



BRIDGES

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

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Wiggins Collection Offers Role Models for Cuffee Students

By Leah Lubman, Paul Cuffee School Librarian



Guest speaker, Torrey Maldonado, speaks frankly about his youth surrounded by poverty and violence and finding salvation in teaching and writing.

THIS YEAR, NEW YORK City teacher and author, Torrey Maldonado, spent an inspiring day with our middle school students. His first book, *Secret Saturdays*, is based on his experiences growing up in Brooklyn’s Red Hook projects. It addresses the challenging issues of bullying, loyalty, friendship, and becoming a man.

Thanks to the Wiggins Society, we were able to purchase copies of *Secret Saturdays* for each advisory so the whole middle school was reading it and preparing for Maldonado’s visit. These reading groups encourage students to share their thoughts on issues they wouldn’t otherwise discuss. They also give teachers the chance to discuss the

writing process and help students develop new vocabulary.

Once familiar with *Secret Saturdays*, our students’ enthusiasm for Maldonado’s arrival was palpable. They cheered for a book they love, an author they admire, and the thrill of seeing themselves represented in someone famous.

When Maldonado took to the stage, he spoke with incredible candor about his experience growing up surrounded by poverty and violence. He talked about the struggles of breaking the cycle and finding his own salvation in writing. Many of our students were moved by his words. After hearing him speak, Christina Russell (6th

grade) wrote, “[Like Mr. Maldonado], I hope to become a role model for other people.”

Christina’s aspiration strikes at the core of the Wiggins Collection’s role in our libraries: to help students become role models. However, students cannot become role models without first having their own. On the day of Torrey’s visit I know many of our students gained a new role model. For those still looking, I see students continuing to find examples in our Wiggins Collection - those fighting for social justice, writing poetry, working as successful professionals, and showing our students a world of possibilities. ∞

I remember feeling and thinking, “Someday life will be different for me. Someday life will be different for me.” You might say I was praying to get strength. I did that a lot. Then my prayer became “I’m going to make it, come back here, and get others out.”

-TORREY MALDONADO



A Moving Force: The Origin of the Wiggins Collection at Paul Cuffee School

Rosalind C. "Posy" Wiggins was a force to be reckoned with, as her friends remember her. A valiant defender of civil rights and advocate for social justice, she spent her adult life teaching and writing, and collecting and editing the logs and letters of Paul Cuffee, our namesake - an 18th century African-American ship's captain, trader, humanitarian, and activist for social justice.

Upon her death, her family donated her vast collection of books by and about African Americans to the Paul Cuffee School and thus began the special collection in each of our libraries known as the *Rosalind C. Wiggins Collection*.

Today, the Collection numbers in the thousands of age-appropriate books and is ever growing.

If you would like to contribute to the *Wiggins Collection*, your contribution in increments of \$25 will purchase a book for the Collection and a bookplate with your or a loved one's name on the frontispiece.

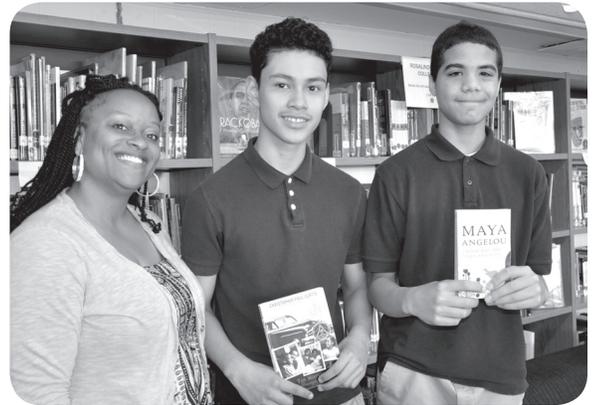
A gift to the *Wiggins Endowment* will ensure that our library shelves are stocked with books and resources by and about African Americans in the years to come.

As we celebrate Posy's life and remember her contribution to literature, education, and social justice, we honor her spirit and determination in a short documentary film about her life. Visit www.paulcuffee.org/academics/libraries/special-collections/ to watch the trailer.

Wiggins Collection Favorites Connect Middle Schoolers with the Civil Rights Era

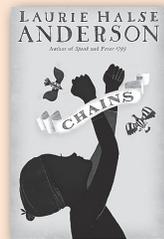
GEANISE LOVE, MIDDLE School Language Arts teacher, (at left in photo) noted *The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963* and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* as 7th grade favorites because students could connect them to the Harlem Renaissance unit that they covered in Humanities class. "The students participated more in class," she remarked, "because those books built great background knowledge and made great connections to class discussions. It also enabled them to write more in both Language Arts and Humanities classes because they actually put themselves in the era and could relate to the experiences that each protagonist faced. It's apparent in the students' writing that

the more connections to their life, the easier it was for them to move beyond the text. Children learn and share through experiences and the more exposure the better." ☞



PCS 7th graders Kevin Cruz and Sebastian Peña relive the era of segregation and discrimination as they delve into Christopher Paul Curtis' historical fiction, *The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963* and Maya Angelou's autobiography, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*.

LIBRARIAN'S PICKS



Chains by Laurie R. King (2008)

This compelling historical fiction novel explains the lengths we can go to be rid of our chains, both physical and spiritual. Told through the voice of a thirteen-year-old girl, Isabel, as she begins her own fight for freedom.

No Crystal Stair by Lewis Michaux (2012)

This is the inspirational tale of Michaux's National Memorial African Bookstore. Set during the great depression, it became a meeting place for African American intellectuals from all walks of life. The author uses text and mixed media to bring to life thirty-six different voices from this rich time period.

