



Burke County Public Library

Morganton ♦ Valdese ♦ C.B. Hildebrand

YA Fiction Addiction Book Discussion Group February 2012

Celebrate Black History Month with

African-American
Fiction

(YA fiction written by
African-American authors
or focusing on
African-American characters)

What is Young Adult Fiction?

The Young Adult Service Division of the American Library Association defines the age of a Young Adult as **12-18** years old. This means YA fiction is written for and marketed to youth of an age range which spans almost an entire decade.

What Makes YA Fiction Different from Children's Books or Adult Fiction?

Young adult literature has certain unique features which set it apart. Books for teens are almost always written in the first person and usually have:

- a teenage protagonist
- adults characters as marginal and barely visible characters
- a brief time span
- a limited number of characters
- a universal and familiar setting
- current teenage language, expressions, and slang
- detailed descriptions of other teenagers' appearances, mannerisms, and dress
- a positive resolution to the crisis at hand (though it may be subtle and never in-your-face moralistic) few, if any, subplots about 125-250 pages in length (although many of the newer YA books are much longer)
- a focus on the experiences and growth of just one main character
- a main character whose choices and actions and concerns drive the story (as opposed to outside forces)
- problems specific to adolescents and their crossing the threshold between childhood and adulthood

Also, a lot of new YA lit is unique in that it is edgy: pushing the limits of socially acceptable content in teen books, especially regarding drug and alcohol use, violence, abuse, suicide, and social norms in human sexuality. This edginess pushes teenage fiction beyond appropriate boundaries for children's books. Young Adult fiction is not watered down adult fiction. It's also not children's fiction with older characters. It is literature that doesn't waste a breath. YA fiction moves at a clip that keeps pace with busy teens who are pressed for reading time, whose attention spans are brief, who are accustomed to and crave instant gratification. YA lit is the movie version of a great story... gripping from the first line, never slowing down, with all the slow parts edited out. YA literature is crisp, lively, and hip.

~Francine Morrisette

Popular now: "Urban Lit" & Realistic Literature

Urban Lit – formally known as Urban Literature, sometimes called Hip-Hop Lit – is a relatively young genre, but it is extraordinarily popular, thanks to page-turning storylines, contemporary urban settings, realistic characters (usually African-Americans), and straightforward prose styles. Almost all Urban Lit titles fall into one or more of these main subgenres:

- Street Lit—with a focus on violence, drugs, and street life
- Drama Lit/Chick Lit—with a focus on relationships

The definition of “urban lit” is constantly changing/morphing but here are some characteristics listed by some YALSA panelists:

- Stories that take place in urban environments
- Entertaining and fast-paced
- Realistic and escapist
- Subgenres are ‘chick lit’ and ‘street lit’
- Usually contain direct comments about the system
- Speaks about experiences of people of color
- The genre that ‘gets jiggy’

Though urban and realistic lit share some characteristics, such as urban settings, predominantly African American casts of characters, and a focus on the milieu of the streets, they offer very different reading experiences:

- Street lit is plot-driven and most action is exterior.
- Realistic YA fiction is character-driven and focuses on emotion and internal experience.
- Street lit shows characters who do “whatever it takes” to survive, sometimes suffering consequences like death or imprisonment.
- Realistic YA fiction shows characters for whom “doing the right thing” is important, and choices outside of this matrix result in negative internal and external consequences.
- Street lit offers the escapist pleasures of voyeurism and wish fulfillment (and, for many readers, the ability to engage with familiar landscapes and experiences at a safe emotional distance).
- Realistic YA fiction, with its focus on internal experience and struggle, offers a much more painful and emotionally difficult read.

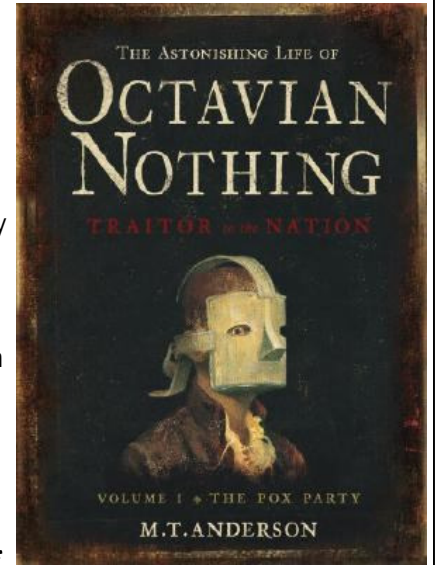
Sources: yalsa.ala.org and <http://phatfiction.wikispaces.com>

