

# Voices from the USA: Publishing for Young People in the United States



Illustration, Kadir Nelson © 2021. From *The Undefeated*, published by Andersen Press.



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# Editorial

Voices from the United States ... we must all feel that we know the United States as yet another *New York Times* best seller is flagged across the cover of the latest young-adult novel, or we look at 'classic' texts that have become so much part of our own lives here. But do we really know what is happening in the world of children's publishing in the USA? Perhaps we are not seeing a complete picture. The contributors to this issue of *IBBYLink* certainly present a much richer, wider and edgier reality where questions and issues are being urgently debated and a status quo is challenged. Of course, the US publishing scene is vast and complex. Evelyn Freeman provides a concise overview of some of the topics and movements that make up the scene from Own Voices and the call for greater diversity to picture-book biographies and the rise of graphic novels.

Diversity – representation – these are very much to the fore as the white hegemony is challenged. Pam Dix introduces us to a range of exciting Black American illustrators, many active since the 1990s, whose work some may recognise now but others are all too often not known here. Kadir Nelson's illustration which we feature on the cover is both a celebration but also draws attention to those undiscovered. In the same way, Debbie Reese's article highlighting the awarding of the Caldecott Medal to Michaela Goade, the first Native American to win this award, makes for a salutary read. There is so much for us to discover and to learn.

What quickly becomes apparent is, in fact, how little comes over to us – or how many authors are no longer in print here – Julius Lester, Virginia Hamilton, even Jacqueline Woodson. However, as the Black Lives Matter movement has raised the profile of

this issue we can hope to see more authors crossing the ocean to inspire authors here. Jewell Parker Rhodes draws attention to how the movement has added urgency to the writing of stories that truly reflect American society and Black lives. We are fortunate that her novel, *Ghost Boys*, heart-breaking, hard hitting, has been published in the UK, and she talks about why she wanted to tell this story – and indeed, why she writes. We must hope that her next book – as radical in its choice of topic – *Paradise on Fire* will be available for all our children to read.

It is not just authors however, who drop from view but illustrators too. Jon Agee is one. Luckily his work, full of his quirky humour, is once more delighting young readers in this country. A number of his books have now been published by Scallywag Press, including *The Incredible Painting of Felix Clousseau*, which first appeared in 1988. Looking back he reflects on his friendship with a well-known illustrator who for many will have created images that will be inextricably linked to their childhood memories – and whose work is familiar still, Maurice Sendak.

Thank you to all our contributors for opening windows and bringing us some very different views of the publishing for young people in the USA.

**Ferelith Hordon**

# African American Children's Book Illustrators: A Glimpse into a Rich Story

Pam Dix is currently the chair of IBBY UK and of the Akili Trust. In her working life she was head of a school library service and a lecturer in children's literature in education. This article has been stimulated by her findings when researching illustrators for a history of illustration in information books, working with Ruth Thomson. Also by attending a panel at the Bologna Book Fair in 2019, 'Black Books Matter: African American Colours and Words', with, amongst others, Claudette McLinn (chair of the Coretta Scott King Book Awards), Rudine Sims Bishop, Christopher Myers and Leonard Marcus, and, of course, by many years of collecting books on trips to the USA.

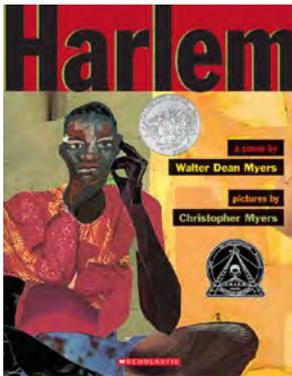
One of the pleasures of my current research into illustration in children's information books is the opportunity to look around the world, at histories, styles and approaches in various countries. I have been particularly fascinated to explore the world of African American children's book illustrators, very few of them published in the UK.

It was in 1974 that the first Coretta Scott King Award for illustration was presented, four years after the award for writing was established. In the 50 years since, the list of winners represents a dazzling range of subjects and illustration styles. The award has undoubtedly influenced the publishing industry as well as giving status and value to these illustrators. It is worth noting that the awards were set up because at that time, 1970, no minority author or illustrator had been awarded the Caldecott or Newbery awards. This is no longer the case. In 1982 the CSK awards became an official part of the American Library Association, though with a separate structure.

The long history of African American contribution to children's literature, starting with W.E.B. Du Bois and *The Brownies Book* in the 1920s, is well documented in *Free Within Ourselves* (Rudine Sims Bishop, 2007). The Harlem Renaissance (1920-mid 1930s), and the work of Langston Hughes in particular, emphasised the celebration of Black life and culture and a commitment to engaging children in this story emerged. Teaching them to feel pride and dignity in their lives and to understand aspects of their heritage and culture led to a commitment to children's books. As an example, Hughes wrote five books for the newly emerging Franklin Watts First Book series between 1952 and 1960.

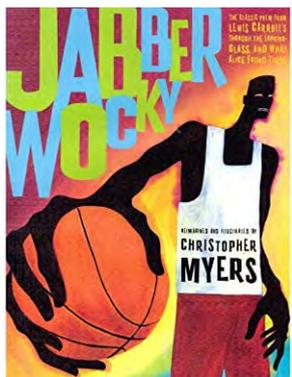
Here I explore just a very few of the illustrators I have researched, looking at a few of the subjects that frequently occur, and thinking about the approach and style they have brought to non-fiction books: the celebration of daily African American life; the exploration of history and historical links with Africa; civil rights; and music and dance.

Harlem, a distinctive geographical area of New York City, became a symbol of urban Black experience as well as a focus and a cultural centre. It was and is the subject of many books celebrating daily life.



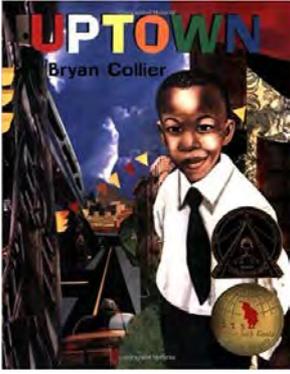
The illustrator Christopher Myers worked extensively with his father, Walter Dean Myers, a multi-award-winning writer and US Ambassador for Children's Literature. Christopher Myers is a writer, publisher and artist, committed to working across cultures. Together they explored historical, cultural and fictional commentaries on the African American experience. *Harlem* is the Myers' tribute to this symbol of metropolitan Black life and culture.

Collage is a format used by many of the illustrators that I consider, a tradition made popular by the artist Romare Beardon in the 1960s. It has been said that this improvisation with materials mirrors the African American experience of 'making something from nothing', seen also in quilt making, and, of course, improvisation is core to jazz. The life of this community is reflected in the movement and rhythm of the pages, the bold colour and the visual storytelling accompanying the poetry. Each illustration is rich with aspects of life, serving as both a mirror for those who know it and a window to help explain it to outsiders, using the Rudine Sims Bishop metaphor. (Sims Bishop, 1990)



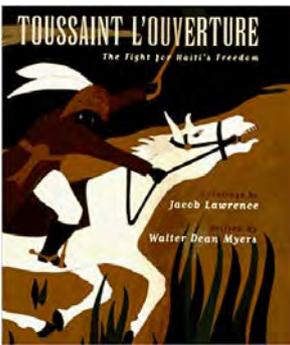
The same sensibilities can be seen in the wonderfully rich reimagining by Christopher Myers of Lewis Carroll's *Jabberwocky*, set in a basketball court.

Collier revisits the seminal story *Uptown* (John Steptoe, HarperCollins, 1970) with his own contemporary version, which he wrote and illustrated. Told through the eyes of a young boy, this perspective on the Harlem neighbourhood is captured with imagination, with pride and excitement. For example, Collier shows the architectural details of brownstone buildings as photographs of Cadbury bars, in the boy's imagination they look like they are made of chocolate. Collier says of his collage that the bringing together of different elements helps deepen your understanding of yourself and others.

