

Librarians Telling Tales Podcast Transcript- Episode 18

Quick Look Booklist:

- **Section 1: Picture Books**
 - *Brown: The Many Shades of Love* by Nancy James and Constance Moore
 - *More Than Peach: Changing the World ... One Crayon at a Time!* by Bellen Woodard
 - Author/Illustrator: Kadir Nelson
 - *Moses: When Harriet Tubman Led Her People to Freedom* by Carole Boston Weatherford, illustrated by Kadir Nelson
 - *If You Plant a Seed* by Kadir Nelson
 - *Please, Puppy, Please* by Spike Lee, illustrated by Kadir Nelson
 - *Our Skin: A First Conversation about Race* by Megan Madison, Jessica Ralli, and Isabel Roxas
 - *Remember to Dream, Ebere* by Cynthia Erivo
 - *Saturday* by Oge Mora
 - *Going Places: Victor Hugo Green and His Glorious Book* by Tonya Bolden
 - *Ruth and the Green Book* by Calvin Ramsey
 - *Only the Best: The Exceptional Life and Fashion of Ann Lowe* by Kate Messner and Margaret E. Powell
- **Section 2: Middle Grade**
 - *Turning 15 on the Road to Freedom: My Story of the 1965 Selma Voting Rights March* by Lynda Blackmon Lowery
 - *The Great Green Heist* by Varian Johnson
 - *Fast Pitch* by Nic Stone
 - *The Last Last-Day-of-Summer* by Lamar Giles
 - *Clean Getaway* by Nic Stone
 - *Eddie Red Undercover* (series) by Marcia Wells
 - *Swim Team* by Johnnie Christmas
 - *The New Kid* by Jerry Craft
 - *When Stars Are Scattered* by Victoria Jamieson
- **Section 3: Young Adult**
 - *The Gilded Ones* (series) by Namina Forna
 - *Pet* by Akwaeke Emezi
 - *Bitter* by Akwaeke Emezi
 - *Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood
 - *Let Me Hear a Rhyme* by Tiffany D. Jackson
 - *With the Fire on High* by Elizabeth Acevedo
 - *The Voting Booth* by Brandy Colbert

Transcript:

Musical Intro: “Uplifting 2463” by Twisterium from pixabay.com

(Description) Upbeat, piano and percussion. Music fades and plays under.

Blair: Hey, Bookworms! Welcome to Librarians Telling Tales, where we introduce you to all the things we love about libraries: books, people, and making connections! I'm Blair.

Jennifer: I'm Jennifer.

Amy: I'm Amy.

(0:24) Music fades out

Jennifer: In today's episode, we'll chat about inspiring reads for Black History Month and recommend wonderful books for kids, teens, and the whole family.

Music Transition: “Ascending-marimba-notification” by Alexander from Orangefreesounds.com

(Description) Bright marimba scale.

(0:33) Section 1: Picture Books

Amy: So I'll get us started. I feel like there are so many wonderful books and authors out there that share new worlds, new ideas, new perspectives with us. And so I was actually really excited to delve into some of the newer books on our shelves. Because I've read, for the last few years, the same ones over and over with school groups in terms of picture books and finding some new ones that I could share about black history or black culture or black lives. And so one of the new ones was *Brown: The Many Shades of Love* by Nancy James and Constance Moore. And it was published in 2020. And it is just so cute. This little guy goes through and describes all the various shades of brown in his family. So like the darker browns, the medium browns, the lighter browns, the cinnamon browns. It is so sweet. And he talks about at the end how he just loves painting all these different colors of brown. And I just was like, where has this book been, you know? So that was one of the new ones or new to me, anyway, that I discovered. How about you guys?

Blair: That brings up one that I have on top here, which is *More Than Peach* by Bellen Woodard. And it is a really sweet book by and about a young activist who when she was in class, someone asked her to pass the skin color crayon and they meant peach. And she's like, but not everybody's skin is peach. My skin isn't peach. There are other kids in this class whose skin isn't peach. We shouldn't call it the skin color. And you know, just kind of expanding how you would have that conversation with your class. And actually I think her response was so sweet. The next time that someone asked her the question about can she pass the skin color, she says: Which one? Skin can be any number of beautiful colors. How simple is that?

