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Art and Storytelling on the Streets: The Council on Interracial Books for Children's Use of African American Children's Literature

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Abstract: From 1970 until 1974, the Council on Interracial Children's Books (CIBC) ran the Arts and Storytelling in the Streets program throughout New York City. This program involved African American and Puerto Rican artists and storytellers bringing children's literature directly to children in the streets. This occurred amid a rise in African American children's literature and educational upheavals in the city as local communities demanded oversight of their schools. Originating in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville district in New York City, the Arts and Storytelling on the Streets program helps to underscore the interrelation between African American children's literature and educational activism. This article examines how storytelling sessions run by authors and illustrators became extensions of African American children's literature and educational activism in the city as Black American children's books became key tools in a fight for a more representative and relevant education. Storytelling teams hoped to use African American children's literature to help engage children in reading and provide a positive association with literature among local children. The Art and Storytelling program mirrored ideas and themes within African American children's literature including Black pride, community strength, and resisting white supremacy. The program also became a key extension of the literature as the locations, storytellers, and the audiences all helped to expand upon the impact and many meanings inherent in contemporary African American children's literature.

Keywords: African American children's literature; Ocean Hill-Brownsville; community control; storytelling; Council on Interracial Books for Children; Rose Blue; John Steptoe

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1. Introduction

In 1974, artist and children's illustrator Leo Carty described his process as reaching "inwardly for a positive Black image" and that his work was not about "striking out and trying to destroy but helping Black people—[his] people—get a better image of themselves" (Tapley 1974). This philosophy was imbued in Carty's work creating Black greetings cards and paintings created in his Anton Studio on Norstrand Avenue, Brooklyn. Crucially, this philosophy was also integral to his work on the streets of New York City each year from 1970 until 1974, as he sketched out images from African American children's literature as Joyce Carty read out stories to children gathered around in parks, on stoops, and an array of locations around New York City. The Cartys were just one of many storyteller teams brought together by the Council on Interracial Books for Children's (CIBC) 'Art and Storytelling on the Street Program.' The CIBC was an organization created to support and facilitate the creation of antiracist and antisexist materials for children. Through reviews, educational programs, events for children, and campaigning, the CIBC sought to highlight representative children's literature and support aspiring authors and illustrators of color. The program's use of storytelling built on a long history of the oral tradition used to "teach and to comfort members of the community" (Champion 2016). In storytelling events that predominantly used African American children's literature as well as significant Puerto Rican children's books, the CIBC engaged children with vital themes and topics within a

growing canon. Despite a proliferation of African American children's literature in the late 1960s and 1970s, a combination of red tape in school libraries and resistance from some figures within the educational establishment meant that these books were not reaching library shelves quickly. The success of the Art and Storytelling program underlined how important grassroots organizing and activism was to the continued successes of African American children's literature and how interlinked the canon became with educational activism. An examination of the CIBC's program uncovers how authors, illustrators, educators, and activists sought to harness the blossoming of African American children's literature in the 1970s to help educate and celebrate children in local communities.

This article focuses on how the Art and Storytelling program interacted with and promoted African American children's literature during a dramatic rise in Black-authored and illustrated works for children. The CIBC's program was a pioneering example of activism that utilized African American children's literature and demonstrated the necessity of grassroots coordination to build on the work being established by authors and illustrators. Giselle Anatol (2011) asserts that African American children's literature has responded to "a number of needs within the American cultural and political context", but often these responses have been hindered by a range of individuals and groups including Boards of Education, teachers, politicians, and right-wing activist groups. In the face of book bans, censorship, and the slow approval process for books in schools, the access to African American children's literature has often been accompanied by grassroots organizing and protest in order to sustain access to these books. Through the program, activists, authors, and educators cooperated to bypass and outmaneuver the obstacles children have faced in accessing African American children's literature. Many Black educators worked to change the racist and damaging education children received such as teachers like M. Lee Montgomery who argued for cultural differences to "be recognized and appreciated" (Montgomery 1970, p. 49). Art and Storytelling on the Streets promoted these books and provided a platform to connect educators with creators who shared a vision to help black children "develop self-worth and dignity through knowledge of their history and culture" (Vann 1970, p. 232).

Despite its crucial links to educational activism in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, the Black Arts Movement, and the rise of contemporary African American children's literature, no scholarly examination of this program has been undertaken. While the Art and Storytelling on the Streets program was only based in New York City, it had a wider impact across the nation as the CIBC became a powerful advocate and ally for protests and programs across the United States and internationally too. A history of the Art and Storytelling program is important because it became an important experimental platform that brought together a range of interesting figures. Children who sought more relatable stories attended the sessions and Black creators who wanted to directly engage with their readership read stories and sketched out images from their books. Furthermore, many of the participants were also part of the Black Arts Movement and they saw an opportunity to further a Black aesthetic and help provide children with a strong Black identity.

The program was an extension of African American children's literature as the teams promoted many of the themes underlying ideologies and visions of contemporary Black creators and indeed were often creators of books themselves. By examining the work of the storytelling teams, it is possible to see how African American children's literature engaged children and contributed to wider educational activism in the city that sought to challenge white supremacist educational practices. Storyteller teams and the CIBC sought to amplify the works of Black and Puerto Rican children's authors and use their books to innovate in education and help celebrate different communities in the city. In their anthology on African American storytelling, Linda Goss and Marian Barnes argue that "the storyteller, the story, and the audience are of equal importance" (Goss and Barnes 1989, p. 10), and in the CIBC's program, the storytellers, the children watching, and the books used were all crucial components in furthering key ideas of Black pride, community strength, and the power of education.

The Art and Storytelling on the Streets program was part of a surge in "culturally conscious" (Bishop 2007) African American children's books that arose in the late 1960s and 1970s but its significance to the literature has not been recognized. Many scholars have identified and analyzed these books' content revealing common topics such as Black pride, Black history, and realistic depictions of children's lives (Johnson 1990b; Fraser and Perry 2013; Austin 2016; Martin 2004). A history of how books were used complements the work of these scholars but also provides insight into how many authors and illustrators understood how their work could be used to further contemporary educational activism. Books by authors such as Muriel Feelings, John Steptoe, Rose Blue, and Sharon Bell-Mathis addressed history, friendship, racism, education, and folklore among many other topics and themes. The publication of these authors' books was crucial in addressing the needs of many children in the 1960s and 1970s; however, the CIBC's program offered a platform to introduce people to these books and gave creators an opportunity to connect directly with their readers. These books were brought to life in storytelling sessions, and understanding how they were used enhances our understanding of their content, as well as underscoring the active role authors and illustrators played in their local communities. The illustrator George Ford, who was a member of the CIBC and contributed to the program, revealed that he was directly responding to how the publishing industry regarded Black children as "peripheral" (Ford and Ford 2019). Both Black creators of children's books and the CIBC were animated by the same desire: to reach out to Black child readers and provide books and events for them.

