

# Black Children's Literature Policy, Publishing, Response, and Engagement: Where Do We Go from Here?

This article examines three interrelated aspects concerning reader access, development, and engagement with Black children's literature—educational policies and surveillance of Black children's literature, publishing trends, and Black youths' reader response—to consider what these elements tell us about where the field of Black children's literature might go from here.

**Like all children's literature,** Black children's literature strives to entertain, inform, and engage its readers. However, Black children's literature is uniquely tasked with disrupting a long history of anti-black social and political structures that continue to limit access and shape childhoods and children's reading lives within and outside schools. As Sims Bishop (2011) asserted, it is a "purposeful literature" (p. 230) embedded with an affective and aesthetic legacy (fictive and lived) that moves across space, place, and time. Black children's literature is a valuable knowledge system and critical educational resource that reflects social-political realities, beliefs, and histories while resisting deprecating representations and omissions to reveal the textures and complexity of Black experiences, wonder, and being.

**These narratives move through and beyond racialized trauma to convey Black childhoods holistically, in everyday contexts that are, at times, carefree, exuberant, and, yes, racialized.**

In 2022, multiple pandemics of economic, environmental, and racial inequities (Ladson-Billings, 2021) persisted. During this time, Black children's

literature expanded, moving beyond a repertoire of books that chronicle historical firsts and the overrepresentations of doctrines of servitude and enslavement. Books like *Saturday* (Mora, 2019) and *Jump In* (Strickland, 2023) highlight Black childhood experiences in joyful everyday contexts unencumbered by racial challenges. Illuminating nonfiction books like *Blue* (Brew-Hammond, 2022) and hybrid structures like *The Thing about Bees: A Love Letter to My Son* (Larkin, 2019) feature narrative nonfiction and fictional writing, expanding the range of informational topics that highlight Black contextual representations and experiences. Hidden histories and erased biographies were unearthed in books such as *Unspeakable: The Tulsa Race Massacre* by Carole Boston Weatherford (2021) and *Lifting as We Climb: Black Women's Battle for the Ballot Box* by Evette Dionne (2022). Fantasies moved away from an all-white world as authors such as Kwame Mbalia and B. B. Alston included Black children as main characters (Short & Cueto, 2022). Other books, such as *Hands Up* (McDaniel & Evans, 2019), *I Am Every Good Thing* (Barnes & James, 2020), and *New Kid* (Craft, 2019) offered captivating visual and verbal imagery of rhetorical healing and resistance to anti-blackness. These narratives move through and

beyond racialized trauma to convey Black childhoods holistically, in everyday contexts that are, at times, carefree, exuberant, and, yes, racialized. The contemporary Black children's literature published within the #WeNeedDiverseBooks (We Need Diverse Books, n.d.) movement continues to evolve, building upon the work of writers like Lucille Clifton, Ashley Bryan, and Angela Johnson to reflect the diversity of Black experiences that allow Black children to see themselves, their families, and their communities in a multitude of contexts.

However, despite their award-winning status and high regard by educators, families, and child readers, the last three books—*Hands Up* (McDaniel & Evans, 2019), *I Am Every Good Thing* (Barnes & James, 2020), and *New Kid* (Craft, 2019)—are examples of Black-authored books that were challenged in 2022 by Texas, Florida, and Pennsylvania school districts. These acts of surveillance reflect a recent trend in states to systematically target and limit engagement and access to Black voices and factual historical accounts of Black children's literature. Throughout this article, we examine three interrelated aspects concerning reader access, development, and engagement with Black children's literature: specifically, educational policies and surveillance of Black children's literature, publishing trends, and Black youths' reader response. We center Black children's literature while recognizing the challenge of other parallel and intersecting racial groups and LGBTQ+ communities as their voices undergo similar scrutiny and extreme acts of surveillance. We hope our nuanced inquiry into some barriers to access to Black children's literature within contemporary contexts will inspire and extend similar inquiry in diverse children's literature. Throughout, we revisit Sims's (1982) critical question, "Where do we go from here?"

We recognize the field has been "here" before—when anti-black social upheaval, educational policy reforms, and publishing of Black and other nonwhite representations intersected. In the early 1980s, Sims posed her question regarding the next steps for African American children's literature at the height of Black authorship and publishing of Black children's literature. Amidst a set of cascading

social and political questions, we see points of convergence between previous decades that provoked a response to white supremacy in society through representational remedies in Black literature for children and our current context. Theoretical discourses inform our examination and analysis, specifically, critical race theory (CRT) (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), the anti-black selective tradition in literature for children (Harris, 1990; Gardner, 2020), and critical policy analysis (Dumas & Ross, 2016). We examine the current movement of the 2020s, hoping that what we learn might inform, inspire, and expand new possibilities for access and engagement with Black children's literature in the future.

