

A painting of four African American men in formal attire (suits and various hats) looking intently at a book held by the man in the center. The background is a red wall with windows showing a blue sky and a ship's mast.

**CORETTA SCOTT KING**

*Book Awards*

**2009 DISCUSSION GUIDE**

**American Library Association**

**Ethnic and Multicultural  
Information Exchange Round Table**

**Coretta Scott King Book Awards Committee**

**American Library Association  
Ethnic and Multicultural Information Exchange Round Table  
Coretta Scott King Book Awards Committee  
[www.ala.org/csk](http://www.ala.org/csk)**

This Coretta Scott King Awards Discussion Guide was prepared by the 2009 CSK Book Awards Committee Chair, Deborah Taylor, and by members of the 2009 Coretta Scott King Book Awards Jury: Carole J. McCollough (Chair), Darwin Henderson (Interim Chair), Brenda M. Hunter, Alan R. Bailey, Jonda C. McNair, Martha Ruff, Robin L. Smith, and Eunice Anderson.

The activities and discussion topics are developed to encompass state school standards. These standards equally apply to students from all linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Students will demonstrate their proficiency, skills, and knowledge of subject matter in accordance with national and state standards. Please refer to the Web site, [www.edu.gov](http://www.edu.gov), for detailed information.

**The Coretta Scott King Book Award: A Living Legend**

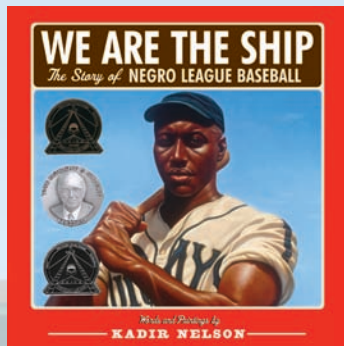
The Coretta Scott King Book Award has grown since its conception in the late 1960s. At its humble inception at the May 1970 dinner gala of the New Jersey Library Association, Lillie Patterson was honored for her biography, *Martin Luther King, Jr.: Man of Peace*. In 1972, the Coretta Scott King Book Awards held its first breakfast at an ALA conference site. Official affiliation with the Social Responsibilities Round Table (SRRT) came in 1980, and in 1982 the American Library Association recognized the Coretta Scott King Award as an association award. During the 2003 ALA midwinter meeting, the Coretta Scott King task force became affiliated with the Ethnic and Multicultural Information Exchange Round Table (EMIERT). The affiliation with EMIERT gave the group a new name: the Coretta Scott King Book Awards Committee. Success of the committee can be attributed to the work of tireless volunteers and visionary founders. For a more complete history, consult works: *The Coretta Scott King Awards Book: From Vision to Reality*, edited by Henrietta Smith, American Library Association, 1999; *The Coretta Scott King Awards: 1970–2009, fourth edition*, by Henrietta Smith, American Library Association, 2009.

For forty years, books by African American writers and artists have been honored by receiving the Coretta Scott King Book Award. This award promotes understanding and appreciation of the culture of all peoples and their contributions to the African American culture. The award is designed to commemorate the life and works of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and to honor Mrs. Coretta Scott King for her courage and determination to continue the work for peace and world brotherhood. The multidimensional characteristics of the authors' and illustrators' works reflect the African American experience from both the historical and contemporary perspectives. Opportunities to celebrate the rich and powerful experiences depicted in these books lie in the hands of the adults in children's and young adults' lives.

This discussion guide is, therefore, dedicated to those teachers, parents, librarians, booksellers, and caregivers who are committed to enriching the lives of children and young adults with quality literature. Among their many other functions, book awards provide a simple means for casual browsers in bookstores, libraries, and schools to find material that is engaging, well-crafted, and satisfying both emotionally and intellectually. The Coretta Scott King Award particularly introduces the best in African American literature to all children. The award now graces dozens of titles, from picture books for the smallest children to novels and nonfiction for teenagers. In this guide, we have examined some of these titles from different angles and perspectives.



