AUTHORS YUSEF SALAAM AND IBI ZOBOI TO DISCUSS THEIR RECENT COLLABORATION

On Thursday, November 19, at 7 p.m., join critically acclaimed authors Ibi Zoboi and Yusef Salaam, who will discuss virtually their new novel in verse, Punching the Air (HarperCollins, 2020). This event will be moderated by Guild member Deborah Taylor.

What happens to a young man when society refuses to see him? Punching the Air is the story of 16-year-old Amal, a talented and aspiring artist who throws a punch and winds up incarcerated. Salaam and Zoboi have combined their prodigious talents to explore heartbreaking and stunning truths in this unforgettable novel. Riveting, timely yet timeless, sometimes painful and ultimately hopeful, this novel is sure to remain with readers of all ages.

Dr. Yusef Salaam, now known as one of the Exonerated Five, the Black and Latinx men wrongly convicted as teenagers of
assaulting a jogger in New York City’s Central Park in 1989, is an educator and lecturer. He advocates for criminal-justice reform, and in 2016 he received a Lifetime Achievement Award from President Barack Obama.

Ibi Zoboi is the author, most recently, of the middle grade novel *My Life as an Ice Cream Sandwich* (Penguin, 2019). She earned an MFA in writing for children and young adults from Vermont College of Fine Arts. Her books also include the young adult novels *Pride* (HarperCollins 2018) and *American Street* (HarperCollins 2017), which was a National Book Award Finalist and *New York Times* Notable Book.

Deborah Taylor, the 2015 recipient of the Coretta Scott King-Virginia Hamilton Award for Lifetime Achievement, recently retired from the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore, where she enjoyed a long and distinguished career. She has chaired and served on many ALA committees, including the 2015 Sibert Award for Outstanding Informational Books for Children, the Newbery Awards, the Coretta Scott King Book Awards and the Printz Award. Taylor is an adjunct professor teaching young adult literature at the University of Maryland’s College of Information Studies.

There is no cost to attend this virtual meeting, but registration is required. Those who register will receive an email with details on how to join the Zoom program.

The Guild will provide the option each month for making a donation to an organization that is working for racial justice in children’s literacy and education. November’s chosen organization is the Brown Bookshelf. For more information about the Brown Bookshelf and its work, please visit: https://thebrownbookshelf.com/.
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SHOUT MOUSE PRESS INTRODUCES THE MEGAPHONE BOARD

The founding members of the board--Jason Reynolds, Meg Medina, Wendy Shang, Elizabeth Acevedo, Hena Khan and Cling Smith--are award-winning authors and advocates who will join Shout Mouse Press in its mission of amplifying unheard voices.

These authors serve as the honorary heads of the Shout Mouse “Megaphones” volunteer corps of dedicated readers, educators and librarians who lend their support by sharing Shout Mouse’s work with their audiences, writing forewords for forthcoming books and engaging with youth authors.

To learn more about this initiative, read the full press release here.

If you are interested in becoming a Shout Mouse Press Megaphone, click here to sign up.

A LETTER FROM GUILD PRESIDENT KAREN DEANS

Happy November, everyone!

This month is an important one on many fronts, as we get out the vote, prepare for cold weather and adapt our holiday plans to stay safe.
during the pandemic. In these fraught times, I find it helpful to recognize the small things I'm thankful for, whether it's that great cup of coffee, brewed just right, or something funny my daughter tells me or the warmth of the autumn sun on my face.

Here's one more: I'm thankful for the community of creative, generous and dedicated folks within the Children's Book Guild and all you do to inspire, educate and nurture countless young lives, even in the midst of a global pandemic. Your impact is vital beyond measure.

We've got a great program planned for our Speaker Series this month, as we welcome Ibi Zoboi and Dr. Yusef Salaam, in a conversation about their young adult novel in verse, *Punching the Air*. We're grateful to Guild member Deborah Taylor for moderating, and we hope you can join us on November 19 at 7 p.m. You'll be receiving an email when registration opens.

