



## Black Was the Ink

written by Michelle Coles

illustrated by Justin Johnson

### About the Book

**Genre:** Historical Fiction

**Format:** Hardcover, \$21.95  
336 pages, 5-1/2 x 8-1/4

**ISBN:** 9781643791968

**Reading Level:** Grade 10

**Interest Level:** Grades 8–12+

**Guided Reading Level:** Z+

**Accelerated Reader® Level/Points:**  
N/A

**Lexile™ Measure:** N/A

\*Reading level based on the ATOS Readability Formula

**Themes:** African/African American Interest, Civil Rights Movement, Collaboration, Conflict resolution, Courage, Discrimination, Diversity, Education, Families, Farming, Fiction, Grandparents, Heroism, History, Home, Identity/Self Esteem/Confidence, Integrity/Honesty, Leadership, Mentors, Overcoming Obstacles, Paranormal, Persistence/Grit, Pride, Protest, Realistic Fiction, Respect/Citizenship, Responsibility, Slavery, United States History, War, YA interest, Reconstruction Era, Congress

**Resources on the web:**

[leeandlow.com/books/black-was-the-ink](http://leeandlow.com/books/black-was-the-ink)

All guided reading level placements may vary and are subject to revision. Teachers may adjust the assigned levels in accordance with their own evaluations.

### SYNOPSIS

*Forgotten heroes still leave their mark.*

Malcolm Williams hasn't been okay for a while. He's angry and despondent and feels like nothing good ever happens for teens like him in D.C. All he wants is to be left alone in his room for the summer to draw or play video games--but no such luck. With growing violence in his neighborhood, his mother ships him off to his father's family farm in Mississippi, and Malcolm is anything but pleased.

A few days after his arrival, his great-aunt tells him that the State is acquiring the farm to widen a highway. It's not news Malcolm is concerned about, but someone plans to make it his concern. One minute Malcolm is drawing in the farmhouse attic, and the next he's looking through the eyes of his ancestor Cedric Johnson in 1866.

As Cedric, Malcolm meets the real-life Black statesmen who fought for change during the Reconstruction era: Hiram Revels, Robert Smalls, and other leaders who made American history. But even after witnessing their bravery, Malcolm's faith in his own future remains shaky, particularly since he knows that the gains these statesmen made were almost immediately stripped away. If those great men couldn't completely succeed, why should he try?

Malcolm must decide which path to take. Can Cedric's experiences help him construct a better future? Or will he resign himself to resentments and defeat?

Perfect for fans of Jason Reynolds and Nic Stone, and featuring illustrations by upcoming artist, Justin Johnson, *Black Was the Ink* is a powerful coming-of-age story and an eye-opening exploration of an era that defined modern America.

## BACKGROUND

### Author's Note from Michelle Coles

"I began writing *Black Was the Ink* in the summer of 2015 because I was frustrated with the pace of racial progress in America. Even as we were making positive strides, I saw signs that the pendulum was about to swing in the opposite direction with the ultimate catalyst being the tragic massacre at Mother Emanuel Church in Charleston, South Carolina on June 17, 2015. At the time, I was on maternity leave with my son, whose middle name happens to be Emmanuel. As I stared into my baby's innocent face, I struggled with how to prepare him for a world filled with so much inexplicable hatred toward people who looked like him.

Following the massacre, I began exploring the church's history and was surprised to learn that Denmark Vesey, the founder of the church, led one of the largest attempted slave revolts on American soil, and that Richard "Daddy" Cain served as pastor of the church before becoming one of the first Black members of Congress in the 1870s. For over 150 years, the church stood as a bedrock for civil rights activism, as evidenced by the church's pastor, Clementa Pinckney, who was also serving as a South Carolina State Senator at the time of his assassination on June 17th.

Learning about Mother Emanuel's legacy crystallized for me the connection between slavery, the collapse of Reconstruction, the civil rights movement, and the danger that White supremacist ideology continues to pose today. Through *Black Was the Ink*, I hoped to teach my children about an earlier period, Reconstruction, where incredible advances toward racial equality took place, only to be unraveled by forces of hate. Perhaps armed with this knowledge, they would be better prepared to face the challenges of their time.