Examples of fiction focusing on African-American characters

The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing, Traitor to the Nation (Vol. 1)
by M.T. Anderson (2006)

Summary:

It sounds like a fairy tale. He is a boy dressed in silks and white wigs and given the finest of classical educations. Raised by a group of rational philosophers known only by numbers, the boy and his mother – a princess in exile from a faraway land – are the only persons in their household assigned names. As the boy's regal mother, Cassiopeia, entertains the house scholars with her beauty and wit, young Octavian begins to question the purpose behind his guardians' fanatical studies. Only after he dares to open a forbidden door does he learn the hideous nature of their experiments – Octavian discovers he is an experimental subject to prove the inferiority of the African American race. Set against the disquiet of Revolutionary Boston, M. T. Anderson's extraordinary novel takes place at a time when American Patriots rioted and battled to win liberty while African slaves were entreated to risk their lives for a freedom they would never claim.



Historical/Sociological Fiction



The Good Girlz series—Blessings in Disguise by ReShonda Tate Billingsley (2007)

Summary:

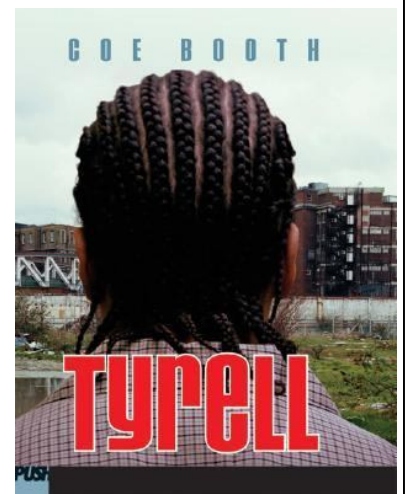
An exciting and inspiring new series from national bestselling author ReShonda Tate Billingsley They share a precious gift....Joining Rachel Jackson's church youth group has been a lifesaver for Camille, Alexis, Jasmine, and Angel. The fabulous four share everything from juicy gossip to mentoring school kids. But their loyalty is put to the test when two of the girls get caught up in problems of their own – and may drag their girlfriends down with them. Will they forget who their friends are? Wealthy Alexis seems to have the perfect life – but no one can see her fear as her parents head for divorce. Meanwhile, Jasmine is tired of being the glue that holds her mother and siblings together, and she escapes by moving in with her father. Both girls are tempted to do something drastic to get the attention they crave, and both need to hear Rachel's hard-won advice on why stealing will only get them more trouble. But when it comes to winning back Camille and Angel's trust, Alexis and Jasmine will have to find the answers in their own hearts.

(African-American Author) *Drama Lit*

Tyrell by Coe Booth (2006)

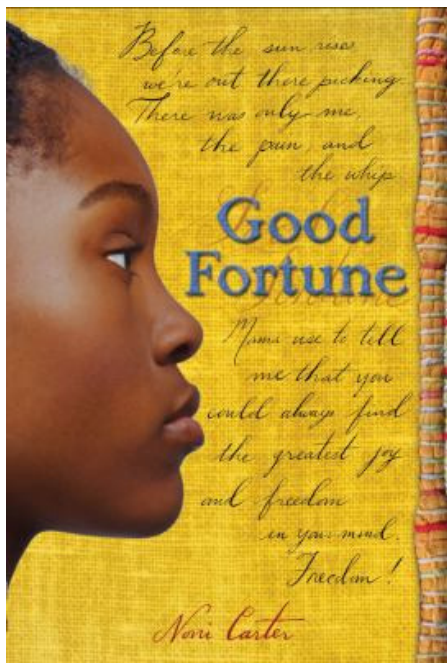
Summary:

Tyrell is a young, African American teen who can't get a break. He's living (for now) with his spaced-out mother and little brother in a homeless shelter. His father's in jail. His girlfriend supports him, but he doesn't feel good enough for her - and seems to be always on the verge of doing the wrong thing around her. There's another girl at the homeless shelter who is also after him, although the desires there are complicated. Tyrell feels he needs to score some money to make things better. Will he end up following in his father's footsteps?