Amy: I love that. I've never heard of that book.

Jennifer: Oh, it's beautiful. I've read it too. I really enjoyed it. It's a lovely book.

Amy: Oh, that's awesome.

Blair: It's gorgeous. And I think it's a really great way to share a very simple conversation that you can have in a classroom or you know, anytime you have an interaction with other people. None of us look the same. So, we should embrace all of the ways we all look different.

Jennifer: I love the concept of that book, something we just don't always think about, but it's something to discuss for sure. Well, I'm gonna talk about a tried and true author that I just love, I go back to all the time. Do you know who Kadir Nelson is?

Blair: Of course.

Amy: Oh, yes. Of course.

Jennifer: I love Kadir Nelson. And so I was looking back to all the books that impressed me and I realized he either wrote it or he illustrated it. And I just love, especially his books about African American culture. *Moses* by Carole Boston Weatherford, that he illustrated about Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad. Beautiful illustrations. But then he's also illustrated and wrote *If You Plant a Seed*. And I just love that. And so I think it's really important to celebrate the illustrators and authors as well. And he is one of my absolute favorites. He also illustrated Spike Lee's *Please, Puppy, Please...*

Blair: Yes.

Jennifer: ...which we love to read to school groups. So I just really wanted to underscore him because, to me, he's kind of a quiet person that might go under the radar, but yet is everywhere. And I just really have really loved his work.

Amy: So another one that I discovered that was a hundred percent new to me... You know how there's just those moments where you're walking around, like on the day you need to do a class read-aloud and a book just jumps out at you 'cause it's been pulled out or it looks wonky or something. And it was *Our Skin: A First Conversation about Race* by a whole bunch of authors, Megan Madison, Jessica Ralli, and Isabel Roxas. And like you were talking about with *More Than Peach*, it's all about skin coming in different colors. And then it does go into talking about like, what color is your skin? And it's in a board book format, and it talks about race and what race is and melanin and just some different things. The way that it's handled for young people is just, I think, so simple and perfect. And the end of course does have a little bit more in depth about things like stereotypes and racism. But as far as the treatment of an introduction and an awareness piece, it's just a really straightforward treatment of that and I thought that was really cool.

Jennifer: So are these books that you would read in a storytime setting? Or are they just more books that you would recommend on a one-on-one interaction with a patron?

Blair: I would say both. Especially the ones that I have or ones that I have either read or would plan on reading to a class group because I think that they are interesting books that have something nice to say and say it in a way that is understandable, relatable, and maybe a little bit eye-opening, which makes them really great. I do have one that I brought, I used it for pajama story time this summer and it is called, *Remember to Dream, Ebere* by Cynthia Erivo. And oh my goodness, it is beautiful. It is just, ugh, it makes me like tear up because it's so sweet because she's just handles that silly picky situation where the kid won't stay in bed, right? Like it's a situation that every parent has. Your kid just won't stay in bed for whatever reason. And so this is her sending her back to bed, telling her to dream. And her daughter gets outta bed and says, this is what I was dreaming about. And then she says, oh, but what was the color of your rocket ship you were dreaming about? And so now she has to go back to bed and figure

out what color the rocket ship is. And then the next time she wakes up, it was: Okay, and what was the name of your rocket ship? And so she has to go back to bed to dream about that. And it's just such a lovely bedtime story. And I think it's that quiet kind of representation too that's really important where it's a book that anyone can pick up and read and find extreme value in, but it shows you a family and that's a great way to celebrate and explore diversity with kids.

Jennifer: That's what I love. I love that connectedness that shows that we're all very similar, even though our skin color may be different. And that reminded me of one of my favorite books, which I've talked about before, but I love *Oge Mora*.

Amy: Mm-hmm.

Blair: Oh, yes.

Jennifer: Just love her books. And *Saturday*, speaking of books that brought tears to your eyes, I remember sitting at the, uh, Youth Service desk reading that book and started to tear up because I thought it was so special, a relationship between a mother and daughter and that's universal. Truly it is. And it reminded me of my own experience with my daughter. But it's an African American woman and she's a single parent finding time to spend with her little girl. And it was so special. Books connect us.

Amy: Mm-hmm.

