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Must-Have Books: Critical Reading for Your Classroom Library

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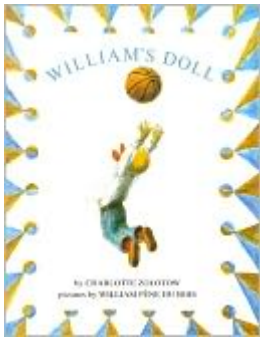
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MUST-HAVE BOOKS

Critical Reading for Your Classroom Library

Visiting Scholar Katherine Bomer shared more than four dozen books with teachers at our 2012 Winter Workshop, helping us envision Critical Reading and Writing for Social Action units for our own classrooms. If you missed the workshop or didn't get to see all of Katherine's 50+ books, IPYW reading workshop coach Jane Leeth can help. Here, Jane presents her "must-have" recommendations from Katherine's stack—including grade levels and story descriptions.



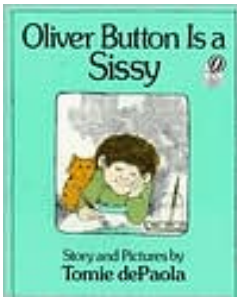
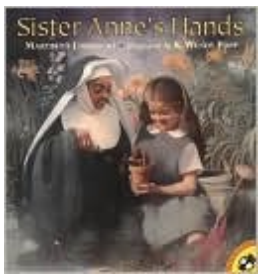
GRADES K-2

William's Doll by Charlotte Zolotow can help initiate a discussion of gender stereotyping. (It can be paired with **Oliver Button Is a Sissy**, which Katherine highlighted during the workshop.) William wants a doll, and his request is met with alarm by his father, brothers and friends. The end message makes it clear that gender stereotypes are misleading and sometimes harmful. Readers might also like to discuss the potential stereotypes found in the grandmother's conversation with William's father.

Sister Anne's Hands by Marybeth Lorbiecki is set in the 1960s, a story about an African American nun that comes to teach in a predominantly

white parochial school, challenging her second grade students' understandings of racism. Sister Anne's creative and interactive teaching reaches each of her students despite the objection by some parents to a woman of "her color" teaching in the school.

How to Heal a Broken Wing by Bob Graham is an ideal story to get young children thinking about how their actions can make a difference in the world. In the midst of a bustling city, no one notices an injured pigeon except for Will. Will takes the bird home and nurses it back to health, eventually releasing it back to the outdoors. This is a subtle yet powerful message with strong visual support that challenges the reader's understanding of perspective as well as compassion.

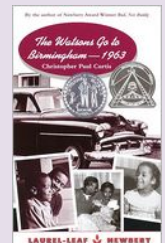
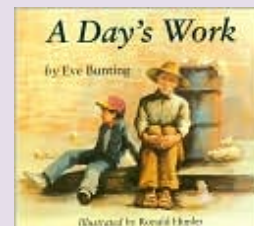


GRADES 3-5

A Day's Work by Eve Bunting is a seemingly simple story about Francisco and his attempts to act as a translator to find his grandfather work for a day, but the text is loaded with opportunities to discuss social issues such as immigration and labor—very relevant in today's classrooms where many children and children's parents/grandparents speak languages other than English. Intermediate readers will recognize the similarities between this text and **The Circuit** by Francisco Jimenez (another book Katherine shared at the workshop).

Ruth and the Green Book by Calvin Ramsey tells the story of Ruth and her family traveling from Chicago to

Alabama in their brand new Buick to visit her grandmother. During their travels south, she learns about Jim Crow laws as her family is refused service. At one stop in Georgia, they are given The Green Book, a guide revealing where African Americans can stop for service, meals and places to stay. While the story is fictional, The Green Book is not. The notes at the back of **Ruth and the Green Book** provide factual information about The Green Book's publication and existence from 1936-1964. This is a strong conversation starter for Civil Rights studies and ways segregation and racial inequality still exist. Consider pairing with **The Watsons Go to Birmingham** by Christopher Paul Curtis.



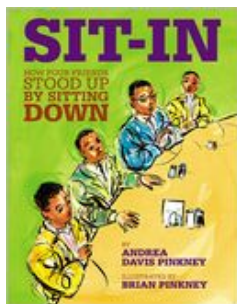
GRADES 3-5 continued on back

GRADES 3-5 (continued)

***Busing Brewster* by Richard Michelson.** is a story told by a first grade African American boy (Brewster) who is bused to a previously segregated all-white school. Through the eyes of Brewster, young and older readers alike will gain insight into the effects of desegregation on the lives of individual children and be encouraged to think critically about equity in opportunity for all learners. The story reflects with historical accuracy the language and sentiments of many during this tumultuous time in

our history—with an author’s note at the end providing additional perspective about the 1970s.

***Fly Away Home* by Eve Bunting** is a story about homelessness told by a boy, Andrew, who lives with his father in an airport. While the book seems simple, it suggests the complexities of life when food and shelter are daily challenges—when there is no place called “home.” Critical readers will empathize with these characters, whose range of emotions is beautifully revealed through the text and illustrations.



GRADES 6-8

***The Arrival* by Shaun Tan** is an exquisite graphic novel depicting many of the experiences faced by immigrants who must grapple with a new language, loneliness, poverty, diminished social status, under-valued qualifications and great distance from family. This wordless book gives the reader a sense of the isolation that arises when our most common human needs are disrupted, confused or obstructed. Each meticulously crafted frame deserves critical study as they illuminate the complexities of an immigration experience.

***Sit-In* by Andrea Davis Pinkney** is the story of four young black men who took a stand against segregation. It can be used in grades 3-5 and with older readers who will be challenged to think about the courage of the Greensboro

Four and the sit-in that made history fifty years ago. A Civil Rights timeline at the end of the book provides further information regarding events of the era. The author’s notes include a picture of the Greensboro Four, adding even more power to the story. Consider using this text side-by-side with ***Freedom on the Menu* by Carole Boston Weatherford.** The understanding of peaceful demonstrations can be furthered by pairing these texts with the historical reality of tensions between the Black Panthers and the Civil Rights movement in ***The Rock and the River* by Kegla Magoon,** another book with substantive author notes.

- Jane Leeth

Jane Leeth is a reading workshop coach for the Indiana Partnership for Young Writers.



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