### **Black Children's Literature, Surveillance, and Educational Policies**

At the time of this writing (March 2023), thirty-nine states have passed new legislation that has primarily manifested into hypercensored control of curricula and a doubling down of narrow, standards-based content in schools. False accusations of teachers using CRT in classrooms have translated into a significant political economy for some politicians. They have used false narratives to leverage high-priority educational policy reforms that preserve white supremacist ideological values in states throughout the country. In Virginia, for example, the new governor enacted Executive Order Number One (E.O. 1, January 15, 2022), "Ending the Use of Inherently Divisive Concepts, Including Critical Race Theory, and Restoring Excellence in K–12 Public Education in the Commonwealth," as one of his first orders governing the state. Florida's Stop Woke Act and Georgia's Protect Students First Act both include parental acts that limit discussions of "racially divisive concepts" within government-funded businesses, including universities.

Groups like Moms for Liberty have successfully lobbied for new legislation and oversight. The oversight has resulted in the subsequent removal of books like *The 1619 Project* (Hannah-Jones et al., 2021) and *Ruby Bridges Goes to School* (Bridges, 2009) on the basis that their white children will be made to feel shame and discomfort about their

whiteness if educators read these titles. As Dumas and Ross (2016) contend, racialized policy discourses have historically reflected less concern with inequality than the “threat posed by the Black to the education of white and other students” (p. 12). In this case, the discussion of Black historical figures and the realities of structural inequalities shaped by the racial violence of forced migration and segregation are acknowledged by the state as primarily an imposing threat to white students.

Nevertheless, Black children are continuously subjected to educational policies and an anti-black selective tradition in publishing and pedagogical practices that have occurred for decades. As this selective tradition of education is “the vision and continued practice of omitting, limiting, tokenizing, and disregarding Blackness, including Black voices, visualities, subjectivities, and, by extension, Black people’s ways of knowing, being in, and narrating the world” (where the field of Black children’s literature

Black children to experience misrecognition, invisibility, and poor teaching of literature and history (Craft et al., 2019). Dumas and Ross’s critical analysis of how policy reforms continuously disregard Black children’s needs aptly reflects a critical reality of anti-black social and political structures that continue to limit access and shape childhoods and children’s reading lives within and outside schools. As Sims-Bishop (2011) asserted, it is a “purposeful literature” (p. 230) embedded with an affective and aesthetic legacy (fiction and lived) that moves across space, place, and time. Black children’s literature is a valuable knowledge system and critical educational resource that reflects social-political realities, beliefs, and histories while resisting deprecating representations in districts and public libraries. The policies and omissions attempt to control the right to read, know, and understand Black lives. It reminds

us of a powerful assertion made by Lerone Bennett, public historian and editor at Johnson Publishing Company, in his 1966 statement at a U.S. congressional hearing chaired by Adam Clayton Powell. Powell, the chair of the Committee on Education and Labor, held a weeklong hearing with an ad hoc subcommittee on de facto school segregation entitled “Books for Schools and the Treatment of Minorities.” Speaking critically against the failure of representations of Black people during the

1960s, Bennett argued, “Education does not tell these students who they are and how they got that way. It does not give them an image of their condition. It does not corroborate their reality. They cannot live the sunny day depicted in the books. The books, the words, the pictures, the symbols are about another people who live in another country” (p. 215). Over fifty years later, Bennett’s assertion remains relevant as curricula and books addressing racial inequality’s systemic realities are being censored by state-sanctioned policies.