Blair: Oh yeah.

Jennifer: Doesn't matter what color our skin is, we can have those same experiences. And I thought *Oge Mora* captured that just so beautifully in *Saturday*.

Amy: And just the resilience in that book, what they thought they wanted to do or what was gonna happen didn't come to fruition. So what they did instead was actually even sweeter as far as the connecting between mom and kiddo.

Jennifer: That ultimately just your time together is more important than the activity that you attend.

Blair: Those are the memories that we make. That's what makes your childhood.

Amy: In terms of a historical context, we got a new book called *Going Places: Victor Hugo Green and His Glorious Book* by Tonya Bolden, what he did and how he did it through his connections and just being a mailman and knowing people and knowing places and how much that impacted the black communities. But I like *Ruth and the Green Book* by Calvin Ramsey more. It's about a family traveling and discovering that book when they visited a gas station, which is a more first-person narrative. I actually like that narrative structure a whole lot more. And I actually intend to share that today with my class that I'm sharing books with because while the biography of him was interesting and the way that it's treated is really nice and, like, all the maps and things that they include, I didn't feel as connected to it as I did reading the narrative structure of *Ruth and the Green Book*. It was just a different experience. And just answering that question, like, I don't know that I would share any of these in a preschool storytime, but I certainly think I'll share the *Brown: Many Shades of Love* with a school group because then there's a chance to talk about things. Whereas with the little people, sometimes it feels more like an entertainment...

Blair: Yes, we're presenters.

Amy: ...that happens. Yes, we're presenters. So...

Jennifer: You have to know your audience...

Amy: Absolutely.

Jennifer: And what's appropriate. And that's why the books that you're sharing, Blair, like *Remember to Dream [Ebere]* is perfect for storytimes because you're still showing that there are people of different colors and representing that. So that's what we can do when they're younger audiences.

Blair: For sure. I have one more, and it is a picture book biography and, coming from my theater, costuming and fashion obsessed self, I absolutely loved this little biography of Ann Lowe and it is called *Only the Best: The Exceptional Life and Fashion of Ann Lowe* by Kate Messner and Margaret E. Dowell [Powell]. Ann Lowe was this fashion icon in specifically the sixties and seventies. But she had come up in Alabama, her mother was highly employed, desirable, fashionable seamstress, but it was the South. And we are talking 1920s. And then her mother passes away, and she's left with unfinished dresses for debutantes and she doesn't have time to grieve. She fixes all those dresses and she gets them and she takes her mother's business and she goes forward with it. And she is one of the first women of color with a shop on fashion row in New York. She presents at Fashion Week, she makes dresses for Jacqueline Kennedy. You know, it was something that could have been a very small trajectory, but because she was such a determined woman, she turned it into a fantastic career. And I think this book handles that journey and that transition through Civil Rights in a very interesting way. There's a moment in the book where she shows up with the dresses for Jackie Kennedy's wedding and they tell her to go in the back door and she refuses and it's awesome. That moment is so great.

Jennifer: I wanna read that book.

Music Transition: "Ascending-marimba-notification" by Alexander from Orangefreesounds.com

(Description) *Bright marimba scale.*

(9:46) Section 2: Middle Grade

Amy: Well, one of the middle grade ones that I read, just kind of keeping in line with the historical vein there, was *Turning 15 on the Road to Freedom* by Lynda Blackmon Lowery. And it was so interesting because I didn't really realize how well-used kiddos were in terms of being sent to march for voting rights. And, I mean, in her case she was 14 when they began that specific march. But they had been marching for months and months leading up to that. And the number of times that she was put in jail, it became like old hat to her. They started packing lunches specifically because they knew they would spend time in jail. It was just really interesting that that march to Selma and their experiences along the way and things, it was just, it was really interesting. And I thought, I can't imagine walking that far under those conditions and then for something that she wouldn't be able to make use of if it was even achieved for years. You know, how amazing for those families and those kiddos to be part of something so big. That was a really interesting read.

Jennifer: I wanna just transition just a little bit. One of the things I read in a *Library Journal* a while ago is that one of the things that black kids wanna read are about kids like themselves. And, and I found that a lot of the books I was reading was about the difficulties, about the Civil Rights movement, about racism. And a lot of times these kids just wanna read books about regular kids.