Reconstruction is a rather obscure era in American history, intentionally so, due to the "Lost Cause" myth that was created directly after the war and that continues to be taught in many school curriculums in the South today. However, after some initial research, I was grateful to find a handful of resources that helped elucidate this period, including W.E.B. Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction in America*, Philip Dray's *Capitol Men*, Charles Lane's *The Day Freedom Died*, as well as several books by Eric Foner, among others. First-hand accounts like Congressman John Roy Lynch's book *The Facts of Reconstruction* and the treasure trove of congressional records at the Library of Congress, and Henry Louis Gates' PBS documentary, *Reconstruction: America After the Civil War*, were also incredibly informative.

During my research, I couldn't escape the parallels I observed between the present and the past: the indiscriminate killing of Black people often without any accountability, the false claims of voter fraud to justify voter suppression, and the failure to address the root causes of poverty in the Black community. Even though it's good to exercise some caution against judging historical people by today's standards, one thing I do hope this story makes clear is that there have always been people, regardless of era, who knew the difference between right and wrong—and some even courageous enough to act on those convictions.

A lot of energy was used to bury the history of Reconstruction and distort its memory, and much

injustice was built atop those lies. But remembering the good that the first Black congressmen and their White allies accomplished is one way to fight back against that injustice.

This is why, with few exceptions, most of the people Malcolm meets as Cedric in the book are real historical figures, and in many instances, I incorporated their actual words into the book's dialogue. It is my hope that readers discover in these words the inspiration to take on the mantle of these visionaries and doers, and finish the task of rebuilding a truly indivisible nation with liberty and justice for all."

### From the Backmatter: Meet the Statesmen in the Book

#### ***Blanche Bruce (1841-1898)***

US Senator from Mississippi (1875-81) and the first Black senator to serve a full term. Born enslaved in Virginia to a Black woman and a White plantation owner. Only former slave to preside over a session of the US Senate. Received eight votes for vice president at the 1880 Republican National Convention. Register of the Treasury (1881-85, 1897-98), making him the first Black person to sign their name to US currency.

#### ***Richard Cain (1825-1887)***

South Carolina state senator (1868-72), member of the US House of Representatives (1873-75; 1877-79). Born free in what is now West Virginia to a Cherokee mother and Black father. Attended Wilberforce University and Divinity School. Ordained minister with the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church and pastor of Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina. Founder of South Carolina Leader newspaper (later renamed the Missionary Record). Co-founder of Lincolnton, South Carolina, a large tract of farmland that was subdivided and sold exclusively to freedmen. President of Paul Quinn College in Texas.

#### ***Robert Elliott (1842-1884)***

Member of South Carolina House of Representatives (1868-70). Member of US House of Representatives (1870-74). South Carolina Speaker of the House of Representatives (1874-76). South Carolina attorney general (1876-77). Little is known about the early details of his life. He was a trained lawyer who spoke French, Spanish, and English, and frequently quoted the classics. Editor of the Missionary Record. Opened the United States' first known Black-owned law firm. Special customs inspector for the Treasury Department (1879-82).

#### ***John Mercer Langston (1829-1897)***

One of the first Black elected officials in the United States (elected town clerk in Brownhelm, Ohio, in 1855). Co-drafter of the Civil Rights Act of 1875. First Black congressman from Virginia (1890-1891). Born free in Virginia to a freedwoman and her former master. Graduate of Oberlin College. Attorney. Founder of Howard University School of Law. President of Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute (now Virginia State University).

#### ***P.B.S. Pinchback (1837-1921)***

Louisiana state senator (1868-71). Lieutenant governor of Louisiana (1871-72). Louisiana governor (Dec. 1872-Jan. 1873), making him the first Black US governor. Elected to the US House of

Representatives and US Senate, but never seated. Born free in Macon, Georgia, to a freed mulatto woman and a White planter. One of the first Black-commissioned Union officers. Co-founder of Southern University in Louisiana.