We find the assaults on CRT ironic since the tenets within CRT, for example, whiteness as value, properly assessing and challenging attempts to curriculum (Lerner, Bellman, & Tith, 1995) are explicitly enacted through the new legislation and maintenance of status quo standards. There are burgeoning pockets of Black advocacy groups resisting the one-sided white-centred discourses, like national and local salient Black Child Initiative (BCI) and Black Child

Institute (BCDI). They are actively working to respond to and literature expanded, moving beyond a repertoire of books that chronicle historical firsts and the overrepresentation of doctrines of servitude and enslavement. Books like *Saturday* (Mora, 2019) and *How Low* (Strickland, 2023) highlight Black childhood experiences in joyful everyday contexts, unencumbered by racial challenges. Illuminating nonfiction books like *Blue* (Brew-Hammond, 2022) and hybrid structures like *The Thing about Black Children’s Literature* (Clark, 2019) feature narrative, nonfiction and fictional writing, expanding the range of informational tonics that highlight Black contextual challenges by others, systemic policies such as literary representations and experiences. Hidden histories and erased biographies were unearthed in books such as *Unspeaking: The Tulsa Race Massacre* by Carole Boston Weatherford (2021) and *Lifting as We Climb: Black Women’s Battle for the Ballot Box* by Evette Dionne (2022). Fantasies moved away from Black children’s literature was available.

Black children as main Publishing Trends in Black Children’s Literature Then and Now (Mora, 2019), *I Am Every*

*Good Thing* (Barnes & James, 2020), and *New Kid* (Craft, 2019) offered captivating visual and verbal imagery of rhetorical healing and resistance to George Floyd indeed “pricked the conscience” of anti-blackness. These narratives move through and

a society that witnessed blatant disregard for Black lives. Moreover, the convergence of publishing and policy reform in response to anti-black racial injustice was much like Nancy Larrick's highly visible challenge in her 1965 article, "The All White World of Children's Literature," which sought to reconcile the systematic exclusion of Black representations in literature and textbooks for youth readers. On the heels of Congress passing the Civil Rights and Secondary Education Acts and Malcolm X's murder, a solid Black children's literature market was created (Sims, 1982, pp. 2–3). However, by 1968, the Council for Interracial Books reported that publishing trends reverted to those reflected in Larrick's original study. Further, Sims noted that between 1975 and 1979, the market for Black writers dropped significantly: It is not clear whether this trend reflects the economy in general, an upsurge in conservatism, a "backlash" effect, or just a general lack of commitment on the part of publishers to make and keep the world of children's literature a pluralistic one (p. 106). Sims's observations of the publishing industry between 1965 and 1979 revealed the impermanence of progress and provided a critical backdrop for analyzing current trends.

Between 2012 and 2019, statistics reported by the Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC), a research library of the University of Wisconsin–Madison School of Education, revealed a slow but steady climb in the percentages of children's books with a Black main character or significant secondary character. Of note, during many of these years, less than half of books labeled "about Black/African" were created by Black authors and illustrators. However, in the summer of 2020, books by Black authors and illustrators centering on antiracism received unprecedented acclaim. WordsRated, a noncommercial research organization and analytics group, reported the number of bestselling books with Black characters surpassed that of bestselling books with white characters for the first time in history (McLoughlin, 2022). This trend was short-lived, however. The report concluded that, following an uptick in representation in 2020, the increase in diversity not only stagnated but retrogressed. By the end of 2020 leading into 2021, the number of

bestselling books by Black authors fell from 26.3 percent down to 18.0 percent, which was less than the 2019 percentages (McLoughlin, 2022). Moreover, many of the books on the 2020 bestselling lists were challenged and ultimately banned in nationwide schools and libraries making it clear that statistics in publishing can never entirely be extricated from the broader social context.

The "war on CRT" proved to be more than anyone had imagined. The American Library Association reported an increase in antiracism titles on its Top 10 most challenged books to list in 2020, including Jason Reynolds and Ibram X. Kendi's *Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You, a History of Racism for Children and Teens*, which was the year's second most challenged title (ALA.org). In Addition, Kendi's children's picture book, *Antiracist Baby*, became a subject of debate at Supreme Court Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson's confirmation hearings. This fierce opposition to specifically Black literature is a present-day example of backlash rooted in white supremacy. Throughout history, literacy has served as a potent instrument of power over Black people. During earlier periods, legislation was passed to impose restrictions on literacy access for both enslaved and free Black people, because slave owners harbored concerns about the potential consequences of educating an oppressed people. Today, classrooms and libraries are being weaponized to suppress the voices and invalidate the lived experiences of Black people.

Events in recent history have made plain, yet again, that the democratic values in American society are fragile at best. We are again at a critical juncture in which publishers must decide whether to acquiesce to conservative interest groups or uphold the promise of racial equity in children's literature. While tacit acceptance of the status quo clearly appeases extremists, what is far less apparent are the nuanced understandings associated with Black children's engagement and responses to contemporary Black children's literature. We remain limited in understanding which Black books matter to Black readers. As such, the following section addresses how we center young Black readers by deeply considering how they access and respond to Black children's literature.



