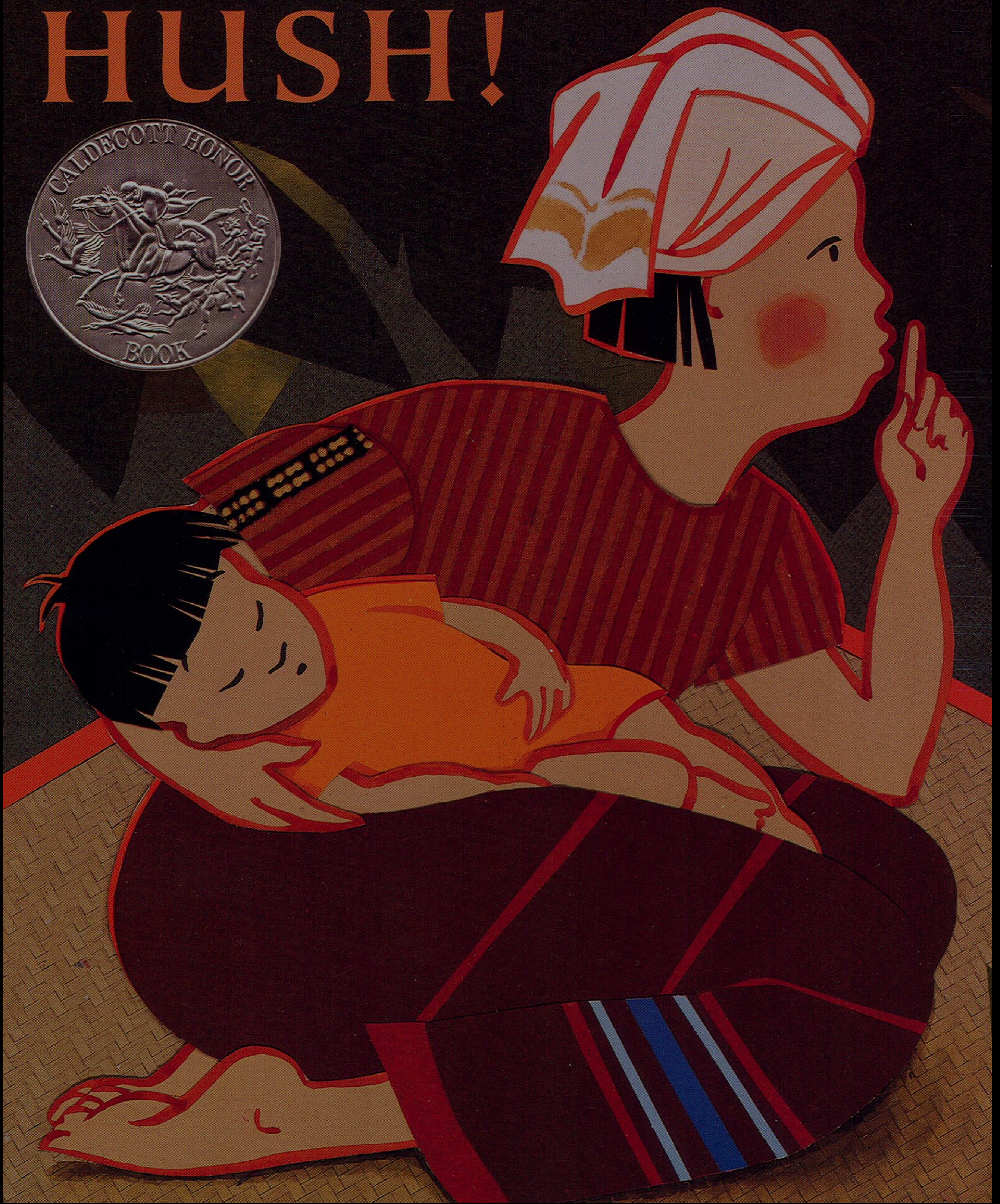
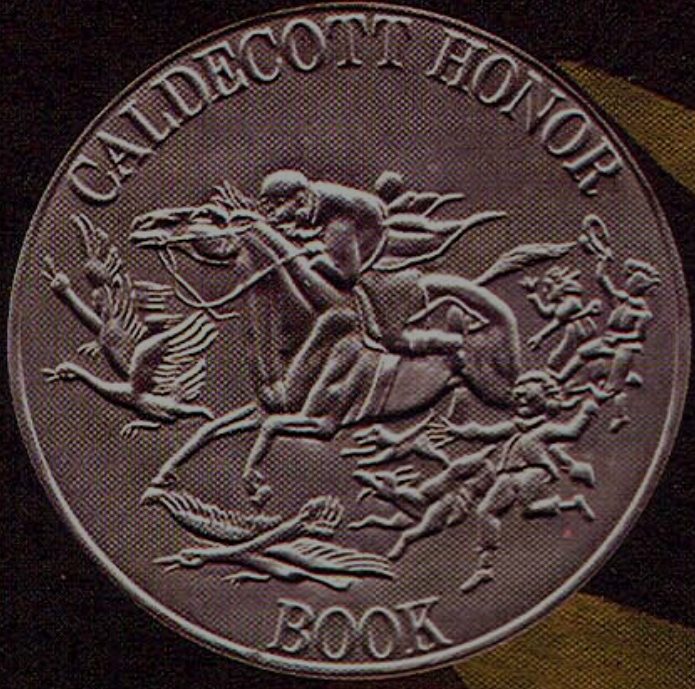


# HUSH!



"MS, YOU HAVE ANY BOOKS  
WITH KIDS THAT LOOK LIKE ME?"