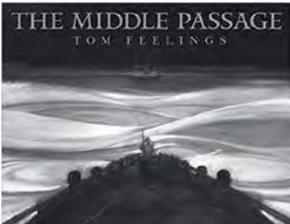


History, in America and the links to African heritage, is explored in very creative ways. Biographies are a vital part of this, providing role models and drawing out empathy and aspiration.

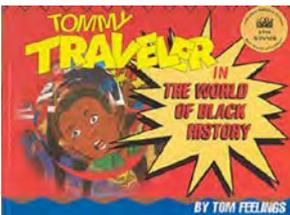
Jacob Lawrence is one of the best-known African American painters, gaining national fame in 1940 at the age of 23 for his Great Migration series, which records the movement of African Americans from the rural south to the industrialised north. Lawrence often painted in series, small paintings which he worked on simultaneously. Lawrence painted a number of series of influential figures including Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass. The series about his hero Toussaint L'Ouverture comprises 41 tempera paintings, telling the story of the liberator of Haiti. Several series were later produced as books to make them more accessible. Like Ringgold (see below), he is an example of an artist taking work outside the gallery.



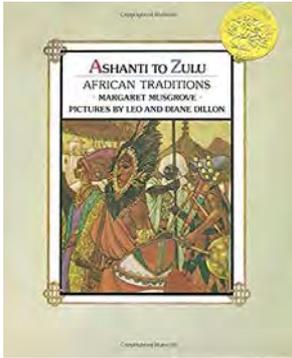
Lawrence's influences are the colours and patterns of the Harlem life. In *Toussaint L'Ouverture: The Fight for Haiti's Freedom* his core colour palette is a mixture of blacks and browns juxtaposed with touches of bright colours used for focus and dramatic effect. The images are reproduced in a mixture of whole page, half page and smaller images, creating pace and dynamism. The figures are minimalist, often shown with markings only for eyes and hair, and very distinctive clothing to reflect their roles.



Tom Feelings is one of the most influential of African American illustrators, a tribute acknowledged by many, including Kadir Nelson (see below). *The Middle Passage: White Ships/Black Cargo* has become a classic of both children's literature and art history. Telling of the most painful of histories, of enslavement, Feelings chose the wordless format saying that the experience was literally too painful for words. He felt that the picture could tell the story and the reader would see and feel what was happening. He wanted the images to have a definite point of view, to show the experience, the endurance. The artwork includes 52 black-and-white drawings made over 20 years, which were displayed in his studio and people invited to comment.

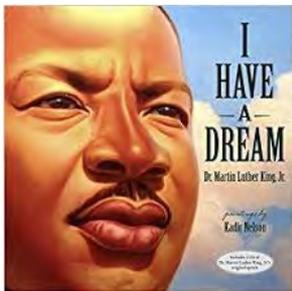


Feelings studied cartooning before illustration, and is well known for the cartoon history *Tommy Traveler in the World of Black History*, first published as a comic strip in the Harlem-based *New York Age* newspaper in 1958 and released in book format in 1991.

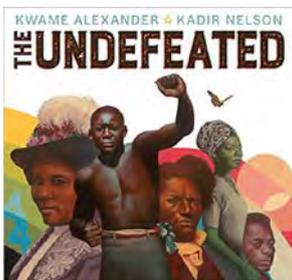


There are many books exploring the roots in Africa, travel often influencing the illustrator. Feelings, for example, worked in Ghana for some time as an illustrator and trainer. This 1976 example, based on research by the Dillons' *Ashanti to Zulu*, contains authentic and detailed portraits of 26 African tribes in a very celebratory way with beautifully composed pictures, using earthy colours and rich details of tribal life. The variety of each tribe highlights cultural difference within one country. Each image is individualised by using the same subject – house, people, animal, artefact, animal and landscape – but making each representative of that area. Borders frame each illustration making the pages appear as a work of art.

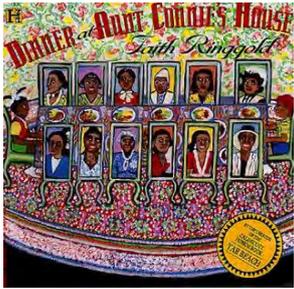
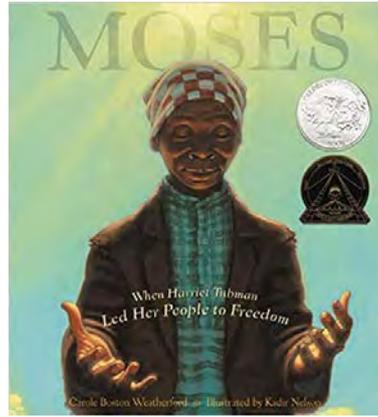
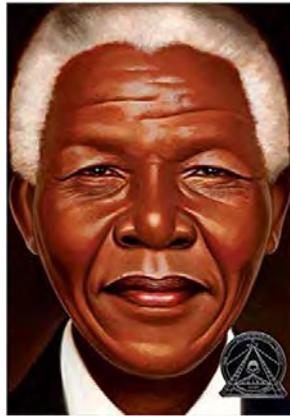
The Dillons were celebrated for their work on cultural diversity. Working as a couple, rather reminiscent of Granström and Manning, they developed the idea of the 'third artist' – a collaboration that resulted in work that is different from what either would do as individual artists.



Kadir Nelson is an award-winning illustrator and writer, interested in African American culture and history, civil rights and biographies of famous Americans. His distinctive close-up studies of faces, not dissimilar to photographs, confront the reader and draw them into the narrative. His recent award-winning *The Undefeated*, a poem written by Kwame Alexander, looking at the famous and also the overlooked heroes of Black history, has been published in the UK by Andersen Press to great acclaim.

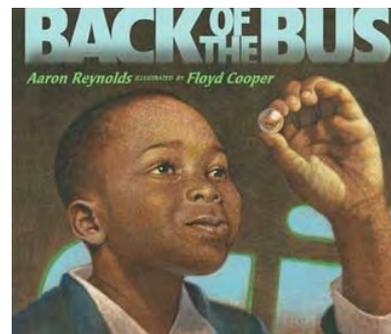
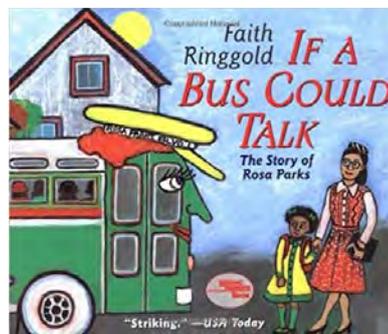


Nelson says that he wants his work to create 'characters of colour for children to identify with, learn from and admire' and to celebrate the strength and integrity of the human being and the human spirit. His illustrations are painterly with a rich palette. His book *I Have a Dream*, on Martin Luther King, focusing on the delivery of his keynote speech, is an exceptionally large format book with details of the iconic context in which the speech was delivered. It is almost cinematic in technique with shifting viewpoints, panning from oversize close-ups of his face, to a rear view of his body with the crowd looking on, then panning to a close-up of the crowd. Nelson brilliantly uses light to focus attention and create drama. He works from photographic and other images to create strong realistic illustrations. The same illustrative device can be seen in his books about Nelson Mandela (left below) and Harriet Tubman (right below).