# AWARD WINNER *and* HONOR BOOKS



Coretta Scott King Book Award  
**Author Award**

**Illustrator Honor Award**

***We Are the Ship: The Story of  
Negro League Baseball***

Written and illustrated by Kadir Nelson

Published by Disney • Jump at the Sun



Coretta Scott King Book Award  
**Author Honor Award**

***Becoming Billie Holiday***

Written by Carole Boston Weatherford

Illustrated by Floyd Cooper

Published by Boyds Mills Press/Wordsong



Coretta Scott King Book Award  
**Author Honor Award**

**Illustrator Award**

***The Blacker the Berry***

Written by Joyce Carol Thomas

Illustrated by Floyd Cooper

Published by Joanna Cotler Books  
An imprint of HarperCollins Publishers



Coretta Scott King Book Award  
**Illustrator Honor Award**

***Before John Was a Jazz Giant***

Written by Carole Boston Weatherford

Illustrated by Sean Qualls

Published by Henry Holt Books for Young Readers  
An imprint of Macmillan Children's Publishing Group



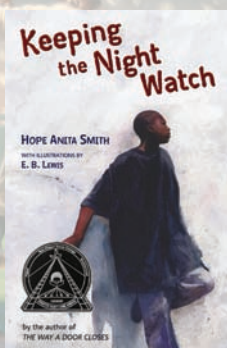
Coretta Scott King Book Award  
**Illustrator Honor Award**

***The Moon Over Star***

Written by Dianna Hutts Aston

Illustrated by Jerry Pinkney

Published by Dial Books for Young Readers  
A Division of Penguin Young Readers Group



Coretta Scott King Book Award  
**Author Honor Award**

***Keeping the Night Watch***

Written by Hope Anita Smith

Illustrated by E. B. Lewis

Published by Henry Holt Books for Young Readers  
An imprint of Macmillan Children's Publishing Group



Coretta Scott King/John Steptoe  
**New Talent Illustrator Award**

***Bird***

Written by Zetta Elliott

Illustrated by Shadra Strickland

Published by Lee & Low Books



*Winner of the Coretta Scott King Author Award  
and a Coretta Scott King Illustrator Honor Award*

## **We Are the Ship: The Story of Negro League Baseball**

Written and illustrated by Kadir Nelson

Disney•Jump at the Sun

An imprint of Disney Book Group



David Harrison

*We Are the Ship: The Story of Negro League Baseball* is a narrated nonfiction account of the rise and decline of the Negro Leagues. Divided into innings, the book provides information about the beginnings of Negro League Baseball, players, managers, and owners. Nelson's dramatic oil paintings and gatefold add to the grace of the story. Realistic images depict players in action on the field, on baseball cards, and in official team portraits. Nelson pays tribute to the unsung heroes of Negro League Baseball and highlights an important aspect of American history.

### **Activities and Discussion Topics**

- The Negro League Baseball Museum is a national treasure. If you live nearby, visit. If you can't visit, explore its Web site, <http://www.nlbm.com/s/index.cfm>
- What did Rube Foster mean when he stated, "We are the ship; all else is the sea?"
- Compare the playing style of the players in the Negro Leagues with the players in the Majors. How was the playing style the same? How was it different?
- Calculate how many miles a team would travel in a year. Draw a map to show the barn storming trips they might make in a year.
- Baseball card collecting was an important part of the Negro Leagues. Choose a player from the leagues and create both sides of the card, include a picture of the player and statistics available at [http://www.nlbpa.com/the\\_athletes.html](http://www.nlbpa.com/the_athletes.html)
- Kadir Nelson captures the African American oral tradition on paper. Interview a person who lived during the '40s and see how his or her life compared to the lives of the players you've read about.
- How many Negro League players were finally elected to the National Baseball Hall of Fame? How were they selected to the Major League Hall of Fame? <http://web.baseballhalloffame.org>
- Choose your favorite illustration and experiment by rendering your own illustration in another medium. (Cut paper, crayons, watercolors, or markers are good options.)
- The success of the Negro Leagues eventually led to Jackie Robinson's signing for the Major Leagues. How did the success of the Negro Leagues eventually lead to its end?
- Athletes should show good sportsmanship, even when things are not going well. Find some examples where the players demonstrated good sportsmanship, even when it was difficult.