BY ELAINE DICKSON, READING OWLS FOUNDER

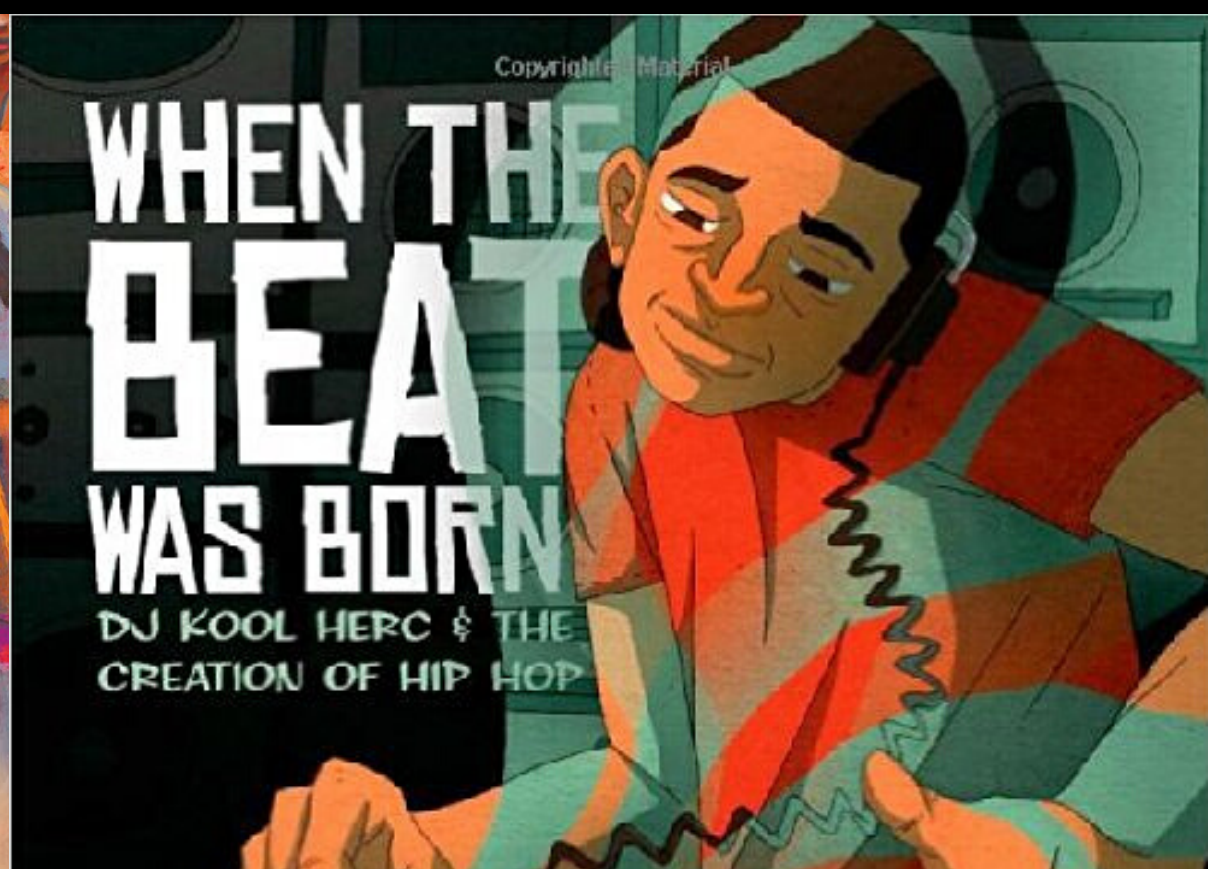
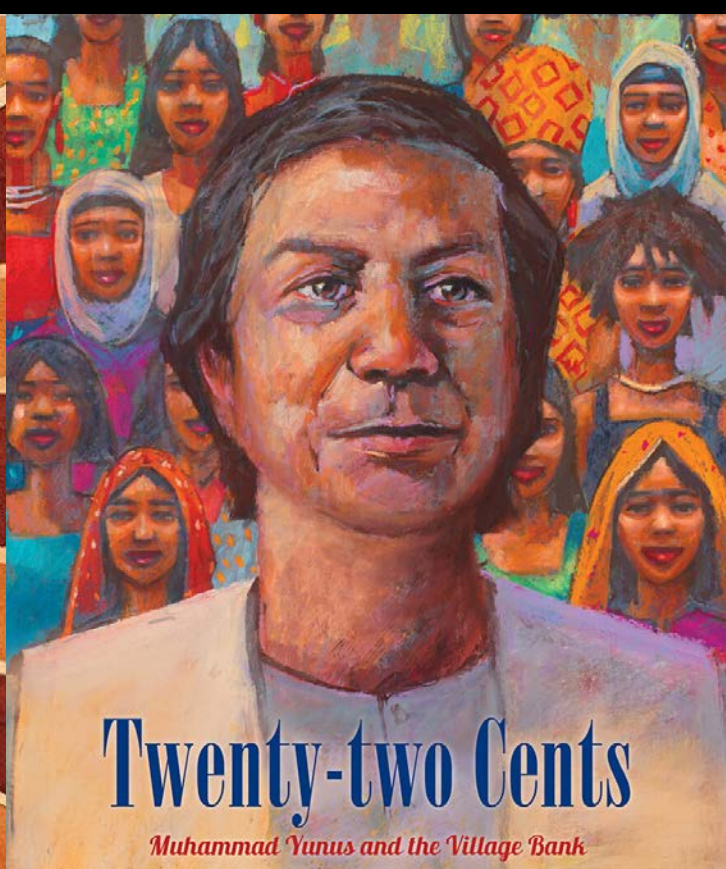
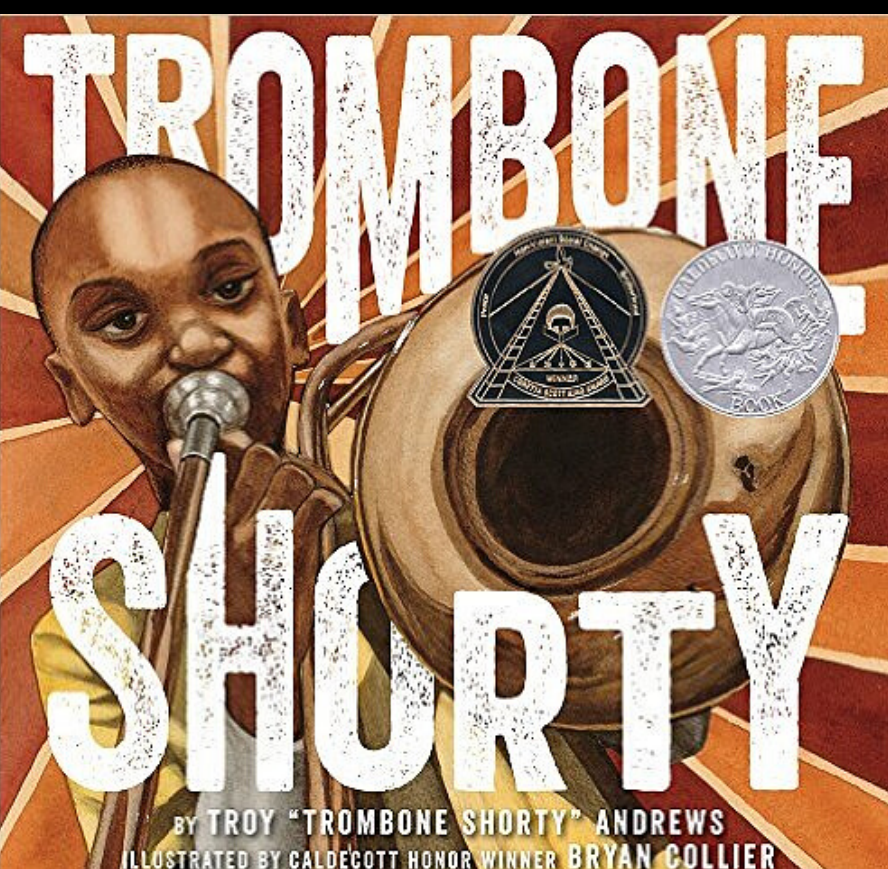




