school visits, consider curriculum needs and pricing, reach children to inspire them, and help educators in this session.

"My job is to take the pressure off the children because a lot of time there's stigmas attached to literacy, to reading, to authors and books. I know this because I grew up hating books. I came from a community where schools structurally failed my community. We were constantly assigned books where Black and brown people were either demonized...invisible...or we were side characters." —TORREY MALDONADO

"People need to honor your time. They need to realize that you have a special life experience and knowledge that not everybody has." —JULIA E. TORRES

MEMORABLE
MOMENTS

HOW TO CULTIVATE RELATIONSHIPS WITH BLACK STORYTELLERS

PUBLISHING COHORT

PANELISTS



KATURA HUDSON



EILEEN ROBINSON

TOPICS COVERED:

- How to position Black literature in marketing efforts.
- How to craft calls for submissions.
- Best practices for connecting with partners.
- Revisiting publishers' "go-to" approaches across the board.

OUTCOME:

- Publishers shared their discoveries and actions of the previous four months, talked about continuing these important conversations, and encouraged one other to keep doing the work to go outside their usual practices.

"I'm not sure I've ever been invited into a space where I can learn from and listen to Black colleagues in publishing, in conversation with each other, and that's actually been kind of tremendous." —JENNIFER MATTSON

"In order to really change publishing this next generation needs to be very representative of what the country looks like." — KATHLEEN ROURKE

MEMORABLE
MOMENTS

COMMUNITY ORGANIZERS & ORGANIZATIONS WORKING TO AMPLIFY BLACK STORIES & STORYTELLERS

PUBLISHING + STORYTELLER COHORTS

PANELISTS



VANESSE LLOYD-SGAMBATI



KRENICE RAMSEY



VERA WARREN

TOPICS COVERED:

- The work of The African American Children’s Book Fair, The Community Book Center: New Orleans and Young, Black & Lit.
- How these organizations increase access to Black children’s books.
- Types of events and promotions.
- Partnering with corporations.
- Marketing and advertising to the Black community.
- Bringing innovation and marketing books directly to the community.

OUTCOME:

- Both cohorts learned how Black creators and publishers can partner with each other and how both can build relationships to organizations to help amplify Black storytellers and to sell Black books.

“If we don’t buy books, they don’t get published. I can’t emphasize that enough. We have to buy books. If we don’t, publishers will think we’re not interested...” — VANESSE LLOYD-SGAMBATI

“The thing that strikes me about what everybody has said is that all of you started out from a very personal need to see books in the hands of children that you knew personally, and you started with your own dollars...that is the heart of what outreach in the Black community really looks like. It’s about people who are getting personally involved in literacy and really connecting with the community. Being that bridge between the community and the storyteller.”

—TRACEY BAPTISTE

“The work we do goes beyond literacy.” —VERA WARREN

MEMORABLE MOMENTS

THE HISTORY OF BLACK STORYTELLING

PUBLISHING + STORYTELLER COHORTS

PANELISTS



ALICIA D. WILLIAMS



DONNA WASHINGTON



BEVERLY FIELDS BURNETTE

TOPICS COVERED:

- Donna Washington shared her story, “Boo Stew,” which began as an oral story, became a performance piece, and then became a book.
- Beverly Fields Burnette shared both a story and a poem.
- Who do we want our work to serve? Whose stories are we told have value?
- How can we claim our space in publishing?
- What storytelling traditions do we honor and lift up?
- Are we losing our ability to keep our storytelling alive?
- The role of independent publishing.
- The tradition and importance of folktales.
- Where inspiration for stories come from.

OUTCOME:

- Storytellers shared and reflected on oral and written traditions and strategies for storytelling and ways to help their stories and voices be heard in a myriad of ways.

“How is it that we can take this energy, the cadence and rhythm, everything that comprises oral storytelling, and let it translate just like that on the page?”

—ALICIA D. WILLIAMS

“It is hard at this point in history to be published with African American folktales...on the other hand, publishers right now are looking for authentic Black voices. Unfortunately, they only recognize them if they sound similar to white people’s voices. So there’s this weird kind of struggle that seems to be going on...if you write authentic books, they don’t recognize it. We have to keep working to get authentic Black voices published.” —DONNA WASHINGTON

MEMORABLE MOMENTS

LEGAL, LICENSING, RIGHTS & PERMISSIONS

STORYTELLER COHORT

PANELISTS



FARAH
GEHY



CHERYL
DAVIS

TOPICS COVERED:

- Farah Gehy from Peachtree Publishing subsidiary rights talked about some of the different kinds of rights.
- Cheryl Davis, Author's Guild general council, talked about what authors can do to protect their rights, copyright, and more.
- How to retain as many rights as possible when negotiating with your publisher.
- The important subsidiary rights for children's books are book club, translation, audio, digital, dramatic rights, and licensing to the school market.
- What drives a publisher to pursue rights?

OUTCOME:

- Storytellers learned about model contracts and reviewing contracts; copyrights, types of rights, and rights strategies; and insurance to help prepare them for growing their careers.

THE MEASURE OF AMPLIFY BLACK STORIES

PUBLISHING + STORYTELLER COHORTS

PANELISTS



OLUGBEMISOLA
RHUDAY-PERKOVICH



KATURA
HUDSON

TOPICS COVERED:

- The measure of Amplify Black Stories.
- Celebrating, and action items for moving forward.
- Breakout sessions for both groups.

OUTCOME:

The combined group gathered feedback for the next round of Amplify Black Stories, suggested ways to facilitate more community-building beyond the program, and recognized publisher and Storyteller progress.

WHAT PUBLISHING PROFESSIONALS SAY ABOUT THE PROGRAM

"Listening to the panelists, learning so much, and appreciating how brilliant they were. They were so incredibly engaging, and I was amazed by them."

"For me it was engaging with like-minded people in this profession. It was just nice to be part of this community of people who are really trying to change things."

"I learned about resources and outlets that I had not known about, in terms of marketing the books. I felt like it was helpful as a touchstone to periodically come into the space and be talking about these issues with other like-minded people."

"One of things I liked the most was watching the chat, seeing comments between panelists and attendees relating them to their own lives. It made me feel part of a community that felt really special."

"I really enjoyed learning more about the non-traditional channels that have been important historically. I felt my attitude really shifting around self-publishing."

PUBLISHING COHORT ACTION ITEMS

AMPLIFY BLACK STORIES 2021

PROGRAM CONNECTIONS

- Working with consultants/resources found through the program, including initiatives to get more Black books in the hands of readers.
- Following up with professionals introduced in the program for ongoing opportunities.

MARKETING

- Using what they've learned to form an ad promotion campaign, website, and newsletter.
- Using the list of Black book reviewers provided.
- Following Black creators on Twitter to stay plugged in.
- Creating a business bootcamp for writers of color and Black creatives.
- Attending NABSE and working to have a better Black presence at other conferences and events.
- Identifying missing resources; adding new newsletters, blogs, creatives, and marketing professionals.
- Finding ways to connect with more educators of color, BIPOC educators/professionals in the educational space, and more BIPOC curriculum writers.

PROCESSES & PRACTICES

- Instituted brainstorming sessions at least three times per year.
- Working to hire and retain staff with an equity lens.
- Listening more actively to Black creatives to absorb rather than "telling."
- Refraining from policing grammar to respect the culture, the story, and the characters that it is intended for.
- Organized and tracked our list of Black stories and storytellers (so we can have real numbers to measure).
- Talked to editors (as an agent) about ways that I can help connect them with resources and requests.
- Tone change and intentionality in meetings about what I've learned with my team.
- Learning to stop and think about many things moving forward in a mindful and strategic way (examining the "programmed" way we "do things" in marketing and publicity).
- Learning more about Black storytelling traditions to help understand more when looking at submissions.

ONGOING CONVERSATIONS

- Talking with my team about how we position Black voices and how we are mindful of the way that we approach each story.
- Learning from and listening to Black colleagues and Black creatives as they share their experiences and expertise.
- Sharing resource names with teams and other departments so that more people can use the resources gained here.
- Finding new ways to cultivate conversations with the people not here.
- Feeling empowered to have conversations with people who aren't here and see what kind of impact I/we can have if we come together and unite under our commitment to Amplify Black Stories.

STORYTELLER TRACK FACILITATORS



TRACEY BAPTISTE



CRYSTAL ALLEN



OLUGBEMISOLA RHUDAY-PERKOVICH

"AMPLIFY BLACK STORIES IS BOTH A CALL AND THE ACTION. IT'S A RECOGNITION ABOUT HOW VALUABLE AND HOW INFLUENTIAL BLACK CREATORS ARE."

—OLUGBEMISOLA RHUDAY-PERKOVICH





bryanpatrickavery.com

BRYAN PATRICK AVERY

STORYTELLER COHORT

ON WRITING FOR CHILDREN:

"In literature, we can create a view of the world that shows us all as equals, breaks down barriers, and imagines a future that is equitable for all. When children read these stories, they begin to accept a world that is different than what they see today. It is my goal to show young readers that children of color (particularly Black children) aren't simply fighting racism and oppression. They can also solve mysteries, defeat dragons, and travel the universe."

ABOUT BRYAN

Bryan Patrick Avery writes poems and stories for children, including the picture book *The Freeman Field Photograph*, the early chapter book series *Mr. Grizley's Class*, and the middle grade mysteries *Off Base* and *Soccer Suspicions*. His newest release is the middle grade nonfiction book *Black Men in Science*.

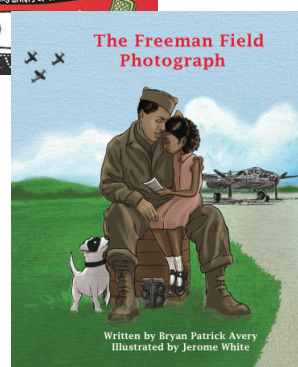
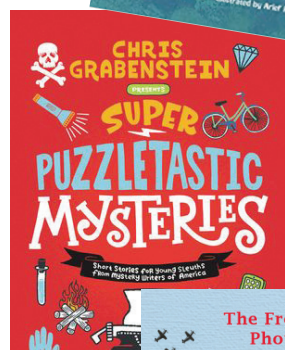
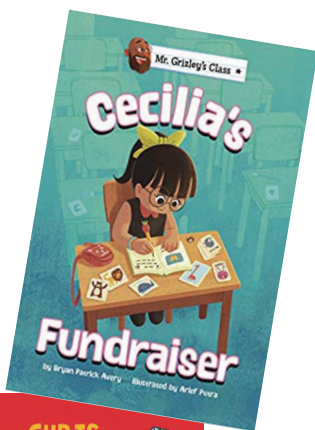
Bryan is the 2021 recipient of the SCBWI Work in Progress Award for his chapter book mystery *The Robot in the Library*.

Bryan serves on the board of directors of the northern California Chapter of Mystery Writers of America. He lives in northern California with his family.

WHAT WAS THE MOST VALUABLE OR MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE OF AMPLIFY FOR YOU?

Writing can often be a very solitary pursuit. It was a joy to have the opportunity to come together with other Black authors to both learn from and celebrate one other.

"WRITING IS AN ACT OF RESISTANCE. EVERY POEM, EVERY STORY, EVERY BOOK DECLARES THAT OUR EXPERIENCES MATTER, OUR STORIES MATTER, WE MATTER."



valeriebolling.com

VALERIE BOLLING

STORYTELLER COHORT

ON WRITING FOR CHILDREN:

"One of my most memorable experiences as a fifth-grade teacher was reading *Lulu Delacre's Salsa Stories* with my students. The book features Latinx characters, with some dialogue in Spanish. Though all of my students enjoyed the book, the comment I still remember is a Latinx student declaring, "This is the first time I've read a story that reminds me of my family."

Diverse children's literature has become even more personal to me recently. I have two nieces, ages 7 and 9; two godsons, ages 10 and 13; and a cousin (my cousin's grandson), age 7 – I write with these special children in mind. In fact, they have provided inspiration for many of my stories. As I write, I think about the stories I read to them and those that I wish were available to them. I feel I have a responsibility to write stories that I want them – and all children – to read."

ABOUT VALERIE

Valerie Bolling's debut, *Let's Dance!* (SCBWI Crystal Kite Award winner and CT Book Award finalist), was published in 2020, and she's happy to welcome *Together We Ride* (illustrated by Kaylani Juanita) and *Ride, Roll, Run: Time for Fun!* (illustrated by Sabrena Khadija) in 2022. Sequels to these books, as well as a Scholastic early reader series (illustrated by Kai Robinson), are slated for 2023. Valerie has been an educator for almost 30 years, teaches classes at Westport Writers Workshop, and is a WNDB mentor. She is deeply immersed in the kidlit writing community, particularly involved with SCBWI, the 12X12 Picture Book Challenge, and Black Creators HeadQuarters. linktr.ee/ValerieBolling

WHAT WAS THE MOST VALUABLE OR MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE OF AMPLIFY FOR YOU?

