



# BRIDGES

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

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## *A Trip to the Home of Nelson Mandela: Paul Cuffee 5th Grader Visits South Africa*

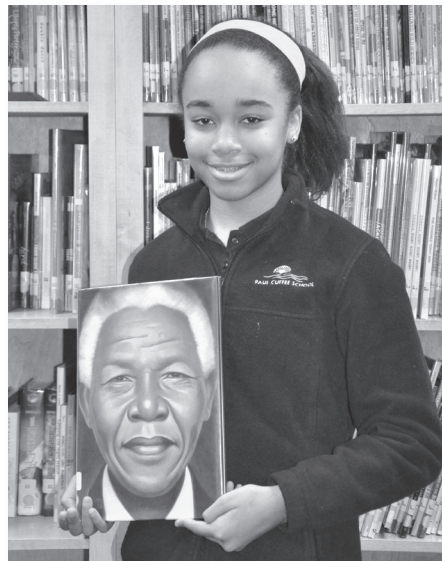
*By Megan Madden, Paul Cuffee School Librarian*

**I**T IS THE TIME OF YEAR TO STUDY heroes at Paul Cuffee School, those “People Who Have Changed the World.” While our students are well acquainted with Martin Luther King Jr., Harriet Tubman, and Rosa Parks, they may not be as familiar with George Washington Carver, Booker T. Washington, or Ida B. Wells. The Wiggins Collection provides students a window into the lives of African American aviators, Olympic medal winners, businessmen and women, and artists who have changed our world forever.

After her family’s recent trip to South Africa, and coincidentally right after the death of Nelson Mandela, Paul Cuffee 5th grader “Cici” read Kadir Nelson’s new biography on Mandela. I sat down with her as she reminisced about her trip and impression of the nation’s response to the passing of their beloved leader.

Cici reflected on her first impressions.

“After a boring 11 hour flight, we finally landed. At first, all of the palm trees reminded me of Florida. The houses looked like they were made by hand and poor people lived in them. All of the fences looked like they were keeping



*PCS 5th grader Cici reads a biography of Nelson Mandela from the Wiggins Collection after having visited the land of Mandela, Cape Town, South Africa.*

people in and they couldn’t go where they wanted. That made me feel sad.

I found a lot of the South African customs a surprise. They drive on the left side of the road! When we were walking, we didn’t know which way to look for oncoming cars. They eat with their hands in restaurants and you don’t pick from a

menu. They just give you whatever they’re cooking! But as strange as some of the customs seemed, I felt like I belonged there because my birth family is from South Africa.

Our visit to District Six made a big impression on me. It was a place where some people from Cape Town lived before apartheid. There, we met a man named Noor who worked at the District Six Museum. He used to live in District Six and wrote a book about his experience: Noor’s Story - My Life in District Six. He shared a story from the book with us about pigeons he set free when he was forced to move. He thought they would come back, and one day, while driving to work, he saw the pigeons back at the old house, which had been completely demolished. It was as if they were expecting him to be there.

We also visited the prison where Mandela was held for all those years. I saw where he did hard labor knocking rocks into dust every day. The Robben Island Museum houses rocks from the pit. After the prisoners were freed, they all took a rock from the pit and put it in the museum to show visitors how hard they had to work. They didn’t want it to be forgotten.

*(continued on page 3)*



"My mom came from a long line of 'uppity women,'" as Posy's daughter, Patsea Cobb, good-naturedly reminisces in the newly-released video, [Posy Wiggins ~ Paul Cuffee ~ and Justice](#).

And true that is. Posy was the great-granddaughter of abolitionist and suffragist, Julia Ward Howe, who is perhaps most famous for penning the poem that became "The Battle Hymn of the Republic."

Though Posy's causes may have differed from those of her famous ancestor, she set her sights and scholarship on our school's namesake, Paul Cuffee, a black Quaker sea captain, and edited and published [Paul Cuffee's Logs and Letters](#).

A tireless advocate for social justice, Posy spent her energies on African-American studies. She obtained her M.A. and later taught African-American studies even up through her retirement years. At her last residence - Laurelmead, an independent living facility - she organized book groups and facilitated discussion on race relations.

Upon her death, Posy's library was donated to the Paul Cuffee School and an endowment was set up to keep the Wiggins Collection, a collection of books by and about African Americans, growing. Our goal is for the endowment, managed by the Rhode Island Foundation, to top \$100,000. We are over half-way there. To contribute to the Rosalind C. Wiggins Endowment, visit [www.paulcuffee.org](http://www.paulcuffee.org), click "Donate Now" on the home page, and enter Wiggins Endowment in the description field.

For a more in-depth glimpse at the life of Rosalind C. "Posy" Wiggins and her posthumous gift to Paul Cuffee School, view [Posy Wiggins ~ Paul Cuffee ~ and Justice](#), available on our website: [www.paulcuffee.org](http://www.paulcuffee.org).

