

Using Picture Book Biographies

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Every afternoon, Christopher, a precocious 5-year-old African American child, and his kindergarten classmates eagerly await story time. The students quietly gather and sit in a semicircle on the floor at Mrs. Jamison's feet. Today she has promised to read them an exciting tale of the adventures of Alvin, a little boy who wanted to travel to the moon. The students wait in anticipation.

Cynthia Jamison begins the story, *When I Grow Up*, sharing the pictures as she reads. As always, she encourages her students to wait until the end of the story to ask questions or share their ideas. The pages of the book contain vivid and colorful drawings of Alvin at home, at school, with his friends, and at the space museum near his home.

In the story, Alvin brings a toy rocket for show-and-tell at his school, and tells his teacher he wants to go to the moon when he grows up. Alvin's teacher smiles and tells him he can certainly go to the moon one day. After Alvin completes his sharing, his teacher tells him and his classmates the story of Alan Shepard and John Glenn, who made history by traveling into space many years ago. She shows the students a picture of John Glenn. They are excited to see a photograph of a real astronaut.

As Mrs. Jamison is about to turn the page, Christopher's hand goes up. She asks him to wait until the end of the story. Obediently,

to Nurture the Talents of Young Gifted African American Students

he puts his hand down. Mrs. Jamison continues reading about Alvin's trip to the space museum with his parents. She shows her students the vibrant pictures of rockets, pilots, and astronauts that are on display in the museum as Alvin and his parents walk around. The students gasp "ooh" and "aahh" with elation. Again, Christopher's hand is in the air. "Just a few more minutes, Christopher," Mrs. Jamison says as she turns yet another page. Christopher sighs and puts his hand down.

Mrs. Jamison continues reading and showing pictures of Alvin with his friends on Career Day. The special guests who visit Alvin's classroom talk about the kinds of jobs they have. The visitors include doctors, lawyers, artists, firemen, and an astronaut. Alvin and his classmates get to talk with the guests and take home their pictures taken with them. Finally, the story ends with a huge picture of Alvin smiling as he stands next to the astronaut. He is holding a signed picture of the astronaut in his hand that reads, "See you on the moon, Alvin."

Mrs. Jamison smiles and says, "The end," signaling time for questions and sharing. The first hand to shoot into the air is Christopher's.

"Yes, Christopher," Mrs. Jamison says.

"Can I become an astronaut?" he asks.

"Why of course you can, Christopher," Mrs. Jamison replies.

"Well, I did not see any astronauts or pilots in the story that look like me. Are there any?" he asks curiously.

Mrs. Jamison clears her throat and says, "I don't know but I imagine there are. We will have to find out. You can become whatever you would like to if you study hard and remain a good boy."

At the same time, other students raise their hands.

Sara, a young Black child, says, "Mrs. Jamison, there were no lawyers at Alvin's school that look like my mommy. She is a lawyer."

Jamal asks, "Mrs. Jamison, my daddy is a fireman, and I did not see anybody like him in the story either. Why not?"

Amidst all the questions, Mrs. Jamison tells the students that it's time to wash their hands for afternoon snacks. Reluctantly, they line up at the sink, still unsatisfied with the unanswered questions that hang in the air. They want answers, but they dare not misbehave or upset Mrs. Jamison.

As the end of the day draws near and the students are packing their book bags to leave, Christopher approaches Mrs. Jamison and says, "I am sure there are astronauts that look like me. Will you please try to find a book about one and read it to us one day soon?"

Trying not to let her doubts show, Mrs. Jamison smiles and says, "Of course I will, Christopher." The students are dismissed and Mrs. Jamison slumps in her chair at her desk. She has no idea how to answer her students' many questions.

During her planning hour, Cynthia Jamison visits Ruth May, the enrichment specialist in the gifted education resource room. Ruth notices the look of despair on her colleague's face. "What's wrong, Cynthia?" she asks.

Cynthia responds, "You know my student, Christopher, the young man who asks so many questions of our monthly featured guest speakers, and who brings all the interesting gadgets from home to share with everyone? The little guy who is so full of energy?"

Ruth May replies, "Why, of course I know him! Who in this school doesn't? He is adorable! So inquisitive and insightful! Christopher is very well known to be so young and new to the school. What's going on with him?"