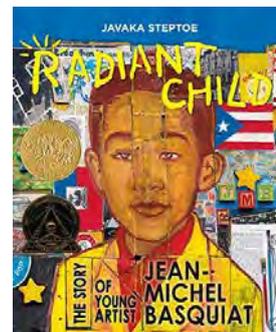
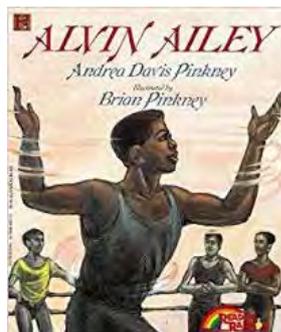
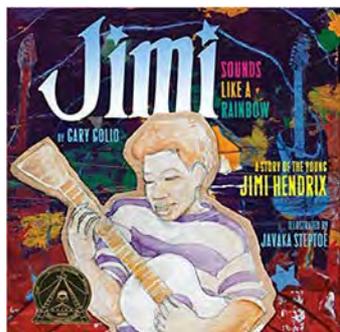


Faith Ringgold is another internationally renowned artist, author of many books for children, a former professor of art and a leading figure in the Feminist Art and Civil Rights movements in the USA. She recently had an acclaimed exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery in London and was the subject of a BBC One *Imagine* documentary. Like Lawrence, she wanted her work to reach a wider audience through children's books. She uses her quilts as a building block to explore narratives of herself and others. *Dinner at Aunt Connie's House* uses 'The Dinner Quilt', constructed in 1986, a mixture of acrylic, fabric and image, and included in the book as the dinner-table scene. Its collection of portraits of twelve significant, courageous, ground-breaking African American women is used to celebrate the message that the dreams of the young Black child can be realised. Ringgold's works always move between dream and reality, story and fact.

Books about civil rights are another key part of this story, with the illustrations encouraging an empathetic and emotive response. With a focus on the individual bravery and courage of political leaders and civil-rights activists, these books are a model of approaches to biography. An interesting study would be to focus on a person of significance, for example Rosa Parks or Martin Luther King, and compare illustrative approaches. That is beyond the space here but I would commend it as an activity.



A brief mention also about the arts, where illustrators use imaginative and vibrant approaches to look at dance, art, music and jazz, for example Gary Golli's *Jimi*.



Brian Pinkney went to dance classes before working on his Alvin Ailey book, in which movement is brilliantly captured.

Javaka Steptoe says that the challenge for the illustrator is to reinterpret the artist's work, to imagine the creative process, for example his *Radiant Child*.

This is a 'glimpse' – there are many others and some personal favourites not mentioned - Ashley Bryan, E.B. Lewis, Michele Wood. The commitment to self-empowerment for children is strong in these books and the diversity of approach and aesthetic is varied and exciting. Racism, the anguish of slavery, violence, are not avoided. Personal empathy and radical, political with a small 'p', storytelling, make for powerful illustrations.

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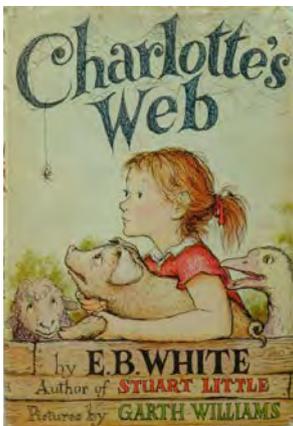
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# Trends in Children's Literature in the United States

Dr Evelyn B. Freeman is Professor Emerita at The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio. She currently serves as president of the US national section of IBBY (USBBY). She has co-authored four books, numerous book chapters and academic journal articles on topics related to children's literature. A past editor of *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature*, she is currently secretary of the Bookbird, Inc. Board. She served on the IBBY Executive Committee for four years and as IBBY vice-president for two years.



**'Why did you do all this for me?' he asked. 'I don't deserve it. I've never done anything for you'. 'You have been my friend,' replied Charlotte. 'That in itself is a tremendous thing'.  
- E.B. White, *Charlotte's Web*.**

This famous quote is from the US modern classic in children's literature, *Charlotte's Web* by E.B. White. It has been almost 70 years since we first met Charlotte and Wilbur and their beloved story of friendship. Children's literature in the United State has certainly grown and changed since 1952.

Even during a pandemic, children's book publishing in the United States experienced a growth year in 2020. Sales of print books from January through September 2020 saw an increase from the same period in 2019. Juvenile fiction saw a 9.5% increase and young-adult fiction increased 18.6% (Millot, 2020). Although the juvenile non-fiction category increased by 29.1% and young-adult non-fiction by 36.5%, 'workbooks' and 'adult colouring books' are considered in these categories respectively, which could skew the numbers. It is clear, however, that children's book publishing is doing well in the marketplace.

The Cooperative Children's Book Center at the University of Wisconsin, which maintains statistics on children's books, received 3,717 new books from US publishers in 2019, compared to 3,335 received in 2018, about an 11% increase in books received (Tyner, 2021).

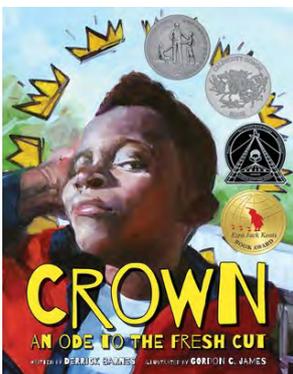
When Ferelith Hordon asked me to write about current trends in US children's books, I had many ideas. But I thought it would be prudent to seek suggestions from respected colleagues active in the field of children's literature. I informally surveyed 12 children's literature professionals, asking them to name the three to five most

significant trends in children’s literature today. They generated more interesting trends than can be discussed here, but I will expand on four of these trends: #OwnVoices; Books about Kindness; Graphic Novels are Now Mainstream; and Picture-Book Biographies. I will then briefly mention some of the other trends that were identified.

## #OwnVoices

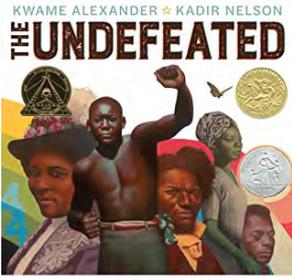
#OwnVoices was introduced by young-adult author Corrine Duyvis in 2015 to refer to marginalised authors writing about a marginalised character or experience. The term encompasses more than race to include other marginalised groups such as disability, sexual orientation and religion. However, the events of recent years in the United States have propelled issues of race in America into the forefront and has led to this important recent trend – the own voice of these marginalised people. According to the Cooperative Children’s Book Center, in 2019 of the 3,717 new books from US publishers that they received, 884 were written and/or illustrated by Black, indigenous and people of colour (Tyner, 2021).

In 2014, a grassroots group established We Need Diverse Books (diversebooks.org), a non-profit organisation to advocate changes in publishing to produce and promote literature for all young people. The organisation has many programmes, including mentorship for writers of colour.

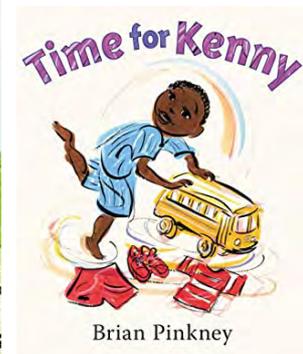
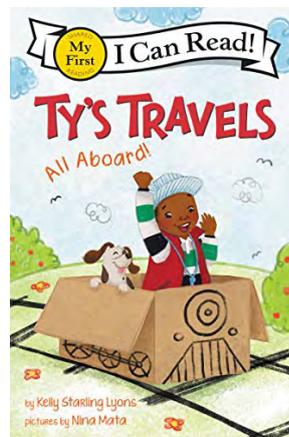


But other pioneers preceded these two efforts. In 1975, Children’s Book Press became the first independent press in the United States to publish children’s books by and about people of colour. In 2012 it became an imprint of Lee & Low. Founded in 1991 by Tom Low and Philip Lee, Lee & Low’s mission is to ‘actively address dearth of multicultural children’s books in the marketplace and make a special effort to work with unpublished authors of color’ (leeandlow.com/about-us). ArtePúblico Press, started in 1979 to publish US Hispanic literature, established Piñata Books, its children’s and young-adult imprint, in 1994. Since then other publishers and imprints of publishers have focused attention on diverse books written by authors of colour. For example, in 2016 Simon & Schuster began Salaam Reads to focus attention on Muslim characters and experiences. Simon & Schuster also brought Denene Millner Books, which had published *Crown: An Ode to the Fresh Cut* by Derrick Barnes, the recipient of both a 2018 Newbery and Caldecott Honor, into its fold in 2020. Kwame Alexander, Newbery award-winning author, launched Versify as an imprint of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, and Random House initiated Make Me a World, an imprint with award-winning illustrator Christopher Myers, in 2019. HarperCollins already has the Amistad imprint and launched

Heartdrum in 2021, the first indigenous imprint with stories by Native authors.