I enjoyed meeting monthly and seeing all the beautiful Black faces. What a wonderful community! The sessions that were most memorable for me were the amazing storytellers and the information that was shared about marketing and publicity.



"I WRITE BECAUSE I WANT ALL CHILDREN TO FEEL AT HOME IN A BOOK. I WANT THEM TO SMILE, LAUGH, THINK, AND QUESTION. MOST OF ALL, I WANT THEM TO CELEBRATE THE DIVERSE WORLD IN WHICH WE LIVE."



ktempestbradford.com

K. TEMPEST BRADFORD

STORYTELLER COHORT

ON WRITING FOR CHILDREN:

"Once I started the querying process, I realized how few MG books there are with Black protagonists that aren't 'issue' books. I know the importance of books that address issues Black kids face, but I also know how important it is to have books where Black kids can see themselves having adventures, or wielding magic, or getting to be joyful. Now I'm very invested in bringing that to the publishing world myself as well as supporting other writers doing the same."

ABOUT K. TEMPEST

K. Tempest Bradford is a science fiction and fantasy writer, writing instructor, media critic, reviewer, and podcaster. Her short fiction has appeared in multiple anthologies and magazines, including *Strange Horizons*, *PodCastle*, *Sunspot Jungle*, *In the Shadow of the Towers*, and many more. She's the host of *ORIGINality*, a podcast about the roots of creative genius, and she contributes to several more. Her media criticism and reviews can be found on NPR, io9, and *Ebony Magazine*. When not writing, she teaches classes on writing inclusive fiction through LitReactor and Writing the Other.com.

Visit her website at ktempestbradford.com.

WHAT WAS THE MOST VALUABLE OR MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE OF AMPLIFY FOR YOU?

Learning all the ways I can advocate for myself and my book to ensure it gets in the hands of Black kids. There are so many avenues I had no idea about, and so many people in the community willing to uplift all of us. So inspiring, both as an author and as a person who wants to do the same for other Black authors to come!



hasaniclaxton.com

HASANI CLAXTON

STORYTELLER COHORT

ON WRITING FOR CHILDREN:

"I am a single father of two young girls (11 and 13) and when they were younger, I became extremely frustrated with the lack of children's books with Black lead characters. This inspired me to write those stories myself."

ABOUT HASANI

Hasani Claxton is a visual artist, author, and educator from St. Kitts, West Indies. He initially studied business at Morehouse College (1999) and Law at Columbia University (2003). While working as an attorney in New York, he began taking evening classes at the School of Visual Arts. In 2005, he decided to pursue his passion full time and enrolled in the Academy of Art University in San Francisco, receiving a BFA in illustration in 2009 and an MFA in studio art from Towson University in 2017. He currently teaches drawing and illustration at Bowie State University and resides in Baltimore, MD. His artwork has been exhibited throughout the US and in the Caribbean, including the National Gallery of Jamaica. His work has appeared in *Spectrum: Fantastic Art*, *Creative Quarterly*, and on *Afropunk.com*. He has been writing for over 10 years and was selected for the Futurescapes Writing Workshop in 2019 and 2020. He is represented by the Emerald City Literary Agency.

WHAT WAS THE MOST VALUABLE OR MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE OF AMPLIFY FOR YOU?

As a Black creative, I'm often the only person of color in the room. Simply being able to engage with so many talented Black writers and artists was a welcome respite from that loneliness.





ronnidavis.com

RONNI DAVIS

STORYTELLER COHORT

ON WRITING FOR CHILDREN:

"I have a responsibility to shape the minds of the future. It is important to me that children and teens are exposed to things outside of what the dominant culture feeds them, and it's important to me that they know they're valued and allowed to take up space outside of stories that accentuate their trauma or that teach white and non-Black people lessons."

ABOUT RONNI

Ronni Davis lives in Chicago with her husband Adam, and her son, Aidan. By day, she copyedits everything from TV commercials to billboards, and by night, she writes contemporary teen novels about brown girls falling in love.

Her debut novel, *When the Stars Lead to You*, is available now from Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, and the anthology *You Too?*, in which she is a contributor, is available now from Inkyard Press. Her next novel, *This Night is Ours*, will be out spring 2024 from Little, Brown Books for Young Readers/Poppy.

WHAT WAS THE MOST VALUABLE OR MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE OF AMPLIFY FOR YOU?

Connecting with amazing storytellers.

"I HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO SHAPE THE MINDS OF THE FUTURE."



judyallendodson.com

JUDY ALLEN DODSON

STORYTELLER COHORT

ON WRITING FOR CHILDREN:

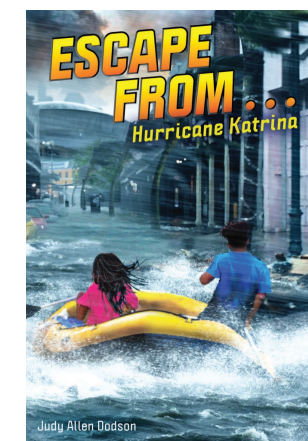
"I want Black children to see themselves in books and know that they too can aspire to be great. I also want children from all cultures to see Black people living and being in everyday situations so that they know that we are human and that our lives matter. It's important for me as an author, librarian, and historian to reach children and teach them at an earlier age to respect differences as a positive, not a negative, whether that be someone's race, religion, gender, disability, etc."

ABOUT JUDY

Judy Allen Dodson is a librarian, archivist, and children's book author. The winner of the 2016 SCBWI On-the-Verge Emerging Voices Award and a recipient of a North Carolina Arts Council Grant, she's a member of SCBWI, the regional co-ambassador for the Authors Guild, and a former member of the Coretta Scott King Archives and History Committee. Through her lens of an authentic and experienced voice, Judy's purpose is to teach young children about Black history through the stories of unsung heroes. Her passion is to give Black children books where they see characters that look like them and know that they too can aspire to be great. "The best part about writing for young people is that I get to take them on journeys that will positively impact their lives forever. From history to the fantastical, we'll explore new adventurous worlds together." Her recent book, *Escape From Hurricane Katrina* (Little Bee Book, July 2021), is a 2021 Junior Library Guild selection. She lives in Raleigh, NC, with her family.

WHAT WAS THE MOST VALUABLE OR MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE OF AMPLIFY FOR YOU?

What I gained from my Amplify experience was immeasurable and priceless. I am honored to have participated in such a profound initiative between the collaboration of The Brown Bookshelf and The Highlights Foundation that focused on the full career of Black storytellers. I relished in the marketing workshops the most. I learned creative ways and tactics to give my book the jump it needs to create buzz surrounding it even before it goes on sale. Honestly, what will stick with me forever and what I found to be the most valuable aspect of the marketing session was that marketing and promotion is not about my one book, but it's about my brand.



"START WHERE YOU ARE. USE WHAT YOU HAVE. DO WHAT YOU CAN."

ARTHUR ASHE JR.



tonyaduncanellis.com

TONYA DUNCAN ELLIS

STORYTELLER COHORT

ON WRITING FOR CHILDREN:

"I was inspired to write my children's series after I noticed a lack of diversity when reading with my three kids. I've always been an avid reader and am proud to create relatable books for children that spark a love of literature. As a child of limited means, books opened the world to me, causing me to dream of a life beyond my hometown in Louisville, KY, sparking an interest in travel, history, languages and so much more. I strive to create the same experience for my readers."

ABOUT TONYA

Tonya Duncan Ellis has had her nose in a book since she learned to read, so it's no surprise that she'd one day become a writer. She is author of the bestselling *Sophie Washington* children's book series, a former journalist, and a member of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI), the Authors Guild, Black Creators in KidLit, and 12x12 Picture Book Challenge. She's a 2022 winner of SCBWI's Independently Published Book Launch Marketing Grant. In 2021, she won the Austin SCBWI Cynthia Leitich Smith Writing Mentor Award. Tonya loves learning about other cultures and has traveled to 49 states and 20 countries. Represented by Sara Megibow of KT Literary, she lives in Houston, TX and is married with three children.

WHAT WAS THE MOST VALUABLE OR MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE OF AMPLIFY FOR YOU?

I'm very grateful to have been selected for the inaugural storyteller cohort. All the sessions were highly informative, but what I valued most were the offline relationships I began with fellow authors. To deepen connections with cohort members, I started an Instagram Live interview show, where we interacted one-on-one. This expanded my author network to include peers I now feel comfortable collaborating with or going to for advice.

Other memorable experiences for me personally were the opportunity to get feedback from Charlesbridge editors and participate in a virtual Highlights Foundation retreat. Thanks so much, The Brown Bookshelf and the Highlights Foundation for all your support!

"BEING SELECTED FOR THIS WONDERFUL EXPERIENCE IS THE GIFT THAT KEEPS ON GIVING! I LOOK FORWARD TO DEEPENING PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS STARTED WITH FELLOW COHORT MEMBERS IN YEARS TO COME."



temikatheartist.com

TEMIKA GROOMS

STORYTELLER COHORT

ON WRITING FOR CHILDREN:

"Storytelling, in its many forms, is a powerful medium that can change the fabric of our society. It allows us to question ourselves and what we know about the world. It helps us to examine complex scenarios and imagine new outcomes. When artists create and collaborate with intention, they heal us and help us envision a new future. Change indeed happens when we create through an activist's lens."

ABOUT TEMIKA

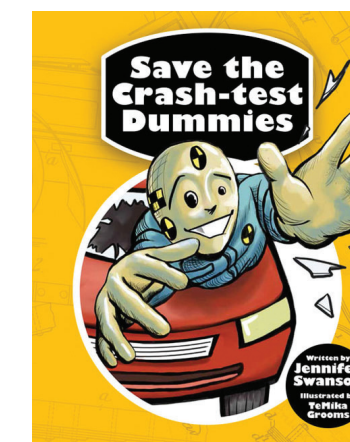
TeMika Grooms is an author-illustrator with a passion for sharing stories. Raised in a military family, she lived in Germany and grew up in Columbus, GA. Her parents supported her love for the arts at an early age, while her mother's experience as a librarian provided a haven amongst books, words, and pictures. TeMika earned a civil engineering degree from Georgia Tech and practiced engineering for many years. She now devotes her time to creative pursuits and creating books for young readers.

Her most recent illustrated nonfiction book, *Save the Crash-test Dummies*, was written by Jennifer Swanson and released by Peachtree Publishing. She volunteers as the SCBWI US Illustrator Coordinator and enjoys supporting others on their creative journeys. TeMika was selected as a 2021 We Need Diverse Books Illustration Mentee and has books scheduled for release in 2022 and beyond.

Learn more about her work at www.TeMikaTheArtist.com.

WHAT WAS THE MOST VALUABLE OR MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE OF AMPLIFY FOR YOU?

The program was filled with several significant moments for me. Being greeted by beautiful, brown faces on screen was affirming as an artist. I immediately felt a sense of belonging, joy, honor, and excitement! I specifically remember sunlight shining into my studio while Vanessa Brantley-Newton brought me to tears as she spoke affirmations and a prayer over us. This set the tone for our journey together. Over the next several months I was able to gain key insights to being a successful author-illustrator. From developing my craft to marketing books to forging valuable connections with Black creators in my field, this program has been a game changer for me.





leahhendersonbooks.com

LEAH HENDERSON

STORYTELLER COHORT

ON WRITING FOR CHILDREN:

"I often think about how my stories might engage and touch a young reader, and my ultimate hope is that they will empower a young person to live, and possibly act. And that action can encompass so many different things, but at the center, I hope there is empowerment and the feeling of being seen and heard and wanting to share more of who we are."

ABOUT LEAH

Leah Henderson is the author of the middle-grade novels *The Magic in Changing Your Stars* and *One Shadow on the Wall*. Her picture books include *Together We March*, *A Day for Rememberin'*, *Daddy Speaks Love*, and the forthcoming *Your Voice, Your Vote*. She holds an MFA in writing and is on faculty in Spalding University's School of Creative and Professional Writing.

WHAT WAS THE MOST VALUABLE OR MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE OF AMPLIFY FOR YOU?

Learning and growing alongside other Black creatives was such an enriching part of the experience – one I cherish. I am so appreciative of the opportunity and the insights.

