May #bookstagram time with @reedfamilyreads

“I WILL ALWAYS WRITE BACK” the stories of a Zimbabwean boy, @martin.ganda, & his American pen pal, @caitlin_alifirenka, really resonated with my daughters, ages 10 & 12. It’s interesting, because I gave this one a solid 3, but my girls rated it 5[]. Let’s talk about why!

Caitlin is a typical white, privileged American 7th grade girl. Martin is a 12 yr old boy, from the slums of Zimbabwe &
struggles even to find paper & postage with which to correspond to his new American pen pal. Their lives couldn’t be more different, but over the course of several years, not only does their pen pal communication unexpectedly continue, but their friendship turns to a deep affinity for one another, which in turn becomes a promise & responsibility to “always write back”. This is quite remarkable in many ways because while Caitlin is living a typical American teen life, Martin is coming of age in a country with deep political unrest & increasing poverty. There’s little reason for them to continue writing to each other, except for this incredible bond they’ve made.

Early on in their letters, Martin tries to shield Caitlin from his family’s economic struggles, but she keys in & begins to realize the difference she can make by sending Martin small amounts of cash & is shocked when she learns he has to pay to go to school. Caitlin’s parents become invested in their relationship & begin financially supporting Martin’s entire family, providing schooling as well as meeting basic needs. Martin & Caitlin finally meet when Martin arrives in the U. S. to attend college & remain friends to this day.

Throughout, my girls & I enjoyed Martin’s side of the story much more, but we especially loved reading their actual letters to one another. The writing, apart from their letters isn’t amazing, but the repetition of American privilege vs. Martin’s life in Zimbabwe was a valuable perspective for my daughters. I do think this story has a bit of a white savior arc, though both Caitlin & Martin’s lives WERE unmeasurably changed & enriched by one another. An authentic, heartfelt story that I’m so glad we read together & could discuss throughout. Please share your thoughts.”
PICTURE US IN THE LIGHT is a phenomenal own voices YA contemporary that I read in 2 sittings. Danny Cheng is an Asian-American teen in his final year of High School living in the Bay Area of CA. He’s a talented artist, a loving son, the friend everyone wants to have, and he even has his future secured with a scholarship to design school.

This is what we learn in the first hundred pages, but slowly little bits of his messy reality begin to emerge, with
powerful themes of suicide, illegal adoption, immigration and sexuality. We experience Danny’s coming of age just as long-hidden family secrets begin to become clear, leaving Danny grappling with his family’s skeletons, while also navigating an emotional loss within his peer group.

The author’s dedication at the front of the book speaks of the gift that I hope this book will be to teenagers. It reads: “THERE WILL ALWAYS BE SO MUCH DARKNESS IN THE WORLD, BUT MAY YOU NEVER STOP FINDING THE LIGHT AND SHINING IT ALL AROUND YOU- AND FOR ALL THE KIDS LIVING IN THE SHADOWS”. 5

Follow @reedfamilyreads here.

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Place a hold here: CCPL catalog
Is that time again, when we stop to read what Mrs. Lauren Reed has to share with us. For #MiddleGradeMarch she picked Stella by Starlight, written by Sharon M. Draper.
“I think you can probably call us super fans of author, Sharon Draper. ☺️ The author’s middle grade books, such as “Stella by Starlight”, (which we’re more than half way through), are perfectly written for children of my daughters’ ages, telling truth in history with great compassion and hope for a better tomorrow.

Stella is a Black girl around age 11, living in the still segregated south of the 1930s where Jim Crow Laws are in place, and the Klu Klux Klan is an alarmingly growing threat. In the chapters we read this morning, Stella travels with her Papa and three other men in the community to the voter registrar’s office to register ahead of the 1932 presidential election. Stella witnesses the malevolence of voter suppression practices of the time, but also proudly watches her father and other men stand in protest for their constitutional right.

A must read historical fiction for upper elementary/middle grade ages portraying both the Great Depression and the era of Jim Crow. The themes of strong community and empowerment through education are quite inspirational. I would highly recommend “Stella by Starlight” if you’re interested in reading along with Krista @krista_booksandjams this month for #MiddleGradeMarch!”

Follow @reedfamilyreads here.