Amy: Everyday experiences, for sure.

Jennifer: And so I looked back at my reading list and thought, gosh, most of everything I read has been really difficult and sad and hard. And when I have a book club, I want have a variety of representation. And so I was looking for a fun book. So I found the *Great Green Heist* (Varian Johnson). The main character is African American and he's so funny and he's mischievous. His name is Jackson Green. And he has a reputation for causing all kinds of escapades in the school, but he is trying to reform. But there's a school election going on. And so there's all these kids that are wanting to enlist his help to sway the election to their side. And it's a fun book. Have you found any other books that are similar?

Amy: I had, I had the same actual thought pattern as I was looking for books. I, that's why I was really trying hard to delve into newer authors.

Blair: Yeah.

Amy: Because I have read a lot and I had read a similar, maybe even that same *SLJ* article talking about it's not just about the struggle and especially the historical struggles, but also the everyday experiences and kiddos of all colors seeing themselves in stories. And so I read things by Nic Stone and... *Fast Pitch* for example, which was awesome. I loved that book about a girl's fast pitch softball team that's the first all-black in their county and they are determined to go to state championships. I loved every minute of that book. I really enjoyed it. There's a part mystery there of like what happened to her great grandpa because he was going to go play in the major leagues, but there was something that went down and he was then turned away from that career path. I mean, just really wonderful stuff. And then also *The Last Last-Day-of-Summer* by Lamar Giles. And that was a hoot. I mean, I cried in that one because there's time travel and an older version of one of the cousins comes back and you realize that the other cousin, I'm gonna tear up, may not have survived into their history. And you now wanna know why, what happened? But I had to be conscious of that as well. I had that same realization. A lot of the books that I had been reading or had read in the past did seem to focus more on a struggle.

Blair: Speaking of Nic Stone, 'cause I just also recently read a Nic Stone book: *Clean Getaway*, which is just brilliant the way that it is a ridiculously wonderful modern story. So Scoob gets essentially kidnapped by his grandma, his little southern white grandma. She lies to him and says that she sold her house and she bought this RV and she needs him to come on this trip with her to help her with something. And what she's actually doing the whole time, you don't find out till the end, but part of what she is doing is retracing a trip that she took with his grandfather, who is now deceased, through the South, using a Green book. And so it is interesting because he doesn't totally understand why they're retracing the steps that we're taking. And eventually she tells him a very brief rundown of why. But really the rest of the story is just the shenanigans that he and his grandma get into trying to evade his father. And he doesn't quite realize he's been kidnapped until he sees that, like, there's alerts out on the <laugh>...

Amy: You're kidding.

Blair: No <laugh>...

Amy: Like, she legit kidnapped him?

Blair: She legit kidnapped him.

Jennifer: So is he biracial? If his granny is white?

Blair: He is biracial, yes. But it is really hilarious.

Amy: And his name is Scoob?

Blair: His name is Scoob.

Amy: Oh, I like that.

Blair: She calls him Scooby Doob.

Amy: <laugh>

Jennifer: There's the *Eddie Red [Undercover]* series (Marcia Wells). He's a detective and he solves mysteries and he's African-American. Really short, quick, easy series. So I like to recommend those ones as well.

Amy: What level of mystery is it? Is it like Encyclopedia Brown?

Jennifer: Around Encyclopedia Brown.

Amy: Gotcha. Okay.

Jennifer: Yep, I would say he would be equivalent to Encyclopedia Brown. More modern, definitely more modern.

Blair: There's also really cool graphic novels, including one that we read for book club, which I'm really excited about 'cause it's brand new and it is also, it got an honor at the ALA Media Awards and I'm trying to remember which...

Jennifer: Coretta Scott King [Illustrator].