"STORIES SPREAD WINGS..."



nadialhohn.com

NADIA L. HOHN

STORYTELLER COHORT

ON WRITING FOR CHILDREN:

"The intersection between art and activism is where I see my stories and my role as a writer for children. Don't forget education and have fun. I grew up in Toronto, searching for books featuring children who resembled me. There were few. As an author today, I feel it is my responsibility to give Black children a variety of ways to see themselves and help keep the doors open for diverse "kidlit/MG lit/YA lit creators."

ABOUT NADIA

Nadia L. Hohn, M.Ed., is a world-traveling elementary school teacher and the award-winning author of several books for children, including *A Likkle Miss Lou*, published by Owlkids and the Malaika series, published by Groundwood Books. Her first picture book, *Malaika's Costume*, was selected as the 2021 TD Book Giveaway and distributed to over 550,000 Canadian first graders. Nadia is a frequent presenter and advocate for diversity in children's and young adult literature. In June 2020, in solidarity with #KidLit4BlackLives, she organized #KidLit4BlackLivesCanada. In 2014, she founded Sankofa's Pen, a group to support 200+ aspiring and published Black Canadian kidlit authors and illustrators. Nadia is currently completing her MFA in creative writing. She teaches courses in writing for children at local colleges and universities. She is a proud alumnus of Highlights Foundation workshops.

WHAT WAS THE MOST VALUABLE OR MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE OF AMPLIFY FOR YOU?

In this historic moment of racial injustices, loss, and isolation, reconnecting with many new and old African American writing colleagues provides a source of community and affirmation. Through Amplify, I found three contributors for my anthology to be published in 2023 and the illustrator of my upcoming picture book in 2024.





[https://painted-words.com/
portfolio/cathy-ann-
johnson/](https://painted-words.com/portfolio/cathy-ann-johnson/)

CATHY ANN JOHNSON-CONFORTO

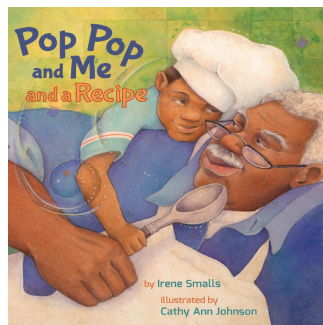
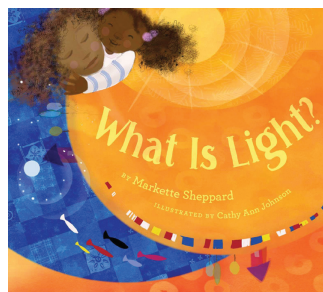
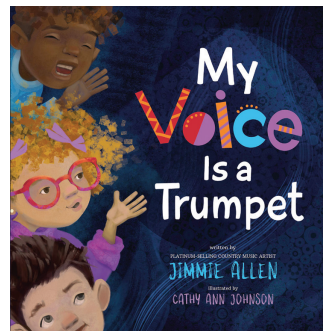
STORYTELLER COHORT

ON WRITING FOR CHILDREN:

"It's important that we control our own narrative. Have a voice in the content that is being created on multiple fronts, including film, social networks, books, and ongoing branded communication that mirror images to our children."

ABOUT CATHY

Cathy Ann Johnson-Conforto is Director, Designer, Illustrator, and owner of Luv-it Studio, based in charming downtown Decatur, GA. With years of working within the walls of organizational boundaries, she embraced leaving the corporate gray cubicle and courageously set out to design a nontraditional, "boundary-less" studio. In an economy designed for innovation and change, (before Covid 19), traditional working platforms were fading fast. Boxing up years of experience from Hallmark greeting cards, advertising agencies, and digital design studios, she successfully carved out a creative place for herself. Growing up in a family who owned and operated a childcare business made her transition to designing children's products seamless. She works in a range of styles and loves connecting words to pictures. Her whimsy and lyrical work focuses on layouts that echo a child's perspective. Her work has appeared in children's books, magazines, posters, gifts, and more. She currently enjoys the freedom of working in her Decatur, GA studio as well as her satellite studio in Rome, Italy. In her spare time, she is with her husband and doggie and enjoys roaming Rome, chasing castles in medieval towns, food, culture, history, and the arts.



dinahjohnsonbooks.com

DINAH JOHNSON

STORYTELLER COHORT

ON WRITING FOR CHILDREN:

"I want children to experience the feeling of being totally immersed in a book, as words dance on page after page and sing in their ears. I want children to know that they are smart and important and that they have a special role to play in their families and in their communities. I want them to understand that what they experience through reading will help them become powerful and creative citizens of the world. At its best, a children's book is one of the most important, impactful, inspiring art forms there is, and I am blessed to make my own small contributions."

ABOUT DINAH

As "Dr. Dianne Johnson," I am a literary historian and an English professor at the University of South Carolina. My work has helped to document the history of African American children's literature. A project especially dear to me is *The Best of The Brownies' Book*, selections from a magazine for Black children published from January 1920 through December 1921. As "Dinah"—my parents' nickname for me—I write books for young people about the things I love: my family, my dolls, African American culture. I was born in the historic city of Charleston, SC. But I've lived in many states as well as in Iran and Germany, where my sixth-grade teacher encouraged me to write and to think of myself as an author. With my daughter, Niani Feelings, I've traveled all around the world. (She's been to every continent!) My favorite possessions are notebooks and pens. And besides home, my favorite place is any school, sharing my love of words with children. I'm grateful to have collaborated with brilliant illustrators like James Ransome, R. Gregory Christie, and Tyrone Geter. I'll have two new books in 2022, *H is for Harlem* and *Indigo Dreaming* (illustrated by April Harrison and Anna Cunha). There will definitely be two more being published in 2023. And there are others finding their way from my heart to the page.

WHAT WAS THE MOST VALUABLE OR MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE OF AMPLIFY FOR YOU?

I am so very grateful to be part of the Amplify community.

"I WRITE ABOUT THE THINGS I LOVE: MY FAMILY, MY DOLLS, AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY, AND MORE. I LOVE STARTING WITH A BLANK WHITE PAGE, USING MY IMAGINATION, AND FINALLY HAVING A BOOK TO SHARE WITH MY FRIENDS OF EVERY AGE AND BACKGROUND."





christinerkendall.com

CHRISTINE KENDALL

STORYTELLER COHORT

ON WRITING FOR CHILDREN:

"Children are our future. It is vitally important that we inform, inspire, nourish, and protect them. Writing for children is a glorious way to do that."

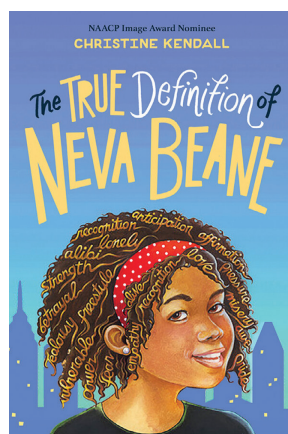
ABOUT CHRISTINE

Christine Kendall is the author of two novels, *Riding Chance* (Scholastic 2016,) which was nominated for an NAACP Image Award in the category of Outstanding Literary Work for Youth/Teens, and *The True Definition of Neva Beane* (Scholastic 2020). Her short fiction has appeared in numerous publications. She lives in Philadelphia, where she co-curates the award-winning reading series *Creative at the Cannery*.

WHAT WAS THE MOST VALUABLE OR MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE OF AMPLIFY FOR YOU?

The warmth of the embrace of everyone associated with the program. It's great to be a part of such a loving and supportive community.

"STORIES HELP CHILDREN DEVELOP EMPATHY, THE ABILITY TO UNDERSTAND THE FEELINGS OF OTHERS — OR, PUT ANOTHER WAY, TO FEEL THEIR MUSIC."



sharonlangley.com

SHARON LANGLEY

STORYTELLER COHORT

ON WRITING FOR CHILDREN:

"In my journey as an author, I am writing stories that are both joyful and reflective... stories in which children can see themselves and their possibilities on every page. Look for board books, picture books, chapter books, and biographies, too!"

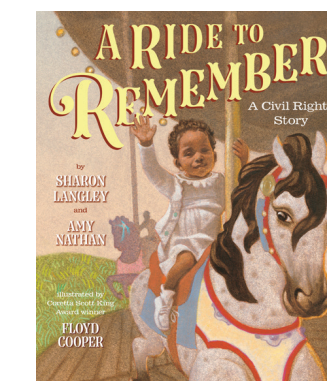
ABOUT SHARON

Sharon Langley is co-author of *A Ride to Remember*, her debut picture book with Amy Nathan and illustrator Floyd Cooper. Her love of reading and writing began with childhood storytime visits to her local library (Enoch Pratt Library in Baltimore, MD). She became a borrower at a young age, diligently practicing her name so she could sign her own library card. She is a graduate of Clark Atlanta University and holds a master's degree from Mt. Saint Mary's University. As an educator, she has worked in schools and shared children's books over the years. As a newly minted writer, she looks forward to sharing her books and stories with children for years to come. Sharon lives and writes in southern California.

WHAT WAS THE MOST VALUABLE OR MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE OF AMPLIFY FOR YOU?

The most valuable element of Amplify are the people...it was wonderful to connect with our Storyteller cohort and to learn about their writerly journeys...their processes and their successes. And our mentors shared a wealth of knowledge, preparing us for the creative and business aspects of a writer's life.

"I AM WRITING STORIES THAT ARE BOTH JOYFUL AND REFLECTIVE... STORIES IN WHICH CHILDREN CAN SEE THEMSELVES AND THEIR POSSIBILITIES."





andreajloney.com

ANDREA J. LONEY

STORYTELLER COHORT

ON WRITING FOR CHILDREN:

"I believe that sharing a rich and diverse world of love, compassion, and joy with children will help to foster a diverse world of love, compassion, and joy when those kids grow up. Writing for kids is my personal investment in a better future for us all. Plus, it is so rewarding and fun!"

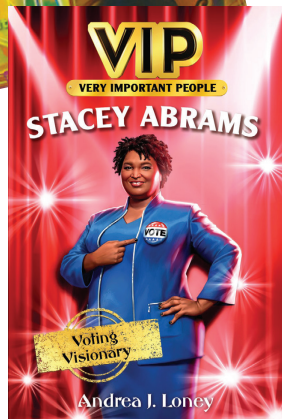
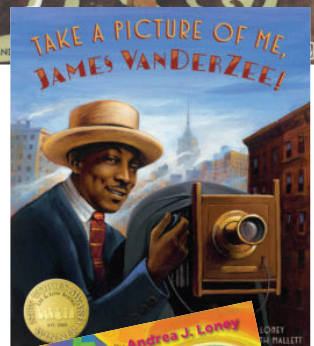
ABOUT ANDREA

Andrea J. Loney's books include the new middle-grade biography *VIP: Stacey Abrams – Voting Visionary*, picture books *Double Bass Blues* (Caldecott Honor for illustrator Rudy Gutierrez) and *Bunnybear* (featured on the ALA Rainbow List), and the picture book biography *Take a Picture of Me, James Vanderzee* (Lee & Low Books New Voices Award Winner, and NAACP Image Award Nominee). Her upcoming works include the picture book biography *Curve and Flow: The Elegant Vision of L.A. Architect Paul R. Williams* (Knopf) and the futuristic chapter book series *Abby in Orbit* (Albert Whitman & Company), all coming in September 2022. A graduate of New York University with an MFA in dramatic writing, Andrea teaches computer science at a local community college. She lives in Inglewood, CA with her family, their pets, and many stacks of kids' books. Learn more at andreajloney.com.

WHAT WAS THE MOST VALUABLE OR MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE OF AMPLIFY FOR YOU?

Communing with this wide variety of Black children's book creators from around the world was such an amazing experience for me. I learned so much and made so many new connections. It's been a joy to celebrate these amazing Black writers and illustrators.

"I BELIEVE THAT EVERY CHILD SHOULD BE ABLE TO GRAB A STACK OF BOOKS AND SEE THEMSELVES AS THE HERO OR HEROINE, THE BELOVED, AND CENTER OF THE STORY. SO WRITING FOR KIDS IS MY PERSONAL INVESTMENT IN A KINDER, MORE COMPASSIONATE, AND MORE EQUITABLE FUTURE FOR US ALL."



melinamangal.com

MÉLINA MANGAL

STORYTELLER COHORT

ON WRITING FOR CHILDREN:

"I write for children, creating stories that reflect their lives, instill pride, and spark curiosity, wonder, and joy. Nothing is more satisfying than knowing I've connected with a young reader—a future scientist, dancer, leader? Writing for children opens up the world."