The CIBC, an organization led by Director Bradford Chambers in 1970, included a growing list of members of educators, publishers, writers, and illustrators. An outgrowth of the Civil Rights Movement, the organization continued to develop close ties to a range of activists nationally and internationally. Beryle Banfield, a longtime member and President of the organization distilled the goals of the CIBC into two key aims: "to promote a literature for children that better reflects the realities of a multi-cultural society" and to "effect basic change in books and media" (Banfield 1998, p. 17) and with the Art and Storytelling on the Streets program, the organization achieved both of these aims. Through programs and their publications, the CIBC conducted campaigns to rid schools of racist books including *Little Black Sambo* and *Dr. Doolittle*, but the organization also challenged libraries that did not feature any books written by people of color. The CIBC recognized the need to support the publication of African American children's books but also the necessity to ensure that these books populated schools and library shelves.

The project developed beyond small storytelling sessions with children to then include exhibitions of the artwork of professional illustrators and children and a 'printmobile' in which children could create their own original works. Not only was the program introducing children to African American children's literature often absent from school library shelves, but it engaged children in the creative process. The CIBC's project addressed local educational needs but also championed the power of multicultural children's literature. The storyteller teams were also integral in reaching out to Puerto Rican communities with these events. This research though reflects the CIBC's initial focus on Black American children's literature. The art and storytelling events give insight into children's responses, the uses of books, and their potential in developing a more relevant education. The selection of the storytelling teams, the books, and the locations underscores how these events were not just about entertainment but were designed to transmit key emphases in African American children's literature, including pride in Blackness, a focus on community strength, and the power of education.

2. The Origins of Art and Storytelling on the Streets: Educational Activism and African American Children's Literature

The idea for the program seemed simple: "children playing in the neighborhood gather as a storyteller opens a book and reads, while nearby an illustrator starts to draw scenes from the story" (Carey Bond 1971). This project, however, was not simple; it was under-

pinned by a powerful educational philosophy that sought to harness the power of African American children's literature. The program was initiated in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, an epicenter of educational activism, and spread across the city in museums, schools, and housing projects. The CIBC's program was designed to connect children with literature that was more relevant to their lives; to challenge the white supremacist education they were often exposed to in school, and to show children how fun books could be. The draft program proposal, written by Director Bradford Chambers, centered on introducing children "to relevant reading material and positive role models" (CIBC 1970a). These aims came at a crucial juncture in African American's children's books that Walter Dean Myers described as a "new beginning" (Myers 1986). The CIBC's work was deeply intertwined with contemporary authors and illustrators who increasingly began working with the organization with the Storytelling on the Streets being one of the most enduring of these relationships. The CIBC's grassroots organizing was a crucial accompaniment to the burgeoning canon that connected authors and illustrators directly with their readership and educators interested in promoting a more culturally relevant education.

The program arose after the Ocean Hill-Brownsville district became one of the 'experimental districts' to explore the possibilities of greater community control over education. Local communities sought more oversight over how schools were run, particularly the curriculum provided. In 1968, New York City Mayor Lindsay initiated three experimental districts across the city in East Harlem, Ocean Hill-Brownsville, and Two Bridges in the Lower East Side as part of his platform to increase citizen oversight (Viteritti 2014). Ocean Hill-Brownsville became the most publicized and contentious district during this short-lived experiment. Jerald Podair (Podair 2002) has highlighted how the local community's struggle against the intransigent Board of Education involved a web of grassroots, federal, union, and corporate politics that deepened racial tensions in the city. The Ocean Hill-Brownsville conflict became a lightning rod for a wide range of disputes in the city (Edgell 1998; Gordon 2001), but often missing from accounts of this story is what happened to children's education. The National Association of Afro-American Educators called for a "Blackening of the curriculum" (National Association of Afro-American Educators 1968), and a range of new classes and materials became available across the Ocean Hill-Brownsville District as educators sought to use it as an opportunity to provide better materials for the students. The Art and Storytelling program, therefore, was more than just showcasing African American children's literature as it used the books to facilitate the educational activism in New York City. While scholars like Podair offer insights into the political struggle in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, the Art and Storytelling on the Streets program highlights how educators, authors, and activists seized the opportunity to offer new directions in education.

The CIBC used their program to build on contemporary educational activism. Leading Black educators such as Albert Vann in Ocean Hill-Brownsville sought to radically alter curricula, teachers, and participation in education and New York became a focal point for these debates (Vann 1970). The Art and Storytelling program was a significant effort in shaping what education could look like and should be understood as part of wider activism that sought to radically change assumptions about education in the United States. Russsell Rickford (2016) has identified the 1960s as a radical era in which activists theorized a radical "black education" that focused on autonomy and cultural relevance but the CIBC's programs are not assessed as part of this wider movement. The CIBC's work in the district and beyond, though *not* always in schools, was still part of this wider educational activism. Through programs like Art and Storytelling on the Streets, educators worked with authors, illustrators, and children in ways not feasible in the school environment.

The Ocean Hill-Brownsville experiment was sensationalized in national headlines and conservative politicians exploited the issue to play on racist fears of constituents across the nation (Burks 1968). The district came under national scrutiny, acting as a conduit for discussions of law and order and racial politics. Out of the spotlight, however, many educators were seizing the opportunity to make a difference in children's education and the

books to which they had access. The district librarian, Harriet Brown, was one key figure who created the community library, 'The Hut', attached to one of the schools on Dean Street in Brooklyn. The Hut became a crucial space for fostering a more representative curriculum as Brown ensured that the library carried "a wide selection of minority-orientated children's books" (Davidson and Chambers 1969). Librarians in the district complained that books needed central approval from the Board of Education, and that often meant many books were objected to by the "white middle-class" (Davidson and Chambers 1969). With increased control over the purchase of books, Harriet Brown began working with the CIBC to assist in the promotion of books authored and illustrated by people of color. The experimental districts created crucial spaces for the innovative use of African American children's literature and this drew together a coalition of activists including educators, parents, authors, illustrators, and the CIBC.

3. Coalition Building and Planning

In 1970, storyteller teams met at The Hut as it became the base for the entire project. From this library, Harriet Brown coordinated events and storytelling teams worked with educators to plan their routes and gathered the books to be used. The origins and location of the Art and Storytelling on the Streets program underscores how educational activism was central to the project. The first Art and Storytelling on the Streets program engaged thousands of children across New York City and provides a key example of the growing interactions between book creators, their audiences, and local activists. As the project was repeated over the years, it expanded beyond Ocean Hill-Brownsville as the CIBC envisioned that storyteller teams would visit "streetcorners, parks and playgrounds and community centers. . .wherever children congregate" in different boroughs of the city. The CIBC worked with several storyteller teams and librarians to develop a citywide program that used African American children's literature to engage all ages. The books on the shelves of The Hut became emblematic of a larger fight for a more representative education. George Ford claimed that "No one was interested in what [Black children's] lives were really like" within the publishing world, but it was at The Hut that concerned authors and educators gathered to directly address how Black children were being ignored by the white establishment.

Indeed, to engage children in African American children's literature the CIBC forged alliances with Harriet Brown and Ocean Hill-Brownsville Unit Administrator Rhody McCoy. Together, they hosted several events, including a Book Week in 1968 and the 'Be-In' in 1969 for creators, children, and publishers to meet. A year later, they created their most enduring project: Art and Storytelling on the Streets. As a consultant on the project, Harriet Brown understood the critical concept of helping children feel positive about education, and she passionately believed that good children's books could foster a positive relationship with learning. The CIBC brought to Ocean Hill-Brownsville a network of interested parties including publishers and creators so they could witness the educational activism happening in schools. In 1968, Brown met with authors and illustrators in a roundtable discussion and explained that misrepresentation in literature was crucial in the "sowing of seeds of despair" (Brown 1968) in children that led to a disengagement with literature by high school. The pedagogical promise of African American children's literature brought together a coalition of writers and illustrators, including Tom Feelings, Terry Berger, and Walter Dean Myers with educators and CIBC activists to create the Art and Storytelling on the Streets program.