**READING OWLS INTERNATIONAL**  
Creating Readers... for Life

**“He who is different from me  
does not impoverish me - he  
enriches me. Our unity is  
constituted in something  
higher than ourselves - in  
Man... For no man seeks to  
hear his own echo, or to find  
his reflection in the glass.”**

— Antoine de Saint-Exupéry,  
writer, poet & national book award recipient





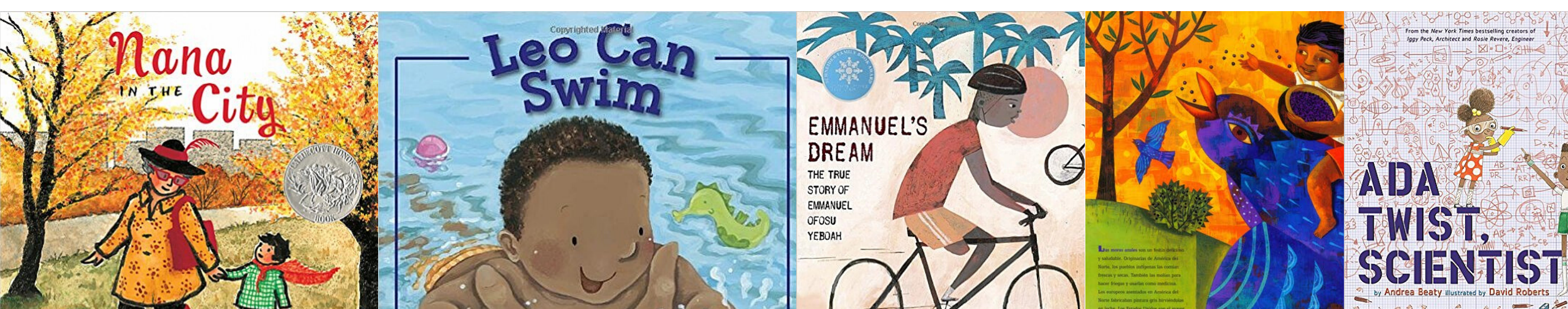
## BRINGING THE WORLD TO OUR KIDS

Recently, in April, I traveled to Jamaica to assess nine new schools. It is part of the function I perform as Chair of a relatively new literacy nonprofit with limited human capital. It is also one of my absolute favorite things to do, as I get to interact with hundreds of kids, and hear first-hand their desires, hopes and dreams, and the type of books they would like to see in any new lending library at their school. The responses are always interesting and varied, but on this trip one of the responses stopped me in my tracks.

**"MS, YOU HAVE ANY BOOKS WITH KIDS THAT LOOK LIKE ME?"**

I stood there stunned and unsure of how to respond and fought back tears that for me sometimes come out of frustration and a sense of helplessness. What was the appropriate response to give