(African-American Author)

Realistic/Urban Lit



Good Fortune by Noni Carter (2010)

Summary:

Ayanna Bahati lives in a small African village when she is brutally kidnapped, along with her brother, and forced onto a slave ship to America. As Ayanna, renamed Anna, rises from the cotton fields to the master's house, she finds the familial love she's been yearning for in elderly Mary and Mary's son Daniel—but she is also faced with more threats to her survival. Risking everything to escape the plantation, Anna manages to make it north and to freedom, eventually settling in the free black community of Hudson, Ohio, and educating herself to become a teacher.

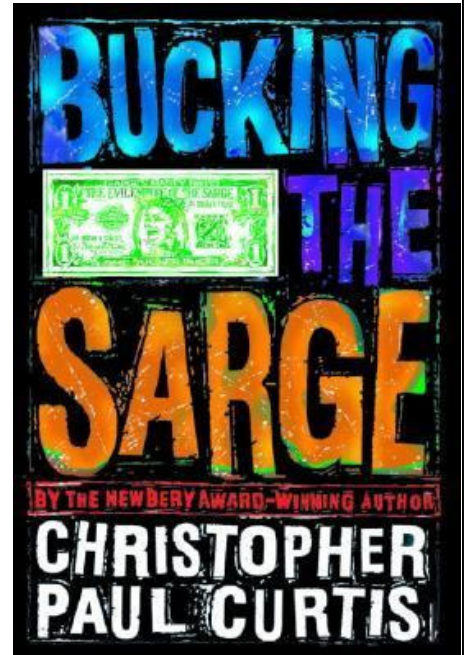
In the tradition of **Copper Sun** and **Chains**, this is the stirring tale of a girl's journey from Africa to freedom and from youth to womanhood, as recounted in this dazzling debut novel.

(African-American Author) *Historical Fiction*

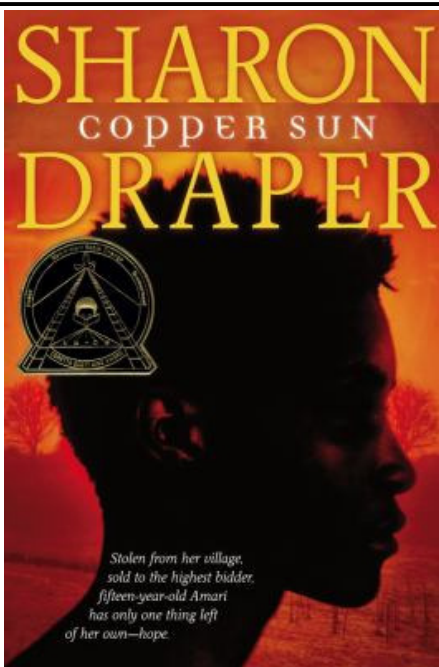
Bucking the Sarge by Christopher Paul Curtis (2004)

Summary:

Luther T. Farrell has got to get out of Flint, Michigan. As his best friend Sparky says, "Flint's nothing but the Titanic." And his mother, a.k.a. "the Sarge," says, "Take my advice and stay off the sucker path." The Sarge milked the system to build an empire of slum housing and group homes. Luther's just one of the many people trapped in the Sarge's Evil Empire—but he's about to bust out. If Luther wins the science fair this year, he'll be on track for college and a future as America's best-known and best-loved philosopher. All he's got to do is beat his arch rival Shayla Patrick, the beautiful daughter of Flint's finest undertaker—and the love of Luther's life. Sparky's escape plans involve a pit bull named Poofy and the world's scariest rat. Oh, and Luther. Add to the mix Chester X, Luther's mysterious roommate; Dontay Gaddy, a lawyer whose phone number is 1-800-SUE'M ALL; and Darnell Dixon, the Sarge's go-to guy who knows how to break all the rules. Readers will root for Luther and Sparky every step of the way.