Cynthia Jamison is hesitant to answer. "Well, today in class, I read a book about a little boy who wants to go to the moon. Of course, during the reading, Christopher was eager to ask questions, but somehow, I held him off until the end of the story. All the while, I was terrified of the questions he would ask. He wanted to know why there were no pictures of astronauts or pilots that look like him in the story. I didn't have an answer and told him we would have to find out. He's only 5 years old for goodness sakes! Where do these questions come from? How am I supposed to work with such a little genius as well as the other students in my class who are not quite where Christopher is? What am I supposed to do?"

Mrs. May sighs. "Well, I agree Christopher is way ahead of his classmates, which means you have to stay a few steps ahead of him." Laughing, she

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continues, “You know, you will be a lot less frustrated if you are prepared with teaching strategies and activities that keep his attention and answer many of those questions he has. Maybe I can help. I have a great collection of picture book biographies that might do the trick. Let’s take a look.”

Mrs. May leads Mrs. Jamison to the gifted education resource room where she has a large collection of picture book biographies. The two begin the search for possible strategies to respond to Christopher’s curiosity.

This scenario highlights an important challenge facing educators in primary grade classrooms. The discussion below addresses this challenge by showcasing scholarly literature that examines the importance of infusing culturally relevant material into K–2 classrooms. Following that discussion, methods of using picture book biographies of African Americans to nurture the interests, strengths, and talents of gifted Black students and a list of high-quality picture book biographies are presented.

Related Literature

The United States is becoming increasingly diverse, and this diversity is clearly evident in our schools. Recent demographic trends have transformed American classrooms through the influx of large numbers of culturally, linguistically, ethnically, and economically diverse students (Larke, Elbert, Webb-Johnson, Larke, & Brisco, 2006). Currently, one in three students in the K–12 population in the U.S. is of a racial or ethnic minority background (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). This trend of increasing diversity is expected to continue well into the 21st century.

With increasingly diverse school populations comes a need to design school environments and experiences

that are culturally responsive (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Manning & Baruth, 2009). Gay (2000) defined culturally responsive teaching as “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (p. 29). Such an approach is based on the belief that a positive self-concept, knowledge of and pride in one’s ethnic identity, and academic achievement are inextricably intertwined.

Furthermore, Gay (2000) maintained that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students they carry more personal meaning, increase student interest, and are learned more efficiently. Ford and Harris (1999) have indicated that for culturally diverse students school is more engaging, motivating, and relevant when they examine their own culture as well as the culture of others. Nieto and Bode (2008) asserted that such an approach is simply good pedagogy. They argue, “all good education takes students seriously, uses their experiences as a basis for learning, and helps them develop into informed, critically aware, and empowered citizens” (p. 59).

The need for culturally responsive teaching is not limited to regular education classrooms. For more than a decade, leaders in gifted education have called for the infusion of culturally relevant approaches in gifted programs (Ford, Grantham, & Harris, 1996; Ford & Harris, 1999). Such multicultural education is predicated on the belief that all individuals have intrinsic worth and seeks to “affirm individual differences and human diversity through the elimination of prejudices, biases, and stereotypes based on socio-demographic variables” (Ford et al., 1996, p. 73). Educators

in gifted programs working to become more culturally responsive in their teaching are dedicated to changes in pedagogy. Culturally responsive teachers begin by searching for and using materials that portray diverse populations in positive ways and guaranteeing that their students know these resources are available (Manning & Baruth, 2009; Nieto & Bode, 2008).

Benefits of Using Picture Book Biographies of African Americans

There are numerous benefits of including picture book biographies of African Americans in the education of young gifted children. It is important that all children view themselves as young students with high potential. Through exposure to high-quality biographical material, young African American children are provided with mirror images of themselves. Studying the lives of individuals who look like them enables gifted African American students to feel more connected to the classroom curriculum.

Teaching biographies of African Americans also benefit students who are not African American. Attention to diversity benefits all students. Because children of various races interact in the classroom, it is vital that they see not only themselves but also one another as all having equally high potential. Given the increasing diversity of the United States, educators are short-changing all students if they do not provide education about the multicultural society in which they live, and provide them instead with a limited, skewed view that does not represent reality.