**Joseph Rainey (1832-1887)**

South Carolina state senator (1870). First and longest serving Black member of the US House of Representatives during Reconstruction (1870-79). Special agent for the US Treasury Department and owner of a brokerage and banking business. Born enslaved in South Carolina, but his father purchased his freedom during his childhood.

**Hiram Revels (1827-1901)**

Mississippi state senator (1869-1870). US Senator from Mississippi and first Black member of Congress (1870-71). Ordained minister in the AME Church. Chaplain in the Union army and recruiter of Black regiments. President of Alcorn Agricultural and Mechanical College (now called Alcorn State University). Born free in North Carolina to parents who were free people of color.

**Robert Smalls (1839-1915)**

Member of the South Carolina House of Representatives (1868-70). South Carolina state senator (1870-75). Member of the US House of Representatives (1875-79, 1882-87). Collector of Customs for the Port of Beaufort, South Carolina (1890-93, 1897-1913). Born enslaved in South Carolina in the heart of the Sea Islands to an enslaved Gullah woman and a White man thought to be the plantation owner's son. Trained as a seafarer. Successfully commandeered the Confederate states' ship Planter and delivered it to the Union Army, gaining freedom for himself, his family, and the crew. His refusal to give up his seat to a White passenger on a Philadelphia streetcar in 1864 led the Pennsylvania legislature to pass a bill outlawing segregation on public transportation. Authored language as a delegate to South Carolina's 1868 Constitutional Convention that made South Carolina the first Southern state with a free and compulsory public education system.

For additional information, including a timeline and bibliography, please see the Backmatter in *Black Was the Ink*.

**Teaching Reconstruction**

- Henry Louis Gates Jr. presents PBS Reconstruction: America after the Civil War <https://www.pbs.org/weta/reconstruction/>
- 13th documentary on Netflix directed by Ava DuVernay
- Historian Eric Foner on the 'Unresolved Legacy of Reconstruction' on NPR's Fresh Air June 5, 2020 <https://www.npr.org/2020/06/05/870459750/historian-eric-foner-on-the-unresolved-legacy-of-reconstruction>
- Foner, E. (2014). *Reconstruction (Updated Edition)*. Harper Collins.
- Gates, H.L. (2019). *Dark Sky Rising: Reconstruction and the Dawn of Jim Crow*. Scholastic.
- DuBois, W.E.B. (1998). *Black Reconstruction in America*. The Free Press.

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- Foner, E. (1996). *Freedom's Lawmakers: A directory of Black officeholders during Reconstruction*. LSU Press.
- Bolden, T. (2014). *Cause: Reconstruction America, 1863-1877*. Random House Children's Books.
- Blight, D. (2002). *Race and Reunion*. Harvard University Press.
- Doringo, R. (2017). We need the lesson of Reconstruction. *Learning for Justice*. <https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/we-need-the-lessons-of-reconstruction>

## BEFORE READING

### Prereading Focus Questions

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 5 and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)  
(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

Before introducing this book to students, you may wish to develop background knowledge and promote anticipation by posing questions such as the following:

- **What strategies do you use when you're sad or upset?** Some of the history and stories told in this book are difficult to read because they describe painful events. What can we do to take care of ourselves when something is both important to hear and difficult to hear/read?
- **What do you know about the history of Reconstruction (1865-1877)?** What was Reconstruction? What have you been taught about this time period? What happened to Black Americans once the Civil War ended and the 13th Amendment abolished slavery ("except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted")? Where did you learn about Reconstruction (in school, at home, in the media, etc.)? Why did Reconstruction end? What is the legacy of Reconstruction and how does it impact your life in the present day?
- **What do you know about the history of slavery in the United States?** What have you learned about slavery from books that you've read or what you've heard before in school? What do you know about the origins of the institution of slavery in the United States? How did the institution of slavery impact the country socially, politically, and economically when it was legal? How/why did slavery end? Does the legacy of slavery continue to have an impact today? If so, how? **Note:** Please be cognizant of the language. Remember that slavery is not who a person is, it was what was forced upon them. Referring to people as "slaves" removes the person/humanity from them, it effectively dehumanizes them. It is important to use "enslaved person" instead of referring to people as slaves.
- **What does it mean to be resilient?** How do you demonstrate resilience even though something may be challenging? Why is it important to be resilient? Do you think it can be learned? How so? Who is someone from history that you consider to be resilient? Why?



