



CSK: 50 Years Strong

The Coretta Scott King Book Awards

Talking Points

Key Messages

- In 2019, American Library Association (ALA) will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Coretta Scott King Book Awards.
- Given annually, the awards serve as a guide for parents, librarians and caregivers, for the most outstanding books for youth by African American authors and illustrators that affirm African American culture and universal human values.
- The real story of the history, development and growth of the Coretta Scott King Award is the legacy the award has created.
- Teachers and librarians across the nation now look to the CSK Award list for quality literature to share with children.
- School and public library professionals look to the CSK Awards for recommendations to parents and youth readers.
- Equally important to the impact on the reading public is the opening of the marketplace gates for countless African American artists and writers. The very existence of the Award gives opportunities to be published and recognized where none existed in the past.

Why Diverse books?

- Literacy depends ultimately on children's desire to read; they must have access to and awareness of books that reflect their culture and language.

- Even though the diversity of our country continues to grow, the percentage of children's books released each year either by a person of color or with a multicultural theme has remained virtually unchanged for nearly 20 years.
- Experts say a lack of diversity in children's books can be harmful to the social and identity development of children, particularly those representing cultures with untold stories.
- It is critical to provide access to and awareness of books that mirror their culture and language.

Coretta Scott King Book Awards

- Coretta Scott King Award titles are intended for readers of all cultures.
- Significantly, the Award list includes numerous titles that capture the history of African American people for today's readers.
- Just as Dr. King's message spoke to all races and religions, the Coretta Scott King Award Titles provide well-written, exquisitely illustrated books that reflect universally accepted human values.
- The award has raised the level of expectations for editors and creators of children's literature, becoming a goal to aspire to for African American writers and illustrators.
- The CSK Award Jury looks carefully for books that exemplify, support, reflect and extend the dream and vision of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.
- Nowhere has this rich body of history been mined so diligently and respectfully.
- All of America is indebted to the CSK Book Awards for the job it does to encourage the writing about African American history, and making that history come alive for today's generation of readers.

History/Background

- The Coretta Scott King Book Awards were established in 1969 by Glyndon Flynt Greer, a school librarian in Englewood, N.J., Mabel McKissack, a school librarian in New London, CT, and John Carroll, a book publisher.
- Award founders envisioned an award that would recognize the talents of outstanding African-American authors and encourage them to continue writing books for children and young adults.

- During the first year, four other librarians joined the founders; Harriet B. Brown of New York City, Beatrice James, President of the New Jersey Library Association, Roger McDonough, New Jersey State Librarian, and Ella Gaines Yates, Assistant Director, Montclair (NJ) Public Library.
- The awards are named after Coretta Scott King, honoring her “courage and determination in continuing the work for peace and brotherhood,” and commemorating the “life and work” of her husband, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
- The selection of Mrs. King as namesake for the award was based on a profound admiration and respect that the award founders, specifically Glendon Greer, had for Mrs. King and the commitment she made to continue the work of Dr. King after his death.
- The Coretta Scott King Author Award was first awarded in May 1970. Lillie Patterson was the first winner for her biography “Martin Luther King, Jr., Man of Peace.”
- The first two awards were presented at the New Jersey Library Association conference in Atlantic City, New Jersey. Roger McDonough, President of ALA 1968-69, strongly urged the founders to celebrate the awards at the American Library Association summer conference.
- Although the award was not affiliated with ALA, in 1972 the third awards ceremony and the first Coretta Scott King Book Awards Breakfast was held at the American Library Association Annual Conference.
- The Illustrator Award followed in 1974. George Ford was the first winner for his illustrations in Sharon Bell Mathis’ biography “Ray Charles.”
- The award seal also was first used in 1974. Artist Lev Mills created the seal to embody Martin Luther King, Jr.’s philosophy of peace and universal brotherhood.
- Mr. Mills, who donated his time and talent to the project, is chair of the art department at Atlanta University. Visitors to Atlanta may see his work on a large scale in a mural at the Martin Luther King Jr. station of the Atlanta Rapid Transit System.

John Steptoe Award for New Talent

- The John Steptoe Award for New Talent (originally the Genesis Award) was established in 1995 to recognize exceptional work from new African American authors and illustrators.

- The first Steptoe Award was given to Sharon Draper for *Tears of a Tiger* (Simon & Schuster). I
- The John Steptoe Award for New Talent is occasionally given for young authors or illustrators who demonstrate outstanding promise at the beginning of their careers. Steptoe winners receive a plaque.

The Coretta Scott King-Virginia Hamilton Award for Lifetime Achievement

- In 2010, the committee established the Coretta Scott King – Virginia Hamilton Award for Lifetime Achievement to be given alternately to an author or illustrator and a practitioner.
- The Coretta Scott King-Virginia Hamilton Award for Lifetime Achievement is presented in odd years (i.e. 2011, 2013, 2015...), to an African American practitioner for substantial contributions through active engagement with youth using award winning African American literature for children and/or young adults, via implementation of reading and reading related activities/programs.
- The recipient may be a public librarian, academic librarian, school librarian (public or private), an educator (pre-K to 12 or any level therein, or higher education), or youth literature advocate whose vocation, work, volunteer service or ongoing promotion of books with and/or on behalf of youth is significant and sustained.
- In even years (i.e. 2012, 2014, 2016...), the award honors an African American author, illustrator or author/illustrator for a body of his or her published books for children and/or young adults who has made a significant and lasting literary contribution.
- The Award pays tribute to the late Virginia Hamilton and the quality and magnitude of her exemplary contributions through her literature and advocacy for children and youth, especially in her focus on African American life, history and consciousness.
- The Award is administered by the Coretta Scott King Book Awards Committee of the Ethnic and Multicultural Information Exchange Round Table, with support from the ALA Office for Literacy and Outreach Services. The recipient receives a medal and \$1,500 cash award.