

# The Carter G. Woodson Book Award, 2021



The Carter G. Woodson Book Award honors outstanding nonfiction trade books that explore and uncover issues related to racially minoritized groups and race relations in the United States. The award is named for renowned scholar Dr. Carter G. Woodson, who dedicated his career to researching and preserving the suppressed history of African Americans and the African Diaspora. Often referred to as the “father of Black History,” Woodson initiated the movement that led to Black History Month, although it was his hope that Black history would eventually be fully included into all American history, thus making the need for a designated time of study redundant.

In 1974, the National Council for the Social Studies developed this award to promote and advance the writing, publishing, and dissemination of outstanding trade books for youth and young-adult readers and to increase the body of authentic social studies resources. The award honors Dr. Woodson’s work by elevating books that highlight contributions and experiences of people from racially and ethnically minoritized groups. The award’s renown and reach has continued to expand over the decades. Starting in 2022, the National Park Service, in conjunction with Howard+Revis Design, will dedicate an exhibit to this award at the Carter G. Woodson Home National Historic Site in Washington, D.C. This permanent exhibit will showcase an image of the award, along with copies of the current year’s award-winning selections.

This year, the Carter G. Woodson Committee selected six books published in 2020, based on the following criteria: (1) nonfiction, (2) set in the United States, (3) accurately reflects the perspectives, cultures, and values of the ethnic/racial group portrayed, and (4) written for young people. The committee received numerous nominees, and there were many outstanding texts, which made this decision very difficult. It is our hope that these books will find a place in every library and classroom, furthering Dr. Woodson’s vision of a society that recognizes and honors contributions of all racially and ethnically minoritized groups.

—Elizabeth Sturm, Chair,  
Carter G. Woodson Book Awards Committee

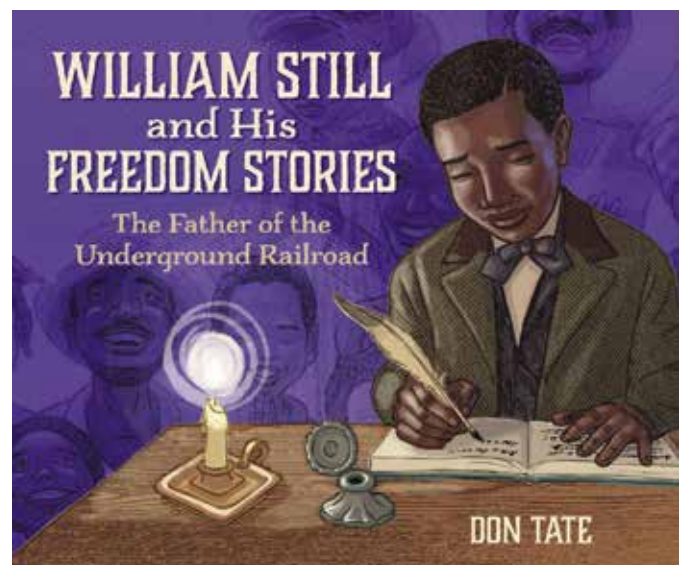
## Elementary Level Winner

*William Still and His Freedom Stories: The Father of the Underground Railroad*, by Don Tate. Peachtree Publishing. Reviewed by Ann Adkins, Fifth Grade Teacher, St. Pius X/St. Leo School, Omaha, Nebraska.

History is filled with untold stories. William Still’s life story is one that few have heard, but which deserves to be told. He, in turn, provided us with the stories of hundreds of enslaved people, ensuring their lasting legacy.

Before William Still was born, his father and mother fled slavery separately with only two of their children. His parents were reunited in the North, where they remained, raising many children. The youngest of these children was William.

Overcoming childhood challenges including a disrupted education, William Still went on to become a key figure in the movement to free enslaved people who were escaping from the South. Through his work, he was unexpectedly reunited with one of his long-lost brothers, and thus, he dedicated himself to recording information about people who were fleeing slavery. He ultimately hoped these records might serve to reunite



divided families like his own. He eventually turned these notes into a book published in 1879 and available today through the Library of Congress (*The Underground Railroad. A Record of Facts, Authentic Narratives, Letters &c., Narrating the*

*Hardships, Hair-breadth Escapes and Death Struggles of the Slaves in Their Efforts for Freedom*).