(African-American Author) *Comedic/Realistic Lit*



Copper Sun by Sharon M. Draper (2006)

Coretta Scott King Award 2007

Summary:

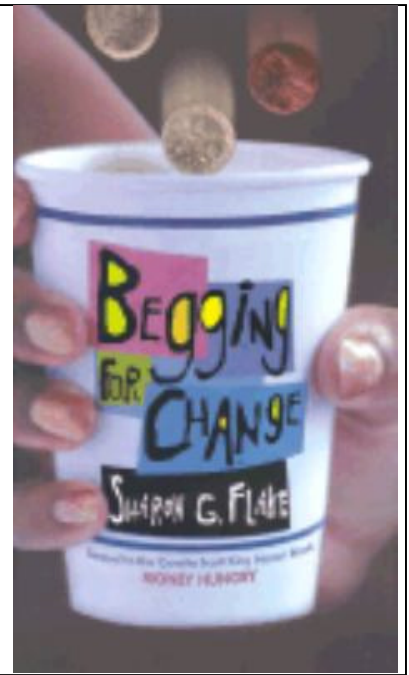
When pale strangers enter fifteen-year-old Amari's village, her entire tribe welcomes them; for in her remote part of Africa, visitors are always a cause for celebration. But these strangers are not here to celebrate. They are here to capture the strongest, healthiest villagers and to murder the rest. They are slave traders. And in the time it takes a gun to fire, Amari's life as she's known it is destroyed, along with her family and village. Beaten, branded, and dragged onto a slave ship, Amari is forced to witness horrors worse than any nightmare and endure humiliations she had never thought possible – including being sold to a plantation owner in the Carolinas who gives her to his sixteen-year-old son, Clay, as his birthday present. Now, survival and escape are all Amari dreams about. As she struggles to hold on to her memories in the face of backbreaking plantation work and daily degradation at the hands of Clay, she finds friendship in unexpected places. Polly, an outspoken indentured white girl, proves not to be as hateful as she'd first seemed upon Amari's arrival, and the plantation owner's wife, despite her trappings of luxury and demons of her own, is kind to Amari. But these small comforts can't relieve Amari's feelings of hopelessness and despair, and when an opportunity to escape presents itself, Amari and Polly decide to work together to find the thing they both want most...freedom.

(African-American Author) *Historical Fiction*

Begging for Change by Sharon G. Flake (2003)

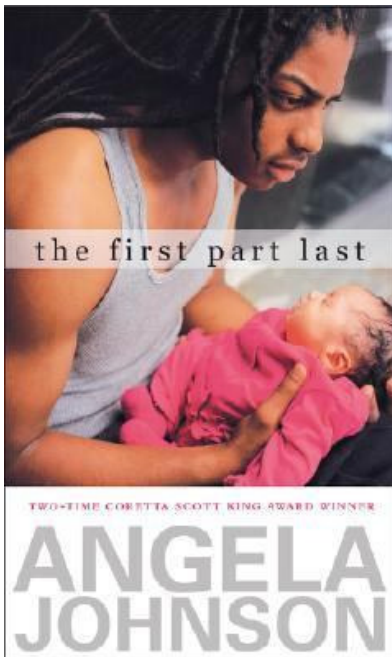
Summary:

Fourteen-year-old Raspberry Hill is still struggling to find security in her life. More than anything, she wants a father who will love and protect her, like Zora's dad. When her mother is attacked, Raspberry does the unthinkable: she steals money from Zora, her best friend. It's only when her thieving, drug-addicted father returns that Raspberry begins to wonder whether betraying Zora will cost her more than she can ever repay. Is Raspberry destined to follow in her father's footsteps? Raspberry is certain. Something's got to change.



(African-American Author)

Realistic/Urban Lit



The First Part Last by Angela Johnson (2003)

Summary:

This little thing with the perfect face and hands doing nothing but counting on me. And me wanting nothing else but to run crying into my own mom's room and have her do the whole thing. It's not going to happen.... Bobby is your classic urban teenaged boy – impulsive, eager, restless. On his sixteenth birthday he gets some news from his girlfriend, Nia, that changes his life forever. She's pregnant. Bobby's going to be a father. Suddenly things like school and house parties and hanging with friends no longer seem important as they're replaced by visits to Nia's obstetrician and a social worker who says that the only way for Nia and Bobby to lead a normal life is to put their baby up for adoption. With powerful language and keen insight, Johnson looks at the male side of teen pregnancy as she delves into one young man's struggle to figure out what "the right thing" is and then to do it. No matter what the cost.

