

Lifting Up the Light that Shines: Activism, Struggle, and the Love Praxis in Children's Literature

Lasana D. Kazembe, Assistant Professor
School of Education, Dept. of Urban Teacher Education
Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis

For long centuries, the historical experiences, folk wisdom, and culture of people of African ancestry have been copiously reflected and articulated through four main channels: song, dance, drum, and the written word. As a central part of the American story, Black Americans' collective experiences have critically informed and inscribed the understandings, orientations, ideologies, and democratic struggles of oppressed and marginalized groups of human beings both in the United States and throughout the world. Relatedly, Black Americans' historical struggles and triumphs point and pave the way for us to understand and apprehend the shifting relationship between freedom and struggle; education and liberation; pedagogy and power; the personal and the political; awareness and advocacy. This paper discusses how the Black American experience of activism, struggle, transcendence, and critical hope is framed and situated in children's literature (specifically, picture books). As a cultural synthesis, this literature conveys rich messages and lessons about the positive power of human agency and resilience to interrupt and transform. Referencing and highlighting specific children's texts, the author discusses how the sociopolitical struggles and triumphs of Black Americans serve as a living-practice text to inform, support, and teach criticalist stances rooted in justice, truth, dignity, and human liberation.