

CULTURALLY RELEVANT BOOKS



MY RAINBOW

By DeShanna Neal and Trinity Neal, Illustrated by Art Twink

Grade Level: PreK–3

Trinity and DeShanna Neal wrote *My Rainbow* based on their own experiences. *My Rainbow* is a heartwarming story about a Black family and their transgender daughter. When Trinity shares with her mother that she’s a transgender girl, the family is full of love and support for her, and Trinity is able to fully express who she is to her family. Given the prevalence of anti-Blackness and anti-LGBTQ+ sentiments in society, and specifically the violence against Black trans girls and women, it is imperative that our schools are inclusive and affirming of Black trans lives. This positive story opens space for discussion around race, gender, gender expression and stereotypes, and family.

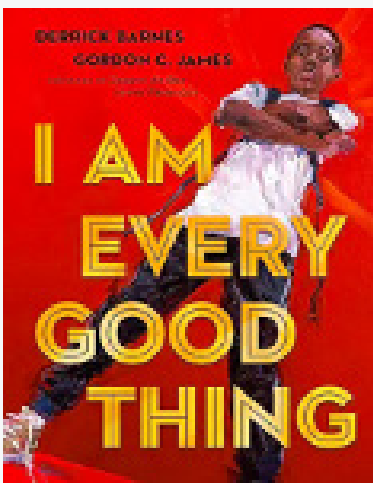


YOUR NAME IS A SONG

By Jamilah Thompkins-Bigelow, Illustrated by Luisa Uribe

Grade Level: PreK–3

This book is a celebration of Black culture and the origins of names. In the story, a young Black girl, Kora-Jalimuso, leaves school upset because her peers and teachers keep mispronouncing her name—a far too common experience for many of our students from non-dominant backgrounds. Not only does this story explore a beautiful bond between an African American and Muslim mother and daughter, but it also creates space for lessons around respect, culture, identity, school, family, and the origins of names.

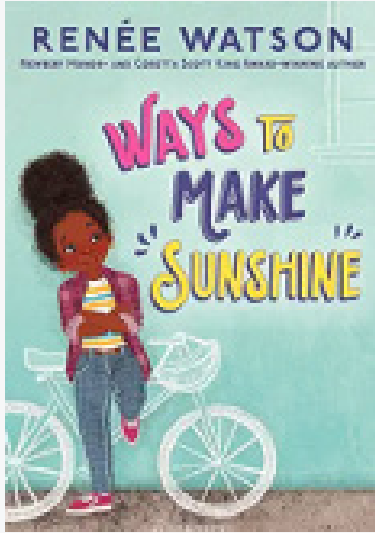


I AM EVERY GOOD THING

By Derrick Barnes, Illustrated by Gordon C. James

Grade Level: PreK–5

Part of the responsibility of a culturally responsive educator is to provide counter-narratives to commonly held negative beliefs around minoritized children. Derrick Barnes’ book is centered on Black boy joy, excellence, and potential. Gordon C. James skillfully illustrated the beauties of Black boyhood. This culturally responsive children’s book is a message to all young kids, especially Black boys, to be who they are with confidence and pride.



WAYS TO MAKE SUNSHINE

By Renée Watson, Illustrated by Nina Mata

Grade Level: 3-5

This is the first book in a new series about the life and family of a young Black girl named Ryan Hart. The book begins with Ryan's family moving to a new home because they could not afford their current one. Ryan is challenged by the move, but she is strong, kind, and creative, and knows how to make sunshine out of hard times. Her family is loving, and her relationship with her brother is relatable. This series will be joyous, and it is a necessary uplifting example of the life of a loving Black girl, her family, and her friendships.

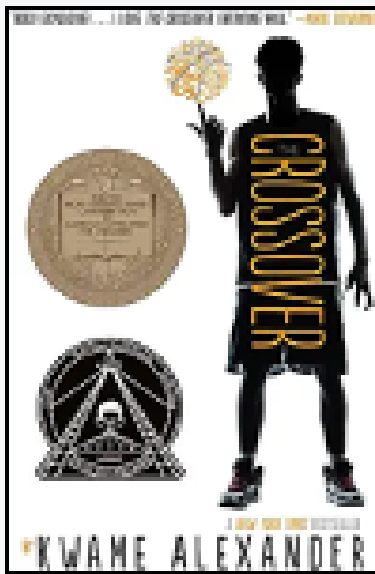


THE LAST LAST-DAY-OF-SUMMER AND THE LAST MIRROR ON THE LEFT

By Lamar Giles, Illustrated by Dapo Adeola

Grade Level: 3-7

These are two books from the Alston Boys series. The books are unpredictable stories of the joys and adventures of two Black boys named Otto and Sheed. The two cousins have their differences but are able to combine their strengths to travel through time, work through challenges, and complete their quests. The boys are relatable, clever, creative, and caring, and they are wonderful strengths-based and imaginative examples of Black boyhood.



