THE CORETTA SCOTT KING BOOK AWARDS

By Katherine Patton-Eilers
WHAT ARE THE CORETTA SCOTT KING BOOK AWARDS?

The Coretta Scott King Book Awards are awarded to outstanding African American authors and illustrators who create books for children and young adults. These books must depict an understanding of African American culture and human values believed by all. They are awarded each year to one author and one illustrator. They also name honor recipients each year (“About the Coretta Scott King Book Awards”). The award was created in memory of Martin Luther King Jr. and in honor of his wife, Coretta Scott King (Tunnell et al. 268). They also occasionally give the John Steptoe Award for New Talent for young authors or illustrators who “demonstrate outstanding promise at the beginning of their careers” (“About the Coretta Scott King Book Awards”).
HISTORY OF THE AWARD

In 1969, the American Library Association (ALA) created the award and the first awards were given in 1970 (Tunnell et al. 198, 268). It was founded by librarians Mabel McKissick and Glyndon Greer, and book publisher John Carroll. The motivation for the award came from the observation that no African American author or illustrator had been honored by the well respected Newbery and Caldecott awards. The first winner of the award was Lillie Patterson, who wrote Martin Luther King, Jr.: Man of Peace. The award was given on May 1970 during the New Jersey Library Association meeting. The award for illustrators was added in 1974. The first recipient of the award was George Ford, for his illustrations in Sharon Mathis’s biography Ray Charles (Smith xi).
THE AWARD CRITERIA

- “Thematically the material (text or illustration) must speak to some aspect of the African American culture, with an awareness of Martin Luther King Jr.’s sense of the brotherhood of all cultures.

- The author or illustrator must be African American.

- The content (illustration or text) must be of high literary or visual quality, with a theme that has the potential for long-term, meaningful significance.

- Only books published the year preceding a jury’s period of deliberation are eligible for consideration.

- Books must be published in the United States.

- The winner of the Coretta Scott King Award must meet the same standards as winners of the other awards, but eligibility is limited to works of those who have had no more than three books published.” (Smith xi-xii)
Author Award Winner: 
Rita Williams-Garcia - P.S. Be Eleven

Illustrator Award Winner: 
Bryan Collier - Knock Knock: My Dad's Dream for Me

The John Steptoe Award for New Talent: 
Illustrated by Theodore Taylor III - When the Beat Was Born: DJ Kool Herc and the Creation of Hip Hop

Want to see all the winners since 1970? Click here!
2014 AUTHOR HONOREES

John Lewis and Andrew Aydin: authors of March: Book One

Walter Dean Myers: authors of Darius & Twig

Nikki Grimes: author of Words with Wings
2014 ILLUSTRATOR HONOREE

- Kadir Nelson, illustrator and author of Nelson Mandela
SOME OF MY FAVORITE BOOKS THAT HAVE WON THE AWARD
SOME NOTABLE AUTHORS OR ILLUSTRATORS WHO HAVE WON THE AWARD

- E. B. Lewis – Illustrator
- Jacqueline Woodson – Author
- Kandir Nelson - Author and Illustrator
- Bryan Collier – Author and Illustrator
- Patricia C. McKissack – Author
- Fred L. McKissack – Author
- Lillie Patterson – Author
- Virginia Hamilton- Author
Kadir Nelson- He has been honored five times and has won the award four times for both the author and the illustration awards. He creates beautiful illustrations with riveting and interesting stories.
**WHY SHOULD THESE BOOK BE A PART OF A CLASSROOM LIBRARY?**

They are great books that allow all students to understand the history and culture of African American. In schools with a majority of African American students it is extremely important to have these books present since they allow for the students to have characters to identify with and to learn from. As the study, “I Never Knew There Were So Many Books About Us” Parents and Children Reading and Responding to African American Children’s Literature Together”, by Jonda C. McNair, she discusses how “… comprehension was significantly more efficient for stories depicting both black imagery and culturally related themes than for stories depicting both White imagery and culturally distant themes” for African American students (203). She concludes that that the utilization of African American children’s literature has the possibility to impact reading ability of these students (203). As Claire Gatrell Stephens, writes, “Teachers interested in books that appeal to a wide variety of students and feature people from all walks of life need to consider the Coretta Scott King Award books to use in their curriculum” (83).
WHY SHOULD CHILDREN READ THESE BOOKS?

These books offer student history and rich African American characters. These books have beautiful illustrations that allow the imagination to bloom and grow. These books can also bring students together, allowing students to create a dialogue and to better understand one another. As the Scholastic editor and author Andrea Davis Pinkney states, “... [these books]...have a way of moving people beyond stereotypes” (Gallagher)
HOW CAN TEACHERS INTEGRATE BOOKS RECOGNIZED BY THE CORETTA SCOTT KING BOOK AWARD IN CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION?

One way to integrate these books is to read a book a day during Black History Month that has won the award or was honored. These books are also from a wide variety of literary categories, allowing these books to be a great tool for teachers to use when teaching about the different genres of books (Stephens 84). In addition, many of these books can help students explore cultures, learn about serious subjects, and history (Stephens 86). Teachers, therefore, could use these books as a tool to teach history and these books could be used to help students understand the heavy and troubling history of the United States and its treatment of African Americans in a sensitive and age appropriate way.
IN CONCLUSION…

Over all, The Coretta Scott King Book Awards recognizes beautiful, interesting, and engaging books for students. These books offer great reads about African American history and culture. It is important that students and teachers alike read these book that prompt and continue the teaching of the beloved Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and his wife, Coretta Scott King, “…brotherhood of all cultures” (Smith xi). As Coretta Scott King once said, “Hate is too great a burden to bear. It injures the hater more than it injures the hated” (“Coretta Scott King Quotes”). We must use these books to teach one another to understand and accept others for who they are and to have a better understanding of cultures that are different from our own.


