



BRIDGES

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

A Wiggins Society Newsletter | Winter Edition 10-11 | Vol. 3

Harlem: A Journey to Remember

By Ariana L. Wohl, Paul Cuffee School Humanities Teacher

When Louis Armstrong belted out the lyrics “Drop me off in Harlem / anywhere in Harlem” to a toe-tapping jazz melody by Duke Ellington, he was singing for a generation of Americans – mostly African-Americans – who had found their way to Harlem, New York between 1910-1935. They arrived excited, eager to pursue their dreams and find community.

Those years are now recognized as the Harlem Renaissance, the time when this neighborhood blossomed into the Black American cultural capital of the world. It was the center of musical, artistic, and literary innovation, as well as the heart of a swelling civil rights movement. In Harlem, jazz-age music and art transformed and began to integrate people well before the laws of segregation were officially dismantled.

Thanks to a generous contribution from the Fain Family Foundation, the entire Paul Cuffee School seventh grade class had the very special opportunity to visit Harlem in January in support of the Humanities curriculum unit on the Harlem Renaissance. Prior to the class trip, students poured over the Wiggins Collection as they researched and wrote biographies on the movement’s leaders and analyzed original works. Their studies also connected to their visual art



Outside of Harlem Hospital, Marco Velasquez takes observational notes on a mural entitled “The Pursuit of Happiness” by Vertis Hayes.

classes and served as a coda to last year’s middle school musical, *Jazz Is a Rainbow*.

Good fortune slipped this interdisciplinary field trip in between two January snowstorms. Students and their teachers eagerly braved the cold for a chance to see Harlem’s cultural and historical sights up close. Being on the city streets allowed them to imagine life there during the 1920-30s. They also gained a better understanding of how the legacy of the era lives on today in this New York City neighborhood.

One student, Jonathan Batista, reflected, “I learned that a lot of our mentors [movement leaders] inspired art made today.” His classmate, Daniel Louis added, “What I’ve learned is that the Harlem Renaissance helped make Harlem the place it is today. Also, it has rich history to inspire others to keep doing well in school so they can make an even bigger difference.”

Highlights for students included finding places where the leaders of the Renaissance movement lived and worked; spending time inside the Schomburg Center for Studies in Black Culture; examining various provocative murals, including Vertis Hayes’s “The Pursuit of Happiness” outside Harlem Hospital, as well as original Aaron Douglas paintings; seeing Michael Jackson’s star at The Apollo Theater; learning about statesman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. under the statue representing his likeness; viewing contemporary art exhibits at the Studio Museum of Harlem; exploring part of the City College of New York campus near Morningside Heights and Hamilton Heights (once nicknamed “Sugar Hill” for its ritzy residences); glimpsing Yankee Stadium; and of course enjoying a rich Caribbean and soul food buffet dinner before heading back to Providence.

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A Window and a Mirror: Reflections on the Wiggins Collection

by Megan Madden, Paul Cuffee School Librarian

In the days leading up to Martin Luther King Day, teachers came into the library asking for biographies of the civil rights leader. Students raised lots of questions during class discussions. Who was he? Why do we have this day off? Why is he so important? From the library they borrowed Faith Ringgold's *My Dream of Martin Luther King*, illustrated with her signature stained-glass colored paintings. They read David Adler's picture book about Dr. King to learn all about his childhood and thought about his moving speeches after reading Doreen Rappaport's *Martin's Big Words*. Important discussions were brought to life with books from the Rosalind C. Wiggins Collection.

Our students don't borrow books from the Wiggins Collection just because they are fun, independent reading choices like the *Ronde and Tiki Barber* football adventures or the *Sugar Plum Ballerina* series by Whoopi Goldberg. They most often use the Wiggins Collection because it directly supports the curriculum and connects to classroom units of study. Wiggins books make it possible for our students to research the Underground Railroad, Reconstruction, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Harlem Renaissance. Students learn about the important American men and women who helped to create our collective history. The Wiggins Collection is key to answering essential questions that arise from thoughtful discussion: "Who was he or she?" Why was he or she so important?"

In the spring, first grade faculty teach a unit on Multiple Intelligences. Students learn how people are smart in different ways. Some are good at music, dance, or art, while others are talented at science, numbers, or working well with other people. Students talk about the different strengths of people like Helen Keller, Cesar Chavez, and Frida Kahlo. They will use the Wiggins Collection to learn how Wangari Maathai was nature-smart and taught the people of Kenya how to plant trees and care for the land. In library classes, we will read *Stealing Home: Jackie Robinson Against the Odds*, and learn how Jackie Robinson was not just sports-smart, but inspired a whole segregated nation with one race against a ball thrown from a pitcher's mound in the World Series of 1955.

