



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Amplify Black Stories Announces 24-Storyteller Cohort

Cohort will participate in program of connection & bridge-building with the children's publishing industry

Honesdale, PA – In partnership with the Highlights Foundation, The Brown Bookshelf is proud to announce the cohort of storytellers selected for Amplify Black Stories, a six-month program focused on supporting Black storytellers, confronting industry challenges, and fostering change.

The cohort is comprised of 24 debut, midlist, and vanguard Black authors and illustrators across all children's literature genres and formats who live and work in the United States, Canada, and Europe. They include: Andrea J. Loney, Brittany J. Thurman, Bryan Patrick Avery, Cathy Ann Johnson-Conforto, Christine Kendall, Debbie Ann Taylor, Dinah Johnson, Hasani Claxton, Janae Marks, Judy Allen Dodson, K. Tempest Bradford, Leah Henderson, Lisa Moore Ramée, Lisa Stringfellow, Mélina Mangal, Nadia L. Hohn, Nikki Shannon Smith, Pamela M. Tuck, Ronni Davis, Sharee Miller, Sharon Langley, TeMika Grooms, Tonya Duncan Ellis, and Valerie Bolling.

The storyteller track kicked off with the first in a series of online workshops on April 25, 2021, and runs through November.

"We're excited about this group's passion and ability to change the timbre of how Black stories for kids and young adults today are promoted and marketed," said Paula Chase, author and The Brown Bookshelf Co-Founder. "Our ability to empower creatives to advocate for their stories can lead to social change, now and for future generations."

The application process for Amplify Black Stories delved into each Storyteller's professional goals for participation; their connection to The Brown Bookshelf's mission of bringing awareness to the myriad Black voices writing for young readers; and their views on the intersection of art and activism.

"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," said Ronni Davis, author of *When the Stars Lead to You*.

“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,” said Leah Henderson, author of *A Day for Rememberin’*.

Throughout the program, the storytellers will take deep dives into discussions of craft, community, publishing, marketing, and sales.

In separate sessions, publisher and industry professional sponsors of Amplify Black Stories will participate in their own cohort track, designed to spur conversations about and create lasting change for equity and inclusion in the children’s publishing industry.

“Twenty companies and organizations answered The Brown Bookshelf’s industry-wide call to action to create meaningful change in the children’s publishing industry by sponsoring this program,” says George Brown, Executive Director of the Highlights Foundation. “Their willingness to actively participate in the conversation and the work required to change systems is what makes this program different.”

Amplify Black Stories sponsors include HarperCollins Children’s Books, Benchmark Education, Bloomsbury, Highlights for Children, Candlewick Press, Stimola Literary Studio, Charlesbridge, Workman Publishing, Reycraft Books, Random House Children’s Books, Andrea Brown Literary Agency Inc., Penguin Random House (Penguin Young Readers), Boyds Mills & Kane, Children’s Book Council, Lerner Publishing Group, Just Us Books, Inc., Renée Watson, Gallt & Zacker Literary Agency, Hachette Book Group, Serendipity Literary Agency, and The Author’s Guild.

A list of titles from the storyteller cohort and members of The Brown Bookshelf is available at [THE LITERARY CAFE - BOOKS & EVENTS Bookstore Amplify Black Stories Book List](#), curated by The African American Children’s Book Project. It showcases a wide range of topics and talent from the Black Literary Community, and includes both non-fiction and fiction titles that will empower, enlighten, and enrich all readers.

Amplify Black Stories is a living commitment to [The Brown Bookshelf’s 2020 kidlit industry Call to Action](#). It’s a partnership initiative between The Brown Bookshelf and the [Highlights Foundation](#) to empower Black kid lit creatives with resources and community; and promote publisher-collaborations to craft detailed actionable programs of support for Black kid lit creatives. [See a full description of the program.](#)

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