The ambitious planning notes of the project were scrawled in thick green marker onto large pink poster paper as the organizers established their aims for the project and their vision of action. The anonymous notes reveal a focus on how Storytelling on the Streets could lead to the opening of "new modes of education" as theories "must be built from the bottom up" (CIBC 1970c). The heavily annotated notes speak of a communal effort from Bradford Chambers, Harriet Brown, and other coordinators of the program in trying to explore the possible benefits of children's books. For the organizers, African

American children's literature was not just about entertaining the children of the city but in introducing an "aesthetic experience" (CIBC 1970b) often denied to them. The planners' belief in the power of children's literature is laid bare as they countenanced that the first summer of events with Black and Puerto Rican illustrators and storytellers was a "period of testing and experimentation" that would develop into much larger community projects.

Across three large posters, the plan begins with a storytelling visit to a community center before building to taking over storefronts and developing programs in other cities. This was not just geographically ambitious; the plan listed short-term goals of interesting children in books, then building on this to help children create their own books, and finally to helping facilitate a new generation of creators who could make use of "community-controlled printing and publishing services" (CIBC 1970c). From the outset, the storytelling sessions were designed to build upon African American children's literature and use the books to enact changes in local education. Inspired by their work in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, this coalition of activists evidently believed African American children's literature could play a vital role in developing a better education and in turn, the children involved could become writers and illustrators themselves. It was not just the content of the books that the CIBC considered powerful, but meeting and engaging with creators too.

4. Storytellers and Artists in Communities

Crucial to this project was not just Black American children's books, but the authors and illustrators who became involved. The aims of this project in the draft proposal were to "raise the level of aspiration" of children who had been disadvantaged by what their schools provided by offering the opportunity with "an intimate, face-to-face relationship with creative and artistic talent" (CIBC 1970a). The project offered a novel approach to storytelling events that were traditionally run by teachers and librarians; instead, children had the opportunity to meet the real authors and illustrators. There were many iterations of storytelling teams, and these included many married couples: Leo and Joyce Carty, Frances and George Wilson, and Don and Dorothy Robertson. As well as these established teams, the other prominent participants who all worked with one another were Betty Dillard, Jeanene Gosey, Charles Bible, Lydia Gonzalez, Nikki Giovanni, Muriel Feelings, George Ford, Peri Thomas, and Sonia Sanchez. These permanent storytelling team members were helped by many other participants across the years who showcased their work to children in exhibitions, including photographer Arnold Hinton and illustrator Tom Feelings. These storytelling teams brought a unique perspective to storytelling sessions as they had intimate knowledge of how books were produced, but crucially, they could act as role models for their audiences. The CIBC's network of contacts and funding created opportunities for children's book creators to share their work and engage with their readership on an unprecedented level.

The opportunity children had to meet and learn from these creators realized the project's aim to inspire children to become writers and illustrators. Before the first Art and Storytelling on the Streets program began in the Summer of 1970, the CIBC arranged for Janet Harris, author of *Black Pride*, and Leo Carty, illustrator of Myers' *Where Does the Day Go?* to visit Intermediate School 271. They discussed their work with the children and answered questions on their processes. Several children wrote about their experience of meeting Harris and Carty. A common theme among the responses was a fascination with the process of making a book. Donna Richards, an eighth-grade student, reported that the class wanted the guests back to hear "more about how books are written" (Richards 1970). Patricia L., however, was more interested in the illustrations. She praised the "young, gifted and Black" Leo Carty whose work had made her realize that she wished to "write a book and have it published". Patricia and Donna's comments speak to the impact of the storytelling sessions with authentic writers and illustrators. These sessions arranged by the CIBC helped produce concrete results for their experimental phase: the sessions sparked children's creativity and interest.

At one session in February of 1971 at the MUSE, a temporary location of the Brooklyn Children's Museum, a school class attended one of Joyce and Leo Carty's sessions. Joyce Carty reported on the session, that after the prompting of his proud peers, one artistic boy in the class approached Leo Carty for advice because he had "never received training but wanted the artist to tell him about schools of art" (CIBC 1971). The sessions gave children the opportunity to gain more understanding of how books were made and how to become involved in their creation. Carty gave the boy some advice about art schools, scholarships, and how to prepare a portfolio, further underscoring how unique these storytelling sessions were. Mary Gould Davis, a professional library storyteller, claimed that in the minds of the children, "the most important thing is not the storyteller, but the *story*" (Baker and Greene 1987, p. 71). For CIBC's project, the stories were invaluable instruments of education and culture, but equally important were the storytellers themselves. Rudine Sims Bishop asserts that though there was a swell of African American children's literature from authors like Lucille Clifton, Eloise Greenfield, and John Steptoe, books to which children had access to were predominantly by white authors (Bishop 2003). By bringing African American children's literature to children, these storytelling teams could engage Black and Brown children with books that were culturally authentic and spoke more directly to their lives. Furthermore, the creators inspired the children themselves and opened up new opportunities in children's lives.

The inclusion in the storytelling teams of prominent writers and artists associated with the Black Arts Movement was indicative of the movement's influence on children's literature and education. By the beginning of the Art and Storytelling program, Nikki Giovanni and Sonia Sanchez had both published poetry collections within the Black Arts Movement. Their active involvement in the movement and their challenges to the masculinist trends established them as key figures in the quest to establish a new Black identity. Cherise Pollard argues that rather than being silenced by their male contemporaries, these women found ways to promote their understanding of the "black aesthetic" (Pollard 2006). Their role as storytellers was an important form of fostering a strong Black identity as the Art and Storytelling program provided a crucial platform to explore these ideas with children. Indeed, this was a view shared by many of the authors whose books were used. Lucille Clifton claimed that within her work she felt it was "better to try and define ourselves than to remain defined by others" (Rowell 1999, p. 67) and so her work like *The Black BC's* and others like Julius Lester's *Black Folktales* reflected ideas that were integral to Black Power and the Black Arts Movement. While not explicitly part of the movement, the program became an important way for authors and activists to engage children with ideas of Black pride and Black nationalism. The sessions gave space and opportunity for an array of storytellers and artists to engage with children and many of them were part of, or at least sympathetic to, the contemporary Black Arts Movement. The storytelling sessions were not like the political education found in Amiri Baraka's African Free School, but they did provide crucial spaces for exchange between the children and the storytelling teams.