- **Have you ever solved a problem?** What did you do? Why did you have to solve that particular problem? How would you feel if you were given a task so great that if you failed it would impact your entire family?
- **Ask students to think about their family and what family means to them.** How is family important to you? How do you interact with your family members? How do you help them? What do you know about your family history or your ancestors? How did you learn about them?
- **Journaling exercise.** Ask students to write a journal entry about something significant that they have witnessed in their lifetime that they would want future generations to know about.

<sup>1</sup> <https://constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution/amendment/amendment-xiii>

### Exploring the Book

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1; Craft & Structure, Strand 5; and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)  
(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

- **Book title exploration:** Talk about the title and cover image of the book, *Black Was the Ink*. Then ask students what they think this book will most likely be about and whom the book might be about. What do they think might happen? What information do they think they might learn? What makes them think that?
- **Read Michelle Coles's Biography:** Read about Michelle Coles on the jacket back flap as well as on her website <https://michellecoles.com/>. Encourage students to think about what could have been her inspiration for writing *Black Was the Ink*.
- **Encourage students to stop and jot in their reading notebooks during the read-aloud when they:** learn new information, visualize or see a powerful image, have an emotional reaction or an idea, have a question, or hear new words.
- **Have students quickly write a feeling in their notebooks during reading.** After reading, ask students why they wrote down that feeling and have them write a journal entry about it.

### Setting a Purpose for Reading

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

Have students read to find out:

- what happened to Malcolm's father and how that impacted Malcolm's relationship with his father's family
- why Malcolm's mother sent him to Mississippi for the summer
- what were the main events of Reconstruction
- what happened after Reconstruction
- why Cedric Johnson appeared to Malcolm and sent him to his past
- what lessons Cedric wanted Malcolm to learn about the past to help him in the present

- how White allies helped Cedric and the Black Congressmen pass civil rights legislation protecting the rights of Black Americans
- how the James Baldwin quote, "History is not the past, it is the present. We carry our history with us. We are our history" applies to Malcolm's experiences that summer in Mississippi
- why Malcolm was not taught the full history of Reconstruction in school
- what happened to the social, political, and economic gains made by African Americans during Reconstruction and why there was a backlash to Reconstruction

Encourage students to consider why the author, Michelle Coles, an accomplished civil rights attorney, would want to write this particular book for young people during this moment in history.

## VOCABULARY

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 4)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

The story contains several content-specific and academic words and phrases that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary below.

Encourage a variety of strategies to support students' vocabulary acquisition: look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, create a specific action for each word, list synonyms and antonyms, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word. (Many of the Spanish words can be found in the book glossary, but there are also some that are not included. Students could be encouraged to create a log of these words—they will not be listed here.)

### Content Specific\*

Reconstruction, slavery, sharecropping, Civil Rights Act of 1875, 1866 Massacre at the Mechanics Institute in New Orleans, La., *Dred Scott vs. Sanford*, Freedman's Savings and Trust Company, Freedman's Village, Reparations, Compensated Emancipation Act of 1862, Homestead Act, Eminent Domain, taking clause, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, segregation, integration, Klu Klux Klan Enforcement Act (1870), 13th Amendment, 14th Amendment, 15th Amendment, Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, *Birth of a Nation* movie (1915), Klu Klux Klan, White supremacy, lynching, 1873 Colfax Massacre, *U.S. vs. Cruikshank* (1873), 1876 Hamburg massacre (South Carolina), 1876 Election, Wormley Agreement, Hayes-Tilden Compromise, disenfranchisement, gerrymandering, poll tax, Jim Crow Laws, literacy test