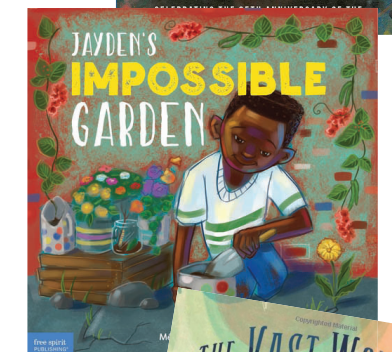
ABOUT MÉLINA

Mélina Mangal is the author of short stories and biographies for youth, including *The Vast Wonder of the World: Biologist Ernest Everett Just*, winner of the Carter G. Woodson Book Award and named an NCSS/CBC Notable Social Studies Trade Book for Young People. Mélina's newest picture book is *Jayden's Impossible Garden*, winner of the Strive/Free Spirit African American Voices contest, with "an abundance of STEAM connections and wonderful character representation" (Booklist, Starred Review). Mélina also works as a school library teacher in Minnesota and enjoys spending time outdoors with her family, whether it's in her backyard or hiking in the woods. Visit her online at melinamangal.com.

WHAT WAS THE MOST VALUABLE OR MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE OF AMPLIFY FOR YOU?

Being in the company of stellar storytellers and learning from the wide range of community members in the children's book world made Amplify an invaluable experience. The Amplify Black Stories program opened up new avenues and spotlighted community resources to help place our stories in the hearts and hands of young readers. The many creative ideas and validating affirmations continue to buoy me.

"WRITING FOR CHILDREN OPENS UP THE WORLD."





janaemarks.com

JANAE MARKS

STORYTELLER COHORT

ON WRITING FOR CHILDREN:

"I have always been interested in writing for this age group, since books were so important to me as a child. I want to continue telling stories about contemporary Black girls so they can feel represented in the books they read. In some ways, I write for my childhood self, since I never really saw myself books in back then."

ABOUT JANAE

Janae Marks is an author of middle-grade novels. Her debut, *From the Desk of Zoe Washington*, is an indie bestseller and was named a Best Book of the Year by *Parents* magazine, *Book Riot*, *Kirkus Reviews*, *Booklist*, Chicago public library and *The Boston Globe*. Her second novel is *A Soft Place to Land*. She has an MFA in writing for children from The New School and lives in Connecticut with her husband, daughter, and miniature schnauzer named Cookie. Visit her website at janaemarks.com.

WHAT WAS THE MOST VALUABLE OR MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE OF AMPLIFY FOR YOU?

I loved getting to be in a space where we could speak openly about our experiences as Black authors and illustrators in a predominately white publishing world. The faculty and guest speakers shared incredibly useful advice. I also enjoyed connecting with the other creators in my cohort and hope to maintain these connections and friendships for years to come!

"WRITING BRINGS ME JOY, AND I HOPE MY STORIES ENTERTAIN AND INSPIRE ALL KIDS."



shareemiller.com

SHAREE MILLER

STORYTELLER COHORT

ON WRITING FOR CHILDREN:

"Creating art for kids has always been my passion. I love writing fun stories and adding to them with colorful pictures. I never grew out of reading and loving picture books, so they have always been a huge inspiration for me. Being able to inspire future generations with my art and stories brings me joy."

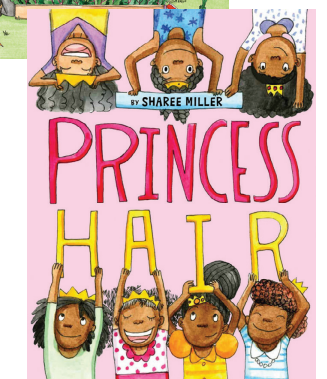
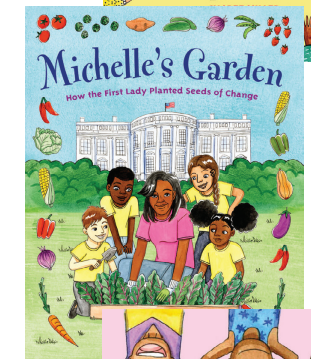
ABOUT SHAREE

Sharee Miller is an acclaimed illustrator and author of *Princess Hair*, *Don't Touch My Hair*, and *Michelle's Garden: How the First Lady Planted Seeds of Change*. She lives in Jersey City with her spouse, son, and their two cats, Pumpkin and Spice!

WHAT WAS THE MOST VALUABLE OR MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE OF AMPLIFY FOR YOU?

Being surrounded by authors and illustrators of color made this experience so inviting and inspiring. It was so affirming to hear about the industry with our experiences, identities, and challenges centered.

"IT WAS SO AFFIRMING TO HEAR ABOUT THE INDUSTRY WITH OUR EXPERIENCES, IDENTITIES, AND CHALLENGES CENTERED."





lisamooreramee.com

LISA MOORE RAMÉE

STORYTELLER COHORT

ON WRITING FOR CHILDREN:

“As a child, reading was my favorite thing to do. It opened entire, foreign worlds to me, and I want to provide that same type of experience for young people. I want to give them experiences and feelings and understanding of a whole host of things. I particularly enjoy the middle-grade space precisely because it is such a difficult age for so many, and books can be a great outlet.”

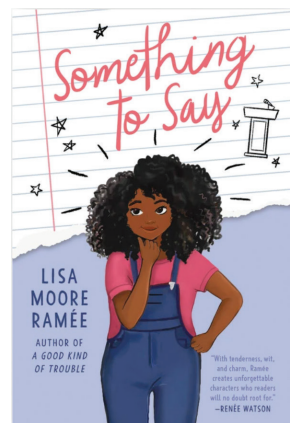
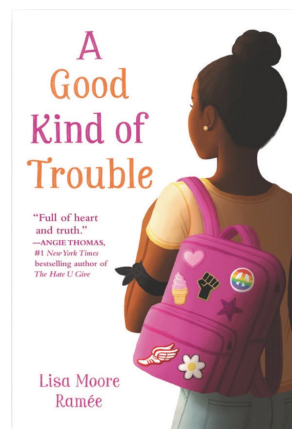
ABOUT LISA

Lisa Moore Ramée was born and raised in Los Angeles and now lives in northern California with her husband, kids, and more yard than she can control. She worked for several years in publishing at the Walt Disney Company, first in comics and then with licensed publishing. While there, she co-penned *The Little Mermaid, Jr.* graphic novel and the writing bug took up permanent residence. *A Good Kind of Trouble*, her first novel, received critical acclaim, garnering three starred reviews (*Publishers Weekly*, *Kirkus Reviews*, and *School Library Journal*) and becoming a bestseller. It appeared on numerous “best of” lists for 2019. *Something to Say* received three starred reviews (*Kirkus Reviews*, *School Library Journal*, and *Bookpage*), was an Indie Next Pick, and was a Kirkus Best of 2020 Book. *Mapmaker*, a MG fantasy, is due out September 2022.

WHAT WAS THE MOST VALUABLE OR MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE OF AMPLIFY FOR YOU?

One of my favorite things about being an author has been the opportunity to hang with other writers — particularly other authors of color — at conferences and festivals, but with COVID, I lost that. Taking part in the Amplify program gave me some of that back and allowed me to “get together” with my fellow Black storytellers and share experiences, stories, laughs, and, of course, grievances in a safe space. I also so appreciated how generous all the panelists were with their time and how honest with their answers.

“...READING WAS MY FAVORITE THING TO DO. IT OPENED ENTIRE, FOREIGN WORLDS TO ME, AND I WANT TO PROVIDE THAT SAME TYPE OF EXPERIENCE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE.”



nikkishannonsmith.com/books

NIKKI SHANNON SMITH

STORYTELLER COHORT

ON WRITING FOR CHILDREN:

“Books serve so many purposes. They teach. They entertain. They comfort. They open portals to other worlds, cultures, and experiences. They foster imagination and creativity. They make us feel. And ideally, they reflect the world around us. My goal as an author is to contribute books that do all of this, while at the same time providing authentic representation for Black children.”

ABOUT NIKKI

Nikki Shannon Smith was born and raised in Oakland, CA. She is the author of twelve books, ranging from picture books to young adult. Her latest book is *Lena and the Burning of Greenwood: A Tulsa Race Massacre Survival Story*. Her work includes the *Azaleah Lane* chapter book series and five titles in Capstone’s multi-author, historical fiction/adventure, middle-grade series, *Girls Survive*. Nikki also wrote *A Star Like Jesse Owens*, a Smithsonian Historical Fiction title about the 1936 Olympics. Nikki’s forthcoming titles include *Our Beautiful Colors* (Random House/Little Golden Books, 2022) and a board book series called *Brown Baby Parade* (Random House Children’s Books, 2022, 2023, 2024). Her writing is informed not only by her research but by her child-like curiosity and nearly 30 years of elementary school teaching experience. She is represented by Jennifer March Soloway of Andrea Brown Literary Agency. (Photo credit: Alan Bradley of AFBPhotography)

WHAT WAS THE MOST VALUABLE OR MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE OF AMPLIFY FOR YOU?

The Amplify Black Stories program was such an uplifting, empowering program. In addition to the wonderful sense of community it created, having Vanesse Lloyd-Sgambati tell us (in no uncertain terms) that we are famous now and that our books need to be face out on our Zoom backgrounds was an important reminder to never underestimate or undervalue ourselves.





lisastringfellow.com

LISA STRINGFELLOW

STORYTELLER COHORT

ON WRITING FOR CHILDREN:

"I want to write stories like those I would have loved to read as a Black child. Students need to see a variety of stories that reflect Black lives and experiences. Too often, in schools children read stories about Black oppression and trauma and not the joy and love in our lives. Libraries in the past, and often still now, have more books written about Black people than by Black people, and nuance and authenticity are often lost in those books."

ABOUT LISA

Lisa Stringfellow writes middle-grade fiction and has a not-so-secret fondness for fantasy with a dark twist. Her debut fantasy, *A Comb of Wishes*, will be published on February 8, 2022 by HarperCollins/Quill Tree Books. It was selected as an *ABA Indies Introduce* title for Winter/Spring 2022, received starred reviews in *BookPage* and *Youth Services Book Review*, and garnered praise from *Kirkus Reviews*, *School Library Journal*, *Booklist*, and *The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*. Lisa received the inaugural Kweli Color of Children's Literature Manuscript Award in 2019 for the novel manuscript. Her work often reflects her West Indian and Black southern heritage. Lisa is a middle school teacher and lives in Boston, MA, with her children and two bossy cats.

"MY EXPERIENCE FROM BOTH MY WEST INDIAN AND SOUTHERN HERITAGE IS ROOTED IN STORYTELLING AND SPOKEN TRADITIONS THAT DON'T ALWAYS CONFORM TO TRADITIONAL WESTERN FORMATS. I WANTED TO RECLAIM AND CELEBRATE THE ORAL TRADITION IN MY MIDDLE GRADE NOVEL *A COMB OF WISHES*."



sweetmusicinharlem.weebly.com

DEBBIE ANN TAYLOR

STORYTELLER COHORT

ON WRITING FOR CHILDREN:

"I write for children because I know the power of language and the meaningful effect that books have. I write books to enrich their lives, broaden their knowledge, and instill that love of language. I am also interested in creating books that will give voice to characters often absent from children's literature, especially women in STEM and working-class characters. Such books will promote resilience and fortitude but will also elicit wonder and joy. Children need books that satisfy and fortify them and that will challenge and empower them."

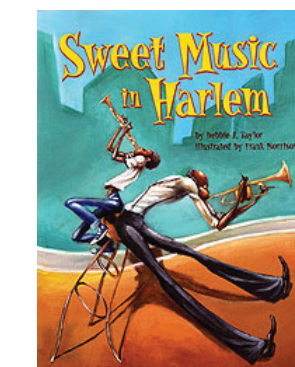
ABOUT DEBBIE

Debbie Ann Taylor is an author of picture books, including *Sweet Music in Harlem* (Lee and Low), *Over in Motown* (Fifth Avenue Press), and nine books for an educational series. Her short stories for children appear in magazines including *Cricket*, *Spider*, *New Moon*, and *Pockets*. Taylor's interest in writing contemporary and historical fiction was sparked before she mastered cursive writing. Visits to museums and botanical gardens provide a rich source of material for her contemporary and historical fiction. A native of Columbus, OH, she relocated to Ann Arbor 30 years ago and worked for decades to increase diversity in STEM fields.

WHAT WAS THE MOST VALUABLE OR MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE OF AMPLIFY FOR YOU?

It was a joy interacting with the other book creators and recognizing "like-hearted" individuals. I was also introduced to the National Association of Black Storytellers.

