Let the Words Flow Free: "Speaking in Tongues" in Rita Williams-Garcia's Gaither Sisters Trilogy

Black women writers have always engaged in discourse that fills the gaps of missing narratives in African-American male and Anglo-American female representations of black women. "Speaking in tongues" is black women's ability to engage in hegemonic discourses while simultaneously engaging in "intimate, private, inspired utterances" of their own understanding (1989). By engaging in this tradition of "speaking in tongues," Rita Williams-Garcia through her Gaither Girls trilogy represents a new frontier in black feminine discourse. Delphine, the narrator of the trilogy, uses this "speaking" as a way to navigate black girlhood. In her essay, Henderson claims that black women through their literary works are able to speak with black men, white women, and white men testimonially and competitively. For example, black women communally engage with black men and their blackness, while entering competitive discourse with black men on the subject of womanhood. Delphine employs this same discursive technique in her communications with the adults she encounters in her life. In comparison to her speech with adults and children, black people and white people, the elderly and the middle aged, Delphine's inner dialogue creates a space for understanding black girlhood. Henderson attributes the success of black women's writing to their ability to engage communally with a variety of audiences while simultaneously offering a new, diverse voice that counters hegemonic discourses that silence black women's voices. Delphine and her sisters' stories offer a similar kind of engagement but starting in girlhood, and thus their stories further support the need for diverse books for young readers. Diverse books are necessary not just because they feature embodied characters of color, but also because their characters can speak across time, fill margins created in a largely uniform space, and tackle the hegemony of language in literary spaces for children.