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as *Hands Up* (McDaniel & Evans, 2019), *I Am Every Good Thing* (Brier & James, 2020), the *Black Kid* (Guth, 2019) offered reapprehending *Visual and gender* in *Maryam* (K. Oka-Haley, 1988) and resistances anti-blackness. These narratives move through and

about Black life are deeply engaging and motivating. Specifically, several of her study participants noted how Malcolm X's struggles reminded them of their own lives, while Malcolm X's aspirations for who he might become likewise aligned with their hopes for themselves. Still, the student participants did not always directly comment on the racial background of the protagonist or mention anything about racial identification. Rather, they became engaged in the protagonist's personal development and overall narrative arc, which further motivated them to read (Sciurba, 2017).

Similarly, McNair's (2011) findings from a community book club involving children in kindergarten to grade 2 and their parents noted that personal interests (i.e., enjoying comics, dancing, music, or martial arts) and experiences heavily influenced book selection preferences when all books from which to select included a depiction of Black life and culture. Contrastingly, in 2007, Holmes and colleagues conducted a quantitative study about motivation and racial preferences. Their research showed that based on the cover of books alone, Black third-grade students did not become more interested in a story just because it visually depicted Black life. A key reason noted by the researchers included considering whether youth feel strongly connected to their racial identity in their early years. Hardy and colleagues (2020) found different non-quantitative results in a similarly designed study. While there were more preferences to select books aligned with one's race, the engagement in reading the book did not deepen for the study participants. Other interesting caveats emerging from this study include the ways in which biracial children make preferences and book selections.

### **Comprehension and Literary Understanding**

Connecting students' background knowledge, language, and cultural practices to stories they are reading stands out as a highlight of early research done with Black readers. Through these connections, researchers demonstrated how comprehension and literary understanding are deepened when Black youth read about Black life. Grice and

Vaughan's (1992) study, for example, pointed out the ways in which background knowledge related to Black culture influenced the comprehension of third graders' reading passages. Rickford (2001) demonstrated the importance of bridging African American vernacular language and cultural practices to reading comprehension and literary interpretation. Of note, she revealed how higher-order thinking enhances when youth read stories about their lives and cultures. She specifically called for teachers to rely on the rich language resources of their students to develop literary understanding.

More recent studies reveal the ways in which literary understandings (i.e., relying on literary elements and devices, analyzing illustrations, entering the story world) and taking both efferent and aesthetic stances while (Rosenblatt, 1978) reading stories occurs when Black youth read narratives representing their lives and culture (Chen & Browne, 2021). Deep comprehension and literary understanding, however, are not limited to Black children solely reading books depicting Black life. As astute readers, Black youth successfully fill in literary gaps and access their prior knowledge for understanding stories depicting all sorts of racial or cultural representations (McGullah, 2013; Sipe, 2002). On other occasions, and as evidence of reading comprehension that includes criticality, Black readers may respond by resisting representations of trauma too frequently tied to the narratives about Black life read during school (Möller & Allen, 2005).

### **Racial Literacy**

Collaborating with Black youth to assist them in building racial literacy characterizes the final area. We define racial literacy as "a skill and practice in which students probe the existence of racism and examine the effects of race and other social constructs and institutionalized systems" (Ortiz & Sealey-Ruiz, 2021, p. 16). Several studies explore the benefits of offering safe Black affinity spaces (such as through book clubs) to discuss topics foregrounded in particular stories such as identifying, critiquing, and avoiding racism rather than having to experience injustices firsthand (Brooks

& Hampton, 2005; Brooks et al., 2018). Another example study comes from Piper's (2019) investigation with several Black children at a summer freedom school. Her results demonstrated how reading civil rights-themed literature led to critical agency in the youth. Similarly, Tyson's (2002) study in an urban middle school indicated that for many participants, the seeds and development of social action as a conceptual idea were fostered through reading Black children's literature.

### Spaces of Engagement: Homes, Schools, and Communities

This article examines three interrelated aspects concerning the Black children's literary tradition: **reader access, development, and engagement with Black children's literature**. Educational policies and surveillance of Black children's literature, publishing trends, and Black youth reader response—to consider what these elements tell us about where the field of Black children's literature might go from here.

local school-based curriculum mandates, and the publishing industry, all is not lost. In fact, imaginative and reparative encounters with books and readers continue to take place in Black spaces inside and outside of schools (including virtually).