### People

Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Hiram Revels, Robert Smalls, Emmett Till, John Roy Lynch, Blanche Bruce, Richard Cain, Robert Elliot, John Mercer Langston, P.B.S. Pinchback, Joseph Rainey Charles Sumner, Andrew Johnson, Ulysses S. Grant, James Wormley, Amos Akerman, James Beckwith, Benjamin Butler, Adelbert Ames, Amzi Rainey, Harriet Tubman, Douglas Syphax, Abbie McKee

### Note

*Black Was the Ink* depicts moments where the N-word is used. Students will need additional historical context and awareness concerning the use of the racial slur. For more information about teaching about the N-word, consult the following resources from Learning for Justice (<https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/fall-2011/straight-talk-about-the-nword>) and Rethinking Schools (<https://rethinkingschools.org/articles/teaching-the-n-word/>). Ta-Nehisi Coates' video, "When Every Word Doesn't Belong to Everyone" also goes into detail about the meaning and implications of the N-word. Please note that this video uses explicit language (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QO15S3WC9pg>).

## AFTER READING

### Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop appreciation for the content. Encourage students to refer to passages and/or illustrations in the book to support their responses. **To build skills in close reading of a text, students should cite textual evidence with their answers.**

### Literal Comprehension

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

#### Chapters 1-10

1. What posters were hanging on the bedroom wall? Why did Malcolm tear them down?
2. Why did Uncle Leroy say that Malcolm was sent to stay at the family farm? Why did he say that Malcolm was lucky?
3. How did the family lose part of their land?
4. Describe Malcolm's father. What does Malcolm learn about him from Uncle Corey?
5. We quickly learn about the kind of sketches that are in Malcolm's sketch pad. What scenes were already in his sketchpad and what does this tell us about Malcolm as an artist and person?
6. What was in the letter that Aunt Carol received from the State? How did the family (including Aunt Carol) react to the news?
7. Why is it important for families to pay their respects to the past and honor their ancestors? How do you honor your ancestors?
8. Who do you think keeps speaking/appearing to Malcolm?
9. Where was Malcolm transported to? Why?
10. What happened at the Mechanic's Institute in 1866 and why? According to Cedric, what was



the purpose of his diary? What message was he trying to send to the world?

### Chapters 11-20

11. Why were the Union soldiers stationed in New Orleans in 1870?
12. What do you think Jasmine meant when she told Malcolm “the South gets a bad rap”?
13. Why did the police officer arrest Malcolm and not the White boys who attacked him? Can you relate this scene to your own life, another book, current events, or something you have seen in the media? What does this scene tell us about the criminal justice system?
14. What emotions do you think Malcolm experienced sitting in the police station? Why?
15. When speaking to Uncle Corey Malcolm remarked, “How can you live when the whole system is working against you”? What “system” was Malcolm commenting on? What life experiences led Malcolm to conclude that the whole system was working against him?
16. How did the Supreme Court rule in the Dred Scott v. Sanford (1857) case? What were the larger implications of the case in how Black Americans were positioned in society? What overturned the Dred Scott decision?
17. What did you learn about the descendants of George Washington?
18. What were some of the legislative priorities for lawmakers during Reconstruction?
19. Who comes to visit Senator Revels at the U.S. capital? What do you know about this person? What was the purpose of the visit?
20. What is sharecropping? What did Uncle Leroy mean when he said that “...slavery didn’t end. It just changed names”?

### Chapters 21-30

21. Have you ever heard of “eminent domain”? What does it mean and how does it affect Malcolm’s family? Can you think of any other instances in the past (or present) when the government has taken land from communities of Color? For more information, consult the following articles (<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/how-southern-black-farmers-were-forced-from-their-land-and-their-heritage>) (<https://www.eater.com/22291510/black-farmers-fighting-for-farmland-discrimination-in-agriculture>) (<https://ejournal.com/news/one-million-Black-families-have-lost-their-farms/>)
22. How did Malcolm calm Jeremy down?
23. What was the Ku Klux Klan Enforcement Act?