



BRIDGES

“Education is all a matter of building bridges.” Ralph Ellison

A Wiggins Society Newsletter | Spring 2012 | Vol. 4

A Gift to the Wiggins Collection Helps the Library and Young Minds Grow

By Leah Lubman, Paul Cuffee High School Librarian

WHEN I STEPPED INTO the Paul Cuffee High School library as its first librarian, I knew that an exciting year lay ahead of me. Our brand-new space was filled with potential. Immediately I began thinking of all of the collection possibilities, but with so many options I wondered where to start. The Rosalind C. Wiggins Collection is where inspiration began percolating.

This unique collection of books and other resources by and about African Americans offers many ways to support our curriculum and capture our high school students' interests. In building the library, we knew that we needed to find a way to connect our collection to students' lives. This meant selecting and acquiring historical and contemporary materials that our students would relate to and encouraging them to make this collection their own.

I tried to imagine which authors, whose points of view, and what genres our truly diverse community of students might seek out. What knowledge and information would they want to access? What inspiration could they hope to gain? While one student might be inspired by the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., another might find solace in the



Library teaching partner Naomi Morey and ninth grader Betsy St. Vil proudly display new Wiggins Collection additions.

poetry of Nikki Giovanni. The goal was to include a wide enough range that we would have something that would speak directly to each one of our students.

With Wiggins Collection funding, which included individual gifts as well as a grant from the Providence Shelter for Colored Children, we set out to purchase biographies, memoirs, poetry, young adult novels, classic literature, historical works, DVDs, and audio materials. We sought out the voices of both contemporary and legendary writers, including Alice Walker, Maya

Angelou, Ernest Gaines, Sharon Draper, and many more. In the end we were delighted to add 138 new resources to our collection, more than one new book per student!

Thanks to your generosity, this year our high school students and their teachers were able to celebrate Black History Month in style. By February, we thought we were prepared to meet curriculum requests and student interests. Students from all cultural backgrounds and walks of life raced to new Wiggins' selections on the shelves, often exclaiming, “I can't believe we have this!” Suddenly there was overwhelming demand for the collection and it was hard to keep materials on the shelves.

Next month I look forward to seeing our students delve further into this very special collection as some of our ninth graders begin their biography unit. This project will give them an additional opportunity to discover some of the many great African American men and women who have helped shape our world.

It has been truly wonderful to watch our ninth and tenth graders enjoy a whole new world of literary favorites. We look forward to seeing the collection grow still further to keep pace with our students' advancement through twelfth grade. Thanks to you, we're off to a terrific start. 🌀

Libraries are not made; they grow.

-AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

Your Wiggins Society Membership at Work

At Paul Cuffee School, the discussion of African American accomplishments, challenges, culture, and history is not something that happens just during Black History month; it's an integral part of the curriculum.

Your annual membership in the Wiggins Society and your donations to the Wiggins Collections in our school libraries make it possible for teachers to readily incorporate African American biographies, history, poetry, music, literature, art, and more across units of study in all grades.

To nourish the interests that grow from that exposure, our librarians are able to add fascinating new resources to the collections in response to requests for titles on their continually evolving lists of must-reads.

Each spring we are pleased to send you this newsletter with announcements of local events, book reviews, and life-altering stories connected to the beneficiaries of your generosity: Paul Cuffee teachers, students, and families. We hope it will lift you up and inspire you to renew your membership in the Wiggins Society.

Join, renew, or honor someone else with a \$35 gift for membership to the Wiggins Society and have a brand new book added to one of our libraries. A Wiggins Collection bookplate will acknowledge your contribution.

You'll also get an invitation to the Society's annual celebration, during which Society members and friends from the extended community gather for a special evening program and refreshments.

As you can see from the graph on the right, we're close to meeting our \$50,000 fundraising milestone. To help us reach our goal, join or renew by sending in your \$35 tax-deductible contribution payable to "Paul Cuffee School" to The Rosalind C. Wiggins Fund, 459 Promenade Street, Providence, RI 02908.

For more information on the Wiggins Society, including its origins, goals, and membership benefits, see http://www.paulcuffee.org/wiggins_page/wigginsociety.htm.

Walk with the Wind: Lessons in Humanity

by Kathleen O'Halloran

In the land where racial injustice was as common as the air we breathe, during an era when it was as plentiful as rain during rainfall, heroes were hard to find."

