

Black Boy Joy: 9 Picture Books Featuring Black Male Protagonists

by Charnaie Gordon



When searching for books that serve as mirrors for my two children, I'm always mindful of exactly which books we choose to read. While we don't discriminate when it comes to literature, I do make it a point to select books that reflect my children and our family. Why? Because I know if I don't expose my kids to these books, they might not see them otherwise.

Let's face it, finding good, quality books featuring people of color is hard! It's a lot easier today than it used to be years back, but the struggle is real. This is especially true when it comes to books that feature black boys as the main character.

As a parent, my goal is to present my children with a full spectrum of brown and black characters in a variety of books. I want their experiences of story and representations of the world to include people of color, people they can imagine being like — people like Oprah Winfrey, Barack Obama, Misty Copeland, Michelle Obama, and Michael Jordan — or fictional characters with whom they can identify.

Of course, I believe all children should be exposed to a wide range of people, experiences, and cultures. We still need greater diversity in children's books to make this happen. But we also need people to buy and read the great books that are out there so publishers will continue to publish them.

Here are nine picture books featuring black males as the main protagonist to enjoy with the little ones in your life.



Max and the Tag-Along Moon

by Floyd Cooper

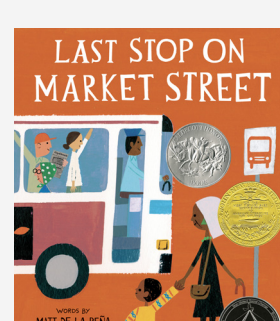
After a visit to his grandpa's house, Max is told by his grandpa that the moon will follow him all the way home. On the car ride back home, Max watches the moon as it tags along. But what happens when the sky starts to get cloudy and Max can no longer see the moon? Was his grandpa telling him the truth? An adorable story that shows a beautiful bond between a boy and his grandpa.



Peekaboo Bedtime

by Rachel Isadora

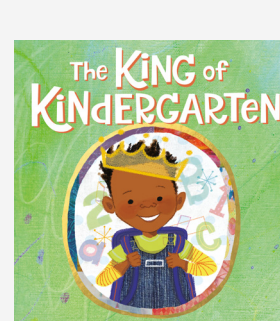
In this story, a toddler boy plays peekaboo with everyone from his grandparents to his puppy, until it's finally time to snuggle into bed with his blankie. When my kids were younger they loved having this book read to them over and over again.



Last Stop on Market Street

by Matt de la Peña, illustrated by Christian Robinson

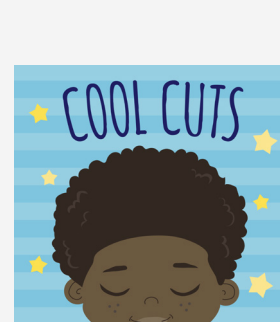
I love the overall message of this wonderful book! Little CJ is so lucky to have a grandmother who teaches him to see things from a different perspective. If only all children could be so fortunate.



The King of Kindergarten

by Derrick Barnes, illustrated by Vanessa Brantley-Newton

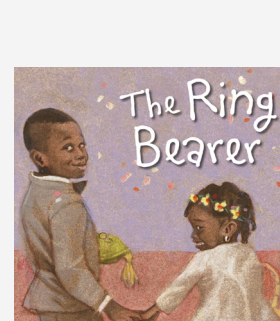
From the Newbery Honor-winning author of *Crown* comes a story about confidence. After his mother tells him he'll be the "King of Kindergarten," this little boy has all the enthusiasm he needs to seize the first day of school! *The King of Kindergarten* is sure to inspire other kids who are a little apprehensive about starting school, and remind them to be brave and kind those around them.



Cool Cuts

by Mechal Renee Roe

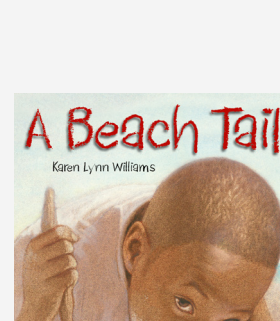
Cool Cuts is a joyful celebration of natural hair in all its expressive possibilities. We see boys with twists and cornrows, afros and waves — each proudly declaring the book's repeated affirmation: "I am born to be awesome!" Isn't that the truth?



The Ring Bearer

by Floyd Cooper

Told from the perspective of the ring bearer Jackson, this book shows little readers that getting married symbolizes the start of something new. It also shows children how families grow and change and teaches them about responsibility and commitment. I think it's the perfect book to gift to a little ring bearer or flower girl for an upcoming wedding, as it may help them cope with feeling nervous about the wedding or adding new people to their family.



A Beach Tail

by Karen Lynn Williams, illustrated by Floyd Cooper

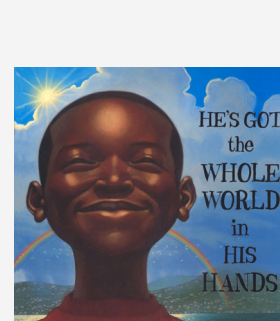
Gregory and his father are spending a day at the beach. Gregory manages to travel down the beach quite a long way, losing sight of his dad and the blue umbrella. On his journey back to find his dad he encounters a jellyfish, a sand castle, a ghost crab, and more. A great book to read during the beach days of summer.



Dear Dragon

by Josh Funk, illustrated by Rodolfo Montalvo

I think this is a fun book about a boy and a dragon who are pen pals. It's great for teaching children to look past physical differences and appreciate the person underneath.



He's Got the Whole World in His Hands

by Kadir Nelson

Nelson takes the old spiritual that has become one of America's best-known songs and turns it into a beautiful picture book following a boy and his family. The message of the song — rejoicing in the beauties of the natural world — is wonderfully interpreted throughout the book's pages.

Charnaie Gordon

Charnaie is a wife, mom of two, computer programmer by day, blogger/influencer by night, self-proclaimed lifelong learner, podcast junkie and Distinguished Toastmaster. Her blog, *Here Wee Read*, is where she is currently expressing her creativity and passion for reading, diverse literature, and literacy. Her children and her husband are her inspiration and her followers/supporters are her book-loving tribe. More than anything else, she cares about connecting people with great books they'll love. In her world books are an absolute necessity. Charnaie is passionate about instilling a love of reading, lifelong learning, and curiosity in her kids. She hopes to inspire others to do the same with their children. Find her online at hereweeread.com and [@hereweeread](https://twitter.com/hereweeread) on Twitter.