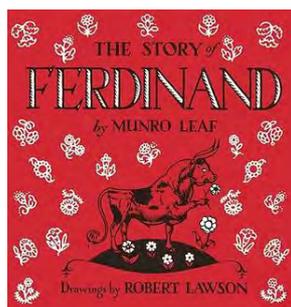


Authors of colour have received prestigious awards in recent years. Jacqueline Woodson, recipient of the 2020 Hans Christian Andersen Award for Writing, had served as the National Ambassador for Young People's Literature in 2018 and 2019. She was followed in that role by Jason Reynolds, who was appointed in January 2020. Kwame Alexander and Kadir Nelson collaborated on *The Undeclared*, a magnificent tribute to African Americans, awarded the Caldecott Medal and a Newbery Honor in 2020.



In addition to realistic and historical fiction, picture books, and poetry, more fantasy novels and beginning-reader titles are being written by authors of colour. For example, Zetta Elliott has written a middle-grade urban fantasy series *Dragons in a Bag* and *The Dragon Thief*. Claribel A. Ortega infuses elements of her Dominican heritage in her debut middle-grade fantasy *Ghost Squad*. Author Kelly Starling Lyons wrote the book *Ty's Travels: All Aboard!* for the My First I Can Read series of HarperCollins, and award-winning Brian Pinkney has penned *Time for Kenny*, a book for emergent readers.

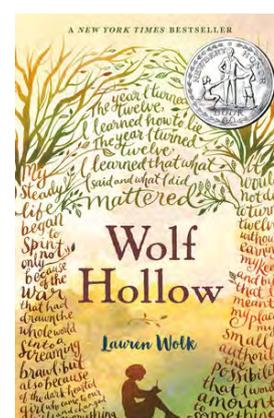
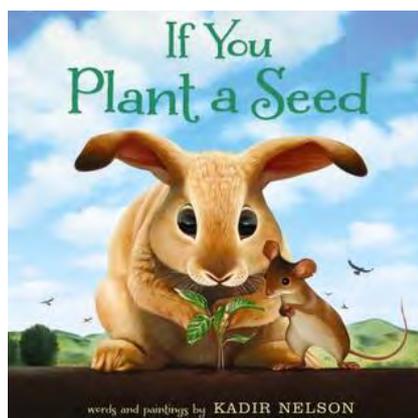
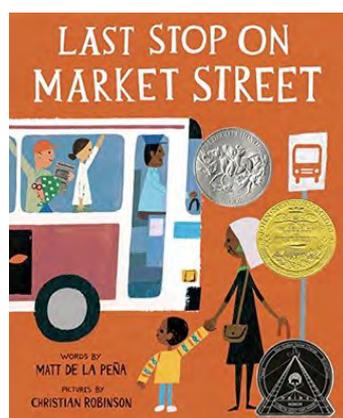
## Books about Kindness



The recent trend of kindness as a theme in children's books reminds us of Jella Lepman, who in 1946 translated *The Story of Ferdinand* into German and convinced a newspaper to print 30,000 paper copies for distribution as a Christmas gift to the children of Berlin who were suffering severe hardships in post-war Germany. Still in print since 1936, this modern US classic tells the story of the bull who sought a peaceful, non-violent life instead of one in the bullfight ring.



Kindness as a theme was propelled forward by the 2012 publication of *Wonder* by R.J. Palacio. The middle-grade novel has sold more than 16 million copies worldwide since 2012, translated into 29 languages, and been adapted for film. 'When given the choice between being right and being kind, choose kind' (p.48) became a precept in the novel as shared by teacher Mr Browne at Beecher Prep on the first day of school. The message of kindness in *Wonder* led to the 'Choose Kind movement'.



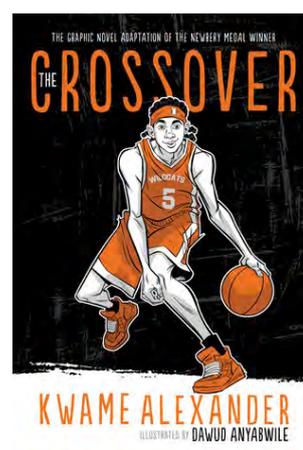
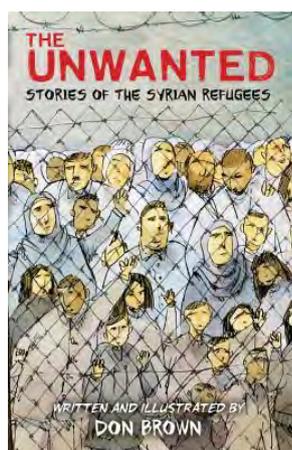
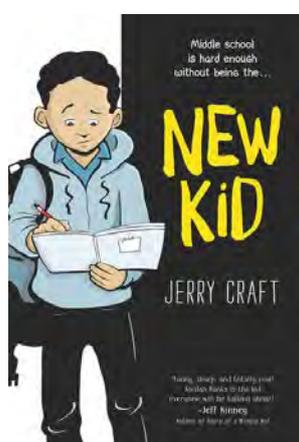
The political, social, and cultural events in the United States over the past several years have increased the attention to kindness as a theme in novels and picture books. *Last Stop on Market Street* by Matt De La Peña and illustrated by Christian Robinson was awarded the 2016 Newbery Medal and named a Caldecott Honor book that same year. The book tells the story of a little boy accompanying his grandmother on a bus ride to their destination – a soup kitchen where they volunteer. In *If You Plant a Seed*, award-winning Kadir Nelson uses a garden metaphor and gorgeous illustrations to describe that 'if you plant a seed of kindness', it will grow into 'very sweet' fruits and vegetables. Lauren Wolk's Newbery Honor book, *Wolf Hollow*, set in 1943, recounts the courage of 12-year-old Annabelle to confront bullying and show kindness to a reclusive World War I veteran.

## Graphic novels are now 'mainstream'

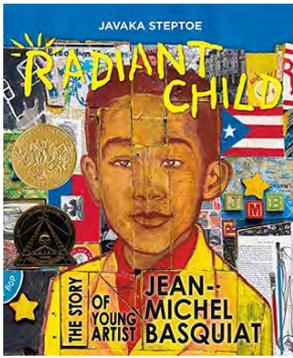


The past decade has witnessed a huge increase in the number of graphic novels being published as they have skyrocketed in popularity among US children and teens. Graphic novels have now become 'mainstream' in US children's book publishing. Major children's book publishers have graphic novel imprints: Graphix at Scholastic; RHGraphic at Random House; Etch at Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. First Second Books publishes graphic novels for all ages and its authors include Shannon Hale, Ben Hatke and Gene Luen Yang. Cartoon and graphic-novel author Gene Luen Yang was named Ambassador of Young People's Literature in 2016 by the Library of Congress. That same year he received a MacArthur Fellows award, referred to as the 'genius grant' by many.

Graphic novels are now winning major children's literature awards. The graphic novel *Roller Girl* by Victoria Jamieson was named a Newbery Honor book and the 2020 Newbery was awarded to *New Kid*, a graphic novel by Jerry Craft. Graphic novels have now assumed their rightful place in US children's literature.

