

# Happy Black History Month, 2025!

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:**

## ***Moving Forward: The Story of Alton Yates***

Written by Chris Barton

Chris Barton has written a number of excellent non-fiction picture books, and ***Moving Forward*** is no exception. This informative picture book, published in 2022, tells the story of Alton Yates, who grew up in Jacksonville, Florida and who joined the Air Force as soon as he was old enough to do so. While in the Air Force in the 1950's, the fearless and courageous Alton Yates volunteered for a space program which sought to learn about how space travel impacts the human body.

Several years later, when Alton needed to return to Jacksonville because his father became ill, he donned his Air Force blues and began his drive from New Mexico to Florida. but after being refused at a gas station, kicked out of a restaurant and other indignities, Alton took on a new mission – civil rights. A great read for children aged 6-10.

## ***Big***

Written and illustrated by Vashti Harrison

This enchanting book tells the story of an unnamed protagonist who is a girl who was developing into a beautiful, talented, expressive, creative, big young lady. This was all fine – until it wasn't. All of a sudden, she was ridiculed for being big and began to hear words like, "Moose!", "You're just too big!", "Whale" and worse. Even though she was bigger than many of her peers, she began to feel small, out of place, and invisible. Her tenacity makes this Caldecott Medal winning book, which is recommended for children aged 4-8, a must read.

### ***Coretta: The Autobiography of Mrs. Coretta Scott King***

Written by Coretta Scott King with the Rev. Barbara Reynolds

This beautifully illustrated book is an adaptation of the book ***Coretta: My Life, My Love, My Legacy***, which was also written by Coretta Scott King and Rev. Dr. Barbara Reynolds. It describes Coretta Scott King's life and makes it understandable for kids aged 4 - 8. The illustrations, created by Ekua Holmes, literally jump off the page, and the words are elegant, just like Coretta. In addition to this beautiful and touching story, there is a timeline which lists the highlights of her extraordinary and courageous life. Many people don't realize how impactful Coretta's work was after her husband was assassinated, and how she preserved to honor his legacy. A touching and informative read for children aged 4 and up.

### ***The Great Migration: An American Story Paintings***

Written and illustrated by Jacob Lawrence

This book is illustrated with the 60 panels of the Great Migration panels painted by Jacob Lawrence. The printed words are Lawrence's recollection of the migration experience as described to him by his parents. It is beautifully done and appropriate for all ages.

### ***Go Forth and Tell - The Life of Augusta Baker, Librarian and Master Storyteller***

Written by Breanna J. McDaniel Illustrated by April Harrison

This book tells the inspiring story of Augusta Baker, enhanced by beautiful illustrations drawn by April Harrison, who is a Coretta Scott King award winning illustrator. Augusta's journey highlights the importance of the oral tradition, which has been and continues to be practiced in many African-American families to this day. An ode to Storytelling at its best for youngsters aged 5-8.

### ***Who Was Harriet Tubman?***

Written by Yona Zeldis McDonough

What can be learned about Harriet Tubman that you don't know already? Her life has been expertly documented, and yet Yona Zeldis McDonough manages to enlighten the reader even further. This informative book weaves in historical facts that took place during Harriet's lifetime and Nancy Harrison's illustrations enhance the already compelling story. This book is part of the ***Who Was/Is*** series and is a perfect non-fiction selection for children aged 7-9.

## ***Sulwe***

Written by Lupita Nyong'o

This book is a moving story written by a famous, contemporary actress, about a dark-skinned girl who wishes her skin was lighter. Beautifully illustrated by Vashti Harrison, it is a book about self-acceptance and positive self-worth. There are parallels between the content of this book and Lupita's life. An enlightening read for children aged 3-8 years.

## ***Little Rosetta and the Talking Guitar: The Musical Story of Sister Rosetta Tharpe, the Woman Who Invented Rock and Roll***

Written and illustrated by Charnelle Pickney Barlow

Sister Rosetta Tharpe was a little-known guitarist who is said to be the "Queen of Rock 'n Roll". Born in 1915, she began playing the guitar at age 4 and soared to stardom (in some circles) in the 1930s. Her music was a blend of blues, jazz and gospel, and Charnelle Pickney Barlow's words and illustrations bring her early years to life. Musicians that include Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, Johnny Cash and Little Richard say that they were influenced by her work. A detailed Author's Note at the end of the book fills in the gaps. An enlightening read for ages 3-7 years.

## ***Put Your Shoes On and Get Ready***

Written by Rev. Raphael G. Warnock

This volume is an oversized book with a big and important message. Reverend Warnock describes the philosophy espoused by his father, which was "Get up! Get dressed! Put your shoes on and get ready!" These words became a familiar refrain throughout Dr. Warnock's life and throughout this charming book. TeMika Grooms's illustrations serve to present Dr. Warnock as an inspired young man who ultimately became the pastor at Ebenezer Baptist Church (Dr. Martin Luther King's church) and a United States Senator from Georgia. An inspiring tale for children aged 4-8.

***How Do You Spell Unfair? MacNolia Cox and the National Spelling Bee***

Written by Carole Boston Weatherford

This is a beautifully written book set in 1936 about MacNolia Cox, a black girl from Akron, Ohio who qualified to enter the Scripps National Spelling Bee. This event took place in Washington, DC. Unfortunately, MacNolia and her mother experienced discrimination on the train and at the Spelling Bee itself. This non-fiction book is recommended for children (and adults) aged 7 and up.