Storyteller Dorothy Robertson described her and her husband's approach as "storytelling with noise." The sessions were planned to be fun for children and provide a different reading experience that children had access to in school. All the storytelling teams reported how children would follow them from stop to stop, eager to join the sessions whenever they could. Robertson even reported that the children still followed them across Brownsville despite the 95-degree heat, so her husband Don bought ice cream for everybody there (CIBC 1971). The storytelling sessions became large communal events as diverse community members gravitated to see the artists and storytellers in action. Jeanene Gosey, one of the storytellers, reported that it was not just children gathering but also interested parents keen to hear about African American children's books, teenagers bringing their younger siblings, and "grandmothers peered down from first floor windows" (Gosey 1971). Bringing storytelling out of libraries and classrooms and into the streets helped foster excitement in audiences. Children would run off when they met the storytelling teams just to bring back more children to come and watch. The proportion of books that included Black characters

doubled from 1965 to 1975 (Chall et al. 1985), yet what cannot be gleaned from this data is the excitement experienced by the children by these books. The storytelling sessions were key extensions of African American children's literature and the program offered a communal way to engage with the literature and showcased the demand for these books.

5. "Insatiable Enthusiasm": Children as Active Participants in Storytelling

The artists and storytellers helped bring children together and brought the stories alive, but the books enthralled many of the children. The CIBC reported that once the sessions got underway, there was an "insatiable enthusiasm" (*Interracial Books for Children* 1970, p. 4) from the children. Children across the city not only listened to the stories, but joined in with the narrative, read back to the storytellers, and borrowed books to read privately. The reports on the sessions never named the children involved so there is no clear way to trace the impact the storytelling sessions had on the children involved in terms of their reading, their ambitions, and later life trajectory. Nevertheless, the storytelling reports written by the teams indicate how children engaged with the sessions and reveal how the same children kept on returning.

Numerous reports of the storytelling sessions reveal that after being read to, many of the children wanted to read the stories themselves. Whether reading these books in private or aloud back to the storytelling teams and other children, this interest in the books provides some insight into reader responses. Moving beyond Rosenblatt's theory of reader response, scholars have examined the variety of ways that children engage with African American children's literature and emphasize the need for a culturally situated understanding of readers (Brooks and McNair 2012; Nilsson 2008; Smith 1995). Dorothy Robertson's "storytelling with noise" was emulated in other sessions as call-and-response became a key feature as children shouted, acted, and participated in stories of Anansi and High John. The children at these events were active participants who added their own meanings and interpretations to stories as their interjections built into the narratives. In one instance, two girls wanted to read back to the storytellers, underscoring the reciprocal relationship between children and authors as they wanted to provide their own reading of the text. Lawrence Sipe (1999) asserts the need to contextualize children's responses to literature, and a history of events, such as the Art and Storytelling program, reinforces how the development of African American children's literature in the late 1960s and 1970s engaged children. Even though their voices were not recorded by the program organizers, the storytelling teams and teachers who brought children to the sessions all reported on the excitement and joy within the sessions.

Black children's responses to the Art and Storytelling on the Streets program underscore their active participation in literature. The diverse responses to the program from Black children reiterate how books impacted each individual differently. Some children were evidently keen to display their command of reading and literature while others became caught up in the excitement of stories like John Steptoe's *Stevie* or fascinated by Black history as storytellers read out Lucille Clifton's *The Black BC's*. Brigitte Fielder has challenged the "dominant framings of Black children" (Fielder 2019, p. 162) that have reduced their lives to racist generalizations and caricatures, depriving Black children of their innocence and humanity. Indeed, the varied responses of Black children to the storytelling sessions reinforce Fielder's comments. Thousands of children demonstrated their literacy and command of the word; pride in their communities; their desire to see better representations of Black childhood, and their joy in literature. That children reacted in a multitude of ways highlights how African American children's literature was not monolithic as was often perceived by mostly white publishers, but that there was a diverse base of readers who clamored for better and more representative books. Though a limited insight into the children's lives, the storytelling reports reveal how the storytelling sessions became crucial spaces of expression. The CIBC's program demonstrated the necessity for the continued broadening of African American children's literature as during each storytelling session, children responded in a variety of ways. Over its four-year run, the program reaffirmed

many educators' beliefs and convinced others of the possibilities of African American children's books within education.

6. Classrooms without Walls: African American Children's Books and Schools

Within a public education system that upheld white supremacy, many children had not been afforded the opportunity to extensively interact with African American children's literature. Rudine Sims Bishop has asserted that African American children's literature "nurtures the souls of Black children" (Bishop 2007, p. 273), providing through text and imagery stories and ideas often denied to them. Indeed, when the Art and Storytelling program began, there was a dearth of culturally relevant literature available in schools and so the sessions on the streets became important educational sites, free from the oversight of educational authorities. Miriam Cohen, an educational consultant for Doubleday and Co., spoke to the CIBC in 1969, claiming that a "long and laborious" (Cohen 1969) process meant any advances in publishing took a long time to reach library shelves. The result of this was a desire among children for access to the increase in African American children's literature that schools could not (and often would not) supply. The CIBC reported in their own publication that for many of the children, the sessions with the teams were "their first encounter with books outside the school environment" (*Interracial Books for Children* 1970, p. 4). The Art and Storytelling program's grassroots organizing ensured that children would have an opportunity to hear the stories and read the books themselves. The coordinators of the program, many of them educators, realized that to reach children with African American children's literature meant doing so outside the confines of schools.

The CIBC had lobbied educational authorities and publishers to provide more relevant material for children who had been routinely ignored but quickly realized that the children needed to be reached out to directly. Storyteller Frances Wilson reported in 1970 that in a session "one little boy looked at each picture carefully and handled the book gently, not flipping the pages quickly but almost with a caressing motion" (Wilson 1970). The attention this boy showed to the book is reminiscent of a scene in Rose Blue's *A Quiet Place*, a book published just a year prior and used in the Art and Storytelling on the Streets program. In Blue's book, the protagonist, Matthew, picks out a particular book because "the boy had brown skin, just like Matthew's and he looked about the same age. Matthew thought it would be nice to read a book about a boy who looked so much like himself" (Blue 1969, p. 54). Blue, a public school teacher in Brooklyn, wrote children's books specifically to cater to the wants, needs, and hopes of local children with her other book *Bed-Stuy Beat* (Blue 1970) also featured in the program. That her work was included in the storytelling sessions speaks to the organizers' vision for providing children's literature that spoke directly to local children's needs. Vital to cries for community control in the city was a more relevant curriculum that reflected the lives of the children who attended the schools. Educators and authors, like Blue, focused on African American children's books as an avenue to achieve this aim and the CIBC's program gave them the outlet to achieve this.

7. The Stories Told: Mirroring and Building on Themes in African American Children's Literature

Originally, the CIBC sought to "encourage the integration of Black people into books for children" (Charnes 1984, p. 18) rather than focusing on developing Black American children's literature. One of the founders, Nancy Larrick, sought to highlight the issue of the "All white world of children's books", but this failed to develop the work of Black creators. As such, in the first year of the Art and Storytelling program, many white authors featured in the selections including Ann McGovern, Jack Keats, and Jill Krementz. The first iteration of the program therefore partially reflected the CIBC's focus on removing racist literature as well as promoting material by Black authors and Black illustrators. As the program developed, there was an increased focus on African American children's literature which reflected both increased availability as well as a more concerted effort to support Black creators. In a 1971 article in the CIBC's publication, Ray Anthony Shepard, a winner

of the CIBC's writing contest the year prior, articulated this shift away from inclusion to one of truer representation when he compared the work of Jack Keats to John Steptoe's *Stevie*. For Shepard, within Keats' work there "was someone who looked like [him]" but in Steptoe's "there is someone who knows what is going on" (Shepard 1971, p. 3). As the program developed, there was an increased focus on rising literary stars of African American children's literature, including Sharon Bell Mathis and John Steptoe, as well as established figures like Langston Hughes. The Art and Storytelling program mirrored the rise in African American children's literature and became a key format to present new children's books to their audiences.

