

Carter G. Woodson Book Awards, 2013

In 2013, the Carter G. Woodson Book Award Committee selected four exemplary books written for young readers that portray ethnicity in the United States in a distinguished manner. Three of the authors received their awards at the NCSS annual conference in St. Louis, Missouri, and participated in an interactive panel as part of a session and book signing.

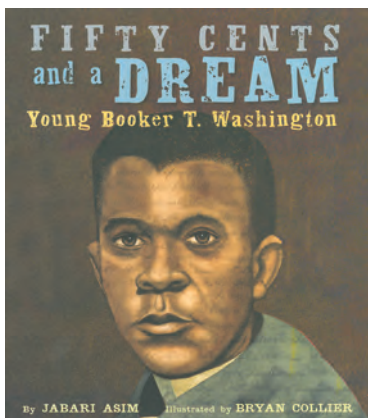
The book award was originally established in 1974 by National Council for the Social Studies with the purpose of not only honoring outstanding books, but to encourage the writing, publishing, and reading of quality social science books that appropriately, sensitively, and accurately address topics related to ethnic minorities. Carter G. Woodson, Ph.D., was a distinguished African American historian, educator, and author of books for adults and young people that recounted the history of African Americans in the United States. The award's creation was the culmination of efforts by the 1973 NCSS Racism and Social Justice Committee, which focused on equity, and the educational needs of minority students.

Nominated books are evaluated by a committee each year based on five key traits including respect for ethnic and racial differences and the worth and importance of people presented; a focus on individuals and issues that provide insight into the experiences of racial and ethnic groups; a focus on the interactions among racial/ethnic groups; a balance of positive with negative and an avoidance of “problem-oriented” portrayals of groups; and the absence of patronizing, distorting, or stereotyping in text and illustration. Other evaluation criteria include readability or stylistic excellence, suitability to age/grade level, illustrations, curriculum enhancement or scholarship, and pluralistic values. One elementary (K-6), one middle (5-8), and one secondary (7-12) book were chosen this year along with an elementary title recognized as an Honor Book. This year, no middle level or secondary titles were recognized as Honor Books. The committee hopes that teachers will read and use these exceptional books in the classroom and expose learners to the ideas presented in each of the biographical stories. Reviews of each of the books are included, as well as connections to the 10 thematic strands for social studies.

—Paige Lilley Schulte
Chair, Carter G. Woodson Committee

Elementary Winner

Fifty Cents and a Dream: Young Booker T. Washington, by Jabari Asim, illustrated by Bryan Collier. Little, Brown and Company.



Reviewed by Paige Lilley Schulte, chair of Carter G. Woodson Committee, associate professor of Teaching and Learning, Southeastern Louisiana University, Hammond, Louisiana.

This book beautifully and creatively illustrates through words and pictures, the triumph of Booker T. Washington in accomplishing his dream of learning to read and write, despite being born into slavery. As an emancipated youth, Washington journeyed 500 miles to Hampton Institute to pursue his goal of obtaining a college degree, with only his determination, his dream, and 50 cents in his pocket. As illustrator Bryan Collier states, “With every footstep Washington took, he had to rely on his great ability to listen and dream.” This idea is embedded throughout the story not only in prose but in the patterns and pictures displayed in the illustrations. The reader can sense young Washington’s fear as well as his determination to make it to the Institute of his dreams and be successful there. The story serves as an inspiration to young readers to create goals, hold onto dreams, and work hard

in pursuing them. ② TIME, CONTINUITY, AND CHANGE; ④ INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT AND IDENTITY; ⑤ INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS, AND INSTITUTIONS; ⑥ POWER, AUTHORITY, AND GOVERNANCE.

Elementary Honor

Harlem’s Little Blackbird: The Story of Florence Mills by Renee Watson, illustrated by Christian Robinson.

Reviewed by Phyllis Esposito, member of the faculty at The Evergreen State College, Olympia, Washington.