Like all children's literature, Black children's literature strives to entertain, inform, and engage its readers. However, Black children's literature is uniquely tasked with disrupting a long history of anti-black social and political structures that continue to limit access and shape childhoods and childhood reading practices. Imaginative and reparative encounters with books and readers continue to take place in Black spaces inside and outside of schools (including virtually).

aesthetic legacy (fictive and lived) that moves across space, place, and time. Black children's literature is a valuable knowledge system and critical educational resource that reflects social-political realities, beliefs, and histories while resisting deprecating representation into their curriculum with a de-emphasis on inclusions and omissions to reveal the textures and complexity of Black experiences, wonder, and being. white parent-led book bans. Yet, in other contexts such as the Philadelphia School District, initiatives to expand access to Black children's literature directly in the curriculum or through extracurricular offerings appear poised to flourish with extensive community support. Beginning in the 2022–2023 school year, this school district began implementing a revamped English language arts curriculum within grades 4 through 12. Students now read a designated set of children's and young adult books

depicting a wide range of cultural groups. These books are foundational to the curriculum rather than supplemental or add-on opportunities granted through independent or voluntary reading (Cultural and Linguistically Responsive Curriculum, 2022; School District of Philadelphia, ELA Units, n.d.).

Over the past several years and in locations spread across the United States, Black youth and their parents/guardians created book clubs to address gaps in school curriculum. These book clubs occurred in virtual spaces and outside of schools to emphasize the Black youth literary gaze. Two noteworthy examples include “The Little Black Girls Book Club” (see Table 1).

Brooks and Brown (2019) state: “Cool Bros for Boys” is the Jrvelly youth-led book club for boys to explore stories curated just for them from African American books! Here, our motto is ‘Cool Bros only be cool.’

As another approach to supplementing school literature, expanded Blacking beyond the canonical books through chronicling historical events and the overrepresentation of Blackness as knowledge and movement. Books like *Sacred Ground* (Modan, 2019) and *Jambos* (Strickland, 2022) highlight Black childhood experiences of joy and representation. They have also challenged the dominant narrative of books like *Blue Boy* (Hammond, 2022) and hybrid structures like *The Things with Which We Live* (Larkin, 2019) feature narrative nonfiction and fictional writing, expanding the range of informational topics that highlight Black contextual representations and experiences. Hidden histories and erased biographies were unearthed in books such as *Unspeakable: The Tulsa Race Massacre* by Carole Boston Weatherford (2021) and *Black Girls Club* by Evette Dionne (2022). Fantasies moved away from an all-white world as authors such as Kwame Mbalia and B. B. Alston included Black children as main characters (Short & Cueto, 2022). Other books, such as *Hands Up* (Modan & Evans, 2019), *I Am Every Good Thing* (Barks & James, 2020), and *New Kid* (CRAFT, 2019) offered captivating visual and verbal imagery of metaphorical healing and resistance to anti-blackness. These narratives move through and



subscription book boxes have also recently gained in popularity as another way for those who desire to fill their homes with affirming children's stories of Black life and culture can more easily do so. "Jambo Books" and "Just Like Me" represent two of a growing number of subscription opportunities where families select and receive books at their homes each month.

These examples inspire and provide guidance on the ways in which schools, youth, their parents/guardians, and communities seek out and advance the reading of Black children's literature. They also highlight the Black reader as a willing audience and interpreter of stories.

## **Conclusion**

Our analysis of policy, publishing trends, and reader response help us understand Black children's literature as a critical part of the structural dynamic associated with the reading lives and curriculum for all youth. African American children's literature is intricately connected to the cultural politics of race within and outside of schools. As we consider where we go from here, we believe the field needs additional studies that explore the historical connections between educational policies, Black children's literature, and children's literature by Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) authors. We find it promising that Black parent groups and organizations like the African American Policy Forum, Lifted Voices, and BCDI are mobilizing and creating support networks to effect systematic change. Such groups are developing public education workshops and policy briefings and working to create equity-oriented policies that do not subvert BIPOC voices. Additional research explores Black communal activism and resistance to book bans and the de facto censorship that is occurring through surveillance. Literacy researchers, educators, librarians, and publishers should consider fostering alliances to advocate against the systematic closing and erosion of services and barriers to access to diverse literature for children provided by public libraries.