In the meantime, you might be interested in checking out the Ava DuVernay Netflix series, *When They See Us*, based on the events that resulted in the wrongful conviction of five youths in the 1989 Central Park jogger case. Those teens, now men, are known as the Exonerated Five, and Yusef Salaam is one of them.

This month's optional donation will go to support The Brown Bookshelf, an organization working for racial justice in children's literacy and education. The Brown Bookshelf promotes “the myriad Black voices writing for young readers.” Last month we raised $245 in small donations for *Teaching for Change*. Thanks to all who donated.

The Program Committee is working on plans for a Zoom gathering for members in December. This will be a more personally engaged (read: faces visible/voices audible!) event than our Speaker Series, allowing us to share our latest news as well as engage in some fun activities and breakout sessions. Be on the lookout in the next couple weeks for a poll to gauge people's availability.

Meanwhile, stay well.

Best wishes,

Karen

INTRODUCING CAROLINE BREWER, A PROSPECTIVE GUILD MEMBER

by Karen Leggett

I am excited and delighted to introduce Caroline Brewer for membership in the Children's Book Guild as a children's literature specialist. I had the pleasure of meeting Caroline at last fall's University Club Book Fair
(how long ago that seems now!) and have seen, since then, just how busy she is promoting access to children’s books for all children. In fact, we will soon be announcing one of Caroline’s projects to enable Guild members to share books with DC families.

Caroline is a Pulitzer Prize-nominated journalist and public relations professional who now teaches literacy skills in schools and has worked as a reading and classroom teacher. She developed her own system of teaching literacy through children’s books, founding an annual celebration of books by DC Black authors as part of the National Council of Teachers of English’s African American Read-In; the celebration airs annually on C-Span’s BookTV.

Caroline is also an author, having published seven books for children through her own Unchained Spirit Enterprises publishing company. Her most recent book is Darius Daniels: Game On, featured on NBC4 during National Family Literacy Month. Caroline has attended two Guild meetings and looks to the Guild as a way to further her work in children’s literacy and literature.

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Twitter - @BrewerCaroline

AUTHOR TIFFANY D. JACKSON PROVIDES A GATEWAY TO UNDERSTANDING TOUGHS ISSUES

by Valerie O. Patterson

Children’s Book Guild member Monica Valentine, program specialist with the Young Readers Center at the Library of Congress, welcomed Tiffany D. Jackson, the critically acclaimed author of four books for young adults, as our speaker for October. Jackson spent a few minutes introducing her books, which are drawn from events of contemporary life. Her first novel, Allegedly (2017), an NAACP Image Award winner about a girl who was accused of murdering a baby at nine and is pregnant at sixteen, was drawn from a similar case in Maine. Monday’s Not Coming (2018), a Coretta Scott King-John Steptoe New Talent Award-winning novel about a girl who is looking for her missing best friend, grew out of cases of missing girls in Detroit and other cities. The novel underscores a concern that all too often black girls and brown girls who go missing are not deemed a national priority. Let Me Hear a Rhyme (2019), inspired by the death of rapper Biggie Smalls, is about two teen boys who turn their murdered friend into a rap superstar by pretending he is still alive. In her latest novel, Grown (2020), Jackson explores what surviving sexual predators means for young girls and what such situations say about race, sexual abuse and victim blaming. In the book, Enchanted grows up in a two-parent middle-class family
and still finds herself manipulated into a relationship with an older man, showing that predators can target anyone.

Jackson noted that some people say her books are “too dark.” She asks whether the comment says more about adult gatekeepers who would rather not see the light and the truth about the world today than about the young adults who read her books. Jackson’s books may be raw, but they are “real.” Otherwise, she said, “we send kids out into the world without tools,” and “without knowledge.” She writes flawed protagonists and flawed adult characters so that kids can find themselves in stories and so they can find answers to questions that people aren’t comfortable giving. Too often, “adults don’t get it but kids do.”