"BOOKS SHOULD HELP READERS RECOGNIZE THE HUMANITY OF OTHERS WHILE APPRECIATING THEIR OWN VALUE AND POWER."





brittanythurman.com

BRITTANY J. THURMAN

STORYTELLER COHORT

ON WRITING FOR CHILDREN:

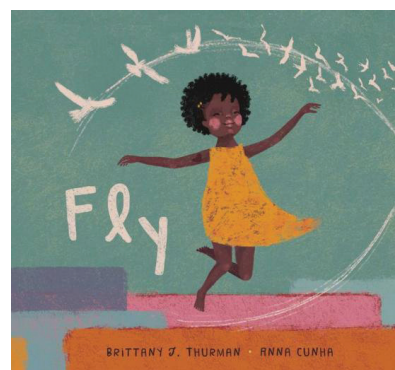
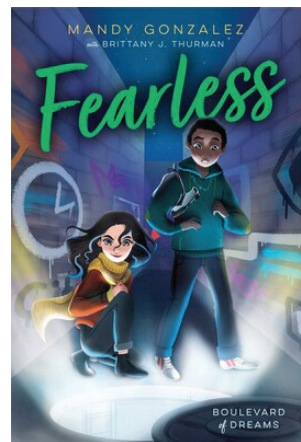
“Our children are waiting for us. The memory I think about the most during my time at a library is when a nine-year-old would repeatedly ask me if my book was finished. When I let her know it wasn’t ready yet, she told me she would wait. From one Black girl to another, I think she saw a reflection in me. I write for Black kids to know they are deserving of books with them conquering their dreams. I write for the patron who let me know she would wait for my books. I write for her to know her dreams of becoming an author are indeed feasible.”

ABOUT BRITTANY

Brittany J. Thurman is the author of picture books and middle-grade novels. Her debut picture book, *FLY*, publishes March 2022 (Caitlyn Dlouhy Books). She is a former children’s specialist, having read hundreds of stories to thousands of babies, toddlers, and preschoolers across Pittsburgh. Her focus remains on representation and early literacy, ensuring children’s literature truthfully reflects the world in which we live. She has spoken and presented at numerous conferences, including The Virginia Hamilton Conference on Multicultural Children’s Literature, Western PA’s SCBWI Conference, and the 13th Annual IBBY Regional Conference.

WHAT WAS THE MOST VALUABLE OR MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE OF AMPLIFY FOR YOU?

I am constantly thinking back to the opening session. Vanessa Brantley-Newton not only spoke to us, she spoke over our shared dream to create. This is the fuel I have used since that moment. It is what I keep in my mind and continue to guide me on this expansive journey. So much was valuable to me during Amplify. The overall experience has helped push me out of my comfort zone and seek what I deserve.



“I WRITE FOR BLACK KIDS TO KNOW THEY ARE MORE THAN DESERVING OF EVERY SINGLE DREAM. OUR CHILDREN ARE WAITING FOR US.”



pamelamtuck.com

PAMELA M. TUCK

STORYTELLER COHORT

ON WRITING FOR CHILDREN:

“WE NEED DIVERSE BOOKS. Children need to see themselves reflected in the books they read. With the Windows and Mirrors concept, The Brown Bookshelf’s mission will fulfill that purpose of reflecting brown and Black children’s voices back to them and opening up a window for other children to learn, appreciate and value Black voices and stories.”

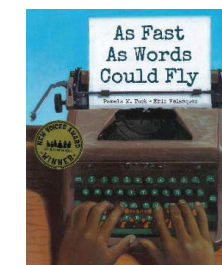
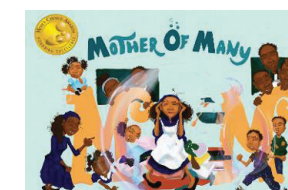
ABOUT PAMELA

Pamela M. Tuck is an award-winning author and mother of 11 children. She credits her writing to her upbringing surrounded by southern storytellers. Her family inspires many of her stories. Pamela is the author of *Mother of Many*, *As Fast as Words Could Fly*, *Color Struck*, *Sheldon*, *The Mushroom*, and over 30 nonfiction and fiction leveled reading books that she has written in her role as writer/editor with the American Reading Company.

WHAT WAS THE MOST VALUABLE OR MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE OF AMPLIFY FOR YOU?

My most memorable experience of Amplify was being given the empowering space to connect with creators who share my passion to inspire, enlighten, and entertain young readers through diverse children’s books. The information shared from the guest speakers was invaluable. The knowledge I gained about marketing strategies to find and/or create channels to market my work was invaluable. I felt blessed to be a part of such an empowering workshop. Sincere thanks to the Highlights Foundation, The Brown Bookshelf, all the guest speakers, and my fellow children’s book creators for your contributions and insights.

“I HOPE MY BOOKS OFFER INSPIRATION, ENCOURAGE EACH READER TO EMBRACE DIVERSITY, AND HAVE THE COURAGE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE.”



PUBLISHING COHORT

PUBLISHER TRACK FACILITATORS



KATURA HUDSON



DR. EBONY ELIZABETH THOMAS



EILEEN ROBINSON

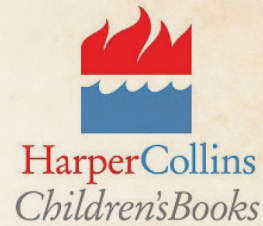
“INDIVIDUALLY AND COLLECTIVELY, WE ARE IN A UNIQUE POSITION TO IDENTIFY AND NURTURE STORIES BY AND ABOUT BLACK PEOPLE, TO INVEST IN THOSE STORIES AND THEIR CREATORS, TO MARKET AND PROMOTE SO THAT BOOKS REACH MORE AND MORE AND MORE READERS. THE POWER IN THIS VIRTUAL ROOM IS AMAZING. LET’S LEVERAGE IT TOGETHER TO DO WHAT THIS WORKSHOP HAS CHARGED US WITH: AMPLIFY BLACK STORIES.”

—KATURA HUDSON



RENÉE WATSON





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HARPERCOLLINS

PUBLISHING COHORT: SUSTAIN

ABOUT:

HarperCollins Publishers is the second-largest consumer book publisher in the world.

Headquartered in New York, HarperCollins has publishing operations in 17 countries. With 200 years of history and more than 120 branded imprints around the world, HarperCollins publishes approximately 10,000 new books every year in 16 languages and has a print and digital catalog of more than 200,000 titles. Writing across dozens of genres, HarperCollins authors include winners of the Nobel Prize, the Pulitzer Prize, the National Book Award, the Newbery and Caldecott Medals, and the Man Booker Prize.

The house of Mark Twain, the Brontë sisters, Thackeray, Dickens, John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr., Maurice Sendak, Shel Silverstein, and Margaret Wise Brown, HarperCollins has a long and rich history that reaches back to the early nineteenth century and offers their publishing team a depth of experience that few others can rival—from the modest print shop that James and John Harper opened in 1817 to the global house they are today.

READ IN FULL COLOR:



HarperCollins Children's Books Read in Full Color initiative aims to highlight stories that reflect every reader.

SHAKE UP YOUR SHELVES:



Shake Up Your Shelves is a program that encourages teachers and librarians to thoughtfully and purposely consider diversity in their curriculum and collection practices utilizing documented research, accessible resources, and simple tools to enact change. Our goal is to spotlight titles by diverse creators and support with high-level, accessible educational materials to help librarians and teachers update their collections/curriculum with books that are more inclusive, representative, anti-racist, and equitable.

HARPERCOLLINS CONT.

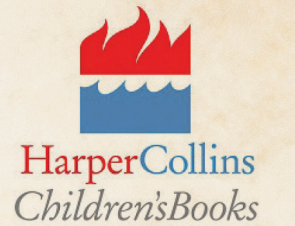
CHILDREN'S IMPRINTS

- Balzer + Bray
- Clarion
- Greenwillow Books
- HarperAlley
- HarperChildren's Audio
- HarperCollins Children's Books
- HarperFestival
- HarperTeen
- Heartdrum
- Katherine Tegen Books
- Quill Tree Books
- Versify
- Walden Pond Press

WHAT WAS THE MOST VALUABLE EXPERIENCE OF AMPLIFY FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION? :

"During one of the Amplify Black Stories virtual events, my team was able to meet and connect with other organizations within the children's literature space who, like us, are committed to amplifying Black stories across our platforms and helping to make young Black readers feel seen and heard. Many of the participants had also worked with outside organizations and non profits on their amplification efforts, and they were kind enough to recommend various communities and spaces we could connect with to make an even greater impact." —Sam Fox, Marketing Director

"The workshops with Felicia Rose Chavez were some of the best I have ever attended. Not only did her talks help to widen my perspective and shift my lens, but she gave practical and actionable advice on an anti-racist approach to writing and working with writers." —Martha Mihalick, Executive Editor, Greenwillow Books



ASTRA BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS

PUBLISHING COHORT: PARTNER

ABOUT:

Astra Books for Young Readers features several children's book imprints: Astra Young Readers (formerly Boyds Mills Press), Calkins Creek, Hippo Park, Kane Press, mineditionUS, TOON Books, and Wordsong. We are committed to creating award-winning, high-quality fiction and nonfiction books for children of all ages. Our wide range of titles explore STEAM subjects, literacy and language arts, U.S. history, poetry, and culture. We publish books that help children navigate the world we live in with compassion, imagination, humor, open-mindedness, and the joy of discovery.

WHAT WAS THE MOST VALUABLE EXPERIENCE OF AMPLIFY FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION?

The Amplify program created an amazing space of learning that was bursting at the seams with creativity and ideas. The goals of listening and taking action were perfectly aligned, and the sessions helped equip us as publishers, editors, and marketers to not only make great books—particularly joyful books—for young Black readers, but to be sure our books could find the readers who need to see themselves reflected in those pages. THANK YOU to Highlights and The Brown Bookshelf for making us a part of this inspiring program.

BENCHMARK EDUCATION

PUBLISHING COHORT: PARTNER

ABOUT:

Our award-winning print and digital solutions support all aspects of literacy for diverse learners. The resources are content-rich and available in English and Spanish. They provide opportunities for explicit instruction in close reading, genre studies, cross-text study, critical thinking, and development of social-emotional skills. Our powerful core and supplemental programs provide each learner precisely the support necessary to accelerate achievement and expand perspectives. Diverse students see themselves in text and illustrations across all grade levels and genres.

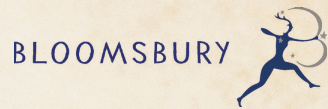
Since our inception in 1998, our mission has remained to provide classroom-based and classroom-tested solutions that support the work of educators in differentiating instruction, enabling students of all abilities and backgrounds to succeed. Our research-proven programs help boost reading proficiency, build knowledge, and expand students' inquiry into concepts in language arts, science, and social studies.

WHAT WAS THE MOST VALUABLE EXPERIENCE OF AMPLIFY FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION?

The most valuable experience was the solution-oriented discussions we had with industry professionals around how we can truly amplify Black voices in children's literature. Our participation in Amplify Black Stories allowed us to better plan for our growth and development as a publisher as we strive to provide resources that equip educators and learners in expanding their literacy skills and global cultural competencies.

WHAT OPPORTUNITIES HAVE SPUN FROM CONNECTIONS MADE IN THE PROGRAM?

The program gave us new ideas and strategies as to the ways in which we can find talented Black authors, illustrators, editors, and designers to help us amplify Black voices in our publishing plans. The connections made during the program allowed us to learn from the faculty and share with colleagues in the program as well as our team.



BLOOMSBURY

PUBLISHING COHORT: PARTNER

ABOUT:

Established in 1998 and located in midtown Manhattan, Bloomsbury USA is a general interest publisher of adult and children's books, which has become known for both its high-quality fiction and nonfiction for adults and children as well as its extensive academic publishing from the world's most recognized experts.


Bloomsbury Children's Books publishes books for readers of all ages, including Renée Watson's *Piecing Me Together* (Newbery Honor and Coretta Scott King Author Award), Salina Yoon's *My Kite Is Stuck! And Other Stories* (Theodore Seuss Geisel Award), Martin W. Sandler's *1919* (National Book Award), Nick Lake's *In Darkness* (Michael L. Printz Award), and Lilliam Rivera's *Never Look Back* (Pura Belpré Honor); as well as works by Legacy Award-winning author Nikki Grimes and *New York Times* bestselling authors Brigid Kemmerer and Danielle Paige.

WHAT WAS THE MOST VALUABLE EXPERIENCE OF AMPLIFY FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION?