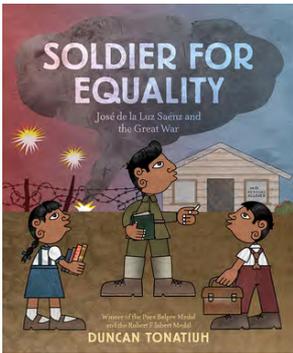


Graphic novels are being published for readers of all ages and across genres. Don Brown's non-fiction graphic novels have received awards and accolades such as *Drowned City: Hurricane Katrina & New Orleans* and *The Unwanted: Stories of the Syrian Refugees*. Popular works of fiction are being adapted as graphic novels. For example, Kwame Alexander's Newbery award-winning novel *The Crossover* is now a graphic novel with illustrations by Dawud Anyabwile. The books in the popular, best-selling fantasy, *The Wings of Fire* series by Tui T. Sutherland are now being published as graphic novels. Younger readers enjoy the *Baby Mouse* series by Jennifer and Matthew Holm, and middle schoolers read everything by popular, award-winning graphic artist Raina Telgemeier.

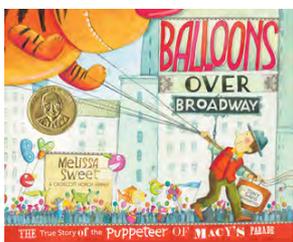
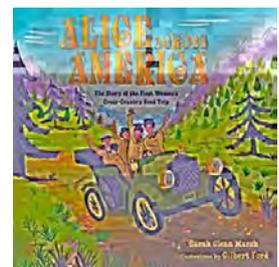
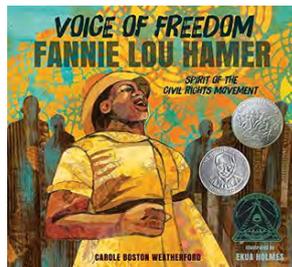
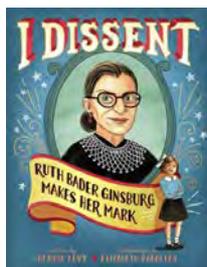


## Picture-book biographies

Picture-book biographies for children in primary and middle grades have grown in popularity and variety. The illustrated narrative is often followed by an Author's Note with additional information and resources for further study. Subjects of these biographies tell stories of women, people of colour and people whose story has not yet been told. Many of these books have received prestigious awards in recent years.



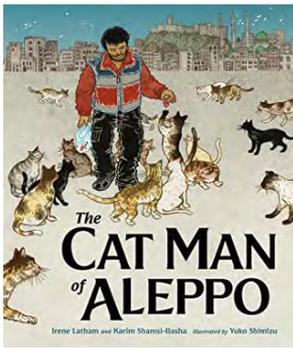
Javaka Steptoe's *Radiant Child: The Story of Young Artist Jean-Michel Basquiat* received the 2017 Caldecott Medal. Jean-Michel, of Haitian and Puerto Rican descent, began as a graffiti street artist whose paintings and drawings were exhibited internationally. He tragically died at age 27 of a drug overdose in 1988. *Soldier for Equality: José de la Luz Sáenz and the Great War* by Duncan Tonatiuh was recognised in 2020 as an outstanding work of non-fiction with the Robert F. Sibert Medal from the American Library Association and as an Orbis Pictus Honor book.



More stories about women are being written. Some are about famous women like *I Dissent: Ruth Bader Ginsburg Makes Her Mark*, the beloved Supreme Court justice who died in 2020, or *Voice of Freedom: Fannie Lou Hamer*, the civil rights icon. Others introduce readers to lesser-known women like Sue Hendrickson who discovered a skeleton of T. Rex on a dig in South Dakota in 1990, described in *When Sue Found Sue: Sue Hendrickson Discovers Her T. Rex*. Sue *Tyrannosaurus Rex* is on permanent display at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago. Alice Ramsey drove cross country with three friends in 1909 as publicity for Maxwell-Briscoe car company, and her adventure is told in *Alice Across America: The Story of the First Women's Cross-Country Road Trip*. She was the first woman to be inducted in the Automotive Hall of Fame.

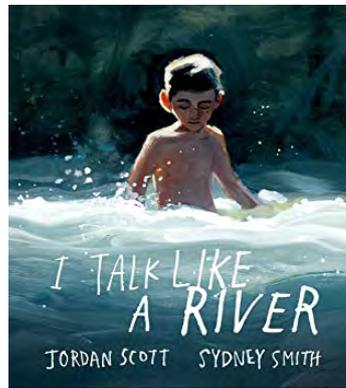
Ordinary people do extraordinary things and their stories are being shared. Most children will not have heard of the puppeteer Tony Sarg. Yet, many watch the famous Thanksgiving Day Macy's Parade in the US on television. Children learn about Tony Sarg in the award-winning *Balloons Over Broadway: The True Story of the Puppeteer of Macy's Parade*. In *The Cat Man of Aleppo*, a Caldecott

Honor book, readers meet Mohammad Alaa Aljaleel who saved hundreds of cats during the Syrian civil war.



## Concluding thoughts

Several other interesting trends were also mentioned. Books dealing with controversial and difficult topics are being written about in a more honest way for middle-grade readers, such as the award-winning *King and the Dragonflies* by Kacen Callender, which deals with homosexuality and child abuse. Many interesting formats and designs are appearing with various sizes of paper, fold-out pages, and combining paper types for special effects. For example, in the critically acclaimed, *I Talk Like a River*, readers encounter a magnificent extra-wide double-gate foldout spread. Children's books have also seen an increase in novels written in verse, wordless books, chapter books with visual images, and adaptations of adult books for younger readers.



As the United States emerges from the impact of the global health crisis, children's book publishing will certainly respond. It will be interesting to follow what new trends and topics might develop. Will there be more books about germs, health, climate change and the global community? Will there be even more books on kindness, racial inequity, and ordinary people who, during this crisis, did extraordinary things? Children's books, like all publishing trends, reflect the times in which they are written. The best of these, like *Charlotte's Web*, offer lasting appeal and endure with a timelessness in the hearts of readers.

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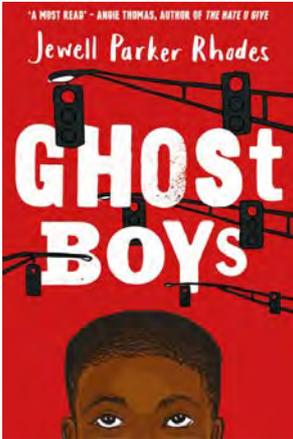
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# Why I Write

Dr Jewell Parker Rhodes is a *New York Times* bestselling and award-winning educator and writer for both youth and adults. She is the Virginia G. Piper Endowed Chair at Arizona State University and Founding Director of the Virginia G. Piper Center for Creative Writing. The driving force behind all her work is to inspire social justice, equality and environmental stewardship.



The rise of Black Lives Matter brought renewed attention to my novel *Ghost Boys*, about the murder by a policeman of a twelve year old playing with a toy gun. Racism, implicit bias, and colourism has afflicted American society since slavery.

While it was heart breaking to write *Ghost Boys*, I did so because I believe books can provide a 'safe place' for youth to discuss social injustice with their parents and teachers. Fiction inspires these conversations and helps to develop empathy and critical thinking skills which can combat prejudice.

Having been stereotyped throughout my life, it is a point of pride that I love all my characters (even the most flawed) and provide a lens for readers to compare and contrast differing perspectives.

Jerome, the murdered protagonist joins Emmett Till (whose murder at fourteen in 1955 ignited the Civil Rights Movement) to find the living who can 'bear witness'. It is Sarah, the white police officer's daughter, who can see the lingering spirits and who becomes empowered to advocate for social justice.