We recognize the publishing industry as a market-driven entity impacted primarily by social-

political factors and interests. It is not—nor has it ever been—race-neutral in the selection processes. We believe feedback loops between families, educators, and publishers are needed that center Black children's perspectives, experiential knowledge, and interests. We also believe there is a need for studies that examine Black youth as capable readers and responders of stories rather than youth who fail to meet a particular benchmark or need an intervention. Going forward, we also call for more complexity in the research done with Black readers responding to stories. For example, the research suggests that it is possible for youth to experience multiple feelings about a text or even parts of the same text (especially as readers develop from picture to chapter books). Finally, we wonder about the value of creating more black affinity spaces (such as extracurricular book clubs) where Black youth—including young children—can think critically and debate ideas about matters relating to race. These spaces would foster racial literacy and even include resistance to or the questioning of stories as one of many pathways toward achieving racial literacy. Ultimately, our findings reflect Kiese Laymon's (2018) notion that as we go forth, we must put more energy into "learning how to talk, listen, organize, imagine, strategize, and fight, fight, fight, *for and with black children*" (p. 239, emphasis added). Building community and familial networks that actively center Black children in accessing, preserving, protecting, engaging, and actively curating their literate lives is critical.

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**We believe feedback loops between families, educators, and publishers are needed that center Black children's perspectives, experiential knowledge, and interests.**

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## **Notes**

1. Due to the prekindergarten to grade 8 focus of this journal, we did not include studies of responses that focused on Black high school youth reading Black literature (young adult and adult). However, several notable studies with this age group include Lee (2001), Johnson (2016), and Park (2012).



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## INTO THE CLASSROOM

readwritethink  
Lisa Strom-Finn  
National Council  
on Education  
NCTE

# Black Children's Literature Policy, Publishing, Response, and Engagement: Where Do We Go from Here?

It's important that students have a say in what they read. These resources from ReadWriteThink.org will help provide some ideas and resources.

In this Strategy Guide, you'll learn about a number of specific methods that can help you gain a fuller picture of the interests of your students as well as what your students understand, know, and can demonstrate by doing.

<https://bit.ly/3kNaq7k>

library. As they work, students plan their arguments and outline their reasons and examples.

<https://bit.ly/2UZh12x>

Turn required reading lists from a teacher-centered requirement to a student-driven exploration by asking students to create brochures and flyers that suggest books to explore.

<https://bit.ly/43Xjiui>

Students write persuasive letters to their librarian requesting that specific texts be added to the school library.

This article examines three interrelated aspects concerning reader access, development, and engagement with Black children's literature—educational policies and surveillance of Black children's literature, publishing trends, and Black youths' reader response—to consider what these elements tell us about where the field of Black children's literature might go from here.

**Like all children's literature,** Black children's literature strives to entertain, inform, and engage its readers. However, Black children's literature is uniquely tasked with disrupting a long history of anti-black social and political structures that continue to limit access and shape childhoods and children's reading lives within and outside schools. As Sims Bishop (2011) asserted, it is a "purposeful literature" (p. 230) embedded with an affective and aesthetic legacy (fictive and lived) that moves across space, place, and time. Black children's literature is a valuable knowledge system and critical educational resource that reflects social-political realities, beliefs, and histories while resisting deprecating representations and omissions to reveal the textures and complexity of Black experiences, wonder, and being.

literature expanded, moving beyond a repertoire of books that chronicle historical firsts and the overrepresentation of doctrines of servitude and enslavement. Books like *Saturday* (Mora, 2019) and *Jump In* (Strickland, 2023) highlight Black childhood experiences in joyful everyday contexts unencumbered by racial challenges. Illuminating nonfiction books like *Blue* (Brew-Hammond, 2022) and hybrid structures like *The Thing about Bees: A Love Letter to My Son* (Larkin, 2019) feature narrative nonfiction and fictional writing, expanding the range of informational topics that highlight Black contextual representations and experiences. Hidden histories and erased biographies were unearthed in books such as *Unspeakable: The Tulsa Race Massacre* by Carole Boston Weatherford (2021) and *Lifting as We Climb: Black Women's Battle for the Ballot Box* by Evette Dionne (2022). Fantasies moved away from an all-white world as authors such as Kwame Mbalia and B. B. Alston included Black children as main characters (Short & Cueto, 2022). Other books, such as *Hands Up* (McDaniel & Evans, 2019), *I Am Every Good Thing* (Barnes & James, 2020), and *New Kid* (Craft, 2019) offered captivating visual and verbal imagery of rhetorical healing and resistance to anti-blackness. These narratives move through and



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