When asked why she chose to write YA novels, Jackson said that at first she didn’t even realize that’s what she was writing. It was her mentor Tayari Jones (An American Marriage, 2018) who pointed out that she was, in fact, writing YA. As for those YA authors who have influenced her work, Jackson credited Jason Reynolds and Walter Dean Myers. She also said that she writes thrillers because she writes for her younger self and tries to capture those scary moments when you need to hold your breath. She went from Goosebumps to Stephen King and retains an affinity for horror.

When asked by Valentine about her advice for writers, Jackson said that “craft is king” and “story is everything.” Make your story unforgettable. When she works, she ignores the noise and puts her head down to focus. That's good advice for all of us.

MEMBER NEWS

TAMMAR STEIN's novel Beni's War, which Kar-Ben will release on November 1, received a starred review from School Library Journal, which called it "a coming-of-age story about the importance of love, courage, and acceptance...Using strong characters, striking landscapes, and accurate historic details, [Stein] provides a gripping glimpse of Israel in the 1970s...VERDICT: Radiating a sense of hope grounded in love of family and community, Beni's story rises above the historic details of war and provides an important perspective for those living in uncertain times."
Truth or Lie: Inventors!, came out on October 6, 2020. It’s the latest in ERICA S. PERL’s (mostly true) nonfiction early reader series, Truth or Lie, published by Penguin Random House through the Step Into Reading line. Erica comments, “While I love Michael Slack’s art, I’ll confess that I wish the publisher hadn’t selected the Wright brothers (two white guys) as the cover image, since this book is chock-a-block with unsung inventors—many of whom are women and/or people of color. But this is a small gripe—the book turned out great and I hope kids will enjoy reading it (while developing their critical reading skills, which is the not-so-subtle point of the series) and getting excited about inventing. And, if you’re looking for a good election/Presidents’ Day read, may I also suggest Truth or Lie: Presidents!”

Also, both Erica and PAMELA EHRENBERG recently received Artist Fellowship Grants from the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities. If any Guild members who live in the District have questions about applying for DCCAH grants, feel free to reach out to Erica or Pam.

MEG MEDINA’s newest title, Evelyn Del Rey Is Moving Away, was one of eight books selected in October for Libro.fm’s ALC (Audiobook Listening Copy) program. This program provides a sample of complimentary audiobooks to educators, librarians, booksellers, media(reviewers and influencers. Each month a new selection of books is sent to program members for download. Libro.fm is the Indie bookstore answer to Audible. When customers sign up they can select an Indie bookstore to be associated with their account, and that store receives a portion of any audio purchases made.
SUSAN STOCKDALE’s miniature paintings, including *Matilda*, will be featured in *The 87th Annual Exhibition of Fine Art in Miniature* at The Mansion at Strathmore in North Bethesda. Susan warmly invites everyone to the exhibition, to be held from November 21, 2020, to January 9, 2021, with an opening reception on November 22, from 2 to 4 p.m.

LULU DELACRE writes: "Give it to virtual programs! Without them I might have never participated in a panel on Beginning Readers alongside Kevin Henkes, Jerdine Nolen and James Yang, organized by BankStreet BookFest. I’d like to give a shout-out to the *Latinx Kidlit Book Festival*, coming up December 4 and 5. The lineup is fantastic. The amount of resources educators will have access to is astounding. Do check it out!

"Also, I’d like to thank the Guild members who offered their condolences after my mother’s passing on September 20. I was privileged to spend the last days of her life by her side. When she requested I sang to her a lullaby, the same lullaby that my grandma sang to her and my mother sang to me and that appears in my collection *Arroz con Leche*. Her life ended as it began."

LEZLIE EVANS’s latest picture book, *I'm a Feel-o-saur*, looks at the ups and downs of everyday life through the eyes of little dinos like Happy-saurus, Silly-saurus, Angry-saurus and Shy-o-saurus. Young readers will explore all the different feelings everyone has! Published by Upside
Down Books, *I'm a Feel-o-saur* will be released on February 2, 2021, in the United Kingdom and later in 2021 in the United States.