To place a hold, consult the #chascolibrary catalog: http://bit.ly/2ucFi5p
Lauren Reed and “Letters to my Daughter”, by Maya Angelou

Hello dear friends of the library! March Book Sale is just around the corner and we cannot wait to see you all! For now, come check one of the awesome books that @reedfamilyreads got for 2 dollars at one of our book sales.
“I gave birth to one child, a son, but I have thousands of daughters. You are Black and White, Jewish and Muslim, Asian, Spanish speaking, Native Americans and Aleut. You are fat and thin and pretty and plain, gay and straight, educated and unlettered, and I am speaking to you all. Here is my offering to you.”

I’ve fallen far off my planned Feb. TBR, but right into the warm embrace of Maya Angelou’s, “Letter to My Daughter”. The words above are only on the second page of this book, and by
then I was moved to tears. The writings within offer a gentle reminder to respond and to stand up, to forgive yourself and be honest with others, to keep living, and loving. Each chapter is uniquely inspirational, while being both deeply comforting and affirming. I highly recommend you start here if you’ve never read any of Ms. Angelou’s works and then, share it with someone you love. ❤️

I picked up this gift of a book at the @chslibfriends library book sale for $2! ☺️

Mrs. Jeanell Marvin and her book gems
One of my favorite things about the @chascolibrary on Calhoun in addition to their author events and $1 bookshelves, is their FREE bookshelf. Tucked in a corner in the YA department (my fave) is a little cart with free books-some of which haven’t even been fully released yet.

I’m always blown away by the gems I find. What a great way to serve the community and encourage reading.

Want to serve the Charleston community in your own way? Consider donating books or volunteering at the upcoming book sales. There’s one March 1-2. Head to @chslibfriends to sign up!

Follow @jeanellnicolereads
“When they came for me, I lifted my hands to them, let them wrap the cuffs around my wrists. I did not fight, I did not yell. When they pressed me into the van, there were others who spoke our language—a language of sun and ocean and beauty, a language of birds and merengue. We leaned across the van toward each other and knew the same people back home. Always
Remember, when you are with your people you are home.”

This book is an absolute gem. Jacqueline Woodson lyrically tells the stories of six middle schoolers and demonstrates through the diverse set of characters how by sharing our story, and opening our hearts to the stories of others, we not only find healing, but quite possibly a harboring love.

I loved the characters so much! From Amari’s wisdom and insight on white privilege, to Haley’s confusion about her own biracial identity and the lingering longing for her incarcerated father.

This middle grade novel would make for a great read aloud and is sure to spark meaningful conversations amongst students. It’s so much more than a friendship book, it’s a book about America through the eyes of eleven year olds, and their perspectives are worth reading.

Follow @jeanellnicolereads on Instagram here
Lauren Reed :: review of Just Mercy, by Bryan Stevenson

Mrs. Reed has a review for us, about a book that she got from one of our book sales. Check this out:

“At 15, I watched the movie “Dead Man Walking” with Susan Sarandon and Sean Penn. It was the first movie that I remember
deeply impacting me, and effectively moving me outside of my adolescent self-absorption. I decided in that moment, that I could never understand or support capital punishment.

In “Just Mercy”, Bryan Stevenson emotes a similar response. This incredible work of non-fiction reads like a narrative novel, as he tells the stories of those wrongly convicted, or sentenced to death or excessive punishment. However, we also learn about people who have committed terrible crimes, the author narrating their stories with compassion and relevance. This helps you if not empathize, at least see how the person arrived there and view the whole picture in context and empathy. Especially those we may easily judge or hold bias against like the poor, the mentally ill, or the oppressed. Mr. Stevenson points out that whether it be fear or anger, we are quick to condemn those most helpless and that “EACH OF US IS MORE THAN THE WORST THING WE HAVE EVER DONE”- something, I think, we can all relate to.

The author’s life’s work in founding the Equal Justice Initiative is enormously daunting. He is representing the most vulnerable of society, and up against the beasts of increasing mass incarceration, institutionalized racism and the prison-industrial complex. Fighting for the fair sentenceing, treatment or rehabilitation of the convicted or unfairly accused is needed.