## Learning from History

By Megan Thoma, Humanities Teacher

**T**HIS WINTER, ALL OF THE 11th and 12th grade students and staff attended a private screening of the Academy Award winning movie *12 Years a Slave* based on the true story of Solomon Northrup, a free black man from New York State who was abducted and sold into slavery.

Modeled after the Middle School's Diversity Day, we met in small groups in the morning to review important historical and ethical ideas explored in the movie, traveled to see the movie, and then came back to school to discuss issues around race, power, and equality. Some students also had an opportunity to meet and speak with Clifford Brown, a Solomon Northrup scholar and author. A handful of seniors expanded upon their experience by reading Solomon's memoir during February's winter break. Below are highlights and reactions from students about the trip.

"One thing I took away from this movie is that slavery isn't just African American's history, it's AMERICA's history. Also, the movie wasn't centered around slavery and what was done but on what wasn't done, the bystander effect!" [Africa Smith](#)

"The day was a simple way to teach the whole community a valuable lesson. It also helped us bond more. We learn through experiences we'll never forget."  
[Giandra Rivas](#)

"My favorite part of going to see '12 Years a Slave' was how it actually gave me more ideas about segregation, on what people of color actually went through, and it made me appreciate the freedom that I have today and not take it for granted." [Ismatu Turay](#)

"I learned from the movie that the pain that he [Solomon] went through was huge, yet he stood tall and stood his ground. The amount of hatred at that time was abusive. How do you take a free man and make him into a slave? I learned that a lot of African Americans went through this. Some were strong, and some lost who they were."  
[Sylvianie Quezada](#)

"We need to be aware of how racist society was back then, how it is now, how we can change that, and how we can help or do our parts to change racism. It brought us together as a serious, good, mature community and it was nice to hear everyone say that they enjoyed the movie." [Ormarie Colon](#)

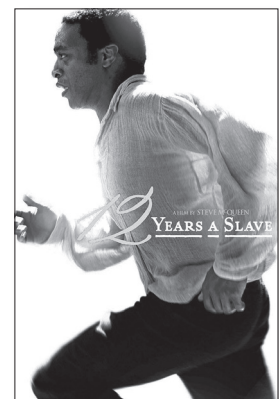
"My favorite part of going to see '12 Years a Slave' was coming together as a community to watch a really moving movie...even after the movie was over, the questions and amount of students that showed up to hear the speaker [Clifford Brown] was really awesome." [Kehinde Oladosu](#)

"What I learned from the movie was that if you have hope and faith that something will happen - it will eventually happen."  
[Taiwo Oladuso](#)

"I think it is important to have special days like this one because it was a very moving, inspirational experience. Times like this is what will bring us together, while also letting us relive the moments of such a hard time."  
[James Edwards](#)

"My favorite part of going to see '12 Years a Slave' was the movie itself. '12 Years a Slave' was impacting and insightful. It gave me goosebumps to see this story unfold."  
[Delio Hernandez](#)

"I think it is important as a community to experience things like this because it brings us closer and gives a sense of depth. Being able to give insight and receive different opinions is very enriching and makes a person well rounded." [Heidi Silverio](#)



We may sit in our library and yet be in all quarters of the earth.

- JOHN LUBBOCK

Even though Mandela had died the month before our visit, they had a big New Year's party where they sang songs and lit fireworks. It seemed like the whole city of Cape Town was there. Pictures of Nelson Mandela were everywhere, huge pictures drawn on buildings. All the cab drivers were talking about him, about how he did things to help their country. The people of Cape Town still looked happy after he died, like they were celebrating him.

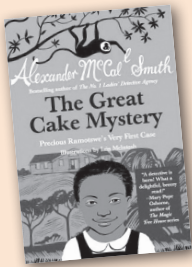
I recently read the book Nelson Mandela, by Kadir Nelson from the Rosalind Wiggins Collection. The book was really sad because his dad died and he got separated from his mom. He always stayed focused though. He was focused in high school and in college, trying to fight against apartheid. He wanted freedom for everyone.

I was surprised to learn that Mandela wore disguises to continue the fight against apartheid. He went to Europe and saw how everyone had freedom there. Then, when he went back to Cape Town, he got caught and put in prison. Mandela was the first black president of South Africa. Before he was president, he did a lot of things to help Cape Town. People wanted more from him, so they chose him to be president.

Mandela was a fighter - not physically, but he fought by talking to people. I think that is why he was so important.

Our trip wasn't just about travel or geography or family or history. It was all of it, rolled into one." ☞

## LIBRARIAN'S PICKS



### **The Great Cake Mystery** by Alexander McCall Smith (2012)

For fans of the beloved smart and sassy detective Precious Ramatswe, McCall Smith, author of the

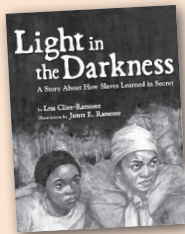
bestselling The No. 1 Ladies'

Detective Agency series, begins a series for the younger set. Precious Ramatswe gets her first case, filled with as many charming characters and quirky plot twists as the original series. Botswana's most hailed lady detective is solving her very first case ever. When Poloko, a chubby boy at school is the prime suspect for a rash of thievery at school, Precious sets out to use her sleuthing skills to prove that things are not as they seem. A sure hit for young mystery lovers!