Through simple prose, Renee Watson recounts the story of jazz singer Florence Mills, born in Washington, D.C., to parents who were former slaves. Mills comes of age at the start of Jim Crow through the height of racial segregation in the United States. Even as a young child, Florence, who loved to sing and had the voice of a beautiful songbird, used her voice as

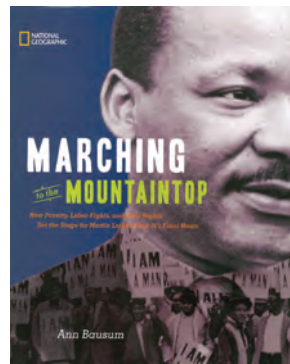


an instrument for social justice, refusing to appear in white-only venues. When offered the chance to become the first black woman to star in the Ziegfeld Follies, she turned it down, instead choosing to sing where she could highlight other African American performers. Watson depicts the manner in which Mills seeks to use her talent for the advancement of equal rights—a theme that runs throughout the text, from Mills’s earliest stands for social justice, through her experiences and self-determination in the face of discrimination while performing abroad in Europe. Mills stands in the company of many talented performers, such as Duke Ellington and Langston Hughes, adding her incredible talents in the time of the great cultural of expression by African American artists, known as the Harlem Renaissance. While Mills was greatly admired and much loved during her time, her voice was never recorded, nor any of her live performances preserved. She died of illness at the age of 32. The story of Florence Mills speaks to individual resiliency and courage in the face of challenges, a theme which resonates today and one which is consistent with the National Council for the Social Studies themes: ❶ CULTURE; ❷ TIME, CONTINUITY, AND CHANGE; ❸ INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT AND IDENTITY; ❹ INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS, AND INSTITUTIONS.

Middle Level Winner

Marching to the Mountaintop: How Poverty, Labor Fights, and Civil Rights Set the Stage for Martin Luther King, Jr.’s Final Hours, by Ann Bausum. National Geographic Children’s Books.

Reviewed by Lara Willox, assistant professor, College of Education, University of West Georgia, Carrollton, Georgia.



Marching to the Mountaintop provides readers a broader perspective of the events surrounding the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. While the story ends with the assassination of Dr. King, the focus is more about the movement than the man. The book reports on the events leading up to the Memphis sanitation strike in 1968 and ultimately Dr. King’s untimely death at the height of the strike. The story helped weave together the major issues of the time including worker rights, union involvement, racial inequality, poverty, and the broader civil rights movement. Woven throughout the book are primary source materials including quotes, photographs and archival materials. The engaging chapter book reads more like a picture book or even a modern day blog. The contrasting colors and juxtaposition of text and photographs enables readers to sense the discord and disharmony during this time. The book is replete with resources including a timeline, research notes, resource guide, bibliography and detailed descriptions of King’s civil rights campaigns. Any teacher interested in exploring the interconnected struggles of the time period would find this book an invaluable resource. ❷ TIME, CONTINUITY, AND CHANGE; ❸ PEOPLE, PLACES, AND ENVIRONMENTS; ❹ INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT AND IDENTITY; ❺ INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS, AND INSTITUTIONS; ❻ POWER, AUTHORITY, AND GOVERNANCE.

Secondary Winner

Stolen into Slavery: The True Story of Solomon Northup, Free Black Man, by Judith and Dennis Fradin. National Geographic Children’s Books.



Reviewed by Marilyn J. Ward, professor, Department of Education, Carthage College, Kenosha, Wisconsin.

Solomon Northup was born free in New York State in 1808, where he was educated and worked as a carpenter in Saratoga Springs and lived with his wife and three children. In 1841, he was drugged, kidnapped, and stolen into slavery. He spent the next 12 years living a horrifying nightmare as a slave on cotton and sugar cane plantations in Louisiana. His name had been changed, so it was impossible for his family and friends to find him, and since his kidnappers had stolen his money and the papers proving he was free, it was impossible for him to prove who he was and regain his freedom. Northup was one of 400,000 free blacks who were kidnapped and sold as slaves. He was extraordinary because he survived, returned to his family, and wrote an autobiographical account of his story. This compelling biography, written in short chapters, with outstanding visuals, illustrates the heartache of a slave’s life, but also tells of the goodness of some of the people Northup encountered. The dialogue and many of the details come from Northup’s own 1853 memoir. Photographs, maps, newspaper images, an afterword, a timeline, online resources, a bibliography, and an index complement the text. ❹ INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT AND IDENTITY; ❺ INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS, AND INSTITUTIONS; ❸ PEOPLE, PLACES, AND ENVIRONMENTS; ❷ TIME, CONTINUITY, AND CHANGE. 🌍