

1. Curtis, C. (1999). *Bud, Not Buddy* (1st ed.). New York: Delacorte Press.

I finished *Bud, Not Buddy* a couple days ago and can, without hesitation, recommend it for classroom use or for a personal library. Christopher Paul Curtis expertly weaves historical information and new vocabulary throughout the storytelling in authentic and accurate ways. His main characters are fully developed and surrounded by interesting secondary characters that are important to the story. Curtis includes enough information to educate the reader without losing the voice of his ten-year-old narrator, Bud Caldwell.

I am absolutely in love with ten-year-old Bud Caldwell. He is brave, feisty, smart, and determined. Even though this novel's targeted audience is age eight-twelve, I have been swept into the narrative, have been laughing out loud, and have even cried a couple times.

Bud Caldwell, has been orphaned and without family since age six when his mother died and has spent four years in and out of orphanages and foster homes. He is a strong personality that has developed "rules" to live by in order to survive, but he has not totally lost his childish innocence or humor. The combination makes for an unforgettable and truly lovable character. Bud takes us along for his 1930's The Great Depression influenced adventures in: an orphanage; a foster home; a haven of a library; a Hooverville shanty

encampment; a close call with train hopping; a rescue by a pro-union “red cap”
train porter; the world of a jazz musician.

I was elated when Bud, with his cherished suitcase full of his only possessions in the world in hand, finally found Herman E. Calloway and the Dusky Devastators of the Depression. This suitcase holds the proof of who Bud is and helps him find his true family in the end. Although I had figured out the outline of the ending beforehand, Curtis’ writing kept me glued to the very last word and I found emotional and intellectual satisfaction in his skilled storytelling.

The author, Christopher Paul Curtis, won acclaim in 1995 with *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963* which was recognized as a Newbery Honor Book and won the ALA Coretta Scott King Award. *Bud, Not Buddy* is his second novel and it has received amazing recognition: 2000 Newbery Award; 2000 ALA Coretta Scott King Award; 2000 ALA Notable Children's Books; 1999 School Library Journal Best Books of the Year; IRA Children's Book Award for Older Readers 2000; ALA Best Books for Young Adults 2000; Publishers Weekly Best Books of the Year 1999. In fact, 2000 was the first time since 1977 that a book by an African American author won the Newbery Medal for the Most Distinguished Contribution to American Literature for Children.

In researching the awards that the novel has won, I came across this quote that I thought was very pertinent to why we are taking this class. In a September 1999 CNN.com interview, Christopher Curtis stated in reference to not reading much as a child, "The reason I think I wasn't a big book person is because there were no books for, by, or about African-Americans. Even today that's true. There are

not a lot of books by us, about us, for us. And I hope 'Watsons' and now 'Bud, Not Buddy' can fill that niche."

2. Myers, W. (1992). *The Righteous Revenge of Artemis Bonner* (1st ed.). New York: HarperCollins Publisher.

I finished reading *The Righteous Revenge of Artemis Bonner* by Walter Dean Myers last night and it was, I must admit, a painful experience. I thought it would take forever to finish this novel despite it being written for a target audience of ages nine-twelve. I stumbled across this book at my public library and thought it would be great fun to read something by Myers' written for a younger audience. I have enjoyed his high school level work very much and knew he usually wrote with a true voice and did not shy away from graphic realities. Unfortunately, *The Righteous Revenge of Artemis Bonner* includes graphic violence and themes – that I would hesitate to use in a fourth-seventh grade setting – without balancing them with authentic historical information or developed characters.

The book is written as a memoir of a fifteen-year-old African-American boy, Artemis Bonner, on a quest to avenge his uncle's death and recover his treasure in 1880. He teams with a half Cherokee thirteen-year-old orphan, but I wouldn't claim that either ethnic group is authentically or accurately portrayed. Artemis travels from New York City to the Old West, Seattle, Alaska, and back. Myers' spends so much time focusing on farcical situations, gross-out humor, and stilted colloquialisms, that he does not include an ounce of imagery to make the novel worthwhile as a classroom read. Advanced vocabulary is not used in a contextual

way to aid instruction in the classroom or assist the young casual reader with comprehension. Any historical references are lost within the text and not fleshed out in any way, rendering them useless to the young casual reader or as an instructional enhancement to a thematic unit in the classroom setting. I personally feel that *The Righteous Revenge of Artemis Bonner* is the literary and educational equivalent of the *Goosebumps* series and that Myers is better off writing to an older audience with more contemporary settings.