Another benefit of such an approach involves curriculum enrichment. Picture book biographies are especially beneficial in supporting

teachers in their efforts to provide appropriate enrichment. Educators will find it easy to make connections between the biographies of African American individuals and all curricular domains. When one considers the life stories of prominent African Americans in social justice, the arts, literature, athletics, scientific discovery and innovation, and politics and government, the possibilities are limitless for enriching teaching and learning in language arts, mathematics, social science, science, and visual and performing arts. With the inauguration of President Barack Obama, the first African American elected to the highest office in our country, teachers may expect more questions from students of color who may be confused by the contradiction between images of a Black president and the absence of images of African American astronauts, pilots, and lawyers in their classroom and curricular materials. The use of picture book biographies of African Americans helps to address this issue.

A third benefit involves addressing the social and emotional development of young gifted children. Picture book biographies of African Americans serve to inspire and motivate young gifted culturally diverse children. As African American children study the lives of individuals who overcame tremendous adversity, reached high levels of achievement, and made significant contributions to society, they should be able to draw parallels to their lives and recognize their potential to do the same.

Teachers also benefit from such an approach. The infusion of picture book biographies of African Americans helps educate teachers from the dominant culture about the life stories of individuals with whom they may not be familiar. In learning about African American history and culture, teachers increase their own knowledge and

cultural awareness, enhancing their ability to address the needs of culturally diverse students.

Considerations in Selecting Picture Book Biographies

Educators need to consider several issues in selecting picture book biographies of African Americans. Because the lives of many African Americans in history have involved difficult challenges related to the country's history of segregation, discrimination, and racial turmoil, teachers will want to select biographies that deal with the reality of the African American experience in a realistic yet sensitive manner.

Particular periods in American history involve very difficult events for African Americans and educators must consider this when selecting appropriate biographies. For example, it is important to include biographies that address slavery and the struggles of the Civil Rights Movement in a curriculum for gifted culturally diverse students. Young students will benefit from learning about these historical events long before they encounter them in upper elementary social studies textbooks that often provide only cursory treatment of these periods. However, teachers will face the challenge of explaining these difficult issues and events in an age appropriate manner. For example, teachers will have to unpack some of the vocabulary associated with the experience of Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the racist epithets hurled at Jackie Robinson, or the angry crowds who met young Ruby Bridges daily as she entered her new desegregated elementary school in New Orleans.

Teachers should consider biographies of individuals from a variety of domains and geographic regions of the

country and ensure that the contributions of both African American men and women are represented in the classroom collection. In addition, teachers need to recognize the differences that exist among African Americans with respect to class, socioeconomic status, and levels of education. This awareness should be reflected in the variety of picture book biographies selected for the classroom.

Educators creating classroom collections of biographies of African Americans need to select picture books written by authors who celebrate the dialect and colloquial expressions of African American people in a sensitive yet authentic manner. Moreover, teachers should search for biographies featuring illustrations that capture the life story and historical events accurately and effectively. Picture books filled with vibrant art that celebrates the African American experience should be included. For example, teachers will want to explore Brian Pinkney's signature scratchboard renderings done in oil pastels and the unique style of Brian Selznick who portrayed the entire life story of opera singer Marian Anderson in beautiful shades of brown.

Teaching Strategies Using Picture Book Biographies

The discussion below provides strategies and classroom activities to assist teachers in making cross-curricular connections using any of the picture book biographies listed in the bibliography of recommended materials. Teachers should find these helpful in working with K–2 students; however, they may be modified for older children. The discussion begins with examples of literacy and art enrichment centered on picture book biographies and is followed by several

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exemplars with discussion of strategies and methods for infusing them across the curriculum.

In using picture books with young gifted students, different approaches may be taken when reading a biography to a group of young children. In the opening scenario, Ms. Jamison was intent on developing good listening skills in her students and chose to have the children wait until the end of the story to comment. In addition, teachers may find that stopping at a critical point in the story and asking the children to describe what has taken place helps to keep them actively engaged in the telling of the story. They also may be asked to predict what they think will happen at the end, which requires students to use higher order thinking.

In addition to the impressive high quality of picture book biographies of African Americans currently available, many are notable selections because of their outstanding artistic content. It is important that teachers consider including activities that incorporate the art. For example, teachers might select illustrations from each story, including the covers, and have students examine them, asking them to describe what they see. They would then explain to the class that interpreting art is similar to interpreting stories and that there also are messages in the art. Finally, the children would share the messages they see in the illustrations.

