

## Welcoming Black Children into Literary Wildscapes: Wildness in African American Children's Picture Books

In September 2018, the late Anne Rockwell published *Hiking Day*, a picture book illustrated by her daughter, Lizzy. While not an #OWNVOICES story, this “quiet story . . . positively portrays a black family spending time in nature. While this shouldn’t be a news flash in 2018, it is” (Kirkus). Childhood obesity experts urge us to get kids outside and active, but many African Americans don’t because, for too long, “the woods” have been dangerous places for black people. Dogs tracked, attacked and mangled slaves in the woods, where some became “strange fruit,” dangling from trees after lynching. Given this history, African Americans have few incentives to venture onto wilderness trails or even into urban forests.

An emerging body of work that depicts black and brown children and their families having positive experiences in nature might signal a change in what scholar Elijah Anderson terms “The White Space.” Anderson theorizes the urban ghetto as the quintessential “black space,” while “the white space” represents places people of color have not been welcome and in which they must prove they belong—repeatedly. “While white people avoid black space, black people are required to navigate white space as a condition of their existence” (Anderson 11). This essay will use the work of Anderson and African American Forestry Professor Drew Lanham to explore how picture books like *Hiking Day* and *Where’s Rodney* position children of color as activists in transforming the white space of the woods into welcoming spaces where they can not only survive but thrive.

### Works Cited

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