'Bearing witness' - whether it's 'speaking truth to power' or making art - is a profound, universal, human activity. I try to model pathways for youth to be resilient, empowered and to become engaged citizens. As Jerome says, 'Only the living can make the world better. Live and make it better'.



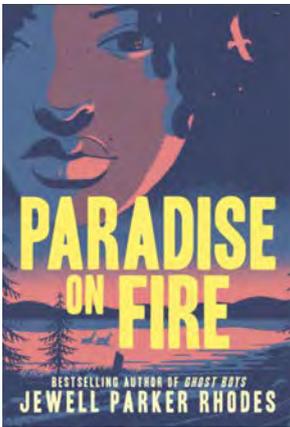
*Black Brother, Black Brother* tackles the myth of race and the destructive power of colourism. Donte and Trey (brothers and sons of a black mother and a white father) are inspired by my own experiences raising two biracial kids (one, light-skinned; the other, darker). Because of skin tone my children have had very different experiences growing up in America. Skin colour should not determine the ease with which one child is more fully embraced by society and the other is subject to racism. Like Donte and Trey in *Black Brother*, I want my children (all children) to be treated equally and none privileged because of skin tone.

Racism and implicit bias also exist in schools. Children of colour from preschool through high school are stereotyped as trouble-makers, more sexually mature and older than their years, and less

intelligent. Schools suspend and disproportionately punish black and brown children more frequently than their white peers. Horrifically, there are real-life examples at all grade levels (even a five-year-old!) being arrested on school grounds by police. This starts a ‘school-to-prison pipeline’ which not only traumatises students but makes it less likely they’ll graduate high school and more likely that as adults they’ll be imprisoned.

My character, Donte, is unjustly arrested in school and he uses sport (fencing) to triumph over bullies. But, more importantly, he develops self-love and urges all his classmates to celebrate their heritages. Everyone is a ‘mixed-blood stew’ of humanity; we are all family.

For young people challenged by discrimination, Donte asserts: ‘Be *you*. Even if others can’t see you’.



My newest novel, *Paradise on Fire*, is a novel about climate change. Wildfires throughout the world are devastating communities, wildlife and habitats. My heroine, Addy, learns the importance of wild lands, national parks and rural communities. She also learns she has the instinct and strength to be a leader and save lives. Addy’s African name is Aduago, ‘daughter of eagles’. Like an eagle, Addy learns to soar by committing herself to environmental stewardship.

Jerome, Sarah, Donte, Trey and Addy are all characters inspired by today’s wondrous kids. I am trying to provide ‘windows’ into other lives and cultures as well as ‘mirrors’ that reflect the glory and uniqueness of every youth. I am spreading love. This is why I write.

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The Jewell Parker Rhodes family.

# A Native Scholar's Perspective on the Caldecott Medal

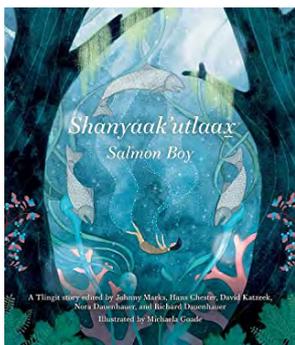
Tribally enrolled at Nambé Pueblo (a sovereign Native Nation in what is currently the United States), Dr Debbie Reese is the founder of American Indians in Children's Literature. Her book chapters, journal, and magazine articles are taught in English, Education and Library Science courses in the United States and Canada.



On 25 January, near the end of the livestream of the 2021 Youth Media Awards, Kirby McCurtis, President of the Association for Library Service to Children said:

**The winner of this year's Randolph Caldecott Medal for outstanding illustration of a children's book is 'We Are Water Protectors', illustrated by Michaela Goade, written by Carole Lindstrom, and published by Roaring Book Press, a division of Holtzbrinck Publishing Holdings.**

Across social media, there was a joyful chorus as Native people learned the news. In 2017 Goade did the illustrations for *Shanyaak'utlaax: Salmon Boy*, a traditional Tlingit story edited by Johnny Marks, Hans Chester, David Katzeek, Nora Dauenhauer and Richard Dauenhauer. That book won the American Indian Library Association's Youth Literature Award in the Picture Book category in 2018.

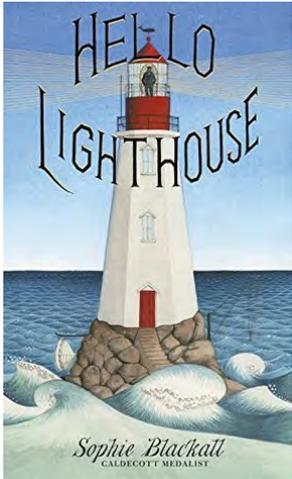


With the Caldecott news, Native reporters for Native news media jumped on the story. The Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska tweeted:

**Congratulations to tribal citizen Michaela Goade for becoming the first Native American to win the Randolph Caldecott Medal.**

In October of 2019 I saw a galley for *We Are Water Protectors*. Written by Carole Lindstrom (Turtle Mountain Chippewa) and illustrated by Michaela Goade (Tlingit, member of the Kiks.ádi Clan), I thought that Goade's art was stunning. I was certain it would be a strong contender for the 2021 Caldecott Medal.

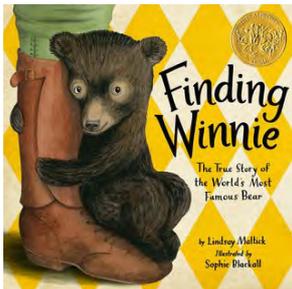
I was - and am - a voice in that chorus but I am also a scholar of children's literature. I knew she was the first ever Native woman to win the award. And while I celebrated with Native people across what some tribal peoples call Turtle Island (the North American continent), I was also aware of a sense of injustice that - with this brief essay - I hope to describe.



Every non-Native writer, illustrator, editor and publisher that is living and working on the continent known as North America is on land that is, or once was, Indigenous land. Though people think we were primitive and that we no longer exist, the fact is our ancestors met invasions of homelands with resistance and then, diplomacy. They are the reason Native people are here, today. Their fight for our status as sovereign nations is why the Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska used the words 'tribal citizen'.

For thousands of years, Native people have created art. Museums around the world have items in them that were taken from us and today, leaders of Native Nations have been working hard to get those items returned. My point: we've been creating desirable art for a very long time. And yet, a Native artist has never won the Newbery.

Hopefully we agree it is not due to a lack of talent or artistic gifts. In the 1990s when I started working in children's literature as a scholar, I heard many editors say that Native people did not submit stories or art to them. It felt like an 'it isn't my fault we don't publish books written or illustrated by Native people' defense rather than a proactive 'what can we do to change that'.



One thing that needs to change is the whiteness of children's literature. In 2019, Sophie Blackall won the Caldecott for *Hello Lighthouse*. That was her second win. She won it in 2016 for *Finding Winnie: The True Story of the World's Most Famous Bear*. Her work is fine but does it merit two wins within such a short period of time – a time when children's literature is exponentially growing with respect to the diversity in who gets published? I don't think it does. That was the same year that Yuyi Morales's exquisite book, *Dreamers*, came out. Nobody will ever be able to persuade me that the *Hello Lighthouse* is superior to *Dreamers*. It isn't.