Young children enjoy talking with each other in class. A teacher may tap into this energy, pair the students, and allow time for interviewing one another to share stories about their lives. Using the information gathered from the interview, the teacher would assist students in writing biographies about their selected partners and creating artwork to illustrate their picture book biographies. Teachers may invite a guest artist to the classroom to share tips for illustrating books. Following

the guest speaker's presentation, the students would have an opportunity to ask questions of the guest artist, and then time would be provided for students to work on illustrations of their own. The final biographies would be placed on display in the classroom or school library for others to enjoy.

Computer software programs serve as exciting interactive tools to use with young gifted children. Teachers may want to explore software programs such as Paint, Orly's Draw-a-Story, Kid Pix, and Art Dabbler for students to use to create the portraits that accompany their biographies. The portraits could be printed and displayed alongside the biographies to celebrate all of the individual personalities in the class.

Computer-generated art may be fascinating for young children; however, teachers also realize that young children enjoy art with any lesson, and the messier, the better! Picture book biographies enable teachers to incorporate a variety of projects with ease. The picture books may serve as inspiration for the use of watercolor, chalk, oil pastels, finger paint, or colored pencils. Students will enjoy experimenting with a variety of media as they create self-portraits or depict their own everyday lives and those of family members and friends.

Family is an important component of a child's growth and development and young gifted children will benefit from being asked to select a family member, family friend, or a mentor to interview. Following the selection of their subject, teachers would provide time for the children to generate interview questions and practice interviewing skills with classmates. Following the interviews with the important people in their lives, the teacher would provide the children time to write their stories. An added dimension of this activity would be having the children enhance their biographical stories with

illustrations using an artistic medium of their choice.

Field trips provide meaningful learning adventures for young children. Teachers may want to visit a local art store or gallery to see different media and styles of art. Museums may offer inspirational exhibits of Afrocentric art or folk art by local African American artists. Such art may be similar to some of the styles of illustration in the picture book biographies the children have enjoyed. After the field trip, teachers will want to spend time discussing with students the many careers that are available to artists. The discussion may be followed by an online Internet search to investigate any careers that are of interest to them.

The following discussion features several exemplars selected from the recommended list of materials. Exploring these books will give teachers the opportunity to generate a variety of ways to incorporate them into their classrooms.

Dizzy Gillespie

Jonah Winter's (2006) *Dizzy* features the story of Dizzy Gillespie, the famed jazz trumpeter. Offering a delightful combination of rich language and vivid pictures, the book reads like poetry and looks like art. *Dizzy* creates a mood and sustains it, teaching as it delivers the story of the famous musician. Reading it aloud to children will allow them to appreciate the rhythm and jazz of the writing as the text glides, dances, and plays along just as Dizzy Gillespie did. The vivid illustrations enhance the work, bringing alive for children the time and events of Dizzy's life.

Music Enrichment. Young children love music. Incorporating music into gifted education classrooms is an enjoyable strategy and with the support of a dedicated music specialist,

jazz appreciation can be developed. Teachers might consider locating samples of jazz music at local music stores or downloading selections from the Internet, including works by Dizzy Gillespie. Following a listening session, students would be encouraged to describe how the music makes them feel. This discussion might be followed by the students writing their descriptions and illustrating their responses to *Dizzy* artistically.

Another enrichment activity would engage students in a class jam session. Children would bring instruments from home, or make homemade instruments (sticks, pot covers, bean-filled jars) and have a jazz concert in the classroom. When children have practiced some of their original compositions, they might want to invite other classes to attend a classroom jazz concert.

Language Arts. Jonah Winter's *Dizzy* features wonderful abstract art that can provide inspiration for student writing. A website filled with a wealth of possible ideas to stimulate writing with students can be found at the following link: <http://home.cogeco.ca/~rayser3/writing.htm#artwrit>. Included in this site are two wonderful activities for young writers designed by Leilani Kesner, a language arts teacher. Explore the possibilities she suggests by visiting the hyperlink, Turning Art and Photographs Into Writing. Ms. Kesner offers an enjoyable way to expose young children to abstract art, presenting beautiful examples of abstract art and offering writing activities to accompany them. After students visit this website, teachers can use the illustrations in *Dizzy* to encourage them to write. Prompts such as "This picture reminds me of . . ." or "This picture makes me feel . . ." serve as effective warm-up activities to get students started in creating poetry, songs, or stories about the famous Dizzy Gillespie.