this young girl standing before me? Should i mention to her that I had been working on an article addressing the lack of diversity in books all year and was still trying to find the right words? Would my words comfort her? This young girl needed a school library, but she also needed books filled with characters and experiences she could identify with; she also needed me to make it happen.

I told her that I wake up every day hoping to make a difference - to get books to Jamaica with kids that look like her, as well as kids from all over the world so that she can not just read, but have fun doing it.





## BRINGING THE WORLD TO OUR KIDS

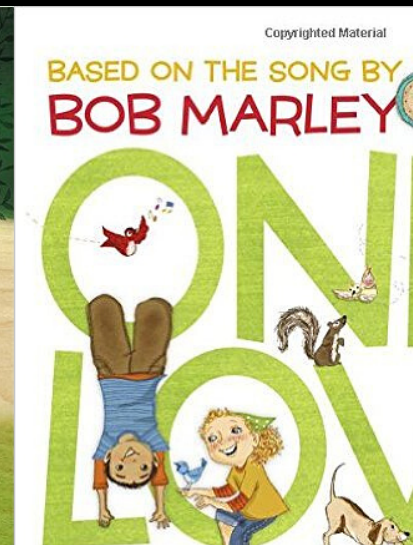
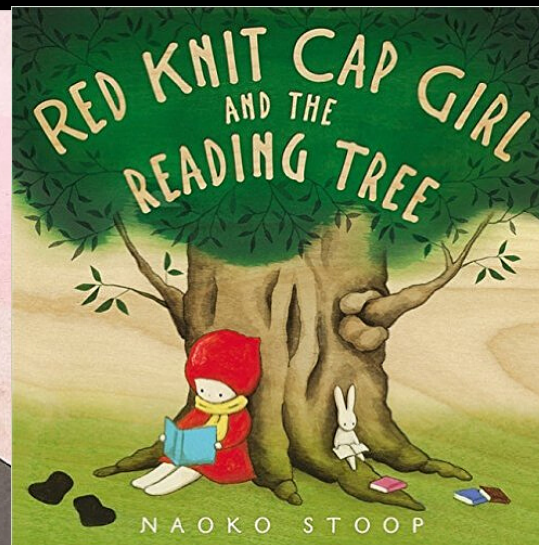
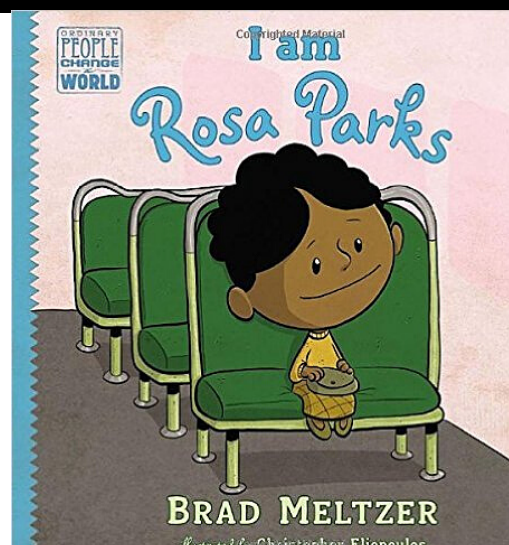
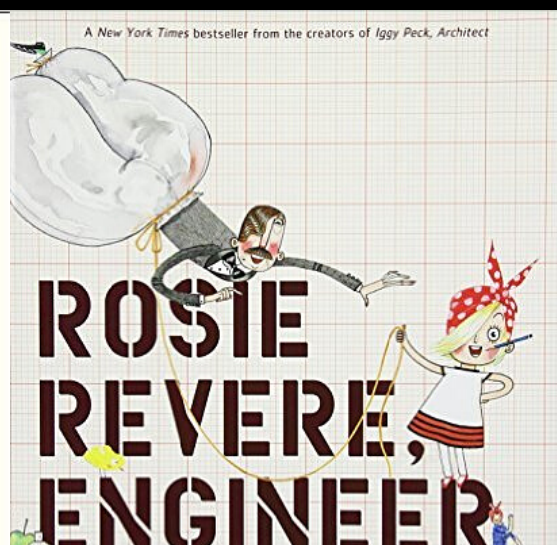
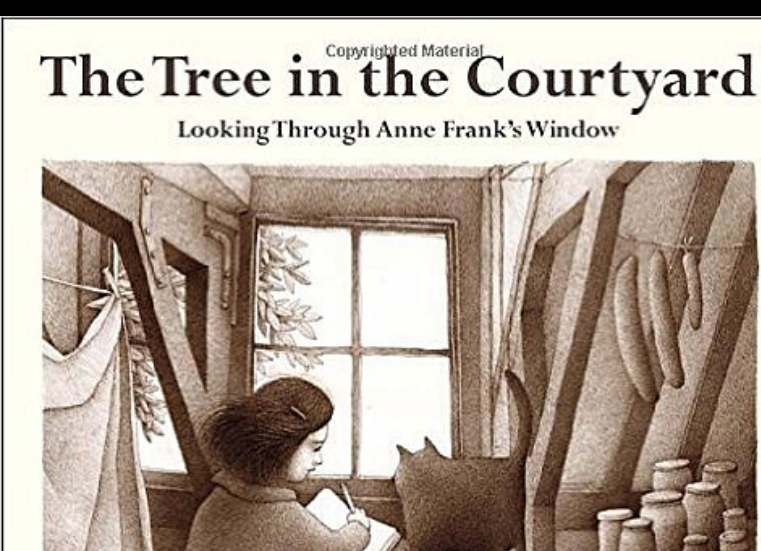
That young girl's plea stayed with me because it was only months before that I had spent several hours in a very large New England bookstore perusing scores of children's books to ensure that the books selected for children in Jamaica are not just high quality, but draws from a diverse range of authors, explore global themes and equally important, are culturally relevant for Jamaican kids.