Over the course of the program, the books used signaled an increasing focus on fostering a positive self-identity in children and promoting positive associations with Blackness through a variety of themes and approaches. Some stories were set in New York City like *Bed-Stuy Beat*, while others focused on African culture like *Zamani Goes to Market*. Other stories focused on heroes like Harriet Tubman or the fictional Stagolee, and others offered intimate stories of children's lives. Michelle Martin (2004) rightly asserts that during the 1970s, African American children's literature focused on normalizing Blackness and sought to address topics that were "systematically ignored" in education. The Art and Storytelling program became a crucial medium in which to engage children with these books, and furthermore, showcased to educators and publishers the demand for this literature.

Each storytelling session featured several books, and often this included one or two stories being read twice due to demand. After an early session in the summer of 1970, Joyce Carty predicted that "one book that is going to be very well known is *Stevie* by John Steptoe" as this was repeatedly requested to be read several times. *Stevie*, a story about peer jealousy, became a staple of the storytelling sessions due to its popularity in the sessions. As Kaavonia Hinton asserts (Hinton 2005) *Stevie* was a pioneering book that was one of the first picture books to include "empowering images of African American males, African American communities, and Black English vernacular" combined with a story of peer jealousy common to all children. As Shepard noted, it was not just the broad appeal of friendships and rivalries in *Stevie* that resonated, but Steptoe's obvious "love for his people" (Shepard 1971, p. 4) appealed to children. Other Steptoe titles included in the sessions were *Uptown* and *Train Ride,* and all became popular titles in the storytelling sessions. Grace E. Funk, a school librarian from New York City, explained in a letter to John Steptoe the "mystical rapport" African American children had with his work. Funk's letter acclaims the "immediate identification" children had with his work, and she explained that one boy responded to *Stevie* by saying "that boy feels like me" (Funk 1970). Though provided in a second-hand account, this anonymous boy's response to Steptoe's work demonstrates an emotional engagement with the book and a clear identification with the characters. The focus on presenting authentic characters in familiar settings, such as local landmarks and recognizable architecture, was a crucial element of the growing Black American children's literature in the 1960s and 1970s. Walter Dean Myers, the first winner of the CIBC's writer contest, argued that it was crucial to include "recognizable fabric of Black life" (Myers 1986) which included subtleties in language, setting, and culture that went beyond simply including Black characters in books. Myers, along with other authors and the CIBC, sought to pressure the publishing industry to reflect a multicultural society.

The Art and Storytelling program used a range of literature with Black protagonists and gave voice to Black children, reflective of wider contemporary African American children's literature. Though there was a rise in Black characters, this did not necessarily result in realistic or even voiced characters. Rudine Sims Bishop's categorization of children's literature includes 'melting pot' books in which Black characters are included but "they choose to ignore anything, other than skin color, that might identify the characters as Black" (Bishop 2012, p. 7). Whether it was Mathis' *Sidewalk Story* or Steptoe's *Uptown*, there was a concerted effort to include materials that connected to the lived experiences of the children to whom they read as these books referred to specific neighborhoods and celebrated com-

munity spirit. Illustrator Charles Bible claimed the "best part" of the project was "when [the children] see themselves" (Friedman 1972). For Bible, this aspect of the program was also integral to his work in children's literature; the Art and Storytelling sessions built on key aspects of African American children's literature to help engage children with books.

In his sessions, Charles Bible expanded on his work in the book *Black Means*. . . which was another regular feature across storyteller teams. Created by Barney Grossman, the principal of P.S. 150 in the Bronx, and Gladys Groom, a teacher at the school, the book focused on the impulse to facilitate a more relevant education. Each double-page spread of the book features an illustration by Charles Bible and a definition of 'Black' submitted by a child of the school. The emphasis is on children's voices as their contributions are the only text within the book in large font opposite Bible's illustrations. The children's diverse understandings of what 'Black' meant to them included definitions ranging from "Black is as precious as a kitten" to overtly politically inspired definitions such as "Black is a people striving for freedom" (Pupils of P.S. 150 1970). The book explicitly places Black children's voices within the literature and directly challenges wider children's literature's erasure and dehumanization of Black children. As Dianne Johnson asserts, all children "need to see representations of themselves both visually and verbally" (Johnson 1990a, p. 11) and Bible's experiences working on books and in the streets both capture this sentiment.

Rudine Sims Bishop (2007) argues that a principal component of culturally conscious children's books is a familiar cultural environment and the Art and Storytelling program included such books, but also drew upon the immediate surroundings within the sessions. Many of the books read were set in nearby neighborhoods, including Harlem and Bedford–Stuyvesant. The inclusion of these familiar settings reinforced children's pride in their local communities but also served to capture children's interest. In *A Quiet Place*, Blue focuses on this lack of familiarity common in children's literature as the character Claudia disparages the books her little brother Matthew reads for being set in places that "may as well be on the moon" (Blue 1969). When Matthew finally discovers a book he wants to read, he is immediately taken by the illustrations of "houses on a street that looked like his street" as Tom Feelings' illustration depicts the child captivated by the book. Rose Blue's works were included in the storytelling sessions as they offered a detailed and positive depiction of the local area as her characters are shown to be proud of their communities. In *Bed-Stuy Beat*, the storyteller would take children through familiar settings and landmarks as the book follows a boy dancing through his neighborhood. Illustrator Harold James' detailed renderings of Bedford–Stuyvesant including brownstones, the library, the subway, local shops, and many other key landmarks would be recognizable to many of the audience in the sessions.

Children could pick out familiar settings in Steptoe's *Uptown* which included detailed paintings of the New York subway, or the familiar brownstones in Sharon Bell-Mathis' *Sidewalk Story* and Ruth Sonneborn's *Friday Night is Papa's Night* as the illustrators sketched out familiar landmarks and buildings, emphasizing the value of their local areas. One of the illustrators, Charles Bible, reveled in the experience of working with the children. During a session on the Lower East Side in Tompkins Square Park, he fascinated a young Millie Moldanado by sketching out local landmarks. Each time she recognized one, she leapt up and pointed out where they were in the city (Friedman 1972). A common thread within a lot of the African American children's literature at the time was to challenge white racist perceptions of the 'ghetto' often found within wider children's literature. In depicting children's local communities, artists and storytellers emphasized to their audiences that their neighborhoods were worthy of being included in literature as they moved beyond the racist stereotypes to which children were too often exposed. In Lucille Clifton's *The Black BC's*, another book frequently used in the program, the letter 'G' is used for ghetto, "a place where we can be at home loved and free" (Clifton 1970, p. 14). The storytelling teams acted as a key extension of contemporary African American children's literature in reiterating key themes and fostering a positive identification with specific cultural environments. Children

saw their neighborhoods and city in print and also met authors and illustrators who grew up in the same environment.