Blair: It's called *Swim Team* by Johnnie Christmas. And Brie and her dad are moving from New York City to Florida, and she feels completely like a fish outta water. She has severe anxiety 'cause she doesn't think she's ever gonna make friends again. And she loves math, but when she goes to pick her classes, the Mathlete's special class is full. So she ends up having to take Swim 101, and she has no idea how to swim. It's really fun how she conquers her fears, conquers her anxieties, ends up joining swim team and she makes these great relationships with other people, with coaches, with friends, including a lovely lady in her building is also African American and was on a swim team in the 1960s. And there was the swim team that almost took state. And so there's a little bit of history in there. There's a little bit of a breakdown about why swimming is uncommon in certain segments of the black community and a lot of it has to do with access to places to swim. So swimming didn't become a part of their everyday and the rest of it is this fantastic story about her personal growth and her making new friends and her learning to conquer something that she was initially terrified of. It's so fun.

Jennifer: How old is she?

Blair: She's 12.

Jennifer: Okay.

Amy: I actually, I never read with my eyes *The New Kid* by Jerry Craft, but I listened to the audio book and I didn't believe that you could make an audiobook out of a graphic novel. That's why I did it because I was like, how did this get a great recommendations? And I thought, really an audio book for a graphic novel, how do you do that? It was awesome! You do it with a full cast and sound effects. And it is totally achievable and it was so much fun that book, the presentation of it, there were some, you know, complex things that happened in that storyline, but I'm kind of curious to try the graphic novel.

Blair: We did that for book club last year and they loved it.

Jennifer: Just so you know, the *Scattered Stars* or *Where the Stars...*

Blair: Oh, *Where the Stars Are Scattered [When Stars Are Scattered]* by Victoria Jamieson.

Jennifer: That audiobook is amazing.

Amy: Is that a graphic novel?

Jennifer: Yes. And the audiobook is phenomenal. I remember I was washing dishes listening to it and I stopped and paid attention 'cause it was so well done.

Amy: Wow.

Jennifer: It's a graphic. Just some recommendations for you.

Music Transition: "Ascending-marimba-notification" by Alexander from
Orangefreesounds.com
(Description) *Bright marimba scale.*

(16:49) Section 3: Young Adult

Blair: I think Teen is where a lot of good representation is really achieved very well and it's achieved in ways that, particularly in fantasy I'm thinking of, you don't have to have the politicizing of anything, you just have a fantastic read with a diverse cast and I love it. Like Namina Forna's *The Gilded Ones*, for example.

Amy: Oh, yes.

Blair: Which is just so well done. I'm so excited for the third book. And then I also really love... Akwaeke Emezi has *Pet* and then the prequel is *Bitter* and they are very short, apocalyptic, dealing with women who draw angels into being on our side of the veil. But are they really angels or are they demons? And what even is good and bad, anyway? So it's got art, it's got weirdness and all of the characters are all over the racial spectrum and all over the LGBTQ spectrum. And it's just a really cool...

Amy: I felt it to be very challenging. Like, I had to really pay attention. I initially tried, based on Blair's recommendation, the audio and I DNFed it. I was like, I can't follow what's happening. I need to actually have eyes on the page. Rewinding, rewinding and trying to figure out what just happened. And definitely an older teen read, for sure.

Blair: It is an older teen read, but I just loved them.

Amy: It's just a very complicated storytelling.

Blair: It reminds me a little bit of a different take on *Handmaid's Tale* (Margaret Atwood), like the breakdown of society that they're living in. It's like that kind of a world. It's very intense.

Amy: One that I read for this podcast and then I bought a copy and... I'm frugal. I don't actually send presents to people anymore. I'm just not that person anymore. I tell you that you should check it out kind of thing, <laugh>. But I sent a girlfriend of mine a copy of this book because it brought back so many memories of growing up in the late nineties. And it was, *Let Me Hear a Rhyme* by Tiffany Jackson. It was so good. If you know Tupac and Notorious BIG or ever listened to rap music during that era of rap, which I totally did. I mean they would mention a song title or a lyric and then the whole song would be playing in my head. It was so much fun and I knew she would have that same recognition. And her birthday is this weekend and I was like, I gotta send this book to you. It's about a kiddo who gets killed actually in a suspicious way on the street. And he was an up and coming rapper locally. His sister and his two best friends decide they're going to make him a star after death. They're gonna achieve his dream for him. And so they create this whole plot. They find all of his old mix tapes and then actually stumble into the recording studio to have some special dubbing done and discover he had been recording there and had some more professional stuff and they sell him to a big name producer and then they

have to figure out, well how do we tell them that he's not actually alive? And the ending was very moving and emotional. So some of the struggles and things are definitely in the story, for sure. But the friendship, the family aspect, the rap, I mean it just took me back so fast to that era of listening and, and I was just like, this is so much fun. I gotta share it.