There were thousands of books in the children's section, many fantastic new ones, and a variety of genres, all wonderfully displayed. Many were also strategically placed all over the store, outside the designated children's section.

Amazingly, not one of these books displayed the face of an Asian, Native American, Hispanic or African American kid - not a single one. This was not the first moment I had noticed the dearth of multicultural literature available in the stores I visit. However, on this occasion it struck me most forcefully because of the size of the store; its size still did not allow for a display that captured the full range, beauty and diversity of our country.

**"KIDS MIGHT NOT JUDGE A BOOK BY ITS COVER, BUT THEY MIGHT JUDGE THEMSELVES BY BOOKS' COVERS."**

Miranda Paul





## BRINGING THE WORLD TO OUR KIDS

And while it is important to see the faces of persons of color on the covers of the literature that our kids read, the bigger issue for me was that the perspectives (and richness) that comes from having diverse storytellers was absent. Our kids need to see the faces of all races and ethnicities, and read their complex and multi-layered stories and get comfortable with differences. They also need to experience and enjoy fun, and heartwarming stories that come from these varied life experiences and points of view, without the usual pigeonholing - civil rights; immigration; preternatural and exotic beings.

How can there be such a gross literary underrepresentation of a significant segment of our nation? Why is it that books with children of color make for such a poor business proposition?

I believe several factors are in play. Many stores are not stocking multicultural books because they are not selling. At the end of the day, it is still about the dollars and those of us with the most purchasing power are not buying enough or any at all. Stores stock in favor of not just the area's demographics, but overall buying trends.

Poor sales will probably be most reflected in homogeneous [largely Caucasian] communities, but even more diverse pockets of the country suffer from the absence of multicultural literature that draws upon and reflect the work of diverse writers, editors, publishers, and illustrators.







