

# Carter G. Woodson Book Awards, 2023

The Carter G. Woodson Book Award is presented by the National Council for the Social Studies to elevate texts that accurately depict the experiences of traditionally marginalized racial or ethnic groups within the United States. The award now has a long history, nearly 50 years, in honor of distinguished scholar and activist Dr. Carter G. Woodson. Woodson's life-long dedication to making Black History known, visible, and valued inspires us to focus our students' learning experiences on classroom resources that elevate the diverse voices of the American social



landscape. The Carter G. Woodson Book Award Committee presents this year's award winners and honorees as excellent examples of resources that can help social studies teachers guide students in inquiries that question and dismantle injustice. We commend the authors and illustrators for their creation of non-fiction texts that focus on BIPOC voices and can educate and inspire our students to be agents of change.

– Jennifer L. Gallagher, Chair,  
Carter G. Woodson  
Book Awards Committee

## Elementary Winner

*Where We Come From*, by Diane Wilson, Sun Yung Shin, Shannon Gibney, and John Coy, illustrated by Dion MBD. Carolrhoda Books, an imprint of Lerner Publishing Group. Reviewed by Elizabeth Sturm, Associate Professor, Department of Education, Lewis University, Romeoville, Illinois.



*"We come from place, language, and spirit. And each of us comes from a story."* The four authors of *Where We Come From* expose multiple layers of their identities in their personal

stories of where they come from, both in ancestral and contemporary time. The poetic telling starts as a communal creation tale of stellar elements

and evolution. It then branches into four tales that highlight the seminal places, events, cultural aspects, and family life that have shaped each author's identity.

Beginning with birthplaces, Wilson's story starts in Mní Sota Makhóche (the Dakota phrase from which "Minnesota" is derived), Shin's in Korea, Gibney's in Michigan, and Coy's in Minnesota. Their stories then flow back to their ancestors, illuminating cultural aspects, languages, achievements, hardships, and migration. Each tale then returns to the recent past, opening to include families and childhood memories. Finally, the tale ends the way it began—illustrating the "circle of past, present, and future, ancestors, families, and you" as it invites the reader to tell their own story.

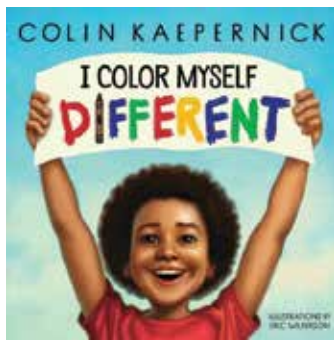
*Where We Come From* provides the reader with four examples of personal storytelling with differing models of identity-formation. In addition, the stories include specific historical events such as the Great Potato Famine and the era of Indian Boarding Schools that play key roles in cultural identity formation. The illustrations enhance the text, with skillfully painted silhouettes of the authors camouflaged within the full-page artwork. The back matter includes additional information

such as pronunciations, an authors' note, further reading resources, and a bibliography.

**Social Studies Themes:** ❶ CULTURE; ❷ TIME, CONTINUITY, AND CHANGE; ❸ PEOPLE, PLACES, & ENVIRONMENTS; ❹ GLOBAL CONNECTIONS.

### Elementary Honoree

*I Color Myself Different*, by Colin Kaepernick, illustrated by Eric Wilkerson. Scholastic. Reviewed by Jennifer Welch, High School History Teacher, Passaic Academy for Science and Engineering, Passaic, New Jersey.



This book is centered on a school task familiar to most children—drawing a picture of one's own family. Recounting his own youthful experience with this school task, Colin Kaepernick offers a window into an experience that is

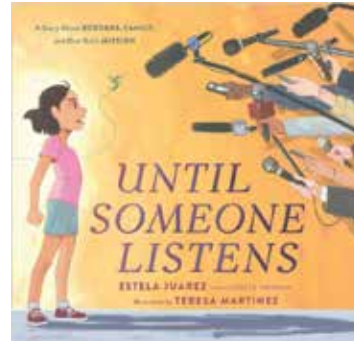
less familiar to most students, that of transracial adoption. When a young Kaepernick creates his family portrait, his classmates immediately notice that he is the only “brown” member of a white family. To explain his picture, Kaepernick informs the other students that his family was formed through adoption. His personal account of being proud to be adopted, and proud to be Black, combine to celebrate both experiences.