Lucille Clifton used the letter 'A' to represent Africa and used it as an opportunity to expand on the "king of the continents" (Clifton 1970, p. 1) to highlight the multiplicity of African cultures and nations. The storytelling teams used books like *The Black BC's* and Muriel Feelings' *Moja Means One* and *Zamani Goes to Market* to further another contemporary focus within African American children's literature: to instill pride in children's African roots. *Moja Means One* is a Swahili counting book that uses the format to not only teach children a new language but is also designed to introduce a variety of cultures and traditions from across Africa. Writing in 1965, Nancy Schmidt argued that most children's literature produced about the continent was imbued with "colonialist biases" and featured "unfavourable stereotypes of African people" (Schmidt 1965, pp. 64–65). Numerous Black children's writers focused on challenging monolithic depictions of Africa and this messaging was embraced by the storytelling teams as stories about Africa and Swahili counting books like *Moja Means One* became features of the sessions. The storytelling sessions built on a long heritage of correcting and challenging white racist literature and helped children challenge the status quo. The storytelling sessions built on the range of African American children's authors and helped deliver them to the intended audience. In the preface to her book *Moja Means One*, Muriel Feelings states that she hopes "boys and girls of African origin will enjoy learning to count in Swahili. . .gaining more knowledge of their African heritage" (Feelings 1971). The collaborative work of Muriel and Tom Feelings focused on celebrating African culture and, as Vincent Steele (1998) has argued, was linked to a pan-African nationalism that was closely tied to the Black Arts Movement. The artists and storytellers who used this book transmitted these ideas and made the book a fun experience for the children.

Though a lot of the attention in the planning of the Art and Storytelling on the Streets program was focused on African American children's literature, these teams also reached out to the Puerto Rican communities in Ocean Hill-Brownsville and Harlem. Central to the CIBC's mission was to be responsive to community needs and support the work of children's authors from a variety of perspectives often ignored by "the establishment media" (Charnes 1984, p. 19). The CIBC's program was deeply indebted to a long heritage of activists and librarians who used storytelling to engage local communities and to provide a more bespoke education not provided in local schools. The New York Public library hosted storytellers from diverse backgrounds as an important service to reach different communities. Storytellers from a range of backgrounds were invited to speak to local children and to facilitate a connection to their cultural heritage from Jewish folktales to Pinocchio in the original Italian (Baker and Greene 1987, p. 21). To serve the growing Puerto Rican community in the city, the NYPL hired Pura Belpré. She became one of the most famous storytellers and was the first Puerto Rican to work for New York Public Library. The Art and Storytelling on the Streets program used her work and Spanish-speaking storytellers to amplify and celebrate Puerto Rican culture and communities.

One of the most common stories used was Pura Belpré's *Perez y Martina* (Belpré 1961) a Puerto Rican folktale that was the first Spanish-language children's book published by a mainstream U.S. publisher in 1932. Belpré's children's literature originated from her role as a librarian after she was requested to submit a story for a storytelling hour. The Art and Storytelling program was part of a longstanding and reciprocal relationship between storytelling and children's literature in which storytelling became a crucial way to engage children with more relevant books. Belpré worked as a storyteller in communities across New York City from the 1930s and was still a powerful force in the city by the 1970s and was invited to bring her bilingual puppetry to the Art and Storytelling program. For Belpré, storytelling was a crucial precursor to her writing as she responded directly to the needs of the children she met (Belpré n.d.). Her first work, *Perez y Martina*, was originally inspired by the Puerto Rican folktales she heard from her grandmother and passing these on to new generations was an integral part of her process. For Belpré, and by extension the

storytelling teams, these folktales resonated with children as they were crucial modes for transmitting social, cultural, and political mores (Walker 2021).

As storytellers read out Julius Lester's retelling of Stagolee or High John, the illustrators etched out the folk heroes onto the sidewalk or onto canvases for children to see. The use of African American folklore in the events connects with a contemporary focus within children's literature to put into print many folktales and stories passed down through generations. As well as Lester's *Black Folktales*, versions of African folktales by white authors like Gerald McDermott's *Anansi the Spider* became popular tales used in the sessions. The storytelling sessions, therefore, not only transmitted contemporary children's literature but also built on a longer African American folkloric tradition. Fables and folk heroes were never static, and, through storytelling, these tales could take on new meanings and resonance. Lawrence Levine identifies African American folktales not as escapism but as "mirrors of reality" (Levine 2007, p. 439) that have reflected contemporary issues with each retelling. The storytelling sessions that took place across parks and playgrounds were part of a long oral tradition that had long roots in education and resistance. Folktales resonated because they manifested contemporary hopes and ideals. Julius Lester, author of *Black Folktales*, claimed that their popularity endures precisely because it is "in the tale that we communicate about our fears, hopes, dreams and fantasies" (Lester 1991). Therefore, the storytelling sessions built upon African American children's literature as children could engage with different interpretations of the stories in the books as audience members, storytellers, and artists added to and adapted the stories.

When they came to conduct a storytelling session at The MUSE in 1971, Leo and Joyce Carty encountered a local man born in 1899 who "recalled the tales of the old folks in the Black community" (CIBC 1971). This intergenerational aspect of the storytelling sessions was built into the program as the organizers hoped to use stories to connect community members. In a press release for the events, Harriet Brown claimed that one of the key aims was to connect children with "all the rich cultural resources of their community" which emphasizes how the storytelling events were more than just to incentivize reading but much wider educational ambitions. In creating storytelling sessions, the CIBC created an environment that invited books to be read communally. Within many of the books used such as Feelings' *Moja Means One*, the authors included a focus on the importance of storytelling for communities. To adapt Bishop's analogy for African American Children's Literature (Bishop 1990), the storytelling events acted as mirrors to African American literature as storytelling teams focused on the same themes in the books and shared many of the same aspirations as the creators. The sessions, however, were also windows as they offered new perspectives and opportunities for the books to be expressed and enjoyed as a broad array of figures were invited to take part in the sessions and add their own contributions.

Embedded in many works used in the program, such as Julius Lester's (1969) *Black Folktales* and Nikki Giovanni's poetry *Spin a Soft Song*, was a focus on a tradition of oral storytelling in which these books were intended to be part of an intergenerational sharing of ideas, values, and history. Julius Lester highlighted that his work was intended to be read aloud as "a folktale assumes the shape of its teller, and through the teller's voice colorations, vocal timbre and rhythms, gestures. . .the tale is recreated and made new" (Lester 1969, p. ix). As Lester reveals, storytelling is not simply a repetition of words but a unique and dynamic performance that amplifies the literature and infuses it with something new. All books used in the Art and Storytelling program were woven with different intonations, interpretations, and audience involvement.

Though the reports of these sessions cannot fully capture the nuances of the readings, the "storytelling with noise" focused on audience participation. The storytelling reports allude to call-and-response happening throughout stories as children became more familiar with the stories and were able to add their own details. The storytelling sessions invited children to join in as their engagement became a key aspect of the literature. Whether it was joining in with the dozens in Lester's *How the Snake Got His Rattles*, as Mrs. Snake starts telling Mr. Snake that "his mama was a lizard and his daddy was a fishing worm"

or whether it was rapping along to Blue's *Bed-Stuy Beat* (which included musical notation aids), the storytelling sessions became sites for children to bring their own meanings and flairs to the books. In the context of their telling, the storytelling sessions gave power to the children to intervene and contribute to the meanings of the stories being told. African American children's literature provided an avenue to help children express themselves and actively engage in their education.