I know how valuable knowledge and access can be and also how fraught earning or asking for that knowledge can be, too. What I appreciated most was Amplify providing the structure for us to ask questions and brainstorm and inviting experts, advocates, and thought leaders to have constructive conversations. Sometimes it was just even a new way of thinking. A real light-bulb moment for me was Saracicia J. Fennell's presentation about publicity—even though I'm a book publicist myself, I distinctly remember her saying, "Our community loves stuff!" That definitely played a role in how I thought about our promo materials and how I might offer more 'swag' to bookstores, schools, and festivals—sometimes even designing special items or partnering with Black-owned businesses for influencer events. –Faye Bi, Director of Publicity, Bloomsbury Children's Books

I so appreciate how this program helped us to examine our processes and find ways to track our progress in promoting Black stories and creators. We were grateful to hear from experts who have been working to promote Black stories for many years and their perspective on what publishing's challenges are. –Sarah Shumway, Editorial Director, Bloomsbury Children's Books

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HIGHLIGHTS

PUBLISHING COHORT: PARTNER

ABOUT:

It all started in a two-room office over a car dealership in Honesdale, Pennsylvania. The year was 1946. After decades as teachers, lecturers, and nationally recognized leaders in education and child development, Garry Cleveland Myers and Caroline Clark Myers created *Highlights*, a monthly magazine for children ages 6 to 12. They filled it with stories, adventures, brainteasers, and, of course, our beloved Hidden Pictures puzzles. It reflected the Myerses' philosophy that children become their "best selves" by using their creativity and imagination; developing their reading, thinking, and reasoning skills; and learning to treat others with respect, kindness, and sensitivity.

Since then, the Highlights brand has grown to a diverse and inclusive family of products for kids from birth to 12. Beyond *Highlights Hello*, *High Five*, *High Five Bilingue*, and *Highlights* magazines, our brand of wholesome fun extends to games, websites, mobile apps, school skills practice books, and the book clubs Let's Grow, LET'S PLAY Hidden Pictures, EAGLE-EYE Hidden Pictures, Mathmania, Puzzlemania, Puzzle Buzz, Top Secret Adventures, Which Way USA, and 15 Minutes a Day to School Success. Highlights not only reaches across multiple platforms, it also spans the globe: Highlights International's products are now available in 60 countries and in 25 languages.



highlights.com

 @HighlightsforChildren

 @Highlights

 @funwithapurpose

 @HighlightsMagazine



CANDLEWICK PRESS

PUBLISHING COHORT: PARTNER

ABOUT:

In 1992, Candlewick Press opened its doors as an independent children’s publisher, and we remain the world’s leading creatively led independent publisher of books and content for children today.

Candlewick Press arrived on the scene with some of the highest-quality picture books available. Since then, our offerings have grown to encompass all ages, with formats from board books to e-books and content from high-end novelty to cutting-edge fiction. Thousands of awards and accolades later, we are as passionate as ever about producing excellent books that are a joy to hold and read and share. Candlewick Press started out with six employees; today we have over 100. We’ve published more than 6,000 books.

WHAT WAS THE MOST VALUABLE EXPERIENCE OF AMPLIFY FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION?

We’re deeply grateful to have found new contacts and to have learned more about the incredible past and ongoing work of committed and creative Black stories, influencers, advocacy groups and other organizations, as well as creators. As a publisher who is committed to adding to the Black children’s book canon, it was so valuable and eye-opening to learn more about the history of Black children’s books. It was also immensely helpful to be told *directly* how Black creators often don’t feel listened to when they make suggestions that are different from “how things have always been done” at a publisher. Being in this position of listening and receiving feedback, advice, and suggestions as to how and what we can do better in this space was inestimable as we move forward and work to improve.

WHAT OPPORTUNITIES HAVE SPUN FROM CONNECTIONS MADE IN THE PROGRAM?

We were able to connect with reviewers, stores, and other outlets we learned about in the program, and to place ads and paid marketing with outlets we hadn’t worked with previously. Connecting with like-minded colleagues and brainstorming how we can work better together, learning about new outlets for finding new authors, illustrators, and talent, and in-roads to spaces we had not known about were all valuable takeaways from the program.

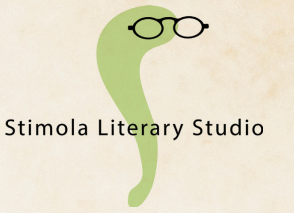
- candlewick.com
- @CandlewickPress
- @Candlewick
- @CandlewickPressBooks
- @CandlewickPress

STIMOLA LITERARY STUDIO

PUBLISHING COHORT: STRENGTHEN

ABOUT:

The Stimola Literary Studio is a boutique literary agency founded in 1997. Through the years, it has established a stellar reputation in children’s publishing, respected for the contributions it has made to the body of literature for young people of all ages, cultures, and ethnicities, across all genres and formats.



- stimolaliterarystudio.com
- @stimolaliterarystudio
- @stimolaliterary
- Stimola Live
stimolalive.com

CHARLESBRIDGE

PUBLISHING COHORT: STRENGTHEN

ABOUT:

Charlesbridge publishes high-quality books for children with a goal of creating lifelong readers and lifelong learners. Our books encourage reading and discovery in the classroom, library, and home. We believe that books for children should offer accurate information, promote a positive worldview, and embrace a child’s innate sense of wonder and fun. To this end, we continually strive to seek new voices, new visions, and new directions in children’s literature.

WHAT WAS THE MOST VALUABLE EXPERIENCE OF AMPLIFY FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION?

The most valuable experience of Amplify for our organization was the ability to connect with like-minded publishing professionals who share our goal of diversifying the industry. The community established and resources shared throughout this program will certainly help Charlesbridge to uplift the Black voices on our list and sign up and foster new talent.



- charlesbridge.com
- @charlesbridgepublishing
- @charlesbridge
- @Charlesbridge Publishing



WORKMAN

PUBLISHING COHORT: STRENGTHEN

ABOUT:

Workman Publishing is part of Hachette Book Group. It includes Workman, Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, Algonquin Young Readers, Artisan, Storey Publishing, and Timber Press. We are also the distributor for The Experiment, duopress, Erewhon Books, and Familius.

WHAT WAS THE MOST VALUABLE EXPERIENCE OF AMPLIFY FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION?

The most valuable part of Amplify for us was having a space dedicated to championing Black stories, learning how other publishers are taking action toward greater diversity, and hearing the personal experiences of authors.

workman.com

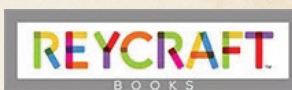
@workmanpub

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@workmanpublishing

@workmanpub

@workmanpub



REYCRAFT BOOKS

PUBLISHING COHORT: STRENGTHEN

ABOUT:

At Reycraft Books our mission is to create books of interest for all children that expand their views of themselves and others. We publish original and licensed works from authors and illustrators around the globe who have unique stories to tell. We believe every child needs to know that stories similar to their own are important—that they have value. We decided to start an imprint to publish the stories that have not yet been told, as well as the stories that have been told but have not yet been truly heard. This is our mission and our passion.

WHAT WAS THE MOST VALUABLE EXPERIENCE OF AMPLIFY FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION?

Hearing and learning from others in the industry who share our common goal of amplifying Black voices in literature. It was helpful to share the different ways we have all tried to accomplish this and to learn from others about what worked and what didn't.

benchmarkeducation.com/reycraftbooks/

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@reycraftbooks

RANDOM HOUSE

PUBLISHING COHORT: STRENGTHEN

ABOUT:

Random House Children's Books (rhcbbooks.com) is the world's largest English-language children's trade book publisher. Creating books for toddlers through young adult readers, in all formats from board books to activity books to picture books, novels, and nonfiction, the imprints of Random House Children's Books bring together award-winning authors and illustrators, world-famous franchise characters, and multimillion-copy series. Random House Children's Books is a division of Penguin Random House LLC.

WHAT WAS THE MOST VALUABLE EXPERIENCE OF AMPLIFY FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION?

The Amplify Black Stories program has provided Random House Children's Books with critical learnings as we continue focusing efforts on strengthening our publishing of books by Black creators and our outreach to Black readers. Following the invaluable discussions among this community, we have already implemented changes to both our internal processes and our marketing and publicity efforts.



rhcbbooks.com

penguinrandomhouse.com

@randomhousekids

@randomhousekids

@randomhousekids

ANDREA BROWN LITERARY AGENCY

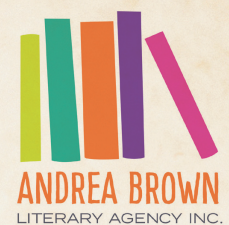
PUBLISHING COHORT: STRENGTHEN

ABOUT:

The Andrea Brown Literary Agency is an agency specializing in children's and adult literature, celebrating thousands of titles sold since our founding in August 1981. We are headquartered in northern California and we also have offices in San Diego, Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, Orlando, and Denver.

WHAT WAS THE MOST VALUABLE EXPERIENCE OF AMPLIFY FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION?

The program as a whole was invaluable—from the opening session's galvanizing Call to Action through monthly discussions overflowing with generous stories, context, business strategies, and networking contacts (like freelance publicists specializing in outreach to the Black community). Every publishing professional should participate if given the opportunity!



andreabrownlit.com

@andreabrownlit

@andreabrownlit

@AndreaBrownAgency



**Penguin
Young
Readers**

penguin.com/children
penguinrandomhouse.
com

@Penguinkids

@Penguinkids

@penguinkidsbooks

PENGUIN YOUNG READERS

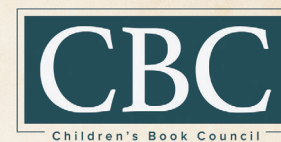
PUBLISHING COHORT: STRENGTHEN

ABOUT:

Penguin Young Readers Group is a global leader in children's publishing with preeminent imprints such as Dial Books, Dutton, Grosset & Dunlap, Kathy Dawson Books, Nancy Paulsen Books, Philomel, Puffin, G. P. Putnam's Sons, Razorbill, Viking, and Frederick Warne.

WHAT WAS THE MOST VALUABLE EXPERIENCE OF AMPLIFY FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION?

Through the program, we've taken immediate and actionable steps in advertising, marketing, and more. The whole experience of the Amplify Black Stories program has been invaluable to Penguin Young Readers, from the conversations, community, and connections to the needed reminder that we can always do more to reach Black readers and publish books by Black creators.



cbcbooks.org

@childrensbookcouncil @cbcbook

@CBCBook @CBCBook

CHILDREN'S BOOK COUNCIL

PUBLISHING COHORT: SUPPORT

The Children's Book Council (CBC) is the nonprofit trade association of children's book publishers in North America, dedicated to supporting the industry and promoting children's books and reading.



lernerbooks.com

@LernerBooks @LernerBooks

LERNER PUBLISHING GROUP

PUBLISHING COHORT: SUPPORT

Lerner Publishing Group creates the highest-quality nonfiction and fiction content for children and young adults in a variety of subjects and formats. Based in Minneapolis since its founding in 1959, Lerner Publishing Group is one of the nation's largest independent children's book publishers, with 13 imprints.



justusbooks.com

@JustUsBooks

@JustUsBooks @JustUsBooks

JUST US BOOKS

PUBLISHING COHORT: SUPPORT

Just Us Books publishes children's books that center and celebrate Black people, history, and culture. Founded in 1988 by Wade and Cheryl Willis Hudson and grounded in the belief that "Good books make a difference," Just Us Books has become an institution in the community and kidlit industry and remains one of the nation's few Black-owned presses.

RENÉE WATSON

renewatson.net

@harlemportland @reneewauthor

@Renee Watson

RENÉE WATSON

PUBLISHING COHORT: SUPPORT

Renée Watson is a *New York Times* bestselling author, educator, and community activist. Her young adult novel, *Piecing Me Together* (Bloomsbury, 2017) received a Coretta Scott King Award and Newbery Honor. Her children's picture books and novels for teens have received several awards and international recognition.



gallt & zacker
LITERARY AGENCY

galltzacker.com

@Galltzacker @GalltZackerLit

GALLT & ZACKER

PUBLISHING COHORT: SUPPORT

The Gallt & Zacker Literary Agency focuses on developing and finding the right home for the work of some of the most talented writers and illustrators in the book industry. Established in 2000, we aim to bring to life stories and artwork that help young readers throughout the world become lifelong book enthusiasts and to inspire and entertain readers of all ages.