Eric Wilkerson's illustrations are luminous, and the drawings on the inside covers are notably charming; also included is an image that appears to be the original picture young Colin Kaepernick drew in school. In a readers' note, Kaepernick retells the childhood story and explains that the moment of significance for him wasn't when the students asked him why he was the only Black member of his family. It was when he selected a brown crayon to depict himself, marking a significant point in his journey to self-acceptance and empowerment. As he explains, coloring his family portrait demonstrated to him that “being different takes courage” and should also be celebrated.

**Social Studies Theme:** ❶ INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY AND DEVELOPMENT.

### Elementary Honoree

*Until Someone Listens: A Story About Borders, Family, and One Girl's Mission*, by Estela Juarez and Lissette Norman, illustrated by Teresa Martínez. Roaring Brook Press. Reviewed by Kristy Brugar, Associate Professor, Social Studies Education, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.



In this lovingly told and beautifully illustrated book, 12-year-old Estela Juarez shares the experience of her mother's deportation to Mexico. As a young girl, Estela wrote letters to newspapers,

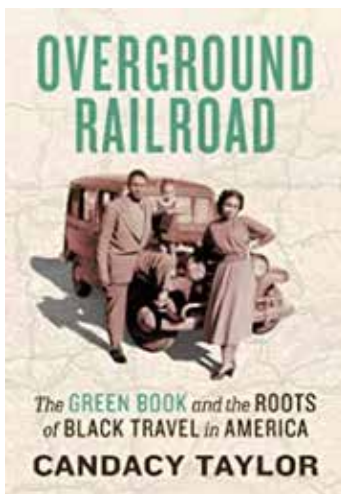
Congress, and the president in an effort to find someone who might help bring her mother back to their family. She needed someone to listen. This is a heart-wrenching autobiographical story in which the author's letters and the power of her words bring her family together again. Estela's story offers a powerful example of children or young people taking action in and for their communities. The Author's Note contextualizes Estela's and her family's experiences in the larger historical context of both the Obama and Trump administrations. The text is available in both English and Spanish.

**Social Studies Themes:** ❶ INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS, AND INSTITUTIONS; ❷ POWER, AUTHORITY, AND GOVERNANCE; ❹ CIVIC IDEALS AND PRACTICES.

### Middle Level Winner

*Overground Railroad: The Green Book and The Roots of Black Travel in America (The Young Adult Adaptation)*, by Candacy Taylor. Abrams Books. Reviewed by Valencia Abbott, History Teacher, Rockingham Early College High School, Wentworth, North Carolina

Movement is such an ordinary concept that many people hardly consider the ability, time, and initiative required to move from one place to another. A trip across town or state lines is



marked by desire and willingness to travel. A trip abroad is decided by schedule and cost. Yet when barriers present themselves, they often seem insurmountable or, at the very least, irritating. During the Jim Crow Era in the United States, legal and customary restrictions defined

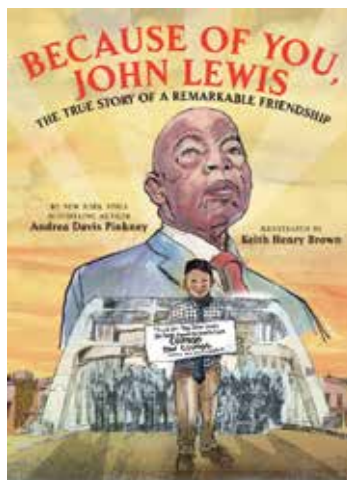
the spaces and places that Black people could occupy. *The Green Book*, the abridgement for *The Negro Motorist Green Book*, was compiled by Victor Hugo Green and his wife, Alma, from 1936 to 1966. It attempted to shrink the barriers that prevented freedom of movement for Black people. Author and journalist Candacy Taylor does a remarkable job of not only telling the history of *The Green Book* and the lives and experiences of the Greens, but the resistance and empowerment that came with the ability to move within a country marked by segregated restrictions. *Overground Railroad* lays out in vivid detail the stories of that era while interposing primary source images that create a time capsule of Black resistance. This is a book that should be in every classroom.