At the middle school, before students study the Harlem Renaissance, they learn about Reconstruction and the Great Migration – these watershed moments in history which were the origins of that creative explosion. Students then select a biography of a "mentor" – an important figure of the Harlem Renaissance who will guide them through the era and whose works they will interpret. Students learn about the poems of Claude McKay, the vocals of Billie Holiday, the paintings of Jacob Lawrence, and the



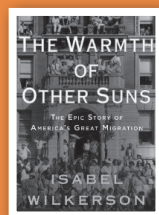
First grade students Nashan Jennins and Cassidy Barrett enjoy books from the Wiggins Collection every week.

political writings of W. E. B. Du Bois. By the time students reach the 8th grade, they have the background knowledge to understand the violence and the triumph of the Civil Rights Movement. They will use the Wiggins Collection again to learn about lesser-known activists like John Lewis and Claudette Colvin and connect their knowledge to social justice issues around the globe.

Our next step is to keep these important conversations going at our high school, now that our first class of freshmen is there. The high school library shelves house a small but growing collection of works from Rosalind Wiggins' personal collection. We need your donations to the Wiggins Fund in order to purchase current, at grade-level materials by and about African Americans. In order to support the curricular units that will be taught at our new high school, we need to keep our collections at all three locations current and flush with materials that support classroom work that builds on the knowledge our students acquire each year.

When students ask important questions, we need to be able to provide the best books and resources available to help guide them to answers, and, more importantly, to their own conclusions. The Wiggins Collection isn't just a book or DVD on a shelf; it's a window and a mirror with which students can discover who they are and how developing their own intelligence and expanding their awareness will contribute to the world they will inherit someday. 📖

BOOK REVIEWS:



The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration was written by Isabel Wilkerson, former Chicago bureau chief of The New York Times and the 1994 winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Feature Writing. Her 2010 poetic recounting of Blacks migrating from 1915 to 1970 to the North from the South is fresh, and necessary to understanding post-slavery American history.

Harlem: A Journey to Remember (continued from cover)

One of the most moving and poignant moments on the trip occurred in the Schomburg Center when student Taylor Easterling read an illustrated version of the Langston Hughes poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" from the Wiggins Collection. Taylor stood above Hughes's ashes and inside the Cosmogram, an art installation on the floor that honors Hughes and Schomburg, inspired by the same poem. Her teacher, Lance Comeau, remembered, "We all just listened silently to the powerful words and Taylor's commanding voice."

For some students, this was their first time ever in New York City. Not only did they make connections to art and history, but they also had the opportunity to generally explore and question another urban American community outside of Rhode Island. Seventh graders made observations about the different architecture and common community problems like waste removal, and they learned some basics about the NYC public schools.

Are you interested in helping PCS students get to Harlem next year or in supporting the Harlem Renaissance section of the Wiggins Collection? We would love to hear from you! Please contact Julia Karahalidis, Director of Institutional Advancement, at 401-453-2626 x118 or email jkarahalidis@paulcuffee.org.

The tour was led by Humanities teacher Ariana Wohl and Shivohn Garcia, former PCS teacher and American Studies Ph.D. candidate who is currently constructing the history of Jesus Colón, a Puerto Rican-born activist, writer, and contemporary of Arturo Schomburg. "Part of my inspiration comes from the questions students at Cuffee have asked about Latinos, literature, and social movements," Ms. Garcia explained.

Parent chaperone Kathy Cooper remarked later, "What a fun, informative, transformative experience! You all are doing a great job in teaching and building a strong community at Paul Cuffee School." 🍌

Wiggins Endowment Update



We're \$7,500 away from meeting 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 www.paulcuffeeschool.org.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Feb. 25 - April 3

Yellowman

By Dael Orlandersmith
Directed by Laurie Carlos

Trinity Repertory Company
201 Washington Street
Providence, RI 02903
Times vary
www.trinityrep.com

Mon., March 21

"Tropical Zion: General Trujillo, FDR, and the Jews of Sosúa"

Author talk with Dr. Allen Wells about the historic and political significance of admitting 750 Jewish refugees to the Dominican Republic during World War II.