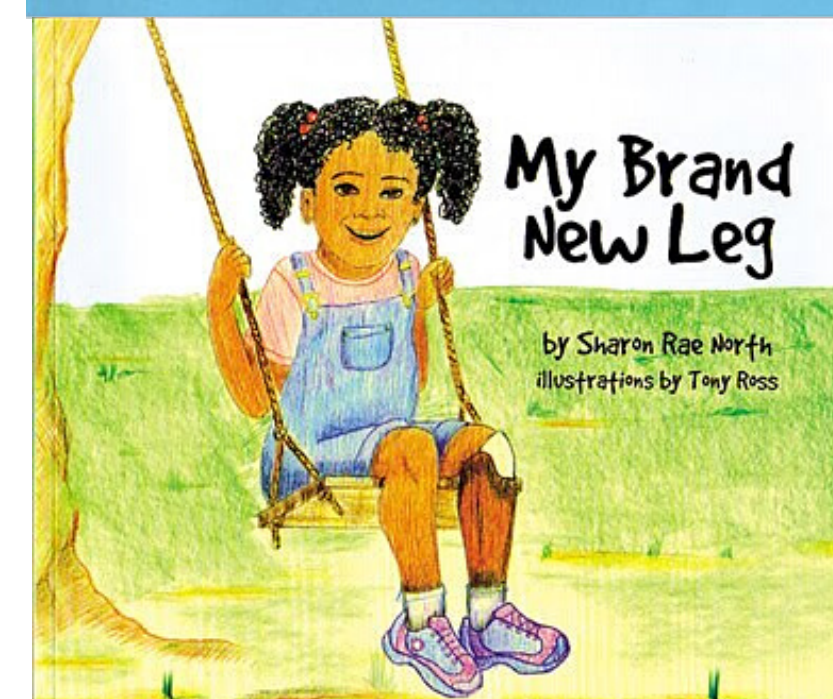
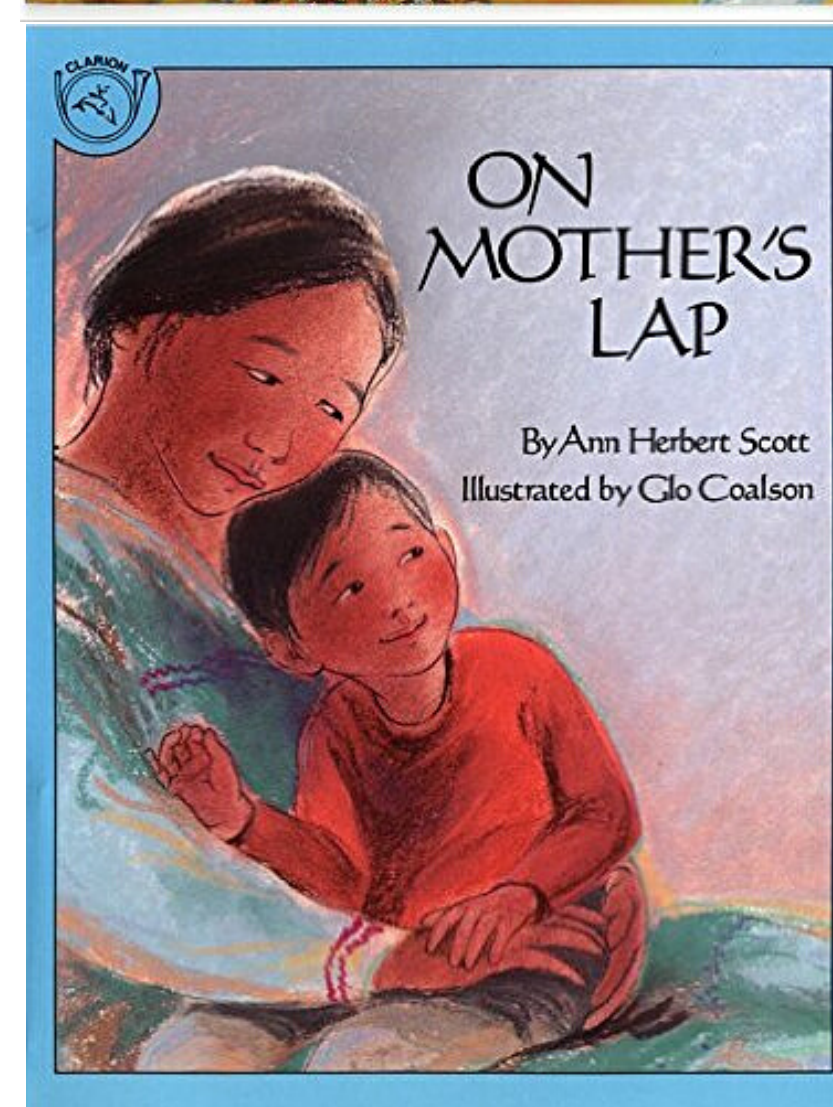