(African-American Author)

Realistic Lit

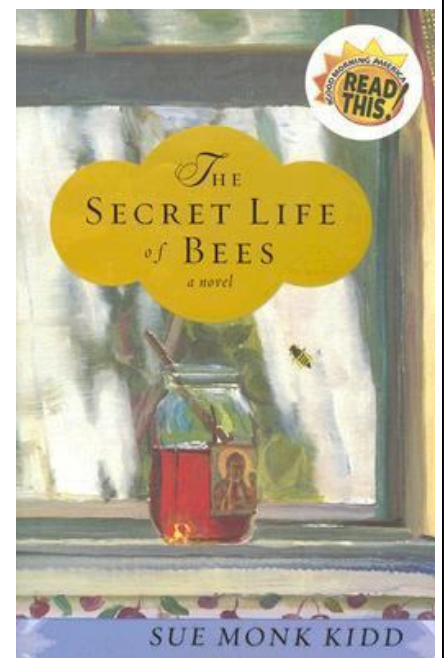
The Secret Life of Bees by Sue Monk Kidd (2002)

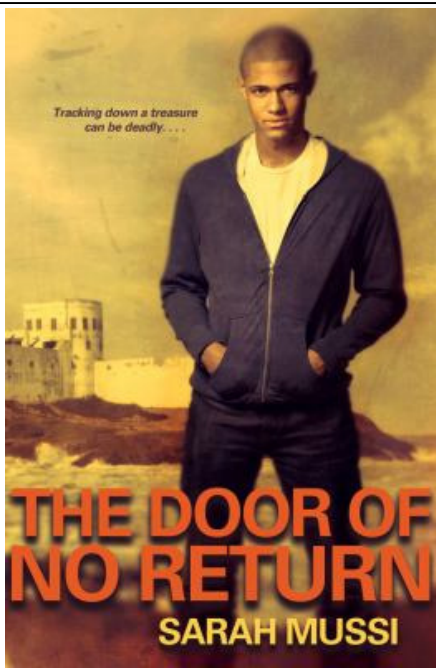
Summary:

Fourteen-year-old Lily Owens lost her beloved mother when she was only four—under tragic circumstances clouded by time and secrecy. She later found a fiercely protective "stand-in," her abusive father's outspoken housekeeper, Rosaleen. Ignoring differences in age and color—and the fact that racial hatred seethed during the summer of 1964 in rural South Carolina—these two unlikely companions set off on a seemingly aimless pilgrimage that ends at the home of a trio of eccentric bee-keeping black sisters. Lily tells her remarkable tale of longing and love in an idiom and accent heard far south of the Mason-Dixon Line, but the lessons learned during her odyssey into the world of bees and their "secret life" are universal and everlasting.

(Read-a-like to The Help by Kathryn Stockett)

Historical/Southern Fiction





The Door of No Return by Sarah Mussi (2008)

Summary:

Zac Baxter's grandfather has always told him that he's the descendant of African kings, whose treasure was stolen when his ancestors were sold into slavery. Of course, Zac brushes this off as a tall tale – until his grandfather is murdered and their apartment is completely ransacked. Clearly somebody is after something. Heeding his grandfather's dying words, Zac is off to Ghana to track down his family's history. But what did his grandfather mean when he said that Zac had the map to the treasure? Following every clue he can find, Zac begins to suspect that the treasure is real, and hidden in one of Ghana's old slave forts. Too bad the killers always seem to be one step ahead of him. With no one he can trust and with everything to lose, Zac races against time as he tries to uncover the truth about the past – and a fortune in gold.