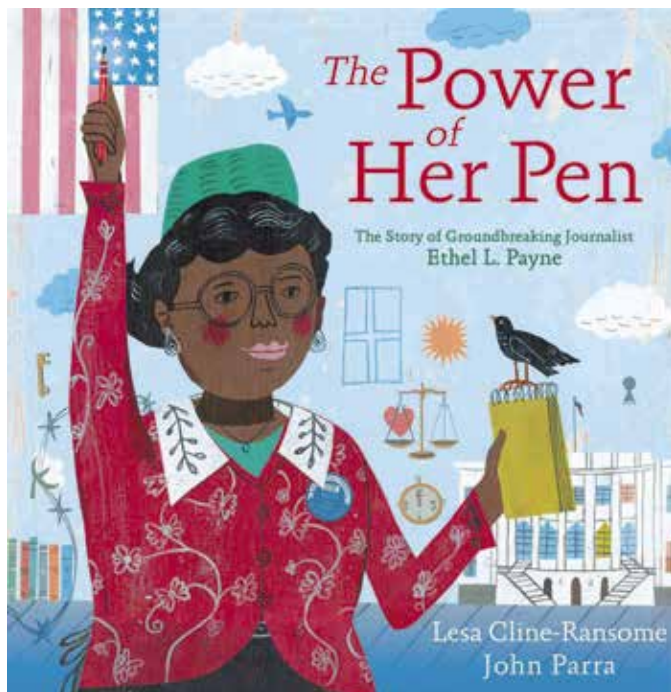
The illustrations' muted tones evoke a somber feeling, reflecting sadness in an era of slavery. Tate's drawings skillfully capture the emotion of each individual depicted. Teachers and students will find the book's back matter, which includes a timeline and bibliography, very useful.

Social Studies Standards: ❶ CULTURE; ❷ TIME, CONTINUITY, AND CHANGE; ❸ INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS, AND INSTITUTIONS; ❹ POWER, AUTHORITY, AND GOVERNANCE; ❺ CIVIC IDEALS AND PRACTICES.

### Elementary Level Honoree

*The Power of Her Pen: The Story of Groundbreaking Journalist Ethel L. Payne*, by Lesa Cline-Ransome; illustrated by John Parra. A Paula Wiseman Book, by Simon and Schuster Books for Young Readers. Reviewed by Ann Adkins, Fifth Grade Teacher, St. Pius X/St. Leo School, Omaha, Nebraska.

From the first pages of this book, readers are drawn to the story of Ethel Payne—a woman who truly used her pen (and her voice)—to fight for civil rights. Though her name may not be known far and wide, her life story is one that deserves to be told.



In Cline-Ransome's book, we learn that Ethel's mother made sure her children visited libraries on the white side of town to experience the "shelves stacked tall with books." We learn of Ethel's days as a student when she "dared to go to school with whites" even though black students were not even allowed to be on the school newspaper staff. And we learn about the beginnings of Ethel's professional life and the significance of her role as a reporter with a White House press pass.

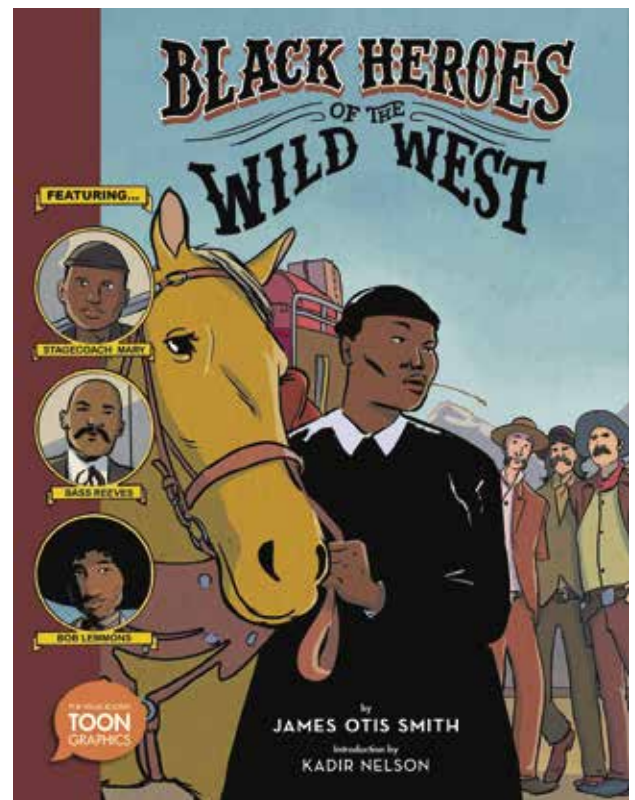
John Parra's illustrations, in their simplicity, will appeal to children, yet their details add another layer of interest and may serve as springboards for activities to extend children's learning.

Ethel Payne had a powerful impact both as a woman of color who confronted injustices and as a formidable journalist.

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### Middle Level Winner

*Black Heroes of the Wild West*, by James Otis Smith with Introduction by Kadir Nelson. TOON Graphics. Reviewed by Valencia Abbott, History/Social Studies Teacher, Rockingham Early College High School, Wentworth, N.C.