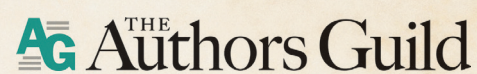
hachettebookgroup.com

@HachetteUS @HachetteUS
 @HachetteUS @HachetteBookGroup

HACHETTE BOOK GROUP

PUBLISHING COHORT: SUPPORT

Hachette Book Group (HBG) is a leading trade publisher and a division of the third-largest trade and educational publisher in the world, Hachette Livre. HBG is made up of eight publishing groups: Grand Central Publishing, Hachette Audio, Little, Brown and Company, Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, Orbit, Perseus Books, and Workman Publishing.



authorsguild.org

@AuthorsGuild @AuthorsGuild

THE AUTHORS GUILD

PUBLISHING COHORT: SUPPORT

The Authors Guild is the nation's professional organization for writers, aiding and protecting authors' interest in copyright, fair contracts, and free expression since 1912. Our mission is to support working writers. We advocate for the rights of writers by supporting free speech, fair contracts, and copyright. We create community and we fight for a living wage.



serendipitylit.com

@serendipitylit @serendipitylit

SERENDIPITY

PUBLISHING COHORT: SUPPORT

A word of varied meaning. At its heart: fortune, twists of fate, luck. Its connotations and sinuous elegance uniquely suit the name of a literary agency. Founded by Regina Brooks in 2000, Serendipity has established a diverse base of award-winning clients in adult and young adult fiction, nonfiction, and children's literature.

THE AMPLIFY BLACK STORIES WORKING GROUP

THOUGH AMPLIFY BLACK STORIES 2021 WAS A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE BROWN BOOKSHELF AND THE HIGHLIGHTS FOUNDATION, A KEY GROUP OF BLACK CREATIVES AND PROFESSIONALS SERVED ON A COMMITTEE CALLED THE AMPLIFY BLACK STORIES WORKING GROUP TO HELP SHAPE AND FACILITATE THE PROGRAM. THESE PEOPLE WERE INTEGRAL TO THE MISSION AND SPIRIT OF AMPLIFY BLACK STORIES, AND IT COULD NOT HAVE HAPPENED WITHOUT THEM.



CRYSTAL ALLEN

crystalallenbooks.com

I am a wife, mother, and children's book author, creating stories where Black children are the main characters but race does not drive the story.

PUBLISHED WORKS INCLUDE: *How Lamar's Bad Prank Won A Bubba-Sized Trophy*, *The Laura Line*, *The Magnificent Mya Tibbs - Spirit Week Showdown*, *The Magnificent Mya Tibbs - The Wall Of Fame Game*, *The Magnificent Mya Tibbs - Mya In The Middle*

WHAT WAS THE MOST MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE OF AMPLIFY BLACK STORIES FOR YOU?

The information provided on where and how to market Black children's books was empowering.

ABOUT THE BROWN BOOKSHELF AND THE WORKING GROUP CONT.



TRACEY BAPTISTE

traceybaptiste.com

Tracey Baptiste is a *New York Times* bestselling author, a teacher at Lesley University's MFA in creative writing, a former elementary school teacher, and a freelance editor. She is best known for *The Jumbies* series, including *The Jumbies*, *Rise of the Jumbies*, and *The Jumbie God's Revenge*; her debut picture book, *Looking for a Jumbie*; and *Minecraft: The Crash*. She writes fiction and nonfiction mostly for young people.

PUBLISHED WORKS INCLUDE: *The Jumbies*, *Rise of the Jumbies*, *The Jumbie God's Revenge*, *Looking for a Jumbie*, *African Icons: Ten People Who Shaped History*

WHAT WAS THE MOST MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE OF AMPLIFY BLACK STORIES FOR YOU?

Being in community with the cohort of creatives and watching as they supported one other was by far my favorite part of the whole experience.



PAULA CHASE-HYMAN

paulachasehyman.com

Co-founder of the award-winning blog The Brown Bookshelf, Paula Chase-Hyman is a longtime Inclusion Jedi and advocate for diversifying the type of fiction featuring Black characters that's highlighted among educators, librarians, and parents. She's presented and blogged about the need to expand the focus beyond children's literature that centers the pain of the Black experience and is the 2021 recipient of the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents (ALAN) Konigsberg Award for her advocacy. Chase-Hyman is the author of nine children's books. *So Done* (Greenwillow/HarperCollins), her critically acclaimed middle-grade debut, was named a 2018 Kirkus Reviews Best Book. *So Done* and its companions, *Dough Boys* and *Turning Point*, are blazing the trail for books that tackle tough and sometimes taboo topics for younger readers. Her latest novel, *Keeping It Real*, focuses on classism in the Black community and the impact of family secrets.

PUBLISHED WORKS INCLUDE: *Turning Point*, *Dough Boys*, *So Done*, *So Not the Drama*, *Don't Get It Twisted*, *That's What's Up!*, *Who You Wit'?*, *Flipping the Script*, *Keeping It Real*

WHAT WAS THE MOST MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE OF AMPLIFY BLACK STORIES FOR YOU?

Sitting in a session and seeing my HarperCollins editor attending filled me with hope that publishers will think about what their Black authors need differently. It felt great that publishing professionals understood the importance of their presence.

ABOUT THE BROWN BOOKSHELF AND THE WORKING GROUP CONT.



CHERYL WILLIS HUDSON

CherylWillisHudson.com; JustUsBooks.com

Cheryl Willis Hudson is an author and co-founder/editorial director of Just Us Books, Inc., an independent company that focuses on Black interest books for young people. Cheryl has authored over two dozen books for young children, including *Bright Eyes, Brown Skin* (with Bernette Ford), *AFRO-BETS ABC Book, From Where I Stand*, and *Clothes I Love to Wear* (Marimba Books); *Hands Can and Construction Zone* (Candlewick Press); and *My Friend Maya Loves to Dance* (Abrams). She also co-edited with Wade Hudson the middle grade anthologies *We Rise, We Resist, We Raise Our Voices, The Talk: Conversations About Race, Love and Truth*, and *Recognize! An Anthology Honoring and Amplifying Black Life* published by Crown Books for Young Readers.

PUBLISHED WORKS INCLUDE: *Bright Eyes, Brown Skin, My Friend Maya Loves to Dance, AFRO-BETS ABC Book, Hands Can, BRAVE.Black.FIRST., Recognize! An Anthology Honoring and Amplifying Black Life*



WADE HUDSON

justusbooks.com

Wade Hudson is president of Just Us Books, a children and young adult book publishing company he and his wife Cheryl founded in 1988. He is also the author of many books for young readers. His most recent titles include *Recognize! An Anthology Honoring and Amplifying Black Life* (co-edited with his wife, Cheryl) and the coming-of-age-memoir *Defiant: Growing Up in the Jim Crow South*, both published by Crown Books for Young Readers.

PUBLISHED WORKS INCLUDE: *Recognize! An Anthology Honoring and Amplifying Black Life, Defiant: Growing Up in the Jim Crow South*

WHAT WAS THE MOST MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE OF AMPLIFY BLACK STORIES FOR YOU?

I have thoroughly enjoyed and been inspired by the opportunity to connect and share with old friends and new friends in our kidlit community.

ABOUT THE BROWN BOOKSHELF AND THE WORKING GROUP CONT.



OLUGBEMISOLA RHUDAY-PERKOVICH

olugbemisolabooks.com

Olugbemisola Rhuday-Perkovich was the “new kid” at school many times over, in more than one country. She wasn’t allowed much TV, so she made up many, many stories. Her wide-ranging life experiences support her work as the author of several children’s books in both fiction and nonfiction, picture books through young adult. Her works include *Operation Sisterhood, It Doesn’t Take A Genius, Two Naomis* (co-authored with Audrey Vernick), which was nominated for an NAACP Image Award, *Saving Earth: Climate Change and the Fight for Our Future*, and more. Olugbemisola has extensive experience as a teaching artist, literacy educator, and writing instructor for children, families, and adults. She is a member of The Brown Bookshelf, former We Need Diverse Books board member, and editor of the WNDB anthology *The Hero Next Door*. She lives with her family in NYC, where she loves walking, discovering good eats, and making in many forms.

PUBLISHED WORKS INCLUDE: *Operation Sisterhood, It Doesn’t Take A Genius, Someday Is Now: Clara Luper and the 1958 Oklahoma City Sit-Ins, Two Naomis, Naomis Too, Above and Beyond: NASA’s Journey to Tomorrow, The Sun Does Shine (Young Readers’ Edition), Saving Earth: Climate Change and the Fight for Our Future, 8th Grade Superzero, Mae Makes A Way: The True Story of Mae Reeves, Hat and History Maker*

WHAT WAS THE MOST MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE OF AMPLIFY BLACK STORIES FOR YOU?

I’m so grateful that I was able to be in conversation with such a diverse and dynamic group of the Black children’s literature community. And that was just a tiny sample of us! It was nourishing, and a regular reminder of how powerful and vital our stories are.

ABOUT THE BROWN BOOKSHELF AND THE WORKING GROUP CONT.



Photo Credit: Melissa R. Campbell

KELLY STARLING LYONS

kellystarlinglyons.com

Kelly Starling Lyons is a founding member of The Brown Bookshelf, teaching artist, and award-winning children's book author. Her 20 titles span fiction and nonfiction, easy readers, picture books, and chapter books, standalone books and series. Accolades her books have won include a Geisel Honor for *Ty's Travels: Zip, Zoom*, a Christopher Award for *Tiara's Hat Parade*, a Caldecott Honor for *Going Down Home with Daddy*, Notable Social Studies Trade Book for *Sing a Song: How "Lift Every Voice and Sing" Inspired Generations* and Junior Library Guild designation for *Dream Builder: The Story of Architect Philip Freelon*. Kelly was the 2021 Piedmont Laureate for the Triangle area of North Carolina and was included on *Good Morning America's* 2021 Inspiration List: Who's Making Black History.

PUBLISHED WORKS INCLUDE: *Jada Jones: Sky Watcher*, *Ty's Travels: Lab Magic*, *Dream Builder: The Story of Architect Philip Freelon*, *Sing a Song: How "Lift Every Voice and Sing" Inspired Generations*, *Tiara's Hat Parade*, *Going Down Home with Daddy*

WHAT WAS THE MOST MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE OF AMPLIFY BLACK STORIES FOR YOU?

I loved the valuable information that was shared by our featured speakers and the warm community created by our talented storytellers.



RENÉE WATSON

renewatson.net

Renée Watson is a #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of books for young readers. She has received several awards, including the Newbery Honor, Coretta Scott King Award, and an NAACP Image Award nomination. Many of Renée's books are inspired by her childhood growing up in the Pacific Northwest. Her writing explores themes of home, identity, body image, and the intersections of race, class, and gender. Renée splits her time between Portland, OR and New York City.

PUBLISHED WORKS INCLUDE: *The 1619 Project: Born on the Water*, *Piecing Me Together*, *Ways to Make Sunshine*

WHAT WAS THE MOST MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE OF AMPLIFY BLACK STORIES FOR YOU?

I loved being a part of the initial planning and visioning for this program. It is so powerful to think about our first meeting and reflect on what it became.

ABOUT THE BROWN BOOKSHELF AND THE WORKING GROUP CONT.



KATURA HUDSON

katurajudson.com

Katura J. Hudson is a children's book author, editor, and communication strategist. She got her start in publishing as a kid working for Just Us Books, the children's publishing company her parents founded in 1988, and has since edited and led marketing campaigns for dozens of children's books. Her own books include *I'm A Big Brother Now* and *I'm A Big Sister Now*, which won the 2019 Benjamin Franklin Award for picture books (both illustrated by Sylvia Walker).

PUBLISHED WORKS INCLUDE: *I'm A Big Brother Now*, *I'm A Big Sister Now*

WHAT WAS THE MOST MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE OF AMPLIFY BLACK STORIES FOR YOU?

When Dr. Nancy Tolson pulled out *Stevie* by John Steptoe, I rushed to the bookshelf to get my copy, too. I think it was the kickoff to Amplify Black Stories, and that really set the tone for me. We have a such a rich Black kidlit canon. It's so important that we honor it.



DR. EBONY ELIZABETH THOMAS

ebonyelizabeththomas.com

Dr. Ebony Elizabeth Thomas is Associate Professor in the Joint Program in English and Education at the University of Michigan's School of Education. A former Detroit Public Schools teacher and National Academy of Education/Spencer Foundation Postdoctoral Fellow, her most recent book is *The Dark Fantastic: Race and the Imagination from Harry Potter to the Hunger Games* (NYU Press, 2019), which won the World Fantasy Award and the British Fantasy Award and was a finalist for the inaugural IGNYTE Award. Her expertise on race and representation in children's and young adult literature has been sought after nationally and internationally. She has been interviewed by MSNBC, the BBC, the *New York Times*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and the *Chicago Tribune*, to name a few. She is a former writer for the *Kirkus Review* children's book section and has written book reviews for the *Los Angeles Times*. She is a past National Book Award judge for Young People's Literature and is a current member of the United States Board on Books for Young People.