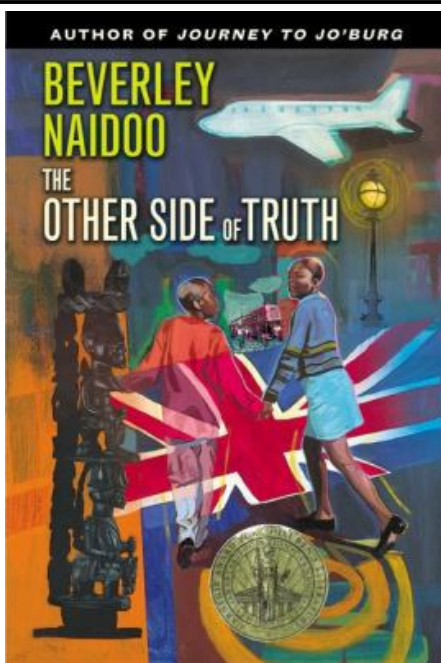
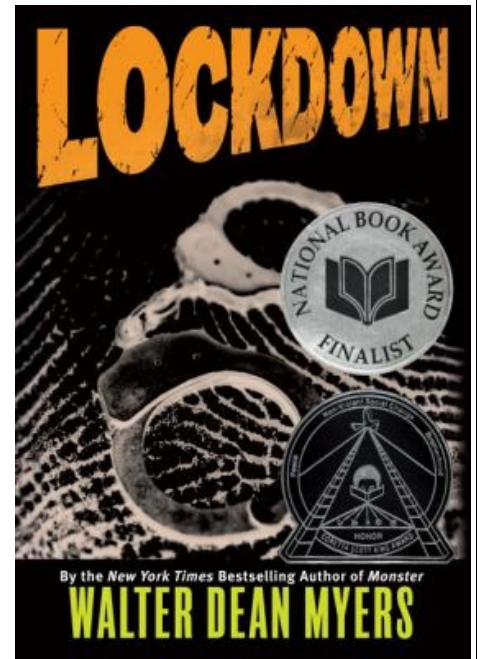
Action/Adventure/Mystery

Lockdown by Walter Dean Myers (2010)
 Coretta Scott King Honor Award 2011
 Summary:

Maurice "Reese" Anderson is sentenced to 38 months in Progress, a juvenile detention center in New York, for stealing prescription forms for use in a drug-dealing operation. After 22 months, Reese, now age 14, is assigned to a work-release program at Evergreen, an assisted-living center for seniors. There he meets racist Mr. Hooft, who lectures him on life's hardships (having barely survived a Japanese war camp in Java), which causes Reese to reflect on his own choices. More than anything, he wants to be able to protect his siblings, who live with his drug-addicted mother, before they repeat his mistakes. Reese faces impossible choices and pressures—should he cop to a crime he didn't commit? Stick out his neck for a fellow inmate and risk his own future? It's a harrowing, believable portrait of how circumstances and bad decisions can grow to become nearly insurmountable obstacles with very high stakes.

(African-American Author)

Realistic/Urban Lit



The Other Side of Truth by Beverly Naidoo (2000)

Summary:

After the murder of their mother, twelve-year-old Sade and her younger brother are smuggled out of Nigeria by their journalist father to escape the corrupt military government and growing violence. They are sent to their uncle in London, but when they arrive, he is missing and they are abandoned, passed between foster homes. Their father escapes to England to find them—but he will be sent back to Nigeria unless Sade can find a way to tell the world what happened to her family.

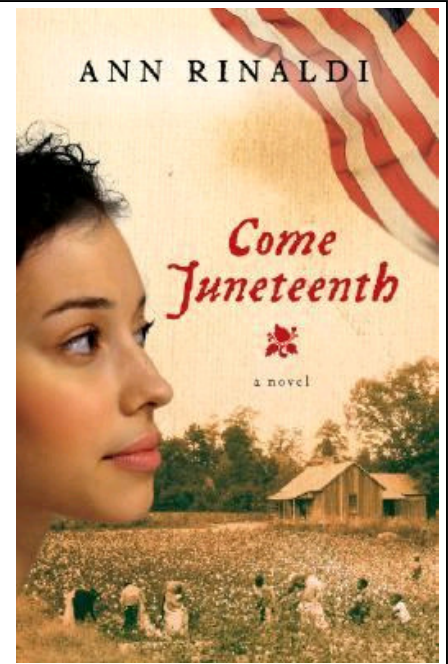
(African-American Author)

Realistic Lit

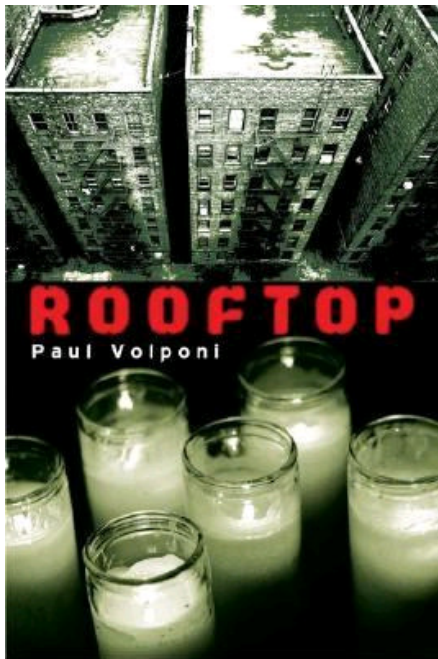
Come Juneteenth by Ann Rinaldi (2007)