Classroom Guidance. Dizzy Gillespie broke many rules in breaking away from the traditional jazz of his time. His clowning around with the trumpet instead of acting out when he was angry turned into an invention that made him famous. Teachers could have students discuss what they do when they are angry and brainstorm ways to deal with anger other than acting out or misbehaving. Teachers may want to have students reflect in writing on how they might apply such a lesson to their lives.

Satchel Paige

Lisa Cline-Ransome's (2000) *Satchel Paige* captures the life of the legendary baseball player who spent 20 years in the Negro Leagues before finally being drafted in 1948 as the first Black pitcher in major league baseball. This immensely talented athlete was subsequently the first African American to pitch in a major league World Series.

Math Enrichment. The Negro Baseball League (NBL) era was a fascinating period in the history of American sports. The Black players and major league players played separate seasons and met only at barnstorming or exhibition games. In addition to providing this background information, teachers would explain that statistics (e.g., batting averages, homeruns, runs batted in) for NBL players are incomplete. To uncover this missing information, teachers would help students determine how to measure a baseball player's ability by calculating a batting average. Students would have the opportunity to figure out their favorite player's average, or their own, using their mathematical skills. Teachers would assist the children in dividing the player's number of hits by the number of times at bat. For example, if a player got a hit 3 times in his last 10 times at bat, the students would divide 3 by 10, which

would be written as $\frac{3}{10}$, or .300. A great resource for educators to locate the batting averages of NBL players is James Riley's (1994) *The Biographical Encyclopedia of the Negro Baseball Leagues*.

Harriet Tubman

Alan Schroeder's (1996) *Minty: A Story of Young Harriet Tubman* provides a glimpse into the early life of a sig-

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nificant woman in African American history. Harriet escaped from slavery to freedom in the North. Unable to forget the horrors of life as a slave, she returned to the South 19 times to lead 300 slaves, including members of her own family, to freedom. Schroeder depicts the remarkable life of this true heroine with an honesty and poignancy young children will appreciate.

Social Studies. The evolution of slavery in America dates back more than 300 years and is poorly documented in school textbooks. The devastating experience of African Americans should be included in more lessons for all students and should include stories of triumph over the terrible conditions during that shameful time in our nation's history.

The website <http://www.scholastic.com> offers an engaging activity for teachers to use with students in discussing the often uncomfortable topic of slavery. An introduction to this activity would involve children locating Africa and the United States on the globe.

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Teachers would then indicate how Africans were taken from their homes and families and forced to travel aboard crowded ships as cargo to America where they were put to work on plantations. An explanation of the role of abolitionists would follow, to highlight that although many Americans approved of slavery, some people courageously spoke out against it.

A Freedom Chart may help students understand why Harriet Tubman worked so hard to free herself and others from slavery. Teachers would provide a poster-sized sheet of paper divided into four columns. The first column would be labeled “Freedom.” Students would be asked to generate a list of simple yet important freedoms they enjoy. The second column labeled “Importance” would serve as the space where students explain why each freedom is important to them. The third column labeled “Slavery” would provide the children the opportunity to describe what happened when slaves were deprived of the basic freedoms listed in the first two columns. In the final column labeled “Feelings,” the students would describe how they would respond if each freedom were taken from them. This activity would conclude with a discussion centered on how Harriet Tubman’s courage and hard work paid off for her and so many slaves during a very difficult time in history.

Music. Traditional African American spirituals are inspirational hymns that were used to empower slaves during times of tragedy and despair. These songs provide an excellent outlet for sharing the expressions and experiences of slaves. Significant examples include “Go Down Moses,” “Joshua Fought the Battle of Jericho,” “Steal Away,” and “Follow the Drinking Gourd.” Spirituals may be obtained online, at a music store, or at a local public library. As teachers share this music with their

students, they should ask them to listen carefully to the words and think about what the songs might have meant to the slaves. Teachers would then lead a discussion about how the songs were used as protest and as a way of looking to a future that might include escape. Following this listening session and discussion, students would be asked to use descriptive or narrative writing to share how the slaves felt about their lives and the horrific treatment they received as well as to depict the story of slaves who were planning to escape.