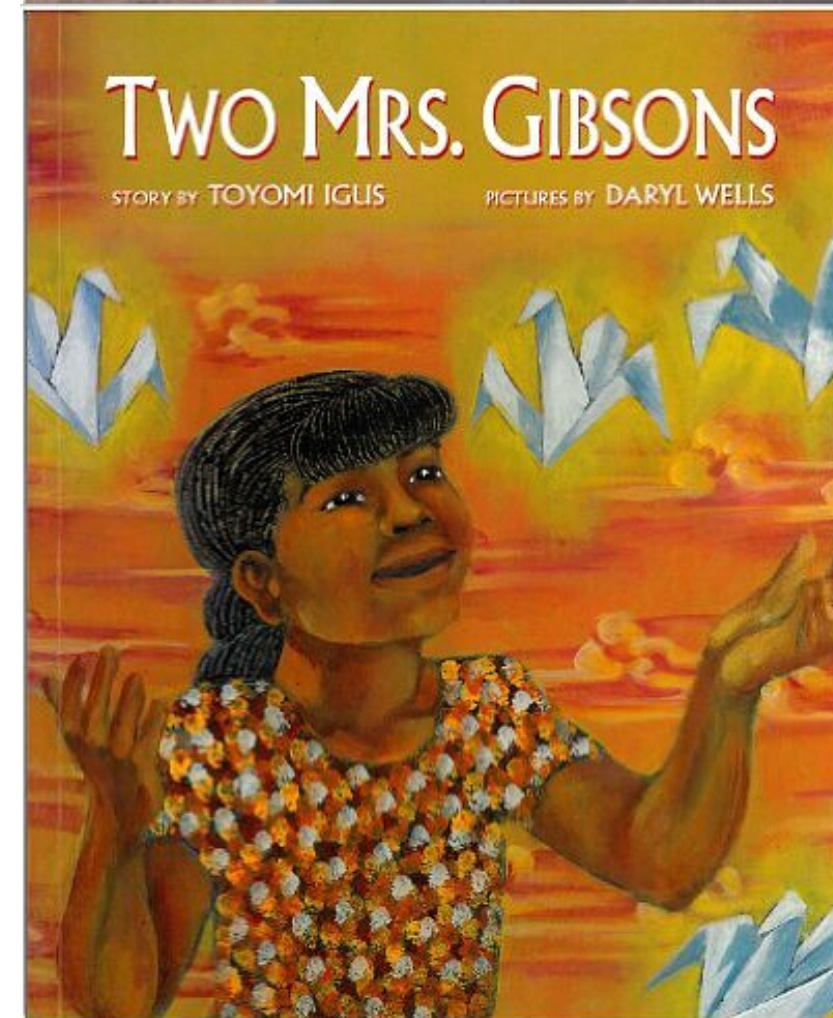
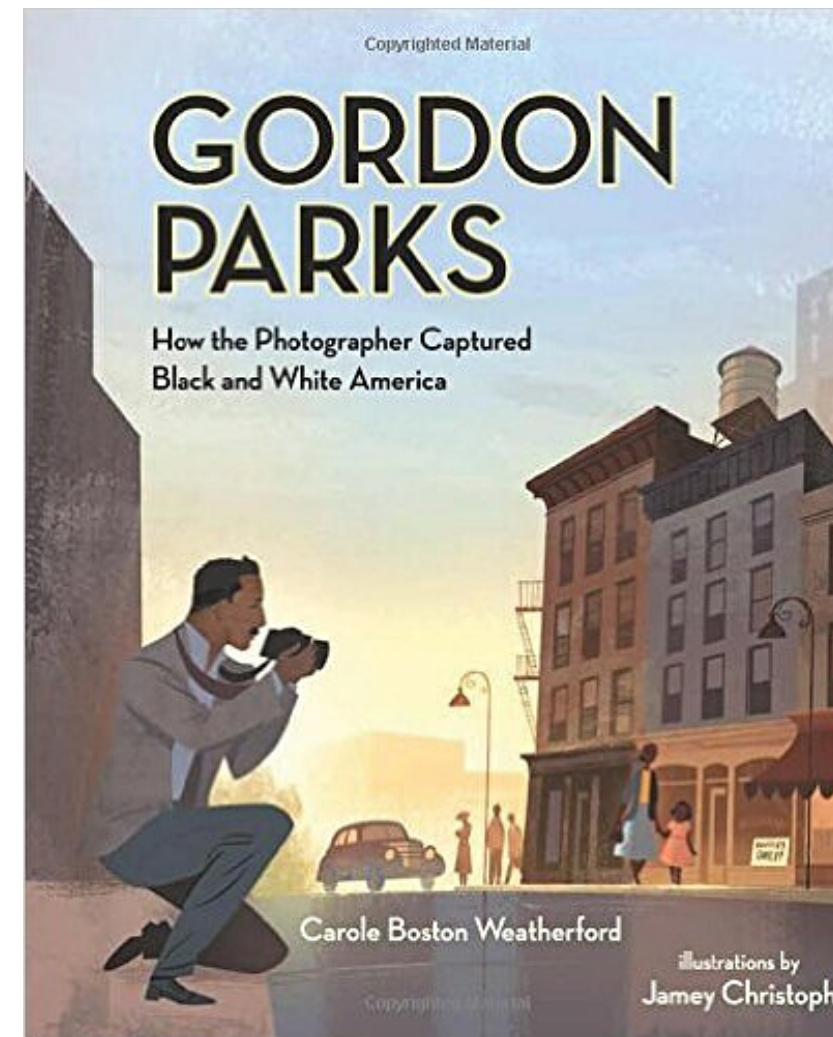
## READING OWLS INTERNATIONAL