### **Related CSK Titles**

*I Never Had It Made: The Autobiography of Jackie Robinson*, as told to Alfred Duckett, Harper Perennial

*Black Diamond: The Story of Negro League Baseball*, Patricia and Frederick McKissack, Scholastic

*The Bat Boy and His Violin*, Gavin Curtis, illustrated by E.B. Lewis, Simon & Schuster



*Winner of the Coretta Scott King Illustrator Award  
and a Coretta Scott King Author Honor Book*

## **The Blacker the Berry**

Written by Joyce Carol Thomas

Illustrated by Floyd Cooper

Joanna Cotler Books/HarperCollins



Jim Dennis Photography



Yelena Cooper

*The Blacker the Berry* is a collection of twelve free verse poems that celebrate and affirm the varied skin tones of African American children. Some titles of poems include “Golden Goodness,” “Biscuit Brown,” “Snowberries,” and “Raspberry Black.” Thomas uses the theme of berries as a literary motif throughout all of the poems. Cooper’s realistic illustrations incorporate children of various shades as beautiful and self-confident.

### **Activities and Discussion Topics**

- Looking at the faces of the children in the book, describe the expressions or moods of the children.
- Create verse that celebrates the range of skin color in the African American community.
- Look at your skin. Look at the skin inside the palm of your hand. Look at your face in a mirror. How would you describe your skin using some of the words from Thomas’s poems?
- Using crayons or pencils that replicate skin colors, write your own “berry” poem.
- “The blacker the berry” is the first part of a common saying among African Americans. The remaining part is “the sweeter the juice.” Why do people say it?
- Copy one of the shorter poems. Underline all the adjectives and circle all the nouns. How do the adjectives change the poem?
- Look at one page. Notice the colors in the art and the way Cooper uses light to draw your eye around the page. Read the poem on the page aloud. How did Cooper use the words to inspire his art?
- Poems are written to be performed! Find your favorite poem and practice reading it aloud. Record your performance and listen to your voice and watch your body movements. Are you surprised? Find another poem and divide the lines up with a friend and perform an instant readers’ theater.
- In “Snowberries,” Thomas mentions the “one drop rule.” What is she referring to? When and how was it used?

### **Related CSK Titles**

*All the Colors of the Race*, Arnold Adoff, illustrated by John Steptoe, Lothrop, Lee and Shepherd  
*Brown Honey In Broomwheat Tea*, Joyce Carol Thomas, illustrated by Floyd Cooper, HarperCollins

## A Coretta Scott King Author Honor Book

### Keeping the Night Watch

Written by Hope Anita Smith

Illustrated by E. B. Lewis

Henry Holt Books for Young Readers

An imprint of Macmillan Children's Publishing Group



In this continuation of the story that began in *The Way a Door Closes*, thirteen-year-old C.J. Washington III is having a difficult time after his father returns from an unexplained absence and reclaims his place in the family. A series of poems, most in C.J.'s earnest, intelligent voice, chronicles the trajectory from abandonment to forgiveness. The first-person account gives readers an intimate view of C.J.'s confusing mix of feelings toward his father. Using references to scripture and familiar hymns, Smith plays with a variety of poetic forms, from free verse to shape poems and acrostics to sonnets, in this affecting portrait of one family's rebirth.

#### Activities and Discussion Topics

- Smith makes reference to the “prodigal son” in her first poem. Who does she mean and how does the Biblical parable relate to the story?
- How does illustrator Lewis show the family's changing emotions in the story? Compare the illustrations of the family in the first pages to the family at the end.
- Smith uses the shape of a diamond in her poem “The Jeweler.” Count syllables and words to see how she constructed this concrete poem. Try it yourself.
- Copy “Maya's Sonnet.” Find the rhyme scheme and explore the number of syllables per line. Use highlighters to show the rhymes and try to write a sonnet of your own.
- How did CJ reconcile with his father? Write a personal essay about a time when you were wronged and had to forgive and reconcile. How have your feelings changed since the real event?
- Write an acrostic poem using Zuri's “ABCs” about yourself or someone you know well. Model Zuri and make the lines create a whole story in verse.

#### Related CSK Titles

*Dark Sons*, Nikki Grimes, Disney•Jump at the Sun

*In Daddy's Arms I Am Tall: African Americans Celebrating Fathers*, by Javaka Steptoe, Lee & Low

*Everett Anderson's Goodbye*, Lucille Clifton, illustrated by Ann Grifalconi, Henry Holt

*The Way a Door Closes*, Hope Anita Smith, illustrated by Shane Evans, Henry Holt

*Somewhere in the Darkness*, Walter Dean Myers, Scholastic



## A Coretta Scott King Author Honor Book

### Becoming Billie Holiday

Written by Carole Boston Weatherford

Illustrated by Floyd Cooper

Boyd's Mills Press/Wordsong



Floyd Cooper

*Becoming Billie Holiday*, is a story in verse of the legendary jazz singer, named Eleanor Fagin at birth. Billie's life was filled with pain, poverty, struggle, crime, and a deep longing for the security of her father's love. The voice of Billie comes through in this fictionalized account through poems that bear the titles of her familiar repertoire; they speak honestly and poignantly of her passionate pursuit to become a singer.

