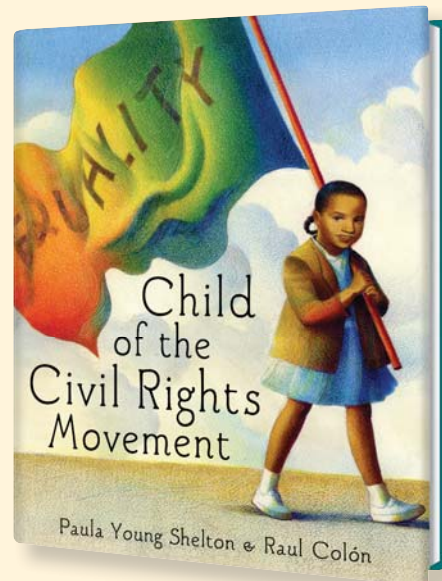


An Interview with Paula Young Shelton, author of Child of the Civil Rights Movement



Paula Young Shelton, author of *Child of the Civil Rights Movement*, illustrated by Raul Colón, is the daughter of civil rights leader and former U.N. ambassador Andrew Young.

She is a teacher in Washington, D.C., and member of the National Black Child Development Institute.

Q. Why do you think it's important to teach Black history and the civil rights movement to young children?

A. It is essential for all children to learn about the accomplishments of African Americans if we are to continue to progress as a nation. Children need to learn their history, even the ugly parts, in order to learn from past mistakes and keep moving forward. It is a great source of pride for me to know that my ancestors survived the Middle Passage, slavery, discrimination, and segregation and yet managed to maintain their faith in God, America, and the value of education. Research has shown that learning about the accomplishments of African Americans builds the self-esteem of African American students. And when white students learn Black history it promotes greater understanding between the races while enhancing their knowledge of American history.

Q. You are a first-grade classroom teacher. How do you help students understand the civil rights movement?

A. Many people think that six-year-olds are too young to comprehend the concepts of civil rights, but ultimately it is about fairness, and few things are more important to a first grader. They fully grasp the idea of being fair, and segregation is not fair, discrimination is not fair. One of the examples we use is the story of Ruby Bridges, who integrated New Orleans public schools at six years old. First graders identify fully with her and are outraged at the way she is treated and inspired by her bravery and compassion. Through books, role-playing, discussions, poetry, and song, we are able to convey to our students the important lessons and facts of the civil rights movement. Few things are more satisfying than to hear a young child exclaim passionately, "I wouldn't go to that school if they wouldn't let my friend go!" I hear this stated in one form or another each year I have taught our civil rights unit.

Q. How do you think your childhood experiences have afforded you a unique view of the civil rights movement?

A. I do believe I had a unique vantage point as the daughter of a civil rights leader. My family was fully entrenched in the "movement." My father worked with Dr. King, my parents socialized with the Kings and the Abernathys and other prominent civil rights families. My mother fed and housed the foot soldiers of the movement and it was not uncommon to wake up in the morning and find people sleeping on the couch and floor, and there was always an extra seat at the dinner table. Watching all of this as a child had a profound affect on the way I perceived the civil rights movement. For my parents, it was not a job or obligation, it was a mission, a way of life. They were fully committed to creating a better world for their children.

Q. What do you want young readers to know about your father, Andrew Young, and his friend, Martin Luther King, Jr.?

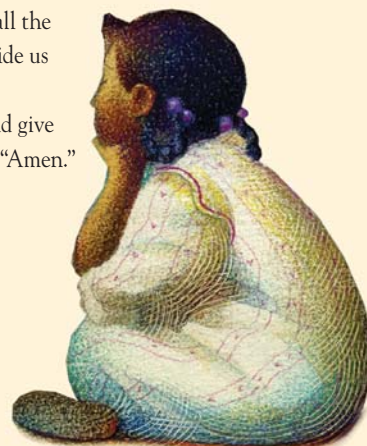
A. Neither Dr. King nor my father set out to be great or famous. They truly answered a calling to change the world and bring people together. The main reason I wrote this book is because I want children to see Dr. King as a human being, not just an icon or legend. I want children to see my Uncle Martin as I did: as a warm, loving, friendly, funny man who loved children.

Q. How did it feel, during your childhood in the 1960s, when you walked with your father and Dr. King? Did you know you were making enormous social change? When did you realize the impact of your work?

A. As a young child, I did not grasp the importance of participating in these marches, but I did feel a strong sense of love and community. As a college student, I began to reflect on my experiences and had a great desire to learn more about the civil rights movement and it became the focus of research papers. As an adult I feel privileged to be able to teach what I have learned and share my experiences.

