

African American Children's Realistic Fiction

Annotated List

Target Audience: Kinder – 3rd Grade, Ages 4 – 8

Allen, D. (2003). *Dancing in the wings*. New York, NY: Puffin Books.

Surely no one knows more about the world of dance than Debbie Allen, who is not only a superb dancer but an award-winning actress, director, choreographer and producer. In Allen's second book for children she utilizes her expertise as a gifted dancer, and the inspiration of her sixteen-year-old daughter, Vivian, also an aspiring dancer, to write a charming work of fiction. Sassy, aptly named because of her quick wit and in-your-face attitude, is a young dancer who dreams of a starring role on-stage despite her physical imperfections. Allen's character captures all the longings and feelings of a budding ballerina. Sassy dreams of becoming a prima ballerina but as her dance classmates tell her, her large feet and long legs stand in the way of her dreams. Sassy has a chance to audition for a place in a summer dance festival, but she almost lets her doubts get the better of her. "Being tall means you can see all around, so you can always find the right path to take her" wise Uncle Redd reassures her. Soon, Sassy realizes that her height is a gift in the world of dance. Kadir Nelson does a wonderful job of slightly exaggerating the dancer's bodies in his paintings, complimenting Allen's humorous, wise-cracking text. At the same time, his illustrations capture the beauty and grace of the dancer's classical lines. With its feel-good ending, this entertaining book is right on point for young lovers of the dance and all children reaching for a seemingly impossible dream.

Price: Paperback \$6.99, Hardcover \$14.85

The Free Library by Farplex (n.d.). Retrieved on April 12, 2016 from <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Dancing+In+the+Wings.-a072275544>

Battle-Lavert, G. (1994). *The barber's cutting edge*. San Francisco, CA: Children's Book Press.

Rashaad gets his hair cut by the best barber in town who also introduces him to the joy of learning new words.

Price: Paperback \$34.83

Book Verdict (n.d.). Retrieved April 12, 2016, from <http://bookverdict.com/details.xqy?uri=Product-5241612.xml>

Bunting, E., & Hewitt, K. (2000). *Flower garden*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

A young girl carries a carton of potted flowers from the supermarket home and up the stairs; she and her father replant them in a window box and light candles on a birthday cake to surprise Mom when she comes wearily home from work. In Hewitt's expansive oil paintings, the girl's honey-brown face shines as brightly as the daisies and daffodils; Bunting's brief rhymed text ("Garden in a cardboard box/Walking to the bus/Garden sitting on our laps/People smile at us!") celebrates the child's contagious happiness, the warm response of everyone who sees her, and the pleasure of having "a color jamboree" of flowers in the window of an inner-city apartment, high above the street. A simple, pleasing episode with a contemporary subtext.

Price: Paperback \$7.00, Hardcover \$17.00

Kirkus Review (2010) Retrieved April 12, 2016, from <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/eve-bunting/flower-garden/>

DeGross, M. (2007). *Donavan's double trouble*. New York, NY: Amistad Press.

Donavan's a word geek, but there aren't words to describe his frustration with math and his embarrassed reaction to his favorite Uncle Vic's homecoming. Vic Carter Johnson had once been a fun-loving basketball star and firefighter. He had taught Donovan and his sister crazy dance moves like the cabbage patch, the snake and the running man. But when Uncle Vic's legs are blown away by a bomb attack while his National Guard unit is on active duty, Donovan is left to figure out how to accept this new version of his adored uncle.

Price: Hardcover Price: \$16.99

Hemphill, H. (2008). Retrieved April 12, 2016, from https://bookpage.com/reviews/5574-monalisa-degross-donavans-double-trouble#.Vw2IM_krLrc

Hubbell, P. (2010). *Black all around*. New York, NY: Lee & Low Books.

In this fun color story, a young girl begins looking at the world around her and noticing all the places she sees the color black. It's in animals - a horse, a cat, beetles, Labradors. It's in music - piano keys and clarinets. It's in the environment - fertile dirt, tree trunks, the night sky. And it's in her family - "Daddy's arm, Momma's cheek."

Price: Paperback and Hardcover \$1.99

Kinsler, M. (2012). Retrieved April 12, 2016, from <http://www.sproutsbookshelf.com/2012/07/picture-book-review-black-all-around-by.html>

Jordan, D., & Jordan, R.M. (2003). *Salt in his shoes*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Michael Jordan's mother and sister team up for an inspirational story about this athlete's earliest on-court efforts. Nelson (Big Jabe) is also a strong player here; he contributes animated art, rendered in a cartoon style that is informal yet polished. In the opening scenario, a bully intimidates young Jordan during a basketball game at a neighborhood park, causing him to flub a pass. Michael tells his older brothers, "I am really sorry, guys. If I were taller that wouldn't have happened." When he asks his mother what will make him grow, she advises him to put salt in his shoes and say a prayer every night. Though he obliges and continues to practice shooting baskets at home his efforts don't immediately pay off. One day, his father convinces him that, rather than being tall, "practice, determination, and giving your best" are the keys to being "a real winner," and Michael runs off to join his brothers in the park, where he makes the game's winning shot. Though the book ends with a rather facile slam-dunk, the authors offer authoritative insight into this six-foot-six-inch-tall hoopster's boyhood spunk as well as reassurance to young athletes impatient for a growth spurt. Nelson handily balances in-your-face on-court action with more reflective portraits of the player's inner growth.