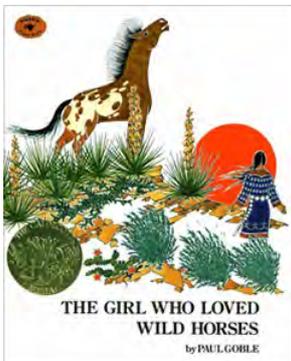
If *Dreamers* had won the Caldecott in 2019, it would have been the first win by a not-white woman. It didn't, and so here we are in 2021, celebrating Michaela Goade as the first not-white woman to win the medal. Are you surprised by that information? I was, initially. That day, *The Horn Book* tweeted that fact. A day later on their Calling Caldecott web page, Martha V. Parravano and Julie Danielson wrote

**She is the first non-white woman, the first Indigenous woman, the first BIPOC woman to win – there are lots of ways to put it. All are true, and all are ground-breaking.**

As you page through *We Are Water Protectors*, take time to study Goade's illustrations of people. The book is Native, through and through. Carole Lindstrom wrote about Native people who are standing up to protect vital resources. *We Are Water Protectors* is

about Native people saying no to oil companies that seek to dig trenches to lay pipelines – in some cases, disturbing sacred burial sites – and to install pipes that can burst and put drinking water at risk. This is a story of Native resistance in the present day, written and told by Native women.

As you think about the books that have won the Caldecott in previous years, some of you might be thinking about Paul Goble's *The Girl Who Loved Wild Horses*. It won in 1979. In an interview he stated his style was influenced by the ledger book. That particular art was created by Plains men incarcerated at Fort Marion in Saint Augustine, Florida, in the 1870s. I don't know if, in 1979, anyone accused Goble of appropriating a Native art style, but we would not hesitate to say that, now. Some people think it is a traditional Native story, but it is his own creation. That sort of thing comes under more criticism now than in the past.



In a nutshell, a not-Native man (Paul Goble) appropriated a Native style of art and made up a story that he puts forth as being Native. Let's juxtapose that with *We Are Water Protectors*. Two Native women (Lindstrom and Goade) created a story about Native resistance to exploitation. Quite a difference, isn't it?

As you study the people in *We Are Water Protectors*, you'll see Native people – young and old – in traditional clothing they've chosen to wear at gatherings, but you'll also see many in everyday wear like jeans and sweaters and hoodies. On the final page you will see a range of appearance. Some Native people have dark skin; some have light skin. Physical appearance is not what makes someone Native (or not). It is citizenship in a tribal nation. There's so much to know about us! I hope *We Are Water Protectors* intrigues you into learning who we are – for real. There's been far too much Goble-like material created about us. It is long past time that people learn about us, from us.

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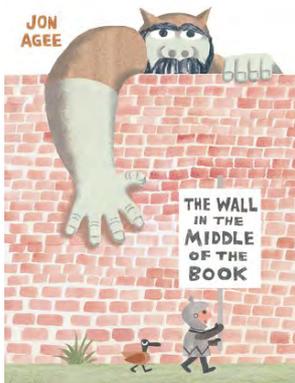
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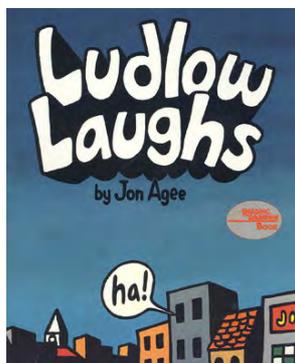
# Two Great People I Met along the Way: Two Stories of Publishing in the 80s

Jon Agee is the author and illustrator of many acclaimed books for children, including, *The Wall in the Middle of the Book*, *Life on Mars* and *The Incredible Painting of Felix Clousseau*. He is also the creator of many books of wordplay, most notably *Go Hang a Salami! I'm a Lasagna Hog, and Other Palindromes*. He lives in California.



My publishing life began in 1981 with Frances Foster. She was my editor – my first editor ever! – at Pantheon Books, in the sleek Random House building on 50th Street in New York City. Frances was an angel, that is, when I think of her I'm reminded of her gentle spirit, which I associate with an angel. But, not to be fooled, she was bright and clever, and she had a droll sense of humour. These qualities just happened to be hidden by a layer of reserve or modesty, or maybe it was just some deeper wisdom.

When I first walked into Frances' office, I was an inexperienced, overconfident, uninformed, insecure, recent college grad. All I knew was that a standard children's picture book was 32 pages, and that Frances published the great Leo Lionni. Frances took my youthful energies in stride. She was an ideal editor; genuinely supportive, and able to instruct or share her point of view in ways that almost seemed deferential.



She would go on to publish my first two books, the first of what I thought might be many, many more, until the day I brought her the dummy for a new book idea, titled *Ludlow Laughs*.

*Ludlow* was the story of a grump, born with a perpetual scowl. He grumbles off to work each day, conveniently enough, at a Complaint Department. One night, Ludlow has a dream which causes him to laugh in his sleep. His laughter, it turns out, is as contagious as our global pandemic. It travels all over the world – until the sleeping Ludlow wakes up in the morning, opens his window, and tells everybody to 'Shaddupp!', before grumbling off to work.

Frances looked at it and seemed amused, and then asked for some time to look at it more closely. Weeks passed. Then, one day, on a visit to her office, she told me that the artist Leonard Baskin had

recently stopped by. He was illustrating a book for her, and apparently, he'd seen the dummy for *Ludlow Laughs* on her desk, and asked to look at it. 'He absolutely loved it,' said Frances. It was very generous of her to tell me this story, particularly because, as it turns out, she didn't feel the same way as Baskin. Her feeling – she finally expressed it! – was that the subject matter and the humour were too grown-up for kids. Frances didn't expect me to agree, nor did she expect me to let the dummy gather dust in a drawer. In fact, she knew that I'd take it to another publisher, and that, very likely, it would be published. And she was right.

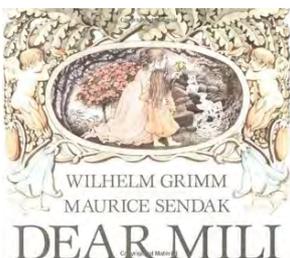
Stephen Roxburgh, the children's editor at Farrar, Straus, Giroux, was charmed by *Ludlow*, and agreed to publish it. I was delighted, naturally, but what I learned, is that moving to another publisher is not a one-book affair. This business model may have changed today, but in 1984, if a publisher was committed to an author, the author was expected to remain loyal to a publisher. Stephen was certainly committed to me, and I would go on to do many books with him. Alas, my relationship with lovely Frances Foster, was over.

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In the 1980s – in the United States – a lot of children's picture books were printed and bound just across the river from New York City, in New Jersey, at the Horowitz/Rae Company. Because of its proximity to publishers, it was not uncommon for authors, like me, to accompany a production manager and oversee the printing of the book.

We would arrive in the morning. A company rep would lead us through the factory, past the enormous, noisy printing presses, to a quiet, sealed-off room. There, we'd relax, sip coffee, and wait for the press manager to bring – directly off the press – the first good printed sheets. Using the original art, we would try and match up the colours.

One morning, as we stepped into the room, the press sheet of my fourth book, *The Incredible Painting of Felix Clousseau*, along with the original art, was already laid out on the table. The pressman was there, chatting with another production manager. There was also a third person, leaning over the table, examining my art. It was Maurice Sendak.



Maurice had come to check on the printing of a poster. His book, *Dear Mili*, had been published earlier in the year – to his customary acclaim – and soon the art would be displayed at the Pierpont Morgan Library. Introductions were made, and Maurice, in his brusque New York tone, said: 'I love your art. So, why have I never heard of you?'

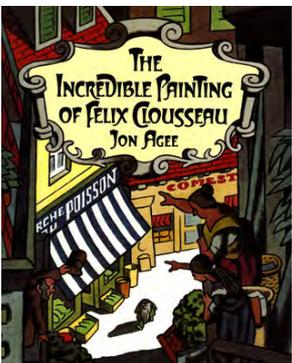
I explained that I'd stumbled into publishing seven years earlier, just out of college. My first three picture books had received very little notice. In fact, my third book - *Ludlow* - had such poor early sales that my publisher - Stephen Roxburgh - quickly managed to shift the printing to paperback.

Maurice turned back to *Felix Clousseau*. 'So,' he said, 'you must be a fan of André Hellé!'. I'd never heard of him. 'How about Edy Legrand?' I hadn't heard of him either.