Paul Cuffee School Gymnasium
459 Promenade Street
Providence, RI 02908
Time: 7:00-8:00 p.m.
www.paulcuffeeschool.org
RSVP to 401-453-2626 x118 or jkarahalidis@paulcuffee.org

Sun., April 3

Pianist Awadagin Pratt

Sapinsley Hall - Rhode Island College
600 Mount Pleasant Avenue
Providence, RI 02908
Time: 2:30 p.m.
www.ric.edu/pfa/pas.php

Tues., May 10

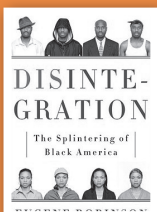
Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre

Providence Performing Arts Center
220 Weybosset Street
Providence, RI 02906
Time: 7:30 p.m.
www.ppacri.org

April 28

Wiggins Celebration with Special Guest Speaker Keith Stokes

Paul Cuffee School Gymnasium
459 Promenade Street
Providence, RI 02908
Time: 7:00-8:30 p.m.
www.paulcuffeeschool.org
RSVP to 401-453-2626 x118 or jkarahalidis@paulcuffee.org



Disintegration: The Splintering of Black America, by Pulitzer Prize winning author Eugene Robinson, is a groundbreaking book that explodes the myth that there is a unified Black agenda led by an agreed upon group of Black leaders. Robinson convincingly documents, through personal experiences and critical observation(s), a new understanding of race in America. He establishes that Black America now comprises four distinct groups reflecting class divisions that have not been openly discussed in the Age of Obama. A must read for anyone interested in questioning 21st Century community, invisibility and assimilation in the U.S.

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Carmella Woods

Join Us for the 4th Annual

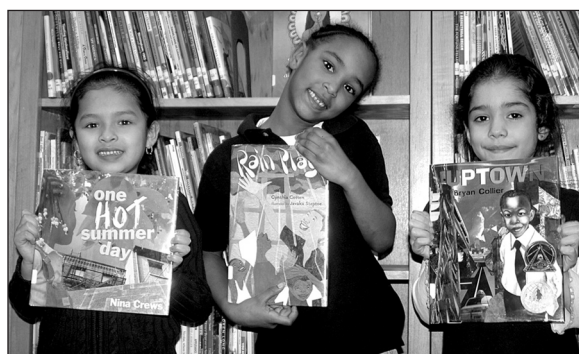
Wiggins Celebration Event

April 28th from 7:00 - 8:30 p.m.

Paul Cuffee School, 459 Promenade St., Providence, RI 02908

*Featuring a Special Presentation on Africa's Children in
18th-Century Rhode Island by Keith Stokes, Director of the
Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation*

How did African teens, who arrived in Rhode Island as forced immigrants, contribute to America's history, culture and economic development? If you enjoyed John Edgar Wideman's talk on his book *Brothers and Keepers* (2009), or our facilitated discussions of Claudette Colvin's role in the Montgomery bus boycotts (2010), then you won't want to miss the April 28th 2011 Wiggins event! Highly recommended for adults and youth 12+, this event is free and open to the public. Youth must be accompanied by a responsible adult. *Seating is limited. RSVP to 401-453-2626 x118 or via email to jkarahalas@paulcuffee.org.*



Your Wiggins
Society
Membership
Creates
Possibilities!

Promote African-American art, literature and history. Encourage reading. Enhance learning. Empower students. Honor the accomplishments of Black writers, scientists, artists, entrepreneurs, civic leaders and athletes. Make an impact on the lives of urban youth, who benefit from your support, every day.

That is what the Wiggins Society does! As a member, you are a vital part of achieving our goals to grow the Wiggins Collection of books and other library media in the Paul Cuffee School libraries every year. The heart of our vibrant School, the library is where more than 500 students discover new interests, satisfy their intellectual curiosity and fulfill their academic requirements every week. Your Wiggins Society membership is a commitment to Providence students to preserve, cherish and make accessible the contributions and heritage of African Americans.

Each year we ask you to join us in carrying forward the mission Posy Wiggins cared so deeply about. Renew your membership or become a new member, and join us as we build a comprehensive, eclectic, modern, age-appropriate collection of books by and about African Americans in the Paul Cuffee School's libraries.

By joining, renewing or honoring someone else with a gift of a Wiggins Society membership, a brand new book will be added to the Paul Cuffee School library with a Wiggins Collection bookplate inside to acknowledge your contribution. Annual membership brings you the Society's newsletter, *Bridges*, and 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. Become a member or renew your commitment by making an online donation at www.paulcuffeeschool.org or by sending in your membership application with your check payable to Paul Cuffee School. ☺

For more information about how to become part of the great work that Wiggins Society members are supporting, please call 401-453-2626 x118 or email jkarahalas@paulcuffee.org.



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