8. New Modes of Education: African American Children's Books and Educational Innovation

In her report on one session, Joyce Carty mused that "Storytelling was one of the earliest means of communication. It was a great medium for sharing experience, for teachings, and for handing down from one generation to another ideas, ideals, values, standards of behavior" (Carty 1971). Inherent in the program was a focus on facilitating an education denied in mainstream schooling. As well as covering topics that were often excluded from public education such as African American folklore and Black history, the storytelling sessions embodied forms of narrative structures and orality often discouraged in Eurocentric models of education (Champion 2016). Champion highlights how African American stories often feature digression, repetition, and allusion, among many other features, and these could be incorporated in storytelling sessions in a way often not possible in the public education system. The storytelling sessions were not just a fun way to enjoy books; the planning notes reveal they were an attempt to provide "new modes of education" (CIBC 1970b) for children whom the Board of Education routinely overlooked in their curricula.

These modes of education scrawled in thick green marker were laid out from the beginning of the project. The CIBC, authors, illustrators, and educators all collaborated because they perceived African American children's literature to be a key in opening up education to children. The organizers identified that the Art and Storytelling program had three-fold educational benefits. Firstly, they claimed that an interest in books would spark a realization of the necessity to be able to read and write which will "follow through in their school work" (CIBC 1970b). Secondly, the organizers believed that these interactive sessions would help establish that "children can teach children;" and provide different avenues for learning as schools had not yet found ways to achieve this. Finally, they hoped that the sessions would help the publishing of more books and this circulation of books would help encourage parents and adults to become more involved in education. At a time when there was clamor for more community involvement in schooling, these educational aims of the project underscore how African American children's literature was perceived to be a crucial tool in the fight for a more relevant and community-oriented education.

In February 1971, the project's second year, the CIBC established a semi-permanent base in Marcus Garvey Village in Brownsville, Brooklyn. This pedestrianized community space was the scene for storytelling sessions and an art show of all the previous summer's artwork by illustrators and children. CIBC member Donnarae McCann highlighted that ten different schools transported children "by the busload" (McCann 1971) to the project for field trips as it became a crucial draw for educators, too. Parents and educators perceived the project as education outside of school rather than simply an activity to entertain children. The approval of local teachers demonstrates that many felt limited within schools in a way that the storytelling project was not. In her notes on the work of CIBC, Donnarae McCann claimed that the project provided children with an informal education which revealed the "potential of mobile, loosely structured activities, in contrast to confining all service within pseudo-Grecian, Carnegie buildings" (McCann 1971; CIBC 1970c). The project's draw for educators was clear; these sessions provided a learning experience not possible within the confines of the curricula they had to follow and African American children's literature could provide a crucial alternative to books provided in school. Dorothy Robertson commented that many teachers were surprised by the substantial numbers of Black-authored children's books the storytelling teams possessed, demonstrating how these books were often not

available in schools. The books had key educational value, but the storytelling events helped bridge the gap between children and educators.

By bringing education outside the school and into new avenues, streets, and homes, the project focused on crucial elements of Black educational philosophy such as cultural relevance, Black pride, and Black history. Not bound by the New York Board of Education, the storytelling teams used an array of books not found on the bookshelves of schools, and these books helped facilitate a Black-centered education. Gloria Ladson-Billings, a pedagogical theorist, argues that the dominant groups' ideology and vision permeates the curriculum, leaving "an incoherent and disjointed picture of those who are not White" (Ladson-Billings 2003, p. 4). The CIBC sought to rectify the fragmentary inclusion of African American stories, histories, and images within schools by focusing on trade books. The Storytelling on the Streets program exemplified a more radical understanding than the New York Board of Education of what relevance meant and used African American children's literature to further their educational aims.

Augusta Baker, another pioneering figure within the New York Public Library (NYPL), was a great advocate for storytelling and its educational benefits (Baker and Greene 1987). She praised the CIBC's Art and Storytelling program as a "wonderful way to motivate children's interest in books" and a model for community education projects. Baker, Coordinator of Children's Services at NYPL at the time, understood how Black children's books acted as a stimulus for many children otherwise disengaged from education. Indeed, as the program developed, the storytelling teams moved from the streets and into children's homes as local educational specialists saw the potential in the program. In the winter of 1971, Don and Dorothy Robertson visited several homes in Red Hook, South Brooklyn, where they read to smaller groups of children who did not attend school at all and provided illustration demonstrations. By going into homes, the storytelling teams supplemented public education that reached out to children who, for many reasons, did not attend school. An educational aide warned the Robertsons that one child never spoke when in the district office but to their surprise, the child became "very warm and talkative" (Robertson 1971b) during the storytelling session. The CIBC felt that African American children's books could be useful educational tools and though not replacing education, they could provide an opening for some children who felt disconnected from education.

9. Portraits and Printing: The Importance of Visualization in Storytelling

In 1971, several of the storytelling teams spoke to school groups and hundreds of other children at the MUSE, the Bedford Lincoln Neighborhood Museum in Brooklyn. There was, however, an increased focus on art as the illustrators sketched hundreds of children and created an exhibition that moved across community centers and libraries across the city. A visual aspect had been integral since the formation of the project as children lined up to have their portraits taken. Each storytelling report not only highlighted how many children attended, but how many of them also had their portrait taken. That the program was selected as a regular feature at the MUSE is indicative of the cultural and community benefits others saw in the sessions. Just eighteen months prior to the events taking place in the museum, community activists and museum officials met to discuss how "the white establishment" (Harvey and Friedberg 1970) was not addressing local cultural needs. As a result of the frank discussions, Emily Dennis Harvey, former Acting Director of the Brooklyn Children's Museum, stated that there existed "fundamental questions about art or culture, and about their function in a community" (Harvey and Friedberg 1970). The CIBC's program addressed some of these concerns and was part of a wider grassroots movement that believed the educational power in Black art.

Across the city in Harlem, Edward Spriggs, the director of the Harlem Studio Museum, developed his own initiative of 'Studio in the Streets' in 1971. Intimately linked with the Black Arts Movement, the program sought to expose "the Harlem community to some bold artistic images and the ideas underlying them" (Braun-Reinitz and Weissman 2009, p. 45). This was one of many community-oriented art projects that encouraged the involvement

of young people in painting murals and creating their own art. This creative impulse was shared by the illustrators and artists involved in the CIBC's program. Central to many of the artists' drive was a desire to foster a positive self-identity for children through art. Their work in African American children's literature was just one key avenue for them to pursue this idea and the storytelling sessions provided an opportunity to expand on this work. Tom Feelings described it as a duty as an artist to provide recognizable images for children to "see the beauty" in themselves. (Roberts 1982). The storytelling events were more than extensions of the African American children's books used; increasingly, the creation of images took on a more significant role in the process.

The children who attended the storytelling sessions listened to Judith Berry Griffin's *Nat Turner* while also witnessing Leo Carty sketch out his own illustrations from the book on the sidewalk in real time. Witnessing the creative process underpinning the books was crucial in helping children connect with books and in identifying with those who created them. As the program developed, however, the art focused more on sketching the children who attended, helping children understand their importance to African American children's literature. They were not just passive listeners but could be active participants in the literature and creation of books.

