

Book Links

UNPACKING A STANDARD:
WITH BLACK HISTORY RESOURCES
BY JULIE GREEN

This article was first published
February 1, 2013 (Booklist Online).



Biographies offer a wonderful opportunity to put fascinating figures into historical context. The more that authors research, inquire, and write, the more that we as readers are able to learn, question, and grow. Below are titles for a wide age range that spotlight fascinating African Americans. Through these books and suggested activities, designed to help teachers implement standards CCSS.ELA-Literacy RI.1.4–RI.6.4., readers can continue to learn more about individuals who fought for equality in their own diverse ways and how their efforts helped to shape the world we live in today. Visit www.booklistonline.com/commoncore for an extended version of this article.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.1.4. Ask and answer questions to help determine or clarify the meaning of words and phrases in a text.

Black Jack: The Ballad of Jack Johnson. By Charles R. Smith. Illus. by Shane W. Evans. 2010. 40p. Roaring Brook/Neal Porter, \$16.99 (9781596434738). 796.83092. Gr. 1–3.

Read this story aloud to students and encourage them to raise their hands whenever they hear a word they don't understand. Record these words on an anchor chart so that by the end of the book, there is a compiled list. Reread the passages with these words, and together as a class, explore what the definitions might be based on the context and the illustrations. Finally, look the words up in a dictionary (this may take several sessions), and compare the students' definitions with what the dictionary states.

When Jackie and Hank Met. By Cathy Goldberg Fishman. Illus. by Mark Elliott. 2012. 40p. Amazon Children's, \$17.99 (9780761461401). 796.357092. Gr. 1–3.

Read and discuss this story aloud with students. As you read, stop and think aloud to the students about important words that they may not be able to define, such as *injustice*. Model for students exactly what goes through a reader's head when she comes to a word that she doesn't know and how she

would try to figure out the meaning. Teach students to ask themselves, "What questions does a reader ask herself to determine that she doesn't know a word's meaning?" This could be a series of mini lessons, modeling different reading strategies and then having students practice on their own.

Touch the Sky: Alice Coachman, Olympic High Jumper. By Ann Malaspina. Illus. by Eric Velasquez. 2012. 32p. Albert Whitman, \$16.99 (9780807580356). 796.42092. Gr. 2–4.

Students can make a journal or a page in a journal based on the question, "What words do I want to read and understand?" Below this heading, students should create three columns: one for a word, one for a picture or word definition, and one labeled "strategy I used to discover the meaning." As students listen to or read the story, they can keep track of the words they want to know. The students can then pair up and work together to use strategies they have been working on to determine the meaning of the words.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.4. Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words or phrases in a text relevant to a grade 4 topic or subject area.

Molly, by Golly! The Legend of Molly Williams, America's First Female Firefighter. By Dianne Ochiltree. Illus. by Kathleen Kemly. 2012. 32p. Boyds Mills/Calkins Creek, \$16.95 (9781590787212). 363. K–Gr. 2.

Have students read through the book and choose three to five words or phrases that show how Molly Williams was someone who practiced core democratic values. Post the core democratic values separately around the room. (PBS' website offers a good overview of the values). Have students write each of the words they chose, illustrate how Molly Williams demonstrated that word, and then write how a core democratic value relates to those words from the text. Post the students' work underneath each corresponding core democratic value. Throughout the year, continue to add illustrations or phrases from other biographies under the value that is demonstrated in each text.

Harlem's Little Blackbird: The Story of Florence Mills. By Renée Watson. Illus. by Christian Robinson. 2012. 40p. Random, \$17.99 (9780375869730). 782.42165092. Gr. 1–3.

This beautifully written title is about an unrecorded singer and performer. Throughout the book, Florence Mills is compared to many different things and ideas. Have students go through the text and pick out several similes. Next, have students define the similes and then illustrate or act out their meanings. What picture do these descriptions, added together, create of Florence Mills?

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CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.6.4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings.

It Jes' Happened: When Bill Traylor Started to Draw. By Don Tate. Illus. by R. Gregory Christie. 2012. 32p. Lee & Low, \$17.95 (9781600602603). 759.13. Gr. 2–4.

In the author's note to this moving picture-book biography, Tate states that no one knows why Bill Traylor began to draw for the first time in his eighties. Throughout the book, the phrase "Bill saved up these memories deep inside" is repeated, following descriptions of events in Bill Traylor's life. Have students discuss what they think the author is trying to accomplish with this repeated phrase. Cite the text as evidence. Ask students to think of another phrase that he could have used instead.

Twice as Good: The Story of William Powell and Clearview, the Only Golf Course Designed, Built, and Owned by an African American. By Richard Michelson. Illus. by Eric Velasquez. 2012. 32p. Sleeping Bear, \$16.95 (9781585364664). 796.352092. Gr. 2–4.

Toward the end of this intriguing book, William Powell's wife, Marcella, says, "Your daddy is putting 'the fair back in fairway.'" Have students look up the definition of *fair* before reading through Michelson's text and citing all the situations in which they think that William Powell experienced unfairness. Have students think about Marcella's statement above and research diversity in today's world of golf, including players' backgrounds and barriers to the sport that young people might encounter. Finally, students can create their own written statement, supported by facts: in 2013, is the world of golf fair, diverse, and equal?