Technology. Virtual field trips are excellent opportunities to create simulated experiences for young children. Teachers may accompany students on a trip on the Underground Railroad by exploring the following website: <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/railroad>. Through this site, students follow the path many slaves took to freedom and experience the hardships and dangers they suffered along the way. This simulated journey would be followed by the students writing their reflective impressions of their imagined experience on the railroad.

Althea Gibson

Sue Stauffacher’s (2007) *Nothing but Trouble: The Story of Althea Gibson* portrays young Althea as a trouble-making tomboy who was happiest when she was playing stickball, basketball, or paddle tennis ball. Jazz musician Buddy Walker saw her potential, bought her a tennis racket, and got her into a high-society tennis club. It took years for Althea to tame her anger and become the first African American tennis player to win at Wimbledon. In this picture book, the reader is treated to a swirl of vivid colors that surround Althea in every scene. This effective technique helps to highlight her emotions and her intensity as she faced racial discrimination in the all-

White world of tennis in the mid-20th century.

Language Arts. After teachers have shared this biography of Althea Gibson, they may want to consider an affective lesson through language arts. Using a Venn diagram, teachers would direct children to compare their own childhood to Althea’s by writing down activities that are unique to Althea in an “Althea’s Childhood” circle and noting the activities they have in common with her in the “Both of Us” portion that overlaps. Students would share their responses with the class or in private journaling.

Physical Education. Video and movie clips are effective in presenting important societal images in the classroom. Historical footage offers even more authenticity to students in sharing the stories of significant African Americans throughout history. Students can experience Althea Gibson’s tennis career through such footage, which may be obtained from historical websites or local public libraries. Teachers of gifted students may want to collaborate with physical education teachers to teach basic tennis techniques and rules of the game. Another possibility would be to invite a tennis pro from a local health club to visit the class and provide demonstrations or a mini-course in tennis. A partnership with the local parks and recreation department might be formed to begin a tennis clinic for interested students.

Frederick Douglass

Suzanne Slade’s (2007) *Frederick Douglass: Writer, Speaker, and Opponent of Slavery* presents the details of the life of Frederick Douglass, one of the foremost leaders of the abolitionist movement, which fought to end slavery in the United States for several decades prior to the Civil War. This powerful portrayal of his life begins with his

birth into slavery and traces his days as an abolitionist and his role as an activist following the Civil War.

Language Arts. Frederick Douglass wrote for *The Liberator*, an antislavery newspaper of his time. Following a discussion of the role of abolitionists during slavery, students might enjoy recreating the experiences of Frederick Douglass. To introduce young gifted students to journalism and creative marketing, teachers would pair students to write a story or create a political cartoon depicting the evils of slavery to be published in a newspaper similar to *The Liberator*. Before the work of the students has been compiled in the class publication, students would determine an appropriate name for their newspaper in honor of the struggles of Frederick Douglass.

Math Enrichment. The statistics regarding the U.S. population in 1860 are rather startling when one considers the number of slaves living in this country prior to the Civil War. To highlight the division of the country's population, students would use reference materials or the Internet to locate this information, then design pie charts to represent the numbers they discover in their research. Following the research and graphing of pie charts, teachers would lead students in a discussion about what these numbers meant to people living during the time of slavery. A comparison of these numbers to present Census statistics would follow with rich class discussions.

Marian Anderson

Pam Muñoz Ryan's (2002) *When Marian Sang* portrays the life of Marian Anderson, the internationally renowned opera singer. Marian Anderson is best known her for historic concert at the Lincoln Memorial in 1939, which drew an integrated crowd of 75,000 people in pre-Civil Rights

America. Although this momentous event showcased the uniqueness of her character and the struggles of the times in which she lived, it is only part of her story. Like the opera arias Marian Anderson sang, Muñoz Ryan's text is a moving libretto. Brian Selznick's illustrations are as exquisitely detailed and elaborately designed as a stage set. From their collaborative effort emerges their shared vision of Marian Anderson as a role model of courage.

