

Annotated Bibliography –African American Authors and Characters
Compiled by Penny Britton Kolloff, Ph.D.

*These books represent a variety of fiction and non-fiction works by and about African-Americans. This is by no means a comprehensive list. It is intended as a resource for educators who want to have a more diverse reading list for their students and themselves. Grade levels as indicated only by S for secondary and E for elementary. An * indicates limited availability.*

NON-FICTION

Black Ice Lorene Carey, 1991, New York: Alfred A. Knopf. Described by one reviewer as "...probably the most beautifully written and most moving African-American autobiographical narrative since Maya Angelou's celebrated *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*," this memoir recounts the author's experiences as a gifted young woman who is recruited, at age 15, by St. Paul's, an exclusive private school that is seeking diversity by admitting females and members of minority groups. Here, she experiences her first academic failure, her first conflict as a minority in a majority culture, her first romance that turns sour. (S)

Coming Home, Floyd Cooper, 1994, New York: Philomel Books. Langston Hughes, African-American poet, was always a dreamer. As a young man, he turned his dreams into writing and created memorable poems that are familiar to many today. This story focuses mostly on his early life with his grandmother, a gifted storyteller. (E)

****Duke Ellington*** Andrea Davis Pinkney, il. By Brian Pinkney, 1998, New York: Scholastic. This is the biography of a legendary creator of American jazz. The illustrations earned a Caldecott Honor Medal. (E)

****Faith Ringgold*** Robyn Montana Turner, 1993, Boston: Little, Brown and Company. Part of the series *Portraits of Women Artists for Children*. This is a biography of the artist who was born in Harlem and became a successful painter at a time when it was difficult for women, much less African-Americans, to gain recognition as artists. Faith has produced vibrant paintings, soft sculptures and story quilts. One of her best known works is the children's book *Tar Beach*. Also in the series are biographies of Rosa Bonheur, Frida Kahlo and Georgia O'Keeffe. This series contains many examples of the artists' works. (E)

Gifted Hands Ben Carson, M.D., 1990, New York: Harper Paperbacks. This inspirational, insightful book traces a life that begins in inner-city Detroit and culminates in a brilliant career as a neurosurgeon. Ben Carson is a gifted young man whose mother, a single parent with a third grade education, instills in him the values of achievement and perseverance, along with a deep spiritual foundation. As Dr. Carson recounts his life story, the reader sees vividly many of the textbook characteristics of giftedness. There are touches of the miraculous throughout the book as Ben and his family overcome potential obstacles. (S)

Having Our Say Sarah and A. Elizabeth Delany with Amy Hill Hearth, 1993, New York: Kodansha International. Sadie and Bessie Delany were 103 and 101 years old when their book was published. This story of their lives allows the reader to see events of most of the 20th century through the eyes of these African-American women. Born in the south, they eventually became professional women in New York. (S)

****I Dream a World*** Brian Lanker, 1989, New York: Stewart, Tabori & Chang. Subtitled *Portraits of Black Women Who Changed America*, this book contains photographs and interviews with 75 women. Among the subjects are women well-known in their fields, like Maya Angelou, as well as women like Johnnie Tillmon who are not familiar faces, and others like Althea Gibson who were once instantly recognized, but who may be new to younger readers. (All)

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings Maya Angelou, 1969, New York: Random House. The poet, teacher, actress, and lecturer writes of her childhood and the people and events that shaped her early years. This eloquent work captures what it was to grow up in the rural south in the 1930s. Early influences on Maya Angelou, including her grandmother; her teacher, Mrs. Flowers; her Sunday School, and members of the community, both black and white, are vividly portrayed. (S)

Through My Eyes Ruby Bridges, 1999, New York: Scholastic Press. Ruby Bridges tells her story in her own words. She recounts the events of the year she spent with her teacher, Barbara Henry, who taught her one pupil through the year. This small book is illustrated with photographs and excerpts of speeches and accounts of this transformational time in our history. (E)

The Story of Ruby Bridges Robert Coles, 1995, New York: Scholastic. In 1960, Ruby Bridges was escorted by federal marshals to become the first African-American child to attend the William Franz School in New Orleans. As parents removed their children from the classroom, she eventually became the only child in the classroom. (E)

FICTION -Young Children

Amazing Grace Mary Hoffman, il. by Caroline Binch, 1991, New York: Dial Books for Young Readers. Grace's imagination leads her to act out many roles. When she wants to play Peter Pan, her classmates tell her that she can't because Grace isn't a boy and Peter Pan isn't black. Her supportive mother and grandmother help her realize that she can achieve her goals. In a recent sequel, ***Boundless Grace***, (1995), Grace visits her father and his new family in Africa. (E)

The Bat Boy and his Violin Gavin Curtis, il. by E. B. Lewis. It's 1948 and Reginald's papa is the manager of a baseball team in the Negro Leagues while Reginald is studying violin. Papa would rather have a ball player for a son, but he learns to appreciate Reginald's talent.