So began a Paul Cuffee eighth grader's essay on the life of Huey P. Newton, co-founder of the Black Panther Party. The student's biography wrestled with Newton's dual nature: he was an achiever and activist on the one hand; a man prone to violence and crime on the other. The research and writing for the essay were the precursors to the next part of the assignment: becoming the character.

Tasked with introducing their peers to the lesser known figures of the Civil Rights movement, the eighth graders in Mr. Chen's humanities class posed as historians of the era and researched figures who were their age during the 1960s. They discovered those who marched, those who sang, those who sat-in, and those who were arrested for sitting at the front of the bus.

As part of the unit, students read Ellen Levine's *Freedom's Children: Young Civil Rights Activists Tell Their Own Stories*, a unique work that presents 30 oral histories of individuals who were young and black in the segregated South of the 1950s and 1960s. "The students are really interested in the book because it centers on the experiences of kids their own age," explains Mr. Chen. "They can relate."

Once the students research and write their biographies, they present their figure

through a skit, poster, PowerPoint presentation, or other creative medium. In one memorable presentation, a student created a CD of hip-hop music that he felt was representative of the 1960s.

Another year, several students joined Mr. Chen at a lecture given by U.S. Representative John Lewis, who grew up in the segregated South and who has remained at the forefront of the human rights struggle in the United States. Lewis, the son of sharecroppers in Alabama, was the youngest person to speak at the March on Washington in 1963.

Lewis's stories of his childhood so impressed one Cuffee student that he shared them with his peers during an all-school assembly a few days later:

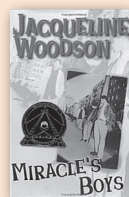
"John Lewis grew up in a tiny shack. It was so small that if you threw a basketball into the front door, it would go out the back. One day he was playing with cousins in the back yard when the wind tried to take the house away. They went inside and grabbed the house and made sure it didn't fly away. John Lewis said we have to 'walk with the wind,' which is a metaphor for us, young people, to change things together in a way that is powerful yet doable."

It is lessons like these that inspire all of us at Paul Cuffee School to continue taking action. We hope you will feel inspired to do the same. ☺

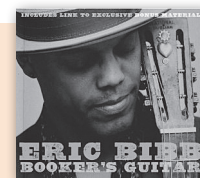
Miracle's Boys is the Coretta Scott King Award-winning story of three young brothers growing up in New York on their own after the death of their parents.

Exploring themes of grief, guilt, and responsibility, the book ultimately celebrates hope and family.

Paul Cuffee sixth graders spent a month studying this and other young adult novels by Jacqueline Woodson, learning about her background, creating a video, and writing to tell her about the profound ways in which her books have touched their lives.



Booker's Guitar and other music by Eric Bibb. With Leon Bibb



for a father, Paul Robeson for a godfather, and John Lewis of the Modern Jazz Quartet for an uncle, it's no surprise that Eric Bibb makes music that's a delight to the ears and solace to the heart. Bibb has made numerous albums

over the past 40 years, including the just-released *Deeper in the Well*. His songs about love, the joys of reading, being alive in this world, and the Black experience are worthy of sharing with anyone who enjoys acoustic blues and folk music.

BOOK AND MUSIC REVIEWS

When You Wish Upon a Star, Makes No Difference Who You Are *Or does it?*

by Edna Attias and Kathleen O'Halloran

On February 15, Paul Cuffee Middle School students participated in Unity Day, an annual school-wide program that celebrates students' uniqueness and diversity. Students' questions about appearance, conformity, and communication led into this year's Unity Day theme: "How media controls stereotypes and self-images."

The day's activities began with a skit, performed by members of the Multicultural Student Union, parodying gender stereotypes and the worries that plague tweens. Students then grappled with *Mickey Mouse Monopoly*, a poignant film that looks at how



Caira Servrien studies how media controls stereotypes and self-images as part of Unity Day, a celebration of uniqueness and diversity.

Disney, one of the world's largest media conglomerates, portrays gender, race, and ethnicity. From Cinderella's tiny waist and flawless lily-white skin to the black hyenas of the *Lion King* spouting street talk and plotting evil, the film explores the subliminal messages that bombard children.

After seeing the movie, all 170 students returned to their Advisories, where they viewed the Warner Brothers film *Happy Feet*. The film depicts the tall and beautiful Emperor penguins as Caucasian and the short and stubby Adele penguins as Latino, with shockingly negative stereotypes. Students reacted to the portrayals and discussed what it feels like to be different.