Language Arts. Letters of protest were written to newspapers when Marian Anderson was forbidden to sing in Constitution Hall because she was Black. The outcry was so strong that authorities were forced to reconsider their decision. As is evident in the story of Marian Anderson, letters of protest can have a powerful impact on society. After exposure to this picture book biography, students might enjoy participating in a letter writing campaign. Students could write letters of protest to a fictitious newspaper similar to the letters written when the opera singer was forbidden to sing. Students also might consider writing letters to Marian Anderson to offer emotional support and to express their admiration for her dignity and grace during such challenging times.

Music/Language Arts. Young gifted students often enjoy learning songwriting. To begin, teachers would ask the children to think of sentences that describe Marian Anderson and the events of her life, then encourage them to write a song using the sentences they have generated. Once the song is written, students would be asked to sing their lyrics to a popular tune or an original tune they create.

Marian Anderson's spirituals and opera selections are both inspirational and entertaining for people of all ages. Children are mesmerized by the power of her voice. Through a search on the Internet or in a local library, teach-

ers could compile a collection of her work to share with students. Following a listening session, students could be encouraged to brainstorm adjectives that describe her voice. Using the brainstormed list of descriptors, students would then write a poem about Marian Anderson.

Social Studies and Technology. Following a discussion of the Jim Crow laws evident in the story of Marian Anderson, teachers would assist their students with an Internet search about these laws and their effects on Americans. With a focus on Jim Crow laws, the students would be asked to generate questions they would want to ask Marian Anderson if they could interview her. Based on what they discover through their Internet search, they would then have to respond to the interview questions the way they think Marian Anderson would have answered them.

When written questions and answers are completed, the students could conduct a talk show in which one student plays the role of the interviewer and another student plays Marian Anderson. Suggestions for other talk show guests include individuals who wrote letters of protest to support Marian Anderson; Eleanor Roosevelt, the First Lady who publicly supported the opera singer; and Marian's dedicated mother.

Summary

The strengths and talents of gifted culturally diverse young children must be supported in culturally responsive gifted education classrooms. Picture book biographies of African Americans enable educators to address the intellectual as well as social and emotional needs of gifted young children. With a search for appropriate biographical materials and concerted efforts

in curriculum planning, teachers of young gifted students will provide an enriched educational program that serves all children well. **GCT**

Recommended Picture Book Biographies of African Americans

- Adler, D. (1997). *A picture book of Jackie Robinson*. New York, NY: Holiday House.
- Cline-Ransome, L. (2000). *Satchel Paige*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Coles, R. (1995). *The story of Ruby Bridges*. New York, NY: Scholastic.
- Cooper, F. (1994). *Coming home: From the life of Langston Hughes*. New York, NY: Philomel Books.
- Cooper, F. (2004). *Jump: From the life of Michael Jordan*. New York, NY: Philomel Books.
- Giovanni, N. (2005). *Rosa*. New York, NY: Henry Holt & Company.
- Grimes, N. (2002). *Talkin' about Bessie*. New York, NY: Orchard Books.
- Grimes, N. (2008). *Barack Obama: Son of promise, child of hope*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Haskins, J., & Benson, K. (2006). *John Lewis in the lead: A story of the Civil Rights movement*. New York, NY: Lee & Low Books.
- Jordan, D. (2000). *Salt in his shoes: Michael Jordan in pursuit of a dream*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Lasky, K. (2003). *A voice of her own: The story of Phillis Wheatley, slave poet*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press.
- Lindbergh, R. (1998). *Nobody owns the sky: The story of "Brave Bessie" Coleman*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press.
- Marzallo, J. (1993). *Happy birthday Martin Luther King*. New York, NY: Scholastic.
- Mellage, N. (2001). *Coming home: The story of Josh Gibson, baseball's greatest home run hitter*. New York, NY: Bridge-water Books.
- Miller, W. (1997). *Richard Wright and the library card*. New York, NY: Lee and Low Books.
- Miller, W. (2004). *Joe Louis: My champion*. New York, NY: Lee & Low Books.
- Mortensen, L. (2007). *Harriet Tubman: Hero of the Underground Railroad*. Minneapolis, MN: Picture Window Books.
- Myers, W. D. (2004). *I've seen the Promised Land: The life of Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York, NY: Amistad.
- Myers, W. D. (2000). *Malcolm X: A fire burning brightly*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Orgill, R. (1997). *If I only had a horn: Young Louis Armstrong*. Boston, MA: Houghton-Mifflin.
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