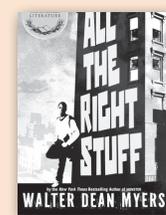
Jefferson's Sons by Kimberly Brubaker

Bradley (2011) What if Thomas Jefferson was your father and no one was allowed to

talk about it? Told through the eyes of one of Sally Heming's children, *Jefferson's Sons* looks at what life as a slave and son of one of America's most famous figures might have been like.

X: A Biography of Malcolm X by Jessica

Gunderson (2013) This eye catching graphic novel serves to introduce a new generation of readers to Malcolm X. Conversation text



boxes in yellow include direct quotes and a useful recap of major events is provided at the end.

All The Right Stuff by Walter Dean Myers (2012)

When sixteen-year-old Paul decides to take a summer job at a Harlem soup kitchen, he is unprepared for how the summer will re-shape him. Eighty-four-year-old Elijah, who runs the kitchen, encourages Paul to contemplate the "heavier" things in life, reminding the reader that you can't expect to see change unless you create it.



Head of School, Michael Obel-Omia, Robert Meeropol, J. Stanley Cobb, Maria Monteiro and Jenn Meeropol discuss Meeropol's memoir, *An Execution in the Family*, after his lecture and book signing.

A Wiggins Society Lecture by Robert Meeropol at Paul Cuffee School

AS PART OF THE Wiggins Society Lecture Series, Robert Meeropol, the younger son of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, shared his life's odyssey with guests of Paul Cuffee School. At the age of six, Robert Meeropol lost his parents, as they were executed by the United States Government for "conspiring to steal the secret of the atomic bomb." Later, Mr. Meeropol and his brother were adopted by Abe Meeropol, a teacher and songwriter, who penned the most important song of the 20th century, "Strange Fruit."

Instead of being defeated by his challenges, Mr. Meeropol has used them to give meaning to his life. For more than 40 years, he has been a progressive activist, author, and public speaker. In 1990, Mr. Meeropol founded the Rosenberg Fund for Children, which provides for the

educational and emotional needs of both targeted activist youth and children whose parents have been harassed, injured, jailed, lost jobs, or died in the course of their activities. In more than 20 years of work, the organization has awarded more than \$4.5 million in grants to benefit hundreds of children.

After the lecture, Mr. Meeropol signed copies of his memoir, *An Execution in the Family*, published in 2004 on the 50th anniversary of his parents' execution.

Perhaps the most stirring testament to Mr. Meeropol's strength is that he can speak with such conviction and act with such clarity. He has dedicated his life to assisting those children who are voiceless, defenseless, and powerless. As one audience member noted, "He is a man of great integrity." ∞

HUMANITY

by Tatyana Ean, PCS 7th grader

Freedom.

We write it
We sing it
We paint it
We preach it
We pray.
For what?

Humanity.

A change in the world,
what we want to see.
a world free of evil
a sidewalk free of red
fewer people violently dead.
We fear... what?

Death and crimes
a chaos that controls our minds.
We search for a meaning
Of which word?

Life.

And for what reason?
To know all of its secrets
and live the fullest lives.
But, will the world change
if we know all of its secrets?
Will death and pain hurt less if we seek it?

Generations to come
and generations to go
like fish that swim to and fro.
If we know what will come,
we will be prepared.
But what is life without surprise?
without a bump in the road?
Then the road will be paved for us,
ready to go.

But how will you learn
if no mistakes are made?
We will learn from our teachers
and they will aid.

And what about life?
Well, what about life?
How can we live life
if there's nothing to learn?





THE SPRING WIGGINS EVENT

La Música de Mi Gente

CELEBRATES A VIBRANT CULTURE

This spring's musical, *La Música de Mi Gente*, written, directed, and produced by Robb Dimmick, celebrated the resplendent Latino culture in song, dance, and poetry.

The musical, performed by a talented ensemble of middle school students and enhanced by drummers from the Upper School Drum Squad, featured songs such as "Waiting for Life," "America," "We

Dance," "Yo Te Daré," "El Pueblo Unido Jamas Sera Vencido," "Gracias a la Vida," "Day After That," "Guantanamo," and "De Colores."

The full house responded with delight to the good-natured self-mocking explanations of "How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents", how to speak Spanish without really

knowing Spanish, and the show-stealer, the question with no easy answer: "What Color Are You?" The selections poignantly shared the pride, the joy, and the struggles that living in America with roots entrenched elsewhere provides.

Rehearsing since January, the cast and accompanists drew cheers and a standing ovation from the audience. With 60% of the cast made up of 6th graders, the

opportunity to perform in the highly-regarded musical was a landmark event.

Katherine Felix, Enrichment Coordinator for the Middle School and coordinator for the musical, commented, "I felt that the play this year was a great challenge for our 6th grade girls. They showed maturity and dedication to the play. I was very proud of them because they were there for every practice, even the ones that were scheduled at the last minute. I loved seeing their faces the day of the performance, the smiles and the quiet excited screams every time they finished a scene. It was great to see all the girls come out of their shells."

Next year's play is already in the making and will be held on **Wednesday, December 11, 2013 at Providence Career and Technical Academy, 41 Fricker Street, Providence.** Fitting for a Wiggins Event, it coincides with the 49th anniversary of the 1964 awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to Martin Luther King, Jr.

Visit www.paulcuffeeschool.org frequently for updated information about the School and the December Wiggins event. ☺



PCS middle schoolers entertain a packed house with "the music of their people".



THE WIGGINS SOCIETY

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