The day culminated in an exercise that turned stereotypes inside out. Students read and discussed *The Paper Bag Princess*, a story about a princess who saves her captured prince using her wit rather than her feminine wiles. Having tricked the evil dragon to effect the rescue, she rejects the prince, who has proved to be shallow and vain.

Teacher Edna Attias notes that the day's lessons will be long lasting: "My advisory decided that we need to share our insights with our family and friends and spread the word. We can try to limit how much we watch and become better at identifying these subliminal messages when watching movies or television." ☞

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

April 30, 4:00 pm

Conversations in Africana Writing

Voice and Memory in the Poetic Imagination

A reading and dialogue featuring South African Poet Laureate Keorapetse Kgositse, with Chinua Achebe and Brenda Marie Osbey
Brown University Africana Studies Dept.
George Houston Bass Performing Arts Space
- Churchill House

Free and open to the public
http://brown.edu/Departments/Africana_Studies/

May 2, 7:30 pm

Human Nature - The Motown Show

Veterans Memorial Auditorium
Ticket prices: \$31.50 - \$54.50
www.vmari.com

May 9, 12:00 noon - 1:00 pm

Department Colloquium

*"To Serve Before the Mast":
Recovering the Lost Legacy of Rhode Island's Black Seamen*

LaShonda K. Barnett, Independent Scholar
Brown University Africana Studies Dept.
Conference Room - Churchill House
Free and open to the public
http://brown.edu/Departments/Africana_Studies/

May 10, 7:30 pm

FirstWorks Presents: Bobby McFerrin

Veterans Memorial Auditorium
Ticket prices: \$22.00 - \$68.00
www.vmari.com

May 15, 7:00-8:30 pm

5th Annual Rosalind C. Wiggins Celebration: Let Freedom Sing *A Musical Revue of the Civil Rights Era and Reflective Dialogue*

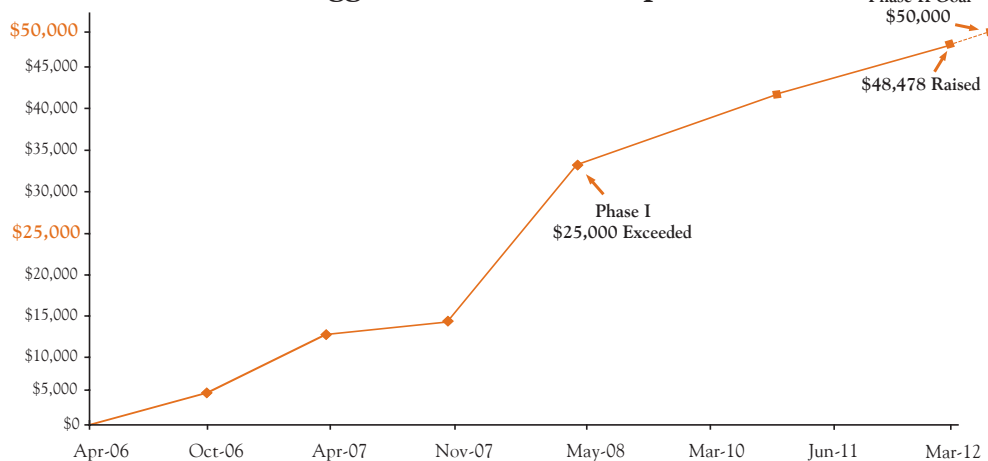
Directed by Robb Dimmick
Featuring Kim Trusty with Paul Cuffee Middle School students
Providence Career and Technical Academy Auditorium
Donations benefit the Rosalind C. Wiggins Endowment at the RI Foundation

May 18, 6:00 pm

We'll Build a School, *A Musical Performance*

The story of Paul Cuffee's life, composed by Bill Harley with Paul Cuffee 4th graders
Directed by Paul Cuffee Integrated Arts Teacher Frances Cruz Candelario
Paul Cuffee Elementary School Gymnasium
459 Promenade Street, Providence, RI

Wiggins Endowment Update



We're almost to our \$50,000 fundraising milestone for the Wiggins Endowment. To help us reach our goal, please send your tax-deductible contribution payable to "Paul Cuffee School" to The Rosalind C. Wiggins Fund, 459 Promenade Street, Providence, RI 02908. You can also donate online at http://www.paulcuffee.org/wiggins_page/wigginsociety.htm.