### **Something to Prove: The Great Satchel Paige vs. Rookie Joe DiMaggio** by Robert Skead (2013)

The year is 1936 and Joe DiMaggio was being considered for a shot at the big leagues with the New York Yankees. To find out what DiMaggio was really made of, Yankees manager Ed Barrow put DiMaggio up against the best pitcher he knew - Satchel Paige, who was not allowed to play in the

major leagues because of the color of his skin. A game of all white players against a team of black players with Satchel Paige was set up to test DiMaggio. With kinetic illustrations by Floyd Cooper, Something to Prove is a great sports picture book about more than just baseball. Four thousand fans showed up to watch the landmark game where the rookie would have to prove himself, and Satchel Paige would shed light on the racism of segregated baseball.



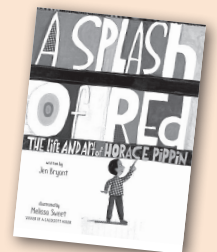
### **Light in the Darkness: A Story About How Slaves Learned in Secret** by Lesa Cline-Ransome (2011)

Based on historical fact with beautiful watercolor illustrations, Light in the Darkness tells the story of a "pit school," a large hole dug in the ground and covered with brush where slaves would gather at night to learn how to read. These secret "schools" were held in the dark of night so that slaves could pass on the secret power of the alphabet and the written word in an attempt to empower other slaves with literacy. Anyone caught trying to learn how to read would earn lashings from their masters, who told the slaves they were too dumb to learn. This is a story about brave

souls, young and old, who risked their lives for the chance to learn to read.

### **A Splash of Red: The Life and Art of Horace Pippin** by Jen Bryant (2013)

Accompanied by the vibrant illustrations of Caldecott honor illustrator Melissa Sweet, this picture book biography traces the life of the artist from childhood, when the young Pippin began drawing on scraps of paper with discarded charcoal. When he was in eighth grade, his father left his family and he had to quit school to work. Even while working at shoveling coal or working in an iron factory, he still made time for his art. After being wounded in World War I and losing most of the use of his right arm, he struggled back to his love of art; it took him three years to finish his first painting. Depicting the continual perseverance and joy of this self-taught artist who later became acclaimed in the professional art world, young artists will be inspired by Pippin's story. This title was a Robert F. Sibert honor book, and won this year's Orbis Pictus Award for Outstanding Nonfiction for Children.



## **Long Walk to Freedom Educator's Guide (2014)**

On December 5, 2013 the world said goodbye to a seminal figure in history. Almost as soon as his passing was announced, the media began to wonder, "How will Nelson Mandela's legacy be remembered?" For educators struggling with this question, a number of great resources have recently become available. One in particular, created by the Weinstein Company and connected to the film *A Long Walk to Freedom* (<http://weinsteinco.com/mandela-education/>), holds particular appeal.

Created with the help of teachers, archivists, and historians, the Long Walk to Freedom Educator's Guide works with the film of the same title to look at the history of South Africa, moving from apartheid into a democratic society. Educators and students, in almost any subject area, may use this tool in examining the life and contributions of Mandela. Having the film also provides students with a dramatization of key events, helping to bring his struggles and success into sharper focus. At the same time, the guide offers activities and probing questions linked to clips from the film like, "What are the qualities of good leadership? What is the cost benefit of violent vs. nonviolent methods of protest? What is the importance of culture and how did it impact Mandela's life?" and many more.

Films can inspire and create lasting imagery. They provide educators with important opportunities for discussion. They help to make powerful figures relatable. As stated by the study guide's creators, "We hope you agree that it is a critical story to share with young

people today, particularly as they seek to make sense of violence and ongoing conflict in their own communities and around the world." We also hope that Mandela's journey, and that of South Africa, might help to inspire our youth; to find greatness within themselves, greatness that lies within all of us.

### **For more web based resources check out:**

**Mandela's Struggle In Posters:** [http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2013/12/05/world/africa/Mandelas-Struggle-in-Posters.html?\\_r=1&](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2013/12/05/world/africa/Mandelas-Struggle-in-Posters.html?_r=1&)

**English and Literacy Lessons:** <http://www.oxfam.org.uk/education/resources/nelson-mandela>

**The Life of Nelson Mandela - Interactive Timeline:** <http://www.nelsonmandela.org/interactive-timeline>

**BBC Film Archive on Mandela:** [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/people/nelson\\_mandela](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/people/nelson_mandela)

**Recording of Speech at Sabotage trial:** <http://www.theguardian.com/world/video/2013/dec/05/nelson-mandela-1964-speech-audio>

**Mandela's Life In Pictures:** <http://www.theguardian.com/world/gallery/2013/dec/05/nelson-mandela-life-in-pictures>

**Tributes From World Leaders:** <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/05/nelson-mandela-death-world-reaction>