Creating Readers... for Life

Focused and sustained effort is required in cultivating and publishing the work of minority writers. It starts with diversifying publishing houses, editorial staffs, and executive levels across the board, but it also involves creating an environment where minority writers are encouraged and embraced as legitimate storytellers, artists and illustrators within the broad American melting pot.

Our kids are still growing up largely segregated, driven mostly by socio-economic factors that determine where they live or go to school. They in turn end up knowing very little about the lives and cultures of others outside their specific communities. If they are intellectually curious enough, they will get to college and take some course in Latin American or Asian studies, but not enough to have the strong cultural competencies needed for a fluid, global society. We are failing them when they need specific classes to learn - not enhance their knowledge - and experience the beauty and diversity of their own country and multicultural society.

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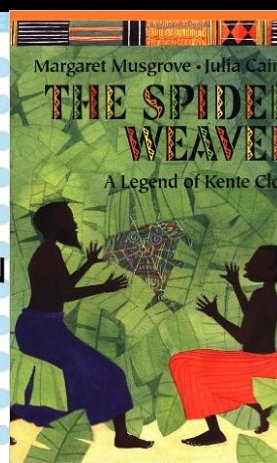
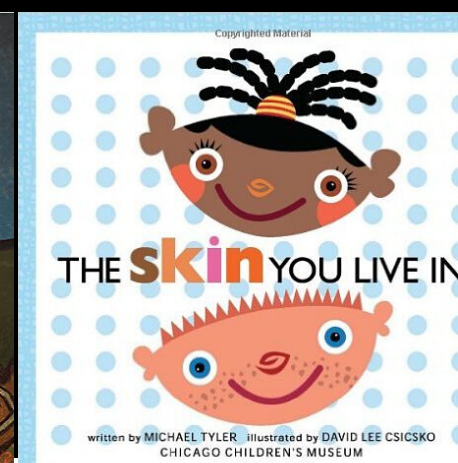
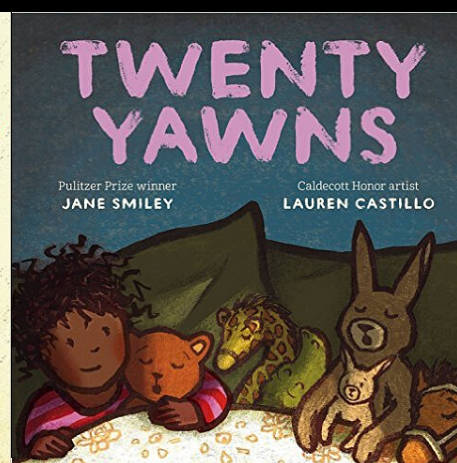
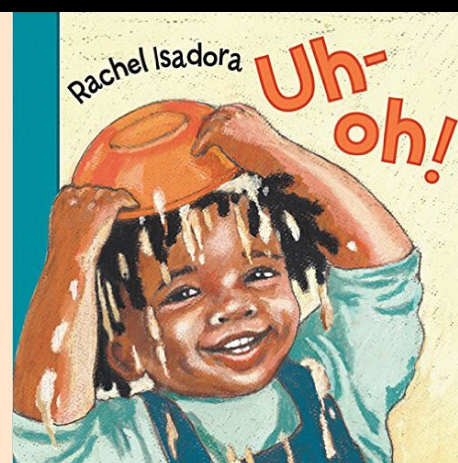
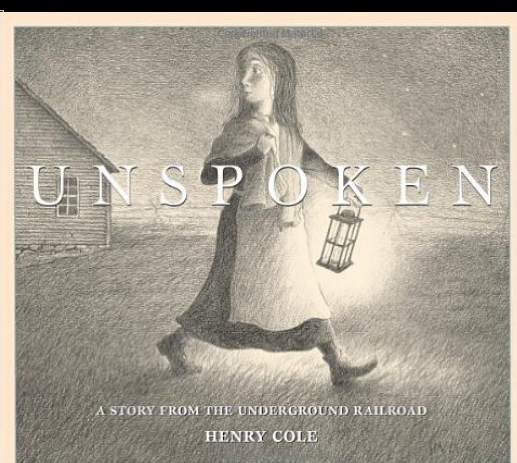
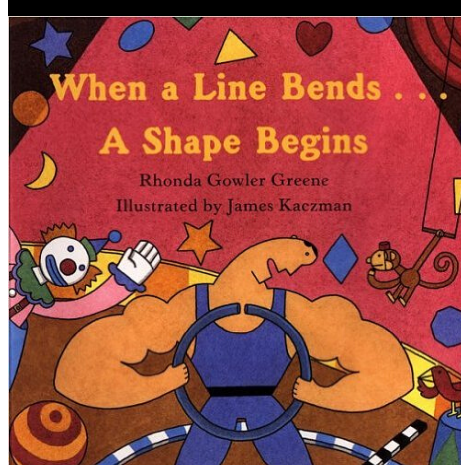




In failing to provide our kids with diverse reading material, we are doing them a huge disservice by constricting their exposure. More broadly, we will continue to fail at weaving and living this beautiful tapestry called America unless we start to expose them from early, and help our kids to understand that there is beauty in diversity. We must also demand that stores (publishing houses) stock multicultural literature, then buy the books, and read them to our kids.

WE NEED DIVERSE BOOKS BECAUSE, BECAUSE NO ONE SHOULD SAY "WHEN I WAS A KID, I DIDN'T KNOW SOMEONE LIKE ME COULD DO THAT."

Qlovi







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