FIFTH ANNUAL

Rosalind C. Wiggins Celebration

LET FREEDOM SING:
SONGS AND STORIES
OF THE
CIVIL RIGHTS ERA



Written and directed by
Robb Dimmick

Keynote speaker and moderator
Ray Rickman

Performances by
Paul Cuffee Middle School students

with special guests
vocalist Kim Trusty

accompanist
Cathy Clasper-Torch

and percussionist
Michael DeQuattro

Wiggins Society members and friends are invited to "Let Freedom Sing," a world-premier event created specifically for Paul Cuffee School. During this special evening, held in honor of social justice advocate Rosalind ("Posy") Wiggins, guests will be taken through a musical and historical chronology of America's Civil Rights era. An all-female ensemble of Cuffee students will join professional musicians to examine Civil Rights from a feminine perspective.

You will hear the voices of women, black and white, who fought valiantly for African Americans' rights to an equal stake in the American dream. The music is the soundtrack of the Civil Rights era, emblematic of the hope, passion, and urgency of the period. Accompanying the cast are musical director Cathy Clasper-Torch, vocalist Kim Trusty, and percussionist Michael DeQuattro. Ray Rickman, who knew Rosa Parks and Posy Wiggins, will provide historical context and moderate a community dialogue during which audience members will have a chance to share their reflections.

JOIN US FOR THE FIFTH ANNUAL
Rosalind C. Wiggins Celebration

WHEN:
Tuesday, May 15, 7:00-8:30 pm

WHERE:
Providence Career and Technical
Academy Auditorium

41 Fricker St., Providence
(entrance on Cranston St.)

DONATIONS WELCOME!

Proceeds benefit the Rosalind C.
Wiggins Endowment at the
RI Foundation

General seating is limited

RSVP BY MAY 1
to Kathleen O'Halloran at
401-453-2626 x138 or
kohalloran@paulcuffee.org

THE WIGGINS SOCIETY

Virginia M. Adams
Cheryl Albright
Brett Alessi
Jametta Alston, Esq.
Abebech Ayele
Bernice Belt
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Ruth and David Bourns
Elaine A. Brown
Claire Buck and Paula Krebs
Bernard V. Buonanno Jr.
Anne and David C. Burnham
Joanna M. Cain
David Campbell and Patsea Cobb
Drew Carey and Lisa Colburn
Letitia M. and John S. Carter
Elizabeth Cazen
Francesca Coats
Elijah Cobb
Laurel K. and J. Stanley Cobb
Pat and Peter Cobb
Virginia F. Coleman
Jonathan Conklin
Kathy and Keith Cooper
Mary K. Curtin-Clinker
Siobhan Cute
Maria DeCarvalho and A.T. Wall
Robb Dimmick and Ray Rickman
Monique and Barry Doherty
Lynne I. Edmonds
Rosalie Fain
Sophia L. French

Susan and Paul Graseck
Mary Lee Prescott Griffin
Frederick R. Griffiths
Lynn Grilli
Teny Gross
Jean-Pierre Jacquet
Zubeda Jalazai
Christine and Eugene Johnson
Ferdinand Jones
Julia Karahalas and Edward Neubauer
Rosalind and Dr. John Ladd
Sandra and Kenneth Lambert
Anthony and Jane Lancaster
Bonnie L. Lilienthal
Mary Santos Lima
Liane Livi and Eli Upfal
Martha and Stanley Livingston Jr.
Megan Madden
Sarah McMillan
Anne T. McNeece
Victoria S. Means
Joanne Melish
Carol Montrond (honorary)
F. Paul Mooney, Jr.
Elizabeth K. and Douglass H. Morse
Dan Moos
Ria and Joop Nagtegaal
Dorothy Nyman
Maryellen O'Leary
Dr. Mamie Oliver
Harold Parker
Naomi Parker and Tesfaye Meren

Dorothy J. and John V. Patrick
Lisa V. Patrick
Marc V. Patrick
Carolyn V. Pemberton
Katherine Perry
Rob Pike
Carla Ricci
Myrtle Rosario
Elizabeth H. Schumann
Keith Stokes
Babak Taleghani
Dulibel and José Ureña
Arline L. Walker
Lisa B. Waldman
Christine Watts
Peter Wells
Louis and Alona Wilson
Susie Wilson
W. Irving Wolf, Jr.
Carmella Woods



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