**REMEMBERING COLBY RODOWSKY**

*by Rebecca C. Jones*

When children’s author Colby Rodowsky died at age 88 in early October, the Baltimore *Sun* responded with a full obituary (*Baltimore Sun*). The Guild, though, has its own memories.

We remember the decades of humor, modesty and friendship. We remember that Colby dedicated one of her books—*Lucy Peale*—to friends in the Guild. And we remember the way Colby maintained those friendships even as her health was declining.

Author Phyllis Naylor said she and Colby each moved, with their husbands, “to different places in our ‘elder years.’” Then Colby suggested “we get together somehow, some place, for lunch, and you would think we were mapping out strategic plans for a spy operation, since neither of us liked to drive on busy highways. I thought we had finally settled on a restaurant halfway between us, but somehow those plans fell through. I always wished we could have had that luncheon, but I think she was just too ill to pursue it.

“I loved her droll sense of humor and the practical way she saw the world,” Phyllis continued. “I would have loved to discuss the present state of politics with her, and can only imagine what she would have to say.”

Other Guild members looked to Colby for inspiration for their own writing. Colby was probably best known for her young-adult novels, which often won awards and made recommended reading lists. “Colby
created characters with unique qualities that spoke to the heart,” said author and former Guild member Mary Claire Helldorfer.

Although Colby was best known for her young-adult novels, author and Guild member Claudia Mills admitted to a special fondness for a book aimed at slightly younger readers.

“Colby’s chapter book Not My Dog has been for me the model of an absolutely perfect chapter book--funny, but so deeply poignant and touching,” wrote Claudia from her home in Colorado. Not My Dog received many accolades, Claudia remembered, “including accolades from me in my heart.”

BRANCHING PATHS...

AN OCCASIONAL SERIES ON HOW GUILD MEMBERS’ WORK LEADS TO OPPORTUNITIES

TIES TO NEGRO LEAGE BASEBALL AND THE TUSKEGEE AIRMEN OPEN PATHWAYS

by Michelle Y. Green

Black Lives Matter, especially those of young Black children who are struggling to read. I now sit on the Board of Directors of the American Baseball Foundation. Based in Birmingham, AL, the organization offers weekly sports challenges, vocabulary quizzes and reading of sports books to improve reading skills and online learning. I held my first virtual author talk with the book club, which is using A Strong Right Arm: The Story of Mamie ‘Peanut’ Johnson as the focal point of its programming.

And a creative marketing opportunity that I found initially humorous was released Friday, October 16. The National Bobblehead Hall of Fame and Museum has created Negro Leagues Special Edition bobbleheads of Negro Leagues players, including Mamie “Peanut” Johnson. Mamie is in good company—the same manufacturer created a bobblehead of COVID expert Dr. Anthony Fauci and Vice-President Mike Pence (www.bobbleheadhall.com).
Also, I now am in the second semester of the Johns Hopkins program in “The Teaching of Writing.” My two courses this semester are “Writing for Young Readers” and “Teaching Creative Writing.”

In my first semester, I wrote two short stories that received high praise from my professors, classmates and editors. One of the most published is “Dog Tags,” a short story about my father, who was a triple-rated Tuskegee Airman. The Charles County Arts Alliance and Maryland Writer’s newsletter reprinted “Dog Tags” with my photo in my authentic bomber jacket and a Redtails ball cap. The October issue of the Kaleidoscope newsletter also reprinted “Dog Tags.”


(tree-branch image above from clipart.email)

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Virtual Programs at Politics and Prose

During the pandemic, Politics and Prose continues to host free events for children and adults—virtually. These can be viewed live, in real time, or afterward, as recordings. You can view P&P’s events calendar and register for events at: https://www.politics-prose.com/events. (Advance registration is required to receive link.)