Summary:

Sis Goose is a beloved member of Luli's family, despite the fact that she was born a slave. But the family is harboring a terrible secret. And when Union soldiers arrive on their Texas plantation to announce that slaves have been declared free for nearly two years, Sis Goose is horrified to learn that the people she called family have lied to her for so long. She runs away—but her newly found freedom has tragic consequences. How could the state of Texas keep the news of the Emancipation Proclamation from reaching slaves? In this riveting Great Episodes historical drama, Ann Rinaldi sheds light on the events that led to the creation of Juneteenth, a celebration of freedom that continues today.



Historical Fiction



Rooftop by Paul Volponi

Summary:

Addison was like the big brother Clay never had. Separated for years by a family argument, the two cousins are finally back together at Daytop, a drug treatment program. Clay's parents caught him smoking pot; Addison was arrested for dealing crack. Now they're at the same place at the same time, trying to work out their problems together. But Addison never gets a chance. One night he and Clay are on the rooftop of one of the buildings in the projects where Addison lives, and Addison is fatally shot—by the police—as Clay stands just a few steps away. Addison wasn't armed. He didn't deserve to die. But was he completely innocent? And what will prove more difficult for Clay—living a lie or facing the truth?

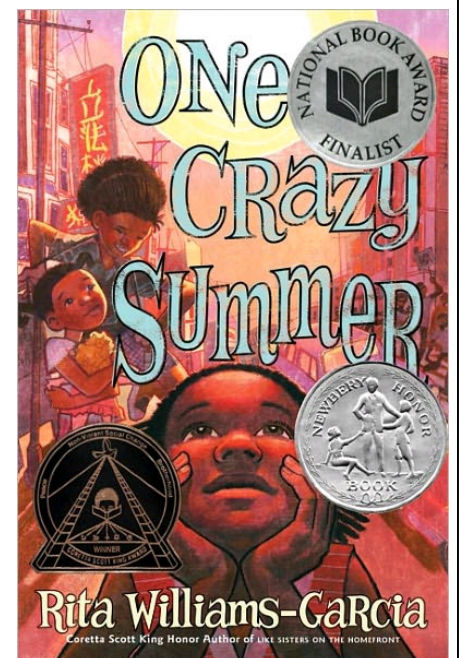
Realistic/Urban Lit

One Crazy Summer by Rita Williams-Garcia (2010)

****Coretta Scott King Award 2011****

Summary:

Eleven-year-old Delphine has it together. Even though her mother, Cecile, abandoned her and her younger sisters, Vonetta and Fern, seven years ago. Even though her father and Big Ma will send them from Brooklyn to Oakland, California, to stay with Cecile for the summer. And even though Delphine will have to take care of her sisters, as usual, and learn the truth about the missing pieces of the past. When the girls arrive in Oakland in the summer of 1968, Cecile wants nothing to do with them. She makes them eat Chinese takeout dinners, forbids them to enter her kitchen, and never explains the strange visitors with Afros and black berets who knock on her door. Rather than spend time with them, Cecile sends Delphine, Vonetta, and Fern to a summer camp sponsored by a revolutionary group, the Black Panthers, where the girls get a radical new education. Set during one of the most tumultuous years in recent American history, one crazy summer is the heartbreaking, funny tale of three girls in search of the mother who abandoned them.



(African-American Author) *Historical/Realistic Lit*

More about The Coretta Scott King Award

In 1969, while attending the American Library Association Meeting in New Jersey, Mabel McKissick and Glyndon Greer, two school librarians, had a chance meeting at a booth when both were trying to get a poster of the late Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. It was a time of great turmoil in the country. Both women loved children's literature and were discussing that African American authors and illustrators had not been distinguished with awards for their work. John Carroll, publisher at the booth where the two were vying for the poster, asked them why they didn't start an award to do so. From that seed of an idea, the Coretta Scott King Award was born.

