

Happy Black History Month!

Since February is Black History Month, and February 7 is World Read Aloud day, I thought it was the perfect opportunity to highlight some books that I believe are wonderful examples of children's literature that put a spotlight on African-Americans. The purpose of Black History month is to showcase the accomplishments and contributions of African-Americans, and what better way than reading books? There are thousands of books that exist that could be listed as books to read during February, but below is my (or should I say Dr. Toughlove's) **Top Ten List**:

***It's Her Story – Shirley Chisholm – A Graphic Novel* by Patrice Aggs**

This book puts a spotlight on the life of the remarkable United States Congresswoman, Shirley Chisholm. Ms. Chisholm, a feisty, tireless fighter for civil rights, ran for President of the United States in 1972. Although she did not prevail, she set an example for all women, particularly black women, to follow their dreams and lead with strength and integrity. Ms. Chisholm is often remembered for the quote, "If they don't give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair" (p.36). The target audience **for "It's Her Story – Shirley Chisholm – A Graphic Novel"** is 7 – 10-year-olds.

***What Do You Do With A Voice Like That? The Story of Extraordinary Congresswoman Barbara Jordan* – by Chris Barton**

Chris Barton's book about his fellow Texan, Congresswoman Barbara Jordan, uses the refrain "What do you do with a voice like that?" to punctuate her incredible journey from the Fifth Ward in Houston, Texas, to law school, to the halls of Congress and finally to the graduate school classroom. Along the way she used her oratory skills to champion justice and equality for all. This picture book is big in size, just like Barbara Jordan's voice, and Ekua Holmes's illustrations are bold and beautiful. ***What Do You Do With A Voice Like That?*** is recommended for children aged 4-8, but as someone who remembers hearing Barbara Jordan's voice in the 70's, 80's and 90's, it's a treat to read at any age.

WHOOSH! Lonnie Johnson's Super-Soaking Stream of Inventions **Written by Chris Barton**

Chris Barton strikes again – this time with an award-winning book about Lonnie Johnson, the gentleman who invented the super soaker. If you read ***WHOOSH!*** you will learn that Lonnie Johnson's journey began in Alabama, and he went on to become an innovative inventor, engineer, scientist who worked for NASA, as well as an entrepreneur. Illustrated by Don Tate (you will read about his book below), the pictures compliment the words beautifully. There is so much to learn about this remarkable man. Recommended for children aged 6 – 10 years.

I Am Ruby Bridges by Ruby Bridges

In 1960, Ruby Bridges integrated the William Frantz Elementary School in Louisiana. I actually get chills thinking about the abuse she faced walking into that school, and that this atrocity took place during my lifetime. But in this book, Ruby takes a different approach; she talks about that experience through the eyes of an enthusiastic six-year-old who doesn't like her name, wants to meet her classmates and is excited that she passed the admissions test to be admitted to William Frantz Elementary School. A wonderful slant on a groundbreaking event for children aged 4-8 years.

The Green Piano: How Little Me Found Music by Roberta Flack and Tonya Bolden

Grammy Award winning performer Roberta Flack decided to share the story of her life in the picture book ***The Green Piano: How Little Me Found Music***. Published in 2023, this beautifully written and illustrated book tells the story of Roberta Flack's journey as an award-winning performer. Her humble beginnings and her family's support of her dreams is inspiring. Hayden Goodman's exquisite illustrations seem to jump off the page, and are joyful and colorful. ***The Green Piano: How Little Me Found Music*** is recommended to children aged 4-8 years, but Roberta Flack fans of any age will enjoy this book.

Who Is Ketanji Brown Jackson? – by Shelia P. Moses

This book relates the wonderful story about the recently appointed Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson, the first African-American Supreme Court Justice. While reading this book, you will learn that Justice Jackson was on the debate team in high school and dreamed of becoming a lawyer and a judge. This amazing woman's journey included serving as the supervising editor of Harvard Law Review and so much more. In addition to facts about Justice Jackson, ***Who Is Ketanji Brown Jackson?*** also includes a diagram of the Federal Court System and additional information about milestones for other African-Americans. Written for readers aged 8-12.

There Was A Party for Langston by Jason Reynolds

This rhymical book, written by award-winning author Jason Reynolds, is a tribute to one of his literacy heroes – Langston Hughes. This book was inspired by a photograph Jason Reynolds saw of two iconic black authors – Maya Angelou and Amiri Baraka, dancing at a party honoring Langston Hughes. The rest, as they say, is history. The book celebrates Langston Hughes's legacy and the work of other famous black writers as well. The larger-than-life illustrations, the use of different size fonts and the unifying themes expressed makes this book a must-read. Recommended for children aged 4-8, but can be enjoyed by young and old.

***William Still and His Freedom Stories* by Don Tate**

This powerful book written and illustrated by Don Tate, tells the remarkable story of William Still, an escaped slave, conductor of the Underground Railroad, writer, entrepreneur, and so much more. Born in 1821, he experienced bondage first-hand, and fought to reverse the stain of slavery in a number of ways. Although this book is recommended for children aged 6-9 years, older children and adults can learn a lot about courage, justice and perseverance by reading this book. In the back of ***William Still and His Freedom Stories*** there is additional information about this extraordinary man.

***Joy Takes Root* – by Gwendolyn Wallace**

This lyrical, beautifully written book tells the story of the special love that is shared between a young girl and her beloved Grammy. The protagonist, Joy, spends the summer in South Carolina with Grammy, and she is introduced to magic of planting seeds and watching vegetables, plants and herbs grow. Grammy has a special connection to earth's wonders, which she shares with Joy in a loving and caring way. Joy learns to appreciate growing things with Grammy and on her own. ***Joy Takes Root*** is an enchanting and beautifully illustrated book, recommended for children aged 4-8.