#### Activities and Discussion Topics

- Billie lived in three cities—Philadelphia, Baltimore, and New York. Describe her life in each place. What are the similarities? What are the differences?
- What effects, good or bad, did religion play in Billie's life? Did it affect her singing?
- Eleanora Fagin was her birth name. Where did the name "Billie" come from and why? If you could change her name what would you change it to?
- In what famous New York jazz clubs did Billie perform? Which clubs are still in existence? Name some other entertainers that have performed there?
- Diana Ross portrayed Billie Holiday in the film *Lady Sings the Blues*. In what ways were the facts of her life in the movie different from those in Weatherford's book?
- A description of Floyd Cooper's artistic technique is found on the back page. Choose a technique and medium that you might use to depict your favorite entertainer.
- Select one of the Weatherford's poems and illustrate it using your own ideas, artistic medium, and technique.
- Using poems from the book plan and perform a Spoken Word and Open Mic program.
- Design a CD cover for a collection of songs sung by Billie Holiday.
- Design a Facebook page for Billie Holiday.
- Choose a person from the list of biographies in the back. Research their lives and learn more about them.

#### Related CSK Titles

*Duke Ellington: The Piano Prince and His Orchestra*, Andrea Davis Pinkney, Illustrated by Brian Pinkney, Hyperion Books for Children

*God Bless the Child*, Billie Holiday and Arthur Herzog, illustrated by Jerry Pinkney, Amistad/HarperCollins

*Jazzy Miz Mozetta*, Brenda C. Roberts, illustrated by Frank Morrison, Farrar, Straus & Giroux

*Jazz*, Walter Dean Myers, illustrated by Christopher Myers, Holiday House

*Don't Explain: A Song of Billie Holiday*, Alexis De Veaux, HarperCollins

*Ray Charles*, Sharon Bell Mathis, illustrated by George Ford, Lee & Low Books

## *A Coretta Scott King Illustrator Honor Book*

### **Before John was a Jazz Giant: A Song of John Coltrane**

Written by Carole Boston Weatherford

Illustrated by Sean Qualls

Henry Holt Books for Young Readers

An imprint of Macmillan Children's Publishing Group



Repeating the refrain, “Before John was a jazz giant,” Weatherford introduces the youngest reader to the legendary musician. The text provides information about John Coltrane’s childhood in the South and the influence of his family and church on his love of music. An informative author’s note and audio and book bibliography rounds out this volume about a boy who was “all ears.”

#### **Activities and Discussion Topics**

- According to the author, John Coltrane tuned into the sounds of his life. What are the sounds of your life? Keep a sound diary for a day, writing down the unique sound-print of your life.
- Look at the circles in the illustrations. Why did the illustrator use them?
- At the end of the book, the author provides a list of music for further listening. Find some of Coltrane’s music at [www.rhapsody.com](http://www.rhapsody.com). Is his music what you expected?
- In Coltrane’s time, music was recorded on vinyl albums and album covers were important in selling music. Design an album cover for John Coltrane.
- To say a person is “all ears” means he or she listens well. Which of your five senses is the most important to you? Are you “all eyes” or “all nose”?
- John Coltrane had a musical gift. It has been said that everyone has a gift of some sort. What are your gifts? Imagine how you will use your talents when you are a grown-up.
- Had you ever heard of John Coltrane before? Research other artists and musicians from his time.
- Enact a television interview with John Coltrane. Choose someone to assume the role of John Coltrane. Prepare questions relating to Coltrane’s life as a musician. Choose a second person to play the role of a talk show host and ask the questions of celebrity guest John Coltrane. Film the interview and share it with classmates, friends, or family.