The CSK Award has certainly grown since its inception in the late 1960s. At its humble inception at the May 1970 dinner gala of the New Jersey Library Association, Lillie Patterson was honored for her biography, *Martin Luther King, Jr. Man of Peace*. In 1972, CSK held its first breakfast at an ALA conference site (but without ALA recognition). Official affiliation with SRRT came in 1980 and in 1982 the American Library Association recognized the Coretta Scott King Award as an association award. Success of the CSK Task Force can be attributed to the work of tireless volunteers and visionary founders. For a more complete history consult two works: *The Coretta Scott King Awards Book, From Vision to Reality* Edited by Henrietta Smith, American Library Association, 1994 and *The Coretta Scott King Awards Book, 1970-1999*, Edited by Henrietta M. Smith, American Library Association, 1999.

The Coretta Scott King Award was the dream of Glyndon Greer. In 1969, while attending the annual conference of ALA in Atlantic City, NJ, Mrs. Greer, along with Mabel McKissack, both school librarians, and John Carroll, a book publisher, organized the Coretta Scott King Award. During the first year, four other librarians joined the founders: Harriet Brown of New York City; Beatrice James, President of the New Jersey Library Association; Roger McDonough, New Jersey State Librarian; and Ella Gaines Yates, Assistant Director, Montclair Public Library.

The first award was presented in 1970 to Lillie Patterson for her book *Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.: Man of Peace* at the New Jersey Library Association Annual Spring Conference in Atlantic City. Roger McDonough, a former president of ALA, strongly urged the founder to celebrate the Award during the ALA annual conference. In 1972, at the time of the third award, the first Coretta Scott King Award Breakfast was held at the ALA annual conference in Chicago, IL.

The year 1979 marked significant changes for the Coretta Scott King Award. At the ALA annual conference in Dallas, TX, the Award's tenth anniversary, Mrs. Coretta Scott King appeared and spoke at the breakfast. In addition, the Atlanta-based awards committee and the advisory board merged to form the Coretta Scott King Task Force. Through the leadership of E.J. Josey, the merger of these two groups placed the Award under the Social Responsibilities Round Table (SRRT) of ALA. It was now an official award, recognized by the American Library Association.

Glyndon Greer served as the first chair of the newly created SRRT Coretta Scott King Task Force. Mrs. Greer passed in 1980, having watched her vision become a reality.

The Coretta Scott King Award has developed into a remarkable success. The CSK New Talent Award was established in 1994 in recognition of aspiring new talent and presented for the first time in 1995. The CSK Award is one of the most prestigious book awards given by ALA. In the spirit of brotherhood, the CSK Task Force continues to be an integrated group of librarians and supporters who share a common bond.



The Coretta Scott King Award Seal was designed by internationally-known artist Lev Mills in 1974. The symbolism used in designing the seal centers around Dr. King's teachings and doctrines, the purpose for which the Award was founded.

Coretta Scott King Award, Bronze Seal, designed by Lev Mills—The basic circle represents continuity in movement, revolving from one idea to another. Within the circle is the image of a black child reading a book. The five main religious symbols below the image of the child represent nonsectarianism. The superimposed pyramid symbolizes both strength and Atlanta University, where the Award was headquartered at the time the seal was designed. At the apex of the pyramid is the dove, symbolic of peace, one of Dr. King's doctrines. The rays shine toward peace and brotherhood.

The CSK seals have recently been revised; the new bronze and black seal denotes a Coretta Scott King Award winner, and the new pewter and black seal denotes an honor book. The former bronze seal (for winners) and pewter seals (for honors) can still be used.

Check-out some of these
African-American Authors

Chinua Achebe
Maya Angelou
James Baldwin
Connie Briscoe
J. California Cooper
Eric Jerome Dickey
Ernest Gaines
James McBride
Mary Monroe
Toni Morrison
Alice Walker
Carl Weber

Classic Fiction by
African-American Writers

- The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman by Ernest Gaines
- Roots by Alex Haley
- The Return of Simple by Langston Hughes
- Their Eyes Were Watching God by Zora Neale Hurston
- Beloved by Toni Morrison
- The Women of Brewster Place by Gloria Naylor
- Cane by Jean Toomer
- The Color Purple by Alice Walker
- Uncle Tom's Children by Richard Wright

Note:

All titles listed in this packet
are available at
Burke County Public Library.