Jennifer: So did you read it or listen to it?

Amy: I listened to it.

Jennifer: So did they include music? Did that enhance your audio experience?

Amy: They did not include music. It was definitely multiple narrators and they had four points of view. But it didn't feel as much like a rap to me because it's more like a talking of the rap. They didn't put it to a beat. It was not like you would hear if you had been listening to his track. But the idea of being at those house parties and somebody running the same song through, I mean that was real. That happened. Yeah. So I was like, this is the raddest. But I did listen to it. So hopefully her experience with the paper book is as amazing as mine was. But...

Blair: I really wanted to read that when it came in. I haven't gotten to it yet.

Amy: Totally do it. Seriously.

Blair: Okay.

Amy: And or listen to it. It was just, I loved it.

Blair: It makes me think of listening to Elizabeth Acevedo's novels in verse, which is usually how I prefer to read her is to listen to her because the audiobooks are so well done. So I had to include *With the Fire on High*, which I think is my favorite of hers. It really is such a fluid novel in verse where truthfully, I mean aside from the very real fact that she is a single teenage mom living with her grandmother and we are dealing with the fact where her biracial background includes Hispanic and African Cuban heritage, she is just a teenage girl who's trying to figure out what she's gonna do with the rest of her life and how she is going to support her child and how she is going to do things on her own when she doesn't have her grandma anymore. And what is she gonna be able to set up for herself while she still has the chance that will give her that career and that life. And I think that is such a relatable, modern struggle. And it felt so like girl power strong, making strong choices. And then you get a little bit cute romance too on a little, you know, trip to Spain and a little bit of fun. It, it is just great. I loved that book.

Amy: I read *The Voting Booth* (Brandy Colbert) also for this podcast.

Blair: I also wanted to read that one.

Jennifer: I've got it on my TBR list...

Amy: Do you?

Jennifer: ...to read it.

Amy: I enjoyed it but I, I wish it hadn't taken place in one day. Too much happened in one day, especially the budding romance part and this lost social media star cat on top of all the voting troubles that they were having and whatnot. And you know, modern day, I thought there's just too much happening in one day. I wish that it had been spaced out differently or things had been edited from that 'cause it was a really fun story. And I love the part about the voting and how determined this girl was to help a guy she had just met cast his first vote, but, man, all the extra stuff, a little, little too much and it all happens in one day.

Blair: I have a hard time getting behind insta love like that.

Amy: Well, especially in that one day she and her boyfriend break up and then she starts a new crushy-romancey thing. It's light, but still it's there.

Jennifer: So we're not recommending this one?

Amy: I mean, you know, if the listener is okay with that... Yes.

Blair: Some people love the fantasy of insta love. I am not one of them. <laugh>

Jennifer: If it's well written and believable. You know, sometimes an author can cast a spell and you think, oh, it could totally happen.

Amy: Mm-hmm. Agreed.

Blair: We hope this episode inspires you to explore and celebrate new books, authors, and perspectives.

Music Transition: "Ascending-marimba-notification" by Alexander from
Orangefreesounds.com
(Description) *Bright marimba scale.*

Outro (22:53)

Jennifer: Thank you for joining us today on Librarians Telling Tales. For a full list of the books shared in this episode, check the link in our podcast bio.

Amy: Don't forget to subscribe to catch our next episode where we chat about early childhood literacy with a special guest.

(23:07) Musical Outro: "Uplifting 2463" by Twisterium from pixabay.com
(Description) *Upbeat, piano and percussion. Music fades in and plays under.*

Blair: This podcast is supported by the Arizona State Library, Archives, and Public Records, a division of the Secretary of State with federal funds from the Institute of Museum and Library Services. We would also like to thank the City of Prescott, Friends of the Prescott Public Library, and all our fabulous coworkers at Prescott Public Library.

Jennifer: Be sure to like and subscribe to Librarians Telling Tales. And until next time, we'll see you in the library.

Total Runtime (23:39)