PUBLISHED WORKS INCLUDE: *The Dark Fantastic: Race and the Imagination from Harry Potter to the Hunger Games*

WHAT WAS THE MOST MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE OF AMPLIFY BLACK STORIES FOR YOU?

I loved the storytellers session! It was beautiful and brought me to tears.

ABOUT THE BROWN BOOKSHELF AND THE WORKING GROUP CONT.



EILEEN ROBINSON

reycraftbooks.com
move-books.com

Eileen Robinson has worked with children's writers all over the world for over 20 years. Former Executive Editor at Scholastic and Editorial Director at Harcourt, she has acquired published works from the UK and Italy and created original works for US markets. One of the very few African Americans to own an imprint, she is the founder of Move Books and consultant and editor for Reycraft Books. She teaches the art of revision with Harold Underdown at their annual Revision Retreat through The Highlights Foundation as well as individual workshops. She also serves on the Connecticut Digital Library Board, helping connect new voices with readers as well as working to amplify the voices of people of color.

WHAT WAS THE MOST MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE OF AMPLIFY BLACK STORIES FOR YOU?

The most memorable experience in Amplify Black Voices for me was feeling heard. For the first time all of us were in one space together, as colleagues and as human beings, talking about the issues, getting beneath the skin even when you could see it was painful (on both sides). We were all teachers and students in this process. But even more joyous was hearing some of the action-steps people were taking to effect change. DOING is the greatest reward.

RESOURCE GUIDE



CRYSTAL ALLEN | crystalallenbooks.com

ABOUT CRYSTAL: Middle-grade children's book author.

AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Middle-grade humor, chapter book humor, presentations on writing humor



TRACEY BAPTISTE | traceybaptiste.com

ABOUT TRACEY: Tracey Baptiste is an author, editor, and teacher.

AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Editing fiction and nonfiction, writing fiction and nonfiction



VANESSA BRANTLEY-NEWTON | vanessabrantleynewton.com

ABOUT VANESSA: If our children can see themselves, then they can be themselves and then free themselves.

AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Diversity and inclusion, illustration, character-building, visual storytelling



REGINA BROOKS | serendipitylit.com

ABOUT REGINA: Regina Brooks is the founder and president of Serendipity Literary Agency and has represented and established a diverse base of award-winning clients. She is a stalwart champion of creators of content for children and young adults. She is the author of *Writing Great Books for Young Adults*.

AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Picture books, chapter books, middle-grade, young adult, and nonfiction in all categories



BEVERLY FIELDS BURNETTE | NCABStellers.org

ABOUT BEVERLY: President of NC Assoc. of Black Storytellers, Inc.

AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Retired school social worker, published poet/writer, lay historian (Researcher of my own Black family genealogy), portrayer of Zora Neale Hurston, lecturer of United States Colored Troops (USCT) from the Civil War and Black NC history



EDITH CAMPBELL | edicottonquilt.com

ABOUT Edith: Edith is a librarian and public scholar who works to promote equity, inclusion, and justice in youth literature.

AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Representation in young adult literature, information literacy, critical literacy, researching anthropomorphic Blackface in picture books

RESOURCE GUIDE CONT.



PAULA CHASE-HYMAN | paulachasehyman.com

ABOUT PAULA: Paula Chase-Hyman is a critically acclaimed author of nine children's books, co-founder of The Brown Bookshelf, and a longtime advocate for diversifying the type of fiction featuring Black characters that's highlighted among educators, librarians, and parents.

AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Advocacy, literary inclusion, storytelling



CHERYL DAVIS | authorsguild.org

ABOUT CHERYL: Cheryl is General Counsel for The Authors Guild and an award-winning playwright and TV writer who has long combined her creative passion with her legal work.

AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Intellectual property for the commercial arena



ANTWAN EADY | linktr.ee/antwaneady

ABOUT ANTWAN: Antwan Eady is a children's book author.

AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Writing, picture books, graphic novels



SARACIEA J. FENNEL | saracieafennell.com

ABOUT SARACIEA: An award-winning book publicist and editor and author of *Wild Tongues Can't Be Tamed*.

AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Publicity, events, nonfiction writing, YA fiction, and speculative fiction



CHERYL WILLIS HUDSON | CherylWillisHudson.com, JustUsBooks.com

ABOUT CHERYL: Cheryl Willis Hudson is an author and co-founder/editorial director of Just Us Books, Inc., an independent company that focuses on Black interest books for young people.

AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Editorial direction, art direction, creating picture books, African American history and culture, biographies



KATURA HUDSON | katurajhudson.com

ABOUT KATURA: An author, editor, and marketing strategist, Katura Hudson works to produce and promote children's books that center and celebrate Black people, history, and culture.

AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Editorial, social media, public relations

RESOURCE GUIDE CONT.



WADE HUDSON | justusbooks.com

ABOUT WADE: A publisher and writer committed to diversity and inclusion in kidlit.

AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Editorial, marketing, publicity



TROY D. JOHNSON | aalbc.com

ABOUT TROY: Troy celebrates Black culture through books for all readers to enjoy through his popular website AALBC.com, which, since 1998, sells books, showcases authors, and more.

AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Bookselling, book marketing and promotion: display advertisements, email newsletter, search engine optimization, SMS text messaging



VANESSE LLOYD-SGAMBATI | vlloydsgam@aol.com

ABOUT VANESSE: Publishing publicity and marketing specialist with a focus on diverse children's books.

AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Publicity, marketing, book curator, bookseller, radio and podcast host



KELLY STARLING LYONS | kellystarlinglyons.com

ABOUT KELLY: Kelly Starling Lyons is an award-winning children's book author whose mission is to center Black heroes, celebrate family, friendship, and heritage, and show all kids the storyteller they hold inside.

AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Award-winning author, founding member of The Brown Bookshelf; teaching artist; accomplished presenter on topics ranging from writing to diversity, equity, and inclusion and history; The Authors Guild council member



MAHOGANY BOOKS | mahoganybooks.com

ABOUT MAHOGANY BOOKS: Owners/Founders: Derrick and Ramunda Young.

AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Curating lists of Black books; working with organizations to procure books for conferences, classrooms, corporations and more; hosting dyadic author conversations while creating community

RESOURCE GUIDE CONT.



TORREY MALDONADO | torreymaldonado.com

ABOUT TORREY: Praised by two NYC Chancellors for being a top culturally responsive educator who has taught for nearly 25 years, Torrey Maldonado writes fast-paced, compelling stories inspired by his experiences born and raised in Brooklyn, NY and his students' experiences; his books have garnered many starred reviews and won spots on "Best Books of the Year" lists.

AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Relatable books loved by educators and kids and often used as a "One School-One Book Reads" across our nation, thin books under 190 pages that are thick with complexity, voice, heartwarming stories, hit with avid and reluctant readers, heavy topics in light and fun ways



KWAME MBALIA | kwamembalia.com

ABOUT KWAME: Black stories, Black futures, Black is a rainbow.

AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Writing, Parenting semi-successfully



MARY MCCUE | mmccue@penguinrandomhouse.com

ABOUT MARY: I have been with Random House Children's Books for seven years and my current role is Senior Director, Publicity & Strategic Communications.

AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Public Relations, communications, media relations, leadership



BREANNA MCDANIEL | breannajmcdaniel.com

ABOUT BREANNA: Breanna J. McDaniel is the co-founder of REIYL (Researchers Exploring Inclusive Youth Literature) and an author, book reviewer, education consultant, and researcher.

AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Representations of Black children in contemporary picture books



KELLY MCGAULEY

ABOUT KELLY: Kelly McGauley is the senior director of trade marketing at Random House Children's Books, focused on developing creative marketing strategies across a wide range of books for young readers of all ages.

AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Copywriting, advertising, critical thinking, and creative problem-solving

RESOURCE GUIDE CONT.



DR. KIM PARKER | drkimparker.org

ABOUT DR. PARKER: I'm an educator, children's and young adult literature advocate, and I also work with educators to normalize the high achievement of Black and other POC children.

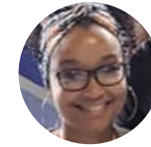
AREAS OF EXPERTISE: African American literacy, African American children's and young adult literature, #disrupttexts



LAURA PEGRAM | kwelijournal.org

ABOUT LAURA: Laura Pegram is the founder and executive director of Kweli and a multidisciplinary artist who is influencing a new generation of aspiring writers.

AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Writing, mentorship, education



KRENICE RAMSEY | youngBlackandlit.org

ABOUT KRENICE: I am the cofounder of Young, Black & Lit, an organization providing children's books featuring Black characters to youth at no cost to the youth or their families.

AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Diverse children's books



OLUGBEMISOLA RHUDAY-PERKOVICH | olugbemisolabooks.com

ABOUT OLUGBEMISOLA: Olugbemisola is a teaching artist and author of picture books through young adult works.

AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Character development, writing dialogue, exploring story structure and form, narrative nonfiction, engaging young artists



EILEEN ROBINSON | reycraftbooks.com, move-books.com

ABOUT EILEEN: Editor/publisher Eileen Robinson loves the power of stories and helping authors revise and has worked in children's publishing as an editor for more than 20 years.

AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Editing, publishing



DR. EBONY ELIZABETH THOMAS | ebonyelizabeththomas.com

ABOUT DR. THOMAS: Dr. Ebony Elizabeth Thomas, Associate Professor in the Joint Program in English and Education, University of Michigan is a career educator and notable scholar of books and media for young people.

AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Children's literature, young adult literature, science fiction, fantasy, history

RESOURCE GUIDE CONT.



DR. NANCY D. TOLSON | ananse.nancy@gmail.com

ABOUT DR. TOLSON: Nancy is a storyteller, scholar, and diverse children’s literature specialist who celebrates the joy of Black cultural stories in books and through the oral tradition.

AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Professional development for educators and publishers on the history and artistry of Black children’s literature, the oral beauty of Black folklore (African, Caribbean, southern, and contemporary), Ananse the Spider, and Black literature and culture



JULIA E. TORRES | juliaetorres.com

ABOUT JULIA: I’m a librarian, scholar, teacher, and believer in books as bridges to a higher humanity.

AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Librarianship, secondary education, creative writing



VERA WARREN | readcbc.com

ABOUT VERA: While working as a substitute teacher, Vera founded Community Book Center. It began as a home based community service nearly 40 years ago, and now serves New Orleans and the world to “highlight the contributions African people throughout the diaspora have made to world civilization; debunking the myth that our history began with slavery.”

AREAS OF EXPERTISE: The preservation and celebration of African cultural heritage



DONNA WASHINGTON | dlwstorytelling.com

ABOUT DONNA: Donna Washington is an author who creates picture books that are meant to be voiced, shared, and read out loud as well as being a professional storyteller who brings tales to life with vocal pyrotechnics, an elastic face, and wild characters.

AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Coaching, spoken word vocal technique, workshop leader, storytelling, personal narrative coaching, storytelling technique, creative writing



MEMPHIS WASHINGTON | MemphisSWashington@gmail.com

ABOUT MEMPHIS: Memphis is an Uptown NYC-based community programs facilitator with a focus on youth, LGBTQ+ issues, environmental justice, and literature.

AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Facilitation, community stewardship, disability justice, bookselling



RENÉE WATSON | renewatson.net

ABOUT RENÉE: Renée Watson is a #1 New York Times Bestselling author of books for young readers.

AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Picture books, middle-grade, young adult, poetry, teaching

RESOURCE GUIDE CONT.



ALICIA D. WILLIAMS | aliciadwilliams.com

ABOUT ALICIA: Alicia is an oral storyteller and educator and holds an MFA in writing for children and young adults; she infuses her storytelling passion and love for history in her novels and picture books.

AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Writing diverse characters, character development, voice, picture book biographies, tackling tough themes in kidlit, arts-integration in the classroom



PHOEBE YEH | pyeh@penguinrandomhouse.com

ABOUT PHOEBE: I've been a children's book editor for more than 35 years and now I'm a co-publisher at Crown Books for Young Readers, with a particular focus on diverse books by diverse creators.

AREAS OF EXPERTISE: Middle grade contemporary fiction, YA contemporary fiction, MG GN, select nonfiction picture books