**Social Studies Themes:** ❶ CULTURE; ❸ PEOPLE, PLACES, AND ENVIRONMENTS; ❷ INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT AND IDENTITY; ❺ INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS, AND INSTITUTIONS.

#### Middle Level Honoree

*Because of You, John Lewis: The True Story of a Remarkable Friendship*, by Andrea Davis Pinkney, illustrated by Keith Henry Brown. Scholastic Press. Reviewed by Jennifer Welch, High School History Teacher, Passaic Academy for Science and Engineering, Passaic, New Jersey.

At times, history teachers struggle with making clear the connections between historical events and our lives today. *Because of You, John Lewis* tells the story of Tybre Faw, who experienced that link at 10 years old when he met his hero, Congressman John Lewis. Telling the story



of a friendship between a boy not much older than the children reading this story and the older civil rights icon lends a sense of immediacy to the events that marked Lewis's early activism and ensures that children can see themselves as

potential historical actors.

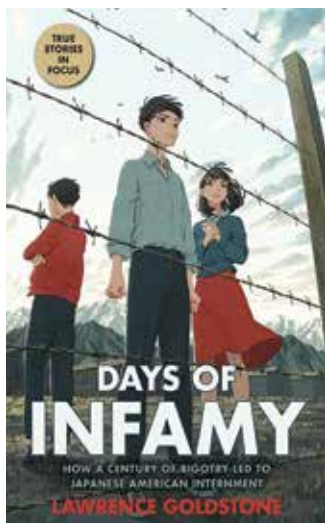
The book highlights parallels between Lewis's story and Faw's. For example, just as a young John Lewis traveled to meet his hero, Martin Luther King Jr., Faw's grandmothers drove him for miles so that he could meet Lewis. The book depicts how a friendship between Lewis and Faw emerged across a generational divide, similar to the friendship that sprung up between a young Lewis and the older King. The book shows how Faw was inspired by reading about John Lewis's activism, but also how Lewis saw in his young friend the future of "good trouble." The book is told in verse, which is especially effective when recounting for young readers the events on the Edmund Pettus Bridge. *Because of You, John Lewis* takes children's interests in history and activism seriously, encouraging young readers to emulate the examples of Lewis and Faw to improve the world around them.

**Social Studies Themes:** ❷ TIME, CONTINUITY, AND CHANGE; ❺ INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS, AND INSTITUTIONS; ❻ POWER, AUTHORITY, AND GOVERNANCE; ❿ CIVIC IDEALS AND PRACTICES.

#### Secondary Winner

*Days of Infamy: How a Century of Bigotry Led to Japanese American Internment*, by Lawrence Goldstone. Scholastic Focus. Reviewed by Ann Adkins, Fifth Grade Teacher, St. Pius X / St. Leo School, Omaha, Nebraska.

In his book, *Days of Infamy*, Lawrence Goldstone dives deep into the roots of the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II and provides readers with a compelling look at the



myriad ways that Asian Americans in general—and Japanese Americans in particular—have suffered prejudice in the United States since the 1800s. Goldstone conveys stories in a manner that is factual, gripping, and heart-wrenching. He is a thorough researcher and provides readers with an extensive bibliography and many source notes. Photographs and other primary source documents support the text and provide the reader with an additional level of understanding about historical events. As we continue to battle prejudices within our country, examining historical instances of bigotry may help older students heighten their understanding of the roots of this hatred and the way it has been woven (often unacknowledged) into the fabric of our past. This book is difficult to put down.

**Social Studies Themes:** ❶ CULTURE; ❷ TIME, CONTINUITY, AND CHANGE; ❸ INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT AND IDENTITY; ❹ INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS, AND INSTITUTIONS; ❺ POWER, AUTHORITY, AND GOVERNANCE; ❻ CIVIC IDEALS AND PRACTICES. ▲

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