The value later ascribed to Black illustrators' work by scholars such as Dianne Johnson (1990a) is evident in children's responses recorded in the reports. Children followed the storytelling teams and lined up to talk to the artists and have their portrait taken. At the grassroots level, illustrators engaged children in reading children's books by showing them art in progress and by including them within the context of children's literature. Johnson's assertion of the importance of visual literacy played out on stoops and sidewalks as illustrators brought the words of African American stories to life in front of them. The CIBC reported that many of the children were amazed to discover that children's books were "drawn by real live artists and not by machines" (*Interracial Books for Children* 1970). Seeing artists create images for them became a key draw for children as the Art and Storytelling sessions engaged children in the creation of African American children's literature and not just the books themselves.

By also sketching each child, the artists cemented a place for the children within children's literature. Children could witness artists like George Ford and Betty Dillard paint familiar images from the stories within the same session that they got to be drawn. Each storytelling session ended with a queue of children waiting to be drawn, often with parents asking to pay the artist to take these images home. Dorothy Robertson reported that her husband "took great pains to sketch almost a complete drawing of each child. He felt that within this age group, self-image and identity were of paramount importance" (Robertson 1971a). The storytelling teams helped children realize that there were Black creators like Leo Carty, Tom Feelings, and Dorothy Robertson who were making books for them and with characters like them.

In their long-term goals for the Art and Storytelling program, the organizers focused on generating children's interest in creating their own books. By 1972, the project's third year, this aim was realized as the 'Printmobile' hit the streets and brought bookmaking directly to children. After the success of the Art and Storytelling project, the Printmobile continued to "bring books alive for children" (Chambers 1972). From their experience in the storytelling sessions, many of the organizers realized that many children had a fascination with the process of making books. Leo Carty was chosen as the director for this offshoot program and he, along with three others, parked their truck and unloaded a block press and an offset press onto the sidewalk or playground. They wanted to build upon the "visual and verbal feel for books and storytelling" and show children "how a manuscript is put together" (Chambers 1972). The Storytelling sessions had successfully used African American children's literature to emphasize the value and significance of Black children in literature. The Printmobile expanded on this and helped inspire children to draw and print their own designs.

Hundreds of members of the neighborhood gathered around the truck which had an emblazoned message on its side: "Printmobile for Kids and Everybody." The Printmobile built on the Storytelling sessions by focusing on creating educational activities in local communities and engaging with African American children's literature. The power of children's books was not just in hearing them be read, but in harnessing people's creativity and encouraging people to contribute to literature.

10. Conclusions

In 1974, the final year of the Art and Storytelling program, Sharon Bell Mathis addressed a conference of librarians on behalf of the CIBC, addressing how institutional racism was still prominent in the children's book industry as she accused *The Slave Dancer*, winner of the Newbery Award, of perpetuating racist stereotypes (Guillaume 1974). Indeed, the organization and many of the authors involved continued this fight far beyond the Art and Storytelling on the Streets program as they sought new avenues to promote African American children's literature. Many of the authors and illustrators articulated that they sought to change the publishing industry's assumptions with their work but, as Walter Dean Myers later claimed, rising conservatism and market forces limited many opportunities (Myers 1986). The CIBC continued their work well into the 1980s as they moved much of their work from the streets and into universities and schools. The CIBC's long struggle to promote anti-racist and anti-sexist children's literature has been taken up ever since by a range of organizations and individuals. African American children's literature and their inclusion in schools has been marginalized and targeted ranging from subtle censorship in curricula committees to the planting of bombs in the 1974 Kanawha County protest. Myers' concern for rising conservatism has been shared by organizations including PEN America and the National Coalition Against Censorship as it has not been enough to just have stories told, but it has been necessary to organize to keep these books accessible for children.

A year after the Art and Storytelling program ended in 1975, the Parents of New York United, a conservative organization, were successful in removing books including works by Langston Hughes and Alice Childress that they deemed "anti-American" from the Island Trees school district in Long Island, New York. Steven Pico, a seventeen-year- old student, sued the board with the support of local librarians and educators who were fearful of the increasing level of censorship being employed in public schools (Foerstel 1994, p. 14). While the Art and Storytelling on the Streets program was not in defiance of a specific book ban, it was in reaction to an educational system that was unresponsive to the needs of many students, precisely the form of censorship Pico was referring to. The CIBC's efforts in the late 1960s and 1970s bypassed many of the obstacles children came across in accessing African American children's literature and this was supported by many educators who had become frustrated with the silent censorship and bureaucracy that limited access. While the program does not feature in histories of book bans, like Herbert Foerstel's, or work on African American children's literature, it was a significant grassroots campaign that helped children access books that were often denied to them. The CIBC's program offered funding, a network of contacts, and also provided key spaces in order to support African American children's literature. Their constant activism and advocacy was crucial in providing access and support to the growing canon.

In recent years, book bans have increased considerably. In their analysis of what books have been banned from 2021 to 2022, PEN America has discovered that 41 percent of banned books contain LGBTQ+ themes or characters and 40 percent feature a protagonist or prominent secondary character of color (Friedman and Johnson 2022). This heightened focus on censoring LGBTQ+ topics and the targeting of books that feature discussions of race or racism through a misappropriation of Critical Race Theory has, however, been resisted. While not consciously emulating the CIBC's program of the 1970s, organizations like the Book Ban Busters have remarkable similarities to the powerful work undertaken decades ago. A grassroots organization with support from prominent children's authors

such as Ibi Zoboi and Melissa Hart, the Book Ban Busters are reminiscent of the work undertaken in the Art and Storytelling on the Streets program as they seek to ensure access to important works for children. Their Banned Bookmobile and Read-ins are indicative of an ongoing coalition of writers and activists in an effort to defy the racist and anti-LGBTQ+ efforts of politicians and activist groups. While the Art and Storytelling on the Streets program has not been adequately recognized within wider scholarship for its pioneering support of African American children's literature, its legacy has lived on as activists, educators, and creators have continued to defy limits placed on more representative children's literature.

Although many of its grander aims were never achieved, the Art and Storytelling program did reach thousands of children over four years. These children became engaged and contributed to African American children's literature as the events became key extensions of the myriad hopes, messages, and meanings present within the literature. Dianne Johnson argues that African American children's literature interprets and invokes aspects of African American life and culture which helps young readers understand the "many meanings and implications of 'Blackness.'" Artists sketched subversive characters like Stagolee for children as well as intimate portraits of familial love as storytellers read out that "Black is as good as your mother tucking you into bed" (Pupils of P.S. 150 1970). The Storytelling sessions were important extensions of African American children's literature that demonstrated its diversity and power to children across New York City. Furthermore, these sessions were more than just retellings of the stories but were important conduits to help the books reach new audiences. Through the story of just one city, the project underscored how African American children's literature could be used to help innovate in education, provide fun for children, and help secure Black children's place within literature. The CIBC was conscious of the wider implications of their work as they believed that their work in New York City could be implemented elsewhere. In notes on their program for *New York Amsterdam News*, the organizers claimed that "all communities can take advantage of their local artists and storytellers to go into the streets where the children are and turn them on to the rewards of reading" (CIBC 1970a).

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