Price: Hardcover \$15.31, Paperback \$5.54

Publishers Weekly (n.d). Retrieved April 12, 2016, from <http://www.publishersweekly.com/978-0-689-83371-7>

Katz, K. (2002). *The colors of us*. New York, NY: Square Fish.

In this tale, Lena, the young daughter of an artist, decides to paint a portrait of herself. Her mother begins teaching her how to mix paints to make "the right brown" for her skin tone when Lena argues that "brown is brown." Lena's mother decides to show her just how many different shades of brown there can be! The two go for a walk and greet their neighbors as they pass them, identifying the colors of their skin with tasty foods. When they return from their eye-opening journey, Lena sits down to paint portraits of the people they've visited, using different colors to depict all their different colors of skin.

Price: Hardcover \$16.12, Paperback \$7.99

University of Manchester Innovation Centre (n.d). Retrieved April 12, 2016, from <http://www.umich.edu/~childlit/ColorsOfUs/display1.htm>

Peete, H.R., & Peete, R. E. (2010). *My brother charlie*. New York, NY: Scholastic Press.

An honest and moving picture book, *My Brother Charlie*, captures the essence of autism from the perspective of a twin sister. The authors, Holly Robinson Peete and Ryan Elizabeth Peete, wrote the story based on their personal experience. This mother-daughter team offers a realistic depiction of autism, highlighting the gifts an affected child has to offer without glossing over the challenges. Like many twins, Charlie and Callie have a lot in common, but they also are very different in some very significant ways. While Callie loves to talk, Charlie is often quiet. Also, Callie has a loving nature but Charlie's does not display outward signs of affection. Loving words are "...locked deep inside my brother."

Price: Hardcover \$12.49

Gallagher, Karen (n.d.). Retrieved April 12, 2016, from <http://lollipopbookclub.blogspot.com/2010/05/book-review-my-brother-charlie-by-holly.html>

Wyeth, S. D. (2002). *Something beautiful*. New York, NY: Dragonfly Books.

This is a story about a young African American girl who initially sees only the ugliness in her neighborhood. After pointing out the various “ugly” aspects of her neighborhood, she seeks to find “something beautiful”. She runs into various people along the way, including Miss Delphine who says, “There is nothing more beautiful tasting than my fried fish sandwiches”. The young girl wants to find her own “something beautiful”. You’ll be surprised at how the girl creates her own piece of beauty.

Price: Paperback \$7.99

Teaching Children Philosophy (n.d.) Retrieved April 12, 2016, from

<http://www.teachingchildrenphilosophy.org/BookModule/SomethingBeautiful>

Selection Process

At my school site, there are not many books with African American protagonists. That is the case in many elementary schools around the country. I decided to make African American children’s literature my focus for this assignment. I specifically chose the genre of realistic fiction because I would like for children to read books in which they can relate their personal experiences. That is why when making my selection of African American realistic fiction children’s books I had to consider many things.

First of all, I had to consider that the books I chose cover a range of topics, such as families with different lifestyles and characters with disabilities. I also have to make sure that my book choices do not have stereotypes about African American people. Therefore, I began my search with all of those things in mind.

I conducted a Google search using the keywords “African American realistic fiction books for children.” I got many results, so I chose the titles that seemed interesting to me in order to compile a list of books. I started with titles that sounded interesting and that dealt with various topics. I compiled a list of about 30-40 books and I organized them in two groups, books for K-2nd grade and books for 4th-5th grades. Then I looked at online reviews for all books and narrowed it even further to about 20 books.

Once I narrowed it to the 20 books, I decided to also narrow the focus and target audience. I wanted to focus on books that were for grade K-3rd, or ages 4-8. That made it a bit easier to pick the final 9 titles on my list. I used reviews from various educational sites such as *The Carnegie Library*, *The Free Library*, and the *University of Michigan* to help me create my final annotated list of African American realistic children’s literature books. I also considered the price of the books, using *Barnes and Noble* as a source. I think that all

books are sold at a considerable price. Only one book was above \$20.00, which was my budget per book, but I believe it is a good investment because the reviews I saw were very good and the book was on many booklists.

The nine books that I chose deal with a variety of topics, such as having positive African American role models, both famous and in the family, persons with disabilities, an uncle in a wheelchair and a brother with autism, being comfortable in your own skin, and being part of a community.