#### **Related CSK Titles**

*Jazz on a Saturday Night*, Leo and Diane Dillon, Blue Sky Press

*Ellington Was Not a Street*, Ntozake Shange, illustrated by Kadir Nelson, Simon and Schuster

*i see the rhythm*, Michele Wood, illustrated by Toyomi Igus, Childrens Book Press







## *A Coretta Scott King Illustrator Honor Book*

### **The Moon Over Star**

Written by Dianna Hutts Aston

Illustrated by Jerry Pinkney

Dial Books for Young Readers

A Division of Penguin Young Readers Group



The imagination and wonder of a child gazing into the heavens to witness history of a man walking on the moon is captured in the story of Mae, a girl with a big dream. There was one person in Mae's family who did not share in all the excitement—her grandfather. He had seen so much in his lifetime that a walk on the moon seemed a waste of time. Pinkney's beautiful, rich watercolors evoke Mae's wonder and awe at the world beyond the stars and the loving family that protect and nurture her. The fictional Mae suggests the real Mae Jemison and encourages all children to follow their dreams.

#### **Activities and Discussion Topics**

- The girl in the story is called Mae, echoing the name of astronaut Mae Jemison. What was special about Mae Jemison and why is she important?
- Look carefully at the illustrations. How does the artist create different moods in his illustrations?
- Mae has big dreams but her Gramps thinks the space program is a waste of money. Why do you think he changed his mind?
- Dreams are a big part of the history of Americans, particularly African Americans. Explore the "dreams" of Langston Hughes, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Barack Obama. Give examples of their writing that referred to their dreams.
- Mae and her buddies construct a spaceship of their own. Imagine a new way to get to the moon and beyond. Design your dream craft for space travel and label all the important parts.
- The moon landing was important enough to Mae's family that they all gathered and watched the moment together. Have you ever gathered to watch an important event with your family? If so, which event was it?
- Imagine the news reporter's voice as the men were landing on the moon. Perform a readers' theater pretending to be the announcers.
- Research a seminal figure in science or aviation and space history.
- Interview someone who was alive and watched the moon landing. Compare that person's memory with Mae's experience in *The Moon Over Star*. Find newspapers from this time. Check out [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com) and explore the press surrounding this event.

#### **Related CSK Titles**

*The People Could Fly*, Virginia Hamilton, illustrated by Leo and Diane Dillon, Knopf  
*Talkin' About Bessie*, Nikki Grimes, illustrated by E.B. Lewis, Orchard  
*Tar Beach*, Faith Ringgold, Dragonfly/Random House

# *A Coretta Scott King/John Steptoe New Talent Illustrator Award*

## **Bird**

Written by Zetta Elliott

Illustrated by Shadra Strickland

Lee & Low Books



*Christopher Myers*

Mekhai, called Bird by his now-deceased grandfather, is facing a number of losses in his life, including the death of his beloved but drug-addicted brother, Marcus. The support of his grandfather's friend, Uncle Son, and the comfort he finds through drawing is at the heart of this poetic and moving book. Life might be tough, but Bird finds his own way through the darkness.

