



STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
LANSING

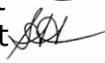
GRETCHEN WHITMER
GOVERNOR

MICHAEL F. RICE, Ph.D.
STATE SUPERINTENDENT

MEMORANDUM

DATE: February 12, 2021

TO: Local and Intermediate School District Superintendents
Public School Academy Directors
Michigan Pre-K-12 Educators

FROM: Michael F. Rice, Ph.D., State Superintendent 
Sheila A. Alles, Chief Deputy Superintendent 
Randy J. Riley, State Librarian 

SUBJECT: Celebrating Outstanding African American Authors – Week Three

The celebration of African American History Month continues with the release of the third week of outstanding African American authors and their noted literary works, nominated by educators across the state. The Michigan Department of Education and the Library of Michigan are co-sponsors of the month-long recognition of African American authors and their literature.

The third week includes another seven African American authors and their writings, along with information about the nominator and a brief description of the nominator's use of the work with students. The [weekly calendar](#) is featured on MDE's [Equity in Literacy website](#).

Week three's selections include: a memoir, *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption*, by Bryan Stevenson; a novel told in verse, *Brown Girl Dreaming*, by Jacqueline Woodson; and the novel, *Look Both Ways: A Tale Told in Ten Blocks*, by New York Times best-selling author Jason Reynolds.

Last month, MDE launched the initiative to recognize and celebrate outstanding African American authors and their literary works. Educators throughout the state were invited to nominate authors and their works that educators have used in their classrooms with students. The response was positive. In a little more than a week, educators submitted 143 nominations from 71 different traditional school districts, public school academies, non-public schools, and institutions. The department greatly appreciates the educators who accepted the invitation and submitted a nomination. Their interests and submissions were instrumental to the success of this new initiative.

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To recognize African American authors is to celebrate and raise up their works of literature, help expand the use of diverse literature in classrooms, and help to offer students opportunities to engage in literature in which they see themselves (mirrors) and others (windows) in their reading, as presented in the work of Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop.

In addition to celebrating outstanding African American authors through this initiative, MDE will host a free virtual conference for educators and administrators, **Building Mirrors and Windows: Children Seeing Themselves and Others in the Literature that We Teach**, on February 25, 2021. The conference will provide participants with ideas to increase the diversity of literature available to students and ways to use the materials for instruction and student engagement.

The conference will run from 9:00 a.m.—noon. Participants can view the conference flyer, register for the conference, and sign up for updates by visiting [MDE's Literacy website](#).

For more information on the conference or the African American authors project, please contact mde-earlyliteracy@michigan.gov.

Thank you for your consideration of these important initiatives.

cc: Michigan Education Alliance
Confederation of Michigan Tribal Education Directors