Q. How would you encourage children today to carry on the messages of your father and Martin Luther King, Jr.?

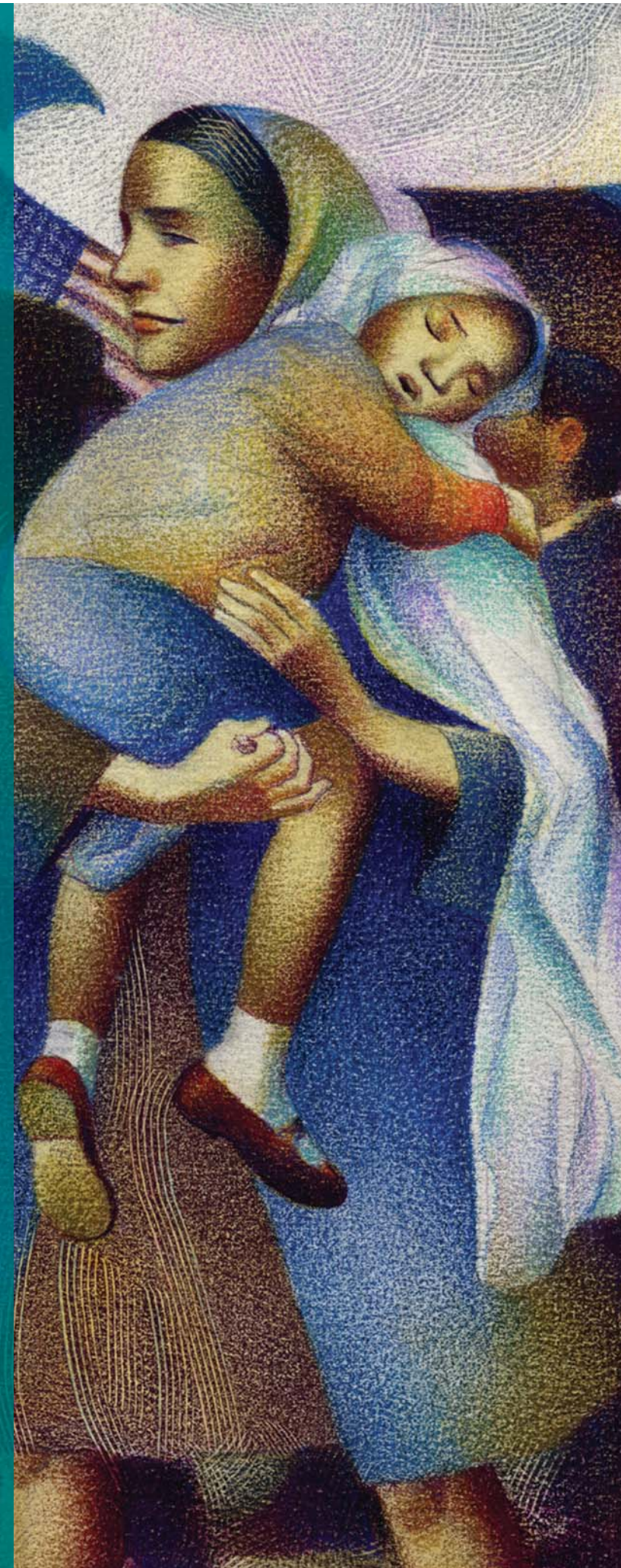
A. I know my father would encourage children (and adults) to reach out to everyone, across the color line, the train tracks, the borders, across faiths, language barriers, and all the walls that divide us and I believe Dr. King would give him a hearty, "Amen."



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"Change does not roll in on the wheels of inevitability, but comes through continuous struggle. And so we must straighten our backs and work for our freedom."—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.



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www.thekingcenter.org

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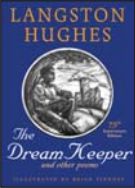
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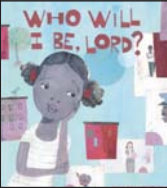
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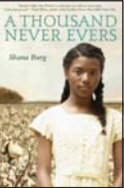
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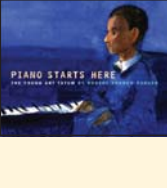
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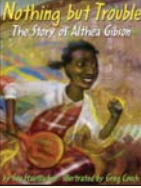
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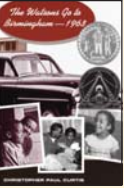
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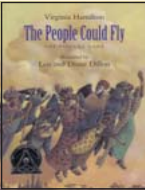
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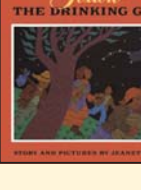
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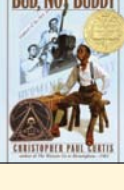
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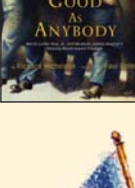
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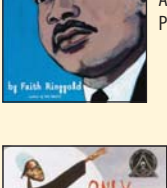
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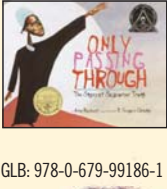
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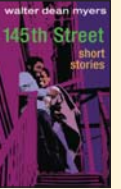
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