### **Activities and Discussion Topics**

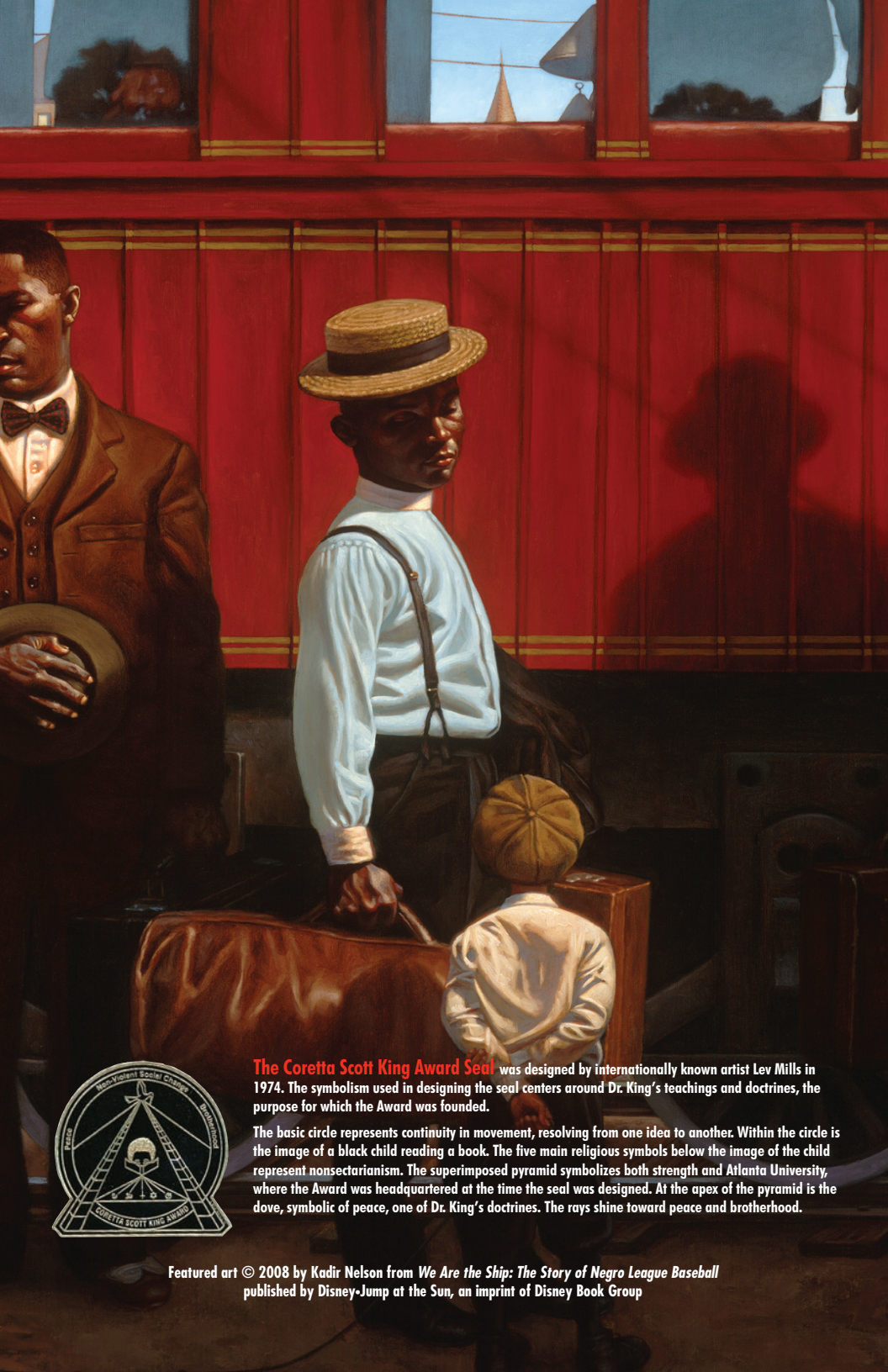
- Bird's brother, Marcus, shared his love of art with Bird. What have you learned from siblings, cousins or other close relatives? Write a thank-you note to someone who has taught you something.
- Bird's grandfather and Uncle Son provide guidance and support as Bird grows up. Find examples in the book where these elders helped Bird by allowing him to make his own decisions.
- Strickland's art is "told" in two voices. Explain how and why she does this.
- Brooklyn is the setting for Bird's life. Think about what your neighborhood is like. Draw a picture that shows the places in your neighborhood that are important to you.
- Imagine yourself as an adult. What kind of grown-up do you hope to be? Is there a character in the book you admire? What advice would you give to a person your age?
- Bird's brother, Marcus, lost his battle with drug addiction despite the support of his family. What are the good memories his family might wish to share?
- Birds are used as a metaphor in Elliott's book. What is a metaphor? Can you find other metaphors in the text and art?
- Bird's love of and talent for art helped him to find a purpose and direction for his life. Research the lives of important African American artists.

### **Related CSK Titles**

*Somewhere in the Darkness*, Walter Dean Myers, Scholastic

*Everett Anderson's Goodbye*, Lucille Clifton, illustrated by Ann Grifalconi, Henry Holt





**The Coretta Scott King Award Seal** was designed by internationally known artist Lev Mills in 1974. The symbolism used in designing the seal centers around Dr. King's teachings and doctrines, the purpose for which the Award was founded.

The basic circle represents continuity in movement, resolving from one idea to another. Within the circle is the image of a black child reading a book. The five main religious symbols below the image of the child represent nonsectarianism. The superimposed pyramid symbolizes both strength and Atlanta University, where the Award was headquartered at the time the seal was designed. At the apex of the pyramid is the dove, symbolic of peace, one of Dr. King's doctrines. The rays shine toward peace and brotherhood.