Getting' Through Thursday by Melrose Cooper, il. by Nneka Bennett, 1998, New York, Lee and Low Books. The day before payday can present challenges to families that live from check to check. André's family creatively faces these Thursdays, but one particular week calls for problem solving beyond the usual. (E)

Just Us Women Jeanette Caines, il. by Pat Cummings, 1982, New York: HarperTrophy. A special book about a warm relationship between a young girl and her aunt as they look forward to a trip to North Carolina-just the two of them; "no boys and no men". A ***Coretta Scott King Honor Book*** for illustration. (E)

Meet Danitra Brown Nikki Grimes, il. by Floyd Cooper. This book is a series of poems about friendship. Danitra and Zuri negotiate the trials of teasing and conflict, celebrate the joys of jumping rope and share treats and secrets. Sequel ***Danitra Brown Leaves Town***. (E)

Tar Beach Faith Ringgold, 1991, New York: Crown Pub. Described as a story quilt, this book combines Ringgold's artistic and writing gifts into a magical tale that begins and ends on a rooftop in Harlem. The story incorporates the African-American theme of "flying" into a little girl's dream of life as she wishes it to be, including a good job for her daddy and ice cream for dessert every night.

The Other Side Jacqueline Woodson, il. by E. B. Lewis. 2001, New York: Putnam. This is a beautifully written and illustrated allegory set in a time of segregation. A fence separates two children who seek friendship despite their mothers' dictates.

Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt Deborah Hopkinson, paintings by James Ransome, 1993, New York: Alfred A. Knopf. This is the story of a young slave who learns to sew and begins to work in the Big House where her creativity and problem solving skills enable many to escape to freedom.

FICTION – Intermediate/Middle School

Bud, Not Buddy Christopher Paul Curtis, 1999, New York: Delcorte Press. It's 1936, and 10-year-old Bud sets out to find his father, whom he has never met. Following clues left by his mother, Bud seeks the musician who may be his dad. There is laugh-out-loud humor in the story, and genuine warmth among those he encounters along his quest.

****Jazz Man*** Mary Hays Weik. Woodcuts by Ann Grifalconi, 1966. New York: Aladdin. Music floats throughout this short, but powerful story of 9-year-old Zeke, whose real-world pain is alleviated by the music that comes from across the court. Beautiful woodcuts add to the story.

Last Summer with Maizon and ***Maizon at Blue Hill*** Jacqueline Woodson, 1990 and 1992, New York: Dell Publishing. Maizon, a gifted young African-American girl, finds her life changing rapidly and dramatically during the course of these two books. After the death of her father, she has an opportunity to attend Blue Hill, a boarding school where she finds herself one of only five black students. *School Library Journal* calls these “a provocative glimpse of the pain and beauty of a gifted girl’s adolescence.”

The Skin I’m In Sharon G. Flake, 1998, New York: Scholastic. Maleeka Madison is struggling with junior high school, low self-esteem, and intimidation by classmates who taunt her because of the “too dark” color of her skin. Then she meets a very special teacher whose own skin sets her apart from others.

The Watsons Go to Birmingham – 1963 Christopher Paul Curtis, 1995, New York: Bantam Doubleday. Humor, family bonds, and a dark moment in the country’s history come together in this award-winning novel. Kenny, age 10, and his “juvenile delinquent” 13-year-old brother and their little sister head south with their parents to visit their grandmother. Events in Birmingham change their lives.

Yolanda’s Genius Carol Fenner, 1995, New York: Simon & Schuster. Yolanda struggles to adapt to life in the calm of small-town Michigan after the excitement of Chicago. In addition to the challenge of making new friends, Yolanda has to watch out for her little brother, Andrew, whose gift is describing the world through his harmonica. Yolanda knows he’s a genius, but how can she protect him from those who don’t understand his talent.

Professional Resources Addressing Low Income & Minority Gifted

- Callahan, C. M., Tomlinson, C. A., & Pizzat, P. M. (1994). Contexts for promise: Noteworthy practices and innovations in the identification of gifted students. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia.
- Ford, D. Y. (1996). Reversing underachievement among gifted black students. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Ford, D. Y. (1994). The recruitment and retention of African –American students in gifted education programs: Implications and recommendations.
- Frasier, M. M. & Passow, A. H. Toward a new paradigm for identifying talent potential. Storrs CT: National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented.
- Frasier, M. M., Garcia, J. H. & Passow, A.H. A review of assessment issues in gifted education and their implications for identifying gifted minority students. Storrs CT: National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented.
- Patton J. M. (1992). Assessment and identification of African-American learners with gifts and talents. Exceptional Children, 59(2), 150-159.
- Reis, S. M., Hébert, T. P., Díaz, E. I., Maxfield, L. R. & Ratley, M. E. Case studies of talented students who achieve and underachieve in an urban high school. (1995). Storrs CT: National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented.
- Van Tassel-Baska, & Stambaugh T. Overlooked gems: A national perspective on low-income promising learners. (2007). Washington DC: National Association for Gifted Children.
[http://www.nagc.org/uploadedFiles/Publications/Overlooked%20Gems%20\(password%20protected%20-%20gifted\).pdf](http://www.nagc.org/uploadedFiles/Publications/Overlooked%20Gems%20(password%20protected%20-%20gifted).pdf)