Obviously, this book is infuriating and upsetting, but at the same time, I felt inspired by the author’s determination to stand up for those misrepresented and mistreated. It encouraged me to continue advocating for those who cannot speak for themselves – the vulnerable and voiceless, poor, mentally ill, or disadvantaged. I’m sure I haven’t given this amazing book the credit it deserves, but I hope I’ve at least persuaded you to read it!
Follow her [here](#).

"Just Mercy is an incredible work of non-fiction by the man who founded the Equal Justice Initiative and the lynching memorial that just opened in AL."

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March Book Sale is around the corner and we need book donations. If you have more than 2 boxes, head to 68 Calhoun St. Less than 2 boxes, drop at any #chascolibrary branch. Thank you!

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![Image](#)

**Say hi to Jeanell Marvin!**

Mrs. Jeanell Marvin is a patron of the Charleston County Public Library and we are delighted to inform that now she is also part of our team, sharing thoughts about her readings.
“Wife, momma of four, elementary school teacher. Loves chips and queso. Reading since the age of four and finds libraries to be safe havens. Drawn to character driven novels that result in elevated empathy and the tugging of the
heartstrings. I read daily and love getting my children and students excited about the power of books.”

To stay tuned with Mrs. Marvin has been reading, follow her Instagram page.

Lauren Reed :: TBR Black History Month 2019

Our February TBR with Black History Month in mind. We implement themes of Civil Rights, Black Lives Matter and social justice into our daily learning, so these books were intentionally chosen to both reflect and to celebrate! Anna @never_without_a_book said it best- “Black History Month began as a way for remembering important people and events in the history of the African diaspora. Today and everyday we celebrate the contributions and legacy of African-Americans to the social fabric of the U.S.”

A few of these are re-reads, and I’ll be stocking our morning basket with picture books by Black Authors, but I wanted to highlight a few.

1️⃣ “Born A Crime: Young Readers Edition”. This is the middle grade adaptation of Trevor Noah’s memoir we all loved. This is due out in April from @RandomHouseKids and the girls and I are really looking forward to it!

2️⃣ “What Color is My World” by Kareem Abdul-Jabbar details the
lost history of American American Inventors. What fun!

3️⃣ I’m re-reading Isabel Wilkerson’s “The Warmth of Other Suns” as part of a ginormous buddy read on @Goodreads with @spinesvines and @kate.olson.reads. Join in! I credit this magnificent book for my “wokeness” several years ago.

4️⃣ I’m reading “Americanah” in a buddy read hosted by @idleutopia_reads. I can’t wait. It’s been on my shelf far too long.

5️⃣ The classic “Invisible Man” is intimidating me a bit (because classics), but I’m also reading this with some Instagram buddies, @naomid1120 and @estoericareads, so I’m hopeful!

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This is clearly an ambitious stack, but I’m a bit of a mood reader, so I like to have options. What do you have planned for #BlackHistoryMonth?

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Follow Lauren Reed on Instagram [here](https://www.instagram.com).
An American Marriage

I think I might be the last person on #bookstagram to read *An American Marriage*, but the buzz we all heard in early 2018 is true. (Plus, it was one of Pres. Obama’s top 2018 reads and I just had to give it a go!)
This is a love story that will break your heart; one that can be blamed on many things, but most of all, on a life stolen by the U.S. Government.

Though “An American Marriage” is a work of fiction, the realities of being a #POC and either wrongly accused or unfairly sentenced, lead me to believe that the story line is representative of another sad statistic of the U.S. criminal justice system.

Through the three perspectives of Roy (wrongly accused and imprisoned), his wife, Celestial, an artist from an affluent family and wife of 1 1/2 years, and finally their life long friend, Andre, we get a unique look at the devastating effects of incarceration on a family. Roy’s Father-in-Law in speaking to his daughter’s new boyfriend says best how the tragedy cannot be blamed on one person, but instead on society. “I have one thing to say to you, as a black man: Roy is a hostage of the state. He is a victim of America.”

I’ve heard the ending was somewhat unpopular, but I found it a believable reality. People either grow together or they grow apart, and most are doing the best they can with what they’ve been given.

This is a beautifully written story of love, family, expectation and heartache, but it is so much more. 4.5 🌟🌟🌟🌟

Shout out to @chslibfriends where I got this beautiful hardcover for $5! ☺

~ Lauren Reed is a member of the Charleston Friends of the Library. Follow her personal Instagram account here.