THE CROSSOVER

By Kwame Alexander

Grade Level: 6-10

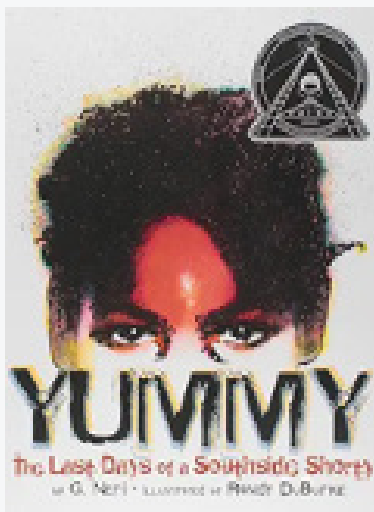
Kwame Alexander's The Crossover is far more than just a book about basketball. Alexander brilliantly uses basketball as a medium to teach valuable life lessons. The novel, written in verse, centers around Josh and JB, two deep, complex Black boys with a love for basketball. Alexander is intentional in his portrayal of Black male characters to avoid commonly-held, negative stereotypes about Black men and boys. This unique coming-of-age story is powerful with its positive depiction of Black boys and men.



YOU SHOULD SEE ME IN A CROWN

By Leah Johnson
Grade Level: 7-12

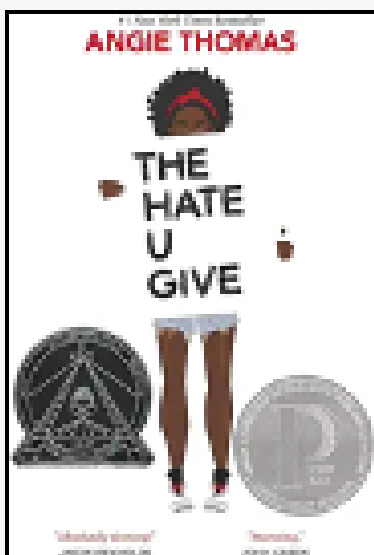
Set in a wealthy, small town in Indiana, *You Should See Me in a Crown* is a story starring Liz, a young girl who feels too Black and not rich enough to fit in. Liz cannot wait to leave the small-town life, get a scholarship, and study pre-med at her dream college, Pennington College. Liz struggles with feeling she should fit in while still staying true to herself. Then, Liz falls hard for the new girl at school. Their relationship takes off, and Liz ends up in a prom dilemma she never imagined. The book raises discussions about racism, homophobia, anxiety, financial hardship, and relatable high school and family moments.



YUMMY: THE LAST DAYS OF A SOUTHSIDE SHORTY

By G. Neri, Illustrated by Randy DuBurke
Grade Level: 7-12

This graphic novel tells the story of an 11-year-old named Robert “Yummy” Sandifer. While his story does not have a heartwarming ending, it does provide a valuable lesson to students about decisions and the importance of quality friends. Moreover, the story of Yummy can be relatable for young people who reside in communities with a heavy gang presence. *Yummy: The Last Days of a Southside Shorty* is an important text not only for students but also for educators. The story of Robert Sandifer is a true one about the unfortunate perils that many Black boys face when they don’t get the support and care that they deserve.



THE HATE U GIVE

By Angie Thomas
Grade Level: 9-12

This bestselling novel is perfect for secondary students of all cultures and backgrounds. Thomas’ novel helps introduce young readers to the complex intersection of race and class in the United States. The story is told through the eyes of Starr Carter, a 16-year-old Black girl who lives in a low-income community of color but attends an affluent, mostly white school. Starr constantly struggles to make sense of her two worlds. This novel can be a powerful teaching tool to begin in-class conversations about topics including police brutality, discrimination, inequity, and youth activism.