In his introduction to James Otis Smith's *Black Heroes of the Wild West*, celebrated painter, illustrator, and author Kadir Nelson states, "I was surprised to learn that in some areas of the Old West, up to a third of the settler population was African American." I am sure that many readers are also surprised by this revelation. This graphic book sheds light on the misrepresentation of the Old West's historical truths with introductions to or revisiting of personages like Stagecoach Mary, Bass Reeves, and Bob Lemmons. The detailed and illuminating graphics combined with primary source images, weaves a story that brings reality to the Old West's fictional past—such as learning that lawman Bass Reeves's legendary exploits may have been

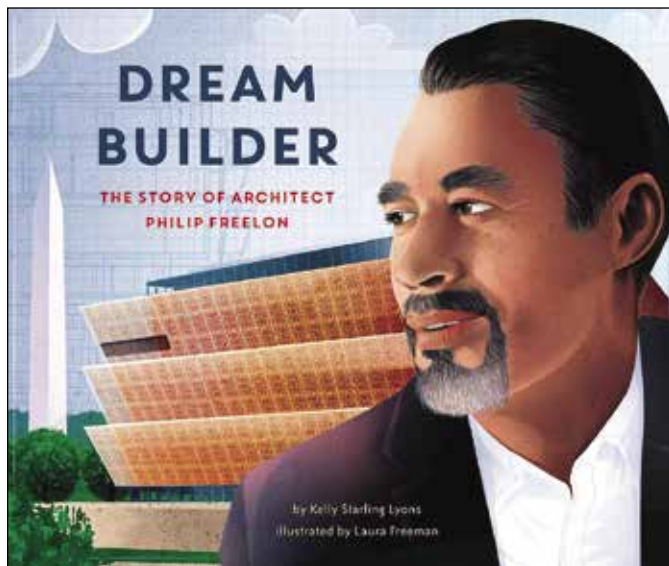


the inspiration for the story of The Lone Ranger. This book reveals that people of African descent were not interlopers but vital and full-fledged members of the time period marked as Westward Expansion. This book demonstrates the importance of knowing all parts of our story.

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### Middle Level Honoree

*Dream Builder: The Story of Architect Philip Freelon*, by Kelly Starling Lyons. Lee & Low Books, Inc. Reviewed by Janae J. Oveson, Department of Teacher Education, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.



The opening of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture in 2016 was the culmination of a “century long dream to honor Black achievement and Black resilience, strength, and pride.” Regarding his role as lead architect on the project, Philip Freelon said his involvement was both an honor and a privilege—and the pinnacle of his career.

Kelly Starling Lyons’s book brings Philip Freelon’s world and experiences to life with descriptively crafted sentences. “In Phil Freelon’s world, art breathes dreams to life.” Phil Freelon grew up surrounded by the richness of art. There were paintings on the walls of his home and discussions about artists at the dinner table. He watched his sister “splatter canvases with creativity” and wandered through his grandfather’s studio where “still-wet canvases and palettes with oily colors dared him to touch.”

Though he was inclined to see “strings of numbers and formulas in his mind,” he grew to “see the world with an artist’s inner eye.” He carried a sketchbook; but didn’t just draw. He began to realize that “words could create images too,” and he

began writing essays and poems. He built models, painted, and created sculpture.

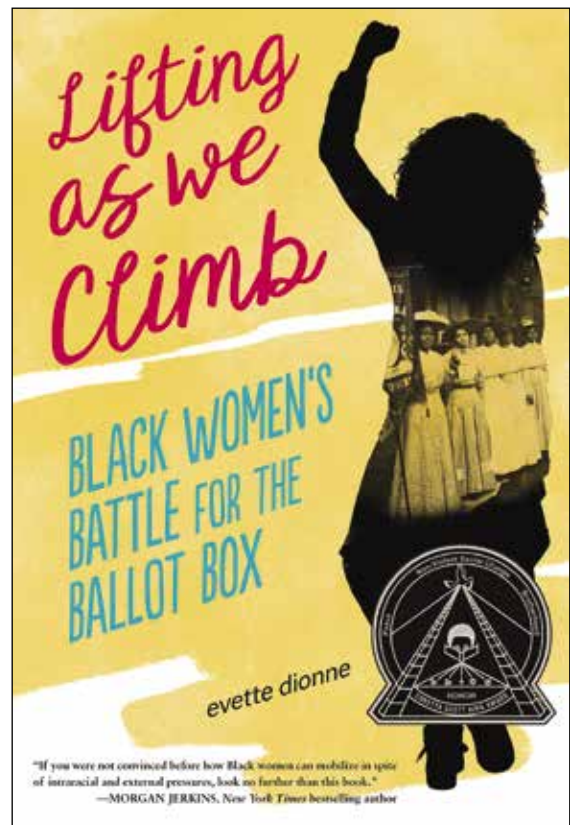
Phil Freelon watched the March on Washington on television and felt as if he was there “soaking in Dr. King’s dream.” In college, his own dream to become an architect “became clear as a snapshot.”