3. Pinkney, A. (2002). *Ella Fitzgerald: The Tale of a Vocal Virtuoso* (1st ed.). New York: Hyperion Books for Children.

Ella Fitzgerald The Tale of a Vocal Virtuoso (2004) written by Andrea Davis Pinkney and illustrated by Brian Pinkney was my favorite picture book to read aloud to my daughter as it is full of modern language, rhythm, and rhyme as Scat Cat tells the story of Ella Fitzgerald's rise from the streets to international fame for her amazing jazz and scat vocals. The illustrations are extremely creative and my daughter squealed with delight at the images. Sadly, this book has not won any awards, but Pinkney has won the Coretta Scott King Author Award in 2001 for *Let It Shine: Stories of Black Women Freedom Fighters*. I really wanted to include this picture book, which is recommended for children ages' five to nine, as it was my favorite to read aloud and it is considered a biography.

4. Curtis, G. (1998). *Bat Boy & His Violin*. (1st ed.). New York: Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing Division.

The Bat Boy & His Violin written by Gavin Curtis and illustrated by E.B. Lewis (1998) was awarded the 1999 Coretta Scott King honor for Non-Violent Social Change. It is recommended for ages' four to ten. My daughter did not vibrate or squeal with delight as we read this book, but she was entranced by Reginald's story and his love of the violin and classical music. She was very concerned that his father was upset with him for rejecting baseball as he is the manager of one of the last teams, the Dukes, left in the Negro National League. Integration started the year before with Jackie Robinson the white teams and the Dukes have lost all their best players to the white league. Reginald's father insists that he work as a bat boy, but his clumsiness forces his father to sit him out and just let him play his violin in the dugout. Reginald's playing is so inspiring that the team wins the rest of their games and almost wins the championship against the Monarchs. This is a wonderfully rich story full of historically accurate references and illustrations that can help educationally enrich a library patron or a classroom. Besides learning about a time in history revolving around baseball's integration, the reader is exposed to the names of some of history's greatest composers and their works. My daughter is still asking me to read her the "violin" book and is very curious as to why the little boy plays music at the baseball games.

5. Haley, G. (1970). *A Story A Story: An African Tale Retold and Illustrated*. New York: Atheneum Books for Young Readers.

A Story A Story – An African Tale Retold and Illustrated by Gail E. Haley. Gail E. Haley wrote and illustrated this African fable picture book based on native African spider stories. The story is about Kwaku Ananse, a tribal “spider man” that climbed his way to Nyame, the Sky God, to ask for a story for those on earth as only the Sky God possessed stories and he kept them in a golden box. Kwaku was asked to deliver a leopard, hornets, and a fairy in exchange for a story and he did so. The Sky God sang Kwaku’s praises and scattered all the stories across the world for all to share. Haley retold this fable in an authentic voice and her woodcut illustrations are enchanting. She was inspired to retell a spider story after living in the Caribbean and studied African folklore and culture to prepare for the book. More specific information regarding Haley’s research was not listed. Haley’s biography is very interesting and she has spent her life working in children’s literature and art. She is currently Culture of Childhood museum curator that includes working classrooms. The museum’s purpose is to study the use of popular culture for childhood socialization. She is Caucasian and her writings do focus on stories that are fable in nature. *A Story A Story* was awarded the 1971 Caldecott Award and is recommended for ages’ four to eight.

6. Johnson, A. (2000). *Down the Winding Road* (1st ed.). New York: Dorling Kindersley Publishing, Inc.

Down the Winding Road by written by Angela Johnson and illustrated by Shane W. Evans is recommended for ages' four through eight, but I think it is probably a little limited in context for kids over the age of six or seven. The story follows a little African-American girl's visit from the city to the country to the "Old One's" house. We catch a glimpse of this young girl's nuclear family unit and her extended family on the last day of summer vacation. We are left to assume this is the family farm. The prose of this book was perfect for my four-year-old daughter as it read poetically and didn't overwhelm her with information. The lack of information has been a point of criticism in reviews of the book as it misses opportunities to flesh out many of the family members. There has also been criticism of the illustrations for presenting caricatures of older family members without the character's idiosyncrasies being explained in the text. Looking back, I can see the critic's point and see that I was not as cognizant to the stereotypes as I should have been. My daughter did ask why some of the people "looked so funny" and I am sure that is not an intended response by the illustrator, Shane W. Evans. I would have to say that I highly recommend the prose of this story, but do have reservations in regards to the illustrations.