A couple of weeks later, I drove up to Maurice's place in Connecticut for lunch. He'd invited me expressly to show off his vast picture-book collection, which included rare editions of LeGrand and Hellé, among other great early twentieth-century book illustrators. When I arrived, he was in a good mood. He'd just finished watching his favourite daytime soap opera.

While his assistant Lynn got lunch ready, he took me on a tour of his sprawling stone cottage. The place was like a museum. From a shelf, among several antiques, he pulled down an object that looked like a thick, old leather wallet. He opened it up to reveal delicate pages of tiny, densely printed text. It was one of the earliest editions of *Grimms' Fairy Tales*. Next to it was Beatrix Potter's original pen-and-ink-case (with pen and inkwell inside). Next to that, on the wall, was a drawing of *Babar*, by Jean du Brunhoff. Every room seemed to be cluttered with treasures from his boundless Mickey Mouse collection - dolls, tin toys, puzzles, games.

Recently, Maurice had become obsessed with antique wind-up music boxes. He had been searching specifically for something from eighteenth-century Vienna. Since most of them existed in museums, he'd located, in Germany, a luthier, who made music boxes that perfectly mimicked the originals. He took one off the shelf and wound it up. 'Listen to that,' he said as the tinny music played. 'It's exactly what Mozart must have heard when he was a child!'



Adjacent to his house, was a small climate-controlled cottage devoted to his larger illustrated book collection. Bookcases stacked with hundreds of picture books lined the walls. Larger books were stored in file cabinets, lying flat to protect their bindings. We leafed through first editions of Hellé and LeGrand, and I was able to see the connection to *Felix Clousseau*: bold shapes, strong lines, saturated colour. He showed me a beautiful, over-sized book illustrated with lithographs by Ferdinand Leger. Maurice had bought most of these from rare-book dealers, paying for some of the pricier ones in instalments, long before he'd made any money in publishing. It was clear that he was not just a book creator. He was a voracious, expert book collector.

We had lunch, and he asked about *Felix Clousseau*. If I wasn't influenced by Hellé or LeGrand, what were my sources? 'You, for one,' I replied. 'And Tomi Ungerer, Leo Lionni, Peter Arno, Ludwig Bemelmans'. And a relatively obscure Belgian cartoonist named Edgar P. Jacobs. I was also spending time at the New York Public Library, sketching from photographs of turn-of-the-century Paris: pictures by Atget, Lartrigue, Brassai.

*Felix Clousseau* was an odyssey. As I worked on it, I moved four times, from one borough of New York City to another. Luckily, in the mid 80's, it was still possible to thrive with not much income. My parents, however – like good, concerned parents – worried about how long the book was taking. My publisher, Stephen, was more patient. He assured me that I would finish it 'all in the fullness of time'. He might have regretted that statement. It took three years before I did.

Maurice understood. He'd had his share of epic book projects. He also knew how, in the end, when you put the last brush stroke to the final picture of a book, there is no applause – nothing. There's just you, alone in your studio, and maybe your dog, wondering if you're going to take him out for a walk.

Fittingly, as the afternoon wound down, we took his dog out for a walk, through the woods near his house. When it came time to go, Maurice walked me to the front door and threw out his arms: big hug. We were from different generations, and upbringings, with very different temperaments, but we genuinely hit it off.

Several months later, *The Incredible Painting of Felix Clousseau* was published, and I sent Maurice a copy. He called me. He was over the moon. 'It should win the Caldecott Medal!'. Then he paused and said: 'Well, to be honest, I want *Dear Milli* to win, but if it doesn't, I hope it's *Felix*'. I couldn't argue with that.

For the next decade or so, we'd see each other every year, in Connecticut or New York City or at a book event on the east coast. Then I moved to California and my visits were less frequent. In the fall of 2011, he called me and said that I should think about visiting him before he 'kicked the bucket'. That winter, my wife and I flew back to New York and drove up to see him. He was frail, and less agile, but his mind and spirit were still in great form, he was full of wit and wisdom. In fact, almost in anticipation of his imminent demise, he'd recently given a triumphant interview on radio (Fresh Air) and another on TV with Steven Colbert. Maurice was ready to die, he said, but he was also going to miss life terribly. The following spring he passed away. I miss him terribly, too.

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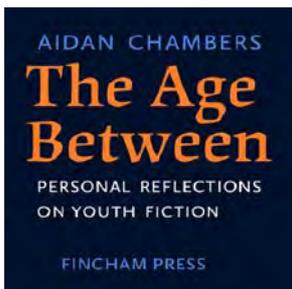
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# Book Review

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## *The Age Between: Personal Reflections on Youth Fiction*

Aidan Chambers, London: Fincham Press, 978 1 9161 2140 9, £16.00, 2020 187pp.



Fincham Press is the academic press of the University of Roehampton and it is so appropriate that they should produce this account of these liminal readers and those who write for them. The University of Roehampton is a centre of excellence for the study of children's literature.

The subtitle is apt. This is a reflective book in which Aidan Chambers tells us of and rationalises his journey into becoming a full-time writer, writing mainly for the young adult, for that age between.

Yet the work is more than just a reflection. Chambers presents us with a sound definition of what the young-adult text is and who are the readers and writers of those texts. He identifies key texts, his selection demonstrating a history of the genre and recommending a canon. He also analyses his own texts, showing that they conform to the habits and etiquette he has identified.

He also demonstrates here a piece of metatext. He argues that we don't grow so much because of our experiences rather than because of our reflection about those experiences. Writing about them is a form of reflection. In writing about what these texts do and how they are made he establishes his own rationale about writing for young people.

I used the word 'liminal' in my opening sentence because that is important in Chambers' argument. The young adult exists between two ages and in many of the texts discussed, including some of his own, the protagonists and other characters are often in a liminal space for other reasons.

Chambers admits to some limitations to his arguments. He has referred only to British and American texts. He has not referred to texts written in other English-speaking countries, or to those in other languages. He highlights the lack of translated texts for young people. With some relief I note that his arguments coincide with my own and my study did include texts from other English-speaking

countries and written in other languages. Chambers highlights IBBY and IRSL (International Research Society for Children's Literature) as offering a way forward on this.

Usefully for many of us, Chambers recognises that it isn't only young people who read these texts. Adults other than school librarians and teachers read perhaps in order to redefine their own youth. He gives us permissions to carry on reading.

The final 30 pages are an interview of Chambers by Deborah Cogan Thacker, who has a special interest in youth literature and literary theory. They cover the topics of voice, adult character in young-adult literature, the implied reader, reader response, reading for companionship, multiple personalities, ethics, morality, responsibility, multiple points of view, preparation and research, the reader as co-author, and the connection between reading and writing.

This has all the hallmarks of an academic book: its price, the fact that it is produced by an academic press, and some sound and valid arguments demonstrated well by the texts discussed. It is also a very readable book for any adult interested in this area of literature. As one would expect of Chambers, it is well written.

**Gill James**

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The UK section of the International Board on Books for Young People

The next issue of *IBBYLink* is *IBBYLink* 61, Summer 2021 and will be titled 'Radical Writing for Children and Young People'.

Articles on other subjects are also welcomed. Contributions to Ferelith Hordon: fhordon@btinternet.com.

If you are interested in becoming a reviewer for *IBBYLink*, contact Lina Iordanaki: reviewseditor@ibby.org.uk. New reviewers are always welcome.

### **Titles for Review**

Publishers and others with books to be reviewed in *IBBYLink* should send them to Lina Iordanaki at University College London, Institute of Education (Room 650, Bay 1), 20 Bedford Way, Bloomsbury, London WC1H 0AL. Pdfs are welcome and should be sent to reviewseditor@ibby.org.uk.

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