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Issues Regarding Minority Gifted Children

Recognition of giftedness in minority children

- Underrepresentation in programs for gifted
 - 5% of students enrolled in gifted programs are Hispanic, minorities make up 30% of public school enrollment but only 20% of gifted programs;
 - Low-income children comprise 20% of student population but only 4% of them score at or above 95th percentile on a standardized test, thus they are unlikely to be placed in programs.
 - Overrepresentation of minority children in special education
- Attention to underrepresented groups in federal efforts. (Jacob Javits Act - 1988)

Identification

- Experts concur that the use of test scores, especially IQ, will exclude many minority students, yet identification methods most often are heavily dependent on test scores.
- Children from some minority groups perform differently on most standardized tests.
- Effects of language, cultural, and ethnic differences keep many children from scoring at the levels required for gifted programs.
- Minorities are under-identified because of 1) test bias, 2) teacher attitudes affecting referrals, and 3) focus on deficits while overlooking strengths (as with LD).

- **Recommendations- IQ and Achievement Tests:**
 - Use different norms for various racial/ethnic groups
 - Use performance rather than verbal subtests
 - IQ should be used to *include* not to *exclude* students
- **Recommendations – Creativity Tests**
 - Mixed results in use of Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking and other creativity measures
- **Recommendations – Teacher Nominations**
 - Problems with bias, but can be helpful if teachers are knowledgeable about characteristics of gifted.
- **Recommendations – Parent Nomination**
 - Parents must see value in nominating children or asking for evaluation
- **Recommendation** - A quota system (same percentage of minority as majority students are gifted)

Programming

Once students are identified, it is necessary to support their participation in different ways.

- Extracurricular cultural enrichment – experiences that many majority kids have (theatre, museums concerts)
- Learning style differences – e.g., kinesthetic (African-American) not auditory (Hispanic)
- Counseling – trusted adults, support in bucking peer pressure not to achieve, systematic programs on weekends, summers, mentors
- Parent support groups – reinforcement of positive cultural identity,
- Development of significant models – those who influence attitudes (mothers, teachers, peers, older student mentors, males for African-American male students. (Use literature)
- Accelerated and enriched curriculum – stimulus rich environment, non-verbal materials, independent and small group activities.
- Career education – college planning, financing and scholarship assistance,
- Maintenance of ethnic identity – (rather than assimilationist efforts) recognition and celebration of different cultures

The following information is abstracted from Reis, Hébert, Díaz, Maxfield, Ratley (This study followed up 35 high ability urban high school students to examine the differences between those who demonstrated above average achievement and those who did not.) The following factors were the ones in which there were demonstrated differences between the two groups.

Factors Influencing Those Who Achieved:

1. Belief in self (able to face personal challenges successfully, were resilient when facing negative circumstances, knew what they wanted to accomplish, had developed goals and identified the direction to achieve the goals)
2. Personal characteristics (motivation, sensitivity to others, positive use of problem-solving)
3. Support systems (network of friends, teachers, coaches, counselors, mentors)
4. Participation in extra-curricular activities and summer enrichment programs (Honor Society, Upward Bound, academic clubs, sports – involvement beyond the academic day)

5. Appropriately challenging classes (effects began back in elementary school, importance of being grouped with other high ability students and being appropriately challenged)
6. Realistic aspirations (clear goal of completing college and having a profession)

Factors Influencing Those Who Underachieved:

1. School factors, including inappropriate challenge in elementary school and high school, little opportunity to develop study skills and work habits, negative interactions with teachers, inappropriate school counseling experiences.
2. Family factors including relationships, lack of role models, problems with siblings, minimal parental expectations or guidance.
3. Community factors including negative school and urban environment, inappropriate peer issues.
4. Personal factors including behavior problems and disciplinary issues, lack of meaningful use of unstructured time, unrealistic aspirations, lack of perseverance and low self-efficacy, inability to cope effectively with challenging circumstances.

Overall Outcomes:

- All students in the study stayed in public school for their entire education. Achievers believed that they were receiving a good education at their high school.
- African-American students were not proportionately represented in the honors/advanced classes.
- A number of female talented students did not remain in school because of pregnancy. (Among the achieving females, it was not unusual to find that they had made a conscious decision not to date during high school.)
- Some identified high ability students had transferred earlier to private schools.
- African-American males who achieved faced peer pressure to underachieve and dealt with stereotype of young black males.
- Achieving Hispanic students were successful despite the fact that they had been English Language Learners from low income homes.
- About half of the two groups (achievers and underachievers) came from families where the parents were divorced.
- The importance of strong peer networks with other achieving students was critical in the lives of the achieving students.

Reis, S. M., Hébert, T. P., Díaz, E. I., Maxfield, L. R. & Ratley, M. E. Case studies of talented students who achieve and underachieve in an urban high school. (1995). Storrs CT: National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented.