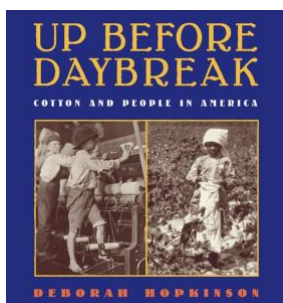


The 2026 Phoenix Award Recipient:



Hopkinson, Deborah. *Up Before Daybreak: Cotton and People in America*. Scholastic, 2006

Hopkinson pairs her frank, accessible text with compelling visuals to welcome readers into the enduring and intertwined histories of cotton and childhood in the United States. Her historical trajectory is both long and vivid; she narrates the development of the cotton industry from colonial America to the 1930s and effectively uses oral histories to help readers understand the lives of children in the past while reminding readers that child labor continues in the present. Hopkinson's skilled selection of primary and secondary sources, including illustrations, create a detailed portrayal of the cotton industry and children's indispensable roles within it. Readers are drawn into the details that require a re-visioning of childhood: picking enough seeds out of cotton bolls to fill a shoe with them before being allowed to go to bed, subsisting on salt pork and molasses, and working in factories where the air was hazy with lint. Ultimately, Hopkinson is both convincing and engaging in her message that whether picking cotton in the fields of the antebellum South, sharecropping to help their families eke out a living, or working the bobbin mills in New England, children and their labor were integral parts of the rise of cotton.

The 2026 Phoenix Honor Book Recipients:

Leavitt, Martine. *Keturah and Lord Death*. Boyds Mills, 2006

The trope of telling stories to outwit Death is not a new one, but Martine Leavitt reimagines it in her spellbinding novel. *Keturah and Lord Death* is many things: fantasy, romance, history, fairy tale, and testament to the power of story. At sixteen, Keturah is an accomplished storyteller. When she meets Lord Death in the woods one day and learns he is there to take her life, she bargains for more time: she tells Death most of a story of true love but refuses to share the ending until the following day. Death grants her 24 hours to find her own true love and more importantly, save her village from the coming plague, but Keturah's relationship with Death does not come without complications and painful choices. The novel's ruminations on death and love are both subtle and meaningful, and Leavitt avoids tidiness as she engages with themes of sacrifice and the ways that love and fear often walk hand-in-hand.

Shusterman, Neal. *Everlost*. Simon and Schuster, 2006

In *Everlost*, Neal Shusterman weaves a ghostly tale around Nick and Allie, two recently deceased fourteen-year-olds who find themselves in limbo between this world and the next. In trying to return to their homes, they meet other Afterlights -- children and teens in the same predicament -- and discover a caretaker who, while seemingly benevolent, actually keeps the children from crossing into the next life. To follow the rules of *Everlost*, Nick and Allie must keep moving and avoid the monster, McGill. As they do, they contemplate whether they should try to escape *Everlost* and return home or stay and grow into new abilities. Horror stories succeed only to the extent authors first ground them in the reality of this world before twisting that reality

into evermore grotesque, but still plausible, shapes; and Shusterman's skilled weaving of plot with the suggestive power of place combine in a slow but steady twisting that raises questions about afterlife narratives and the motives of those who create them.