On the day he stood before competition judges who would select the architect for the museum, “he tells the story of the dream he wants to build.” *Dream Builder* is the story of “Phil Freelon, the kid artist from Philly, who became a builder of dreams.”

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### Secondary Level Winner

*Lifting As We Climb: Black Women’s Battle For the Ballot Box*, by Evette Dionne. Viking Books for Young Readers. Reviewed by Valencia Abbott, History/Social Studies Teacher, Rockingham Early College High School, Wentworth, N.C.



On the day that I am writing this book review for *Lifting As We Climb: Black Women’s Battle for the Ballot Box*, Stacey Abrams has pulled out a precedent event with voter turnout in Georgia. A comment on Twitter that followed the blast of

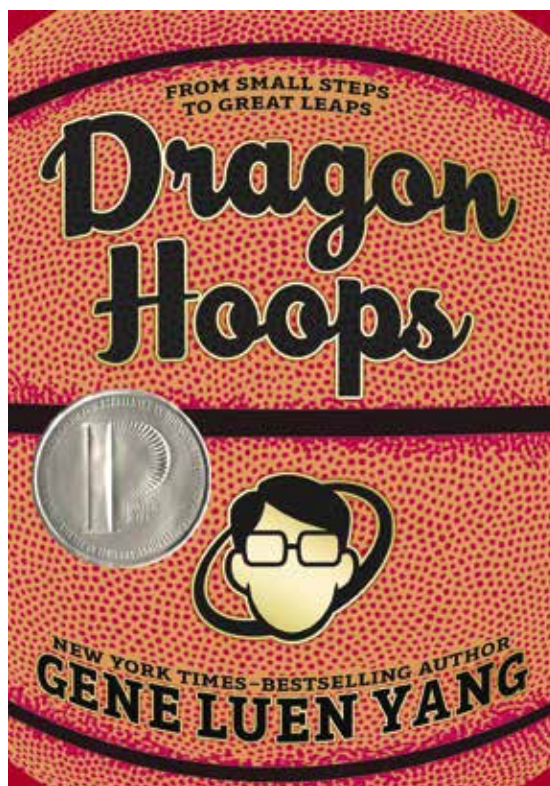
news stated that “Stacey Abrams” should be considered a verb for engaging voter turnout. Memes and posts were connecting Abrams to voting rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer, and in some instances to Rosa Parks. Scrolling through the media, I realized how little we know of the history, sacrifices, and contributions of Black women to the ballot box. With this book, Evette Dionne has set out to rectify that. After I’d finished this book, I wanted to go back to every lesson I’d taught on Women’s Suffrage and reteach it. Yes, I was aware of Anna Julie Cooper, Mary Church Terrell, and Sojourner Truth, but I was not aware of Nannie Helen Burroughs, Amelia Boynton Robinson, or Maria Stewart. Despite obstacles placed before them by the Women’s Movement, Black women would create spaces and places that enabled them to gain a voice. Though Alice Paul sought the exclusion of Black women during the first protest in front of the White House, Black women fought for their rights. Their motto and mission was “lifting as we climb.”

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### Secondary Level Honoree

*Dragon Hoops*, written and illustrated by Gene Luen Yang. Color by Lark Pien. First Second, an imprint of Roaring Brook Press. Reviewed by Elizabeth Sturm, Associate Professor, Department of Education, Lewis University, Romeoville, Ill.

Gene Yang’s graphic novel, *Dragon Hoops*, shoots and scores in the interweaving of three connected storylines that come together in a compelling tale. The primary focus chronicles Bishop O’Dowd High School’s varsity basketball team’s 2015 season. Layered into this is the history of men and women’s basketball and Yang’s own memoir as he follows the team and grapples with personal career choices. While the book centers on a sport, the essence is the characters, both as individuals and as a team. Yang sensitively portrays the athletes and their coaches, whose passion for the game does not dim, win or



lose. Though Yang admires the team, he does not glorify the challenges faced, such as racism, and he narrates his own discomfort about whether to include the reason the former coach suddenly retired.

The graphic elements work extremely well with this story and provide a sense of action on the court. The colors change from muted, when building the historical sport of basketball, to bold during each game of the 2015 season. Details, such as the repetition of the word and visual “step” to signify a transition in life course or character maturity, clue the reader to look for change. The back matter includes informative author notes that enhance the text, and a bibliography.

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## 2021 IDM Summer Institute

Making Inquiry Possible The Seventh Annual IDM™ Summer Institute will be ONLINE July 19–20, 2021! Sponsored by C3 Teachers and National Council for the Social Studies, the IDM Summer Institute is back! This is our 7th year helping teachers learn about the Inquiry Design Model (IDM) and designing inquiries. This institute will be conducted online this year. And it will be an experience!

<https://www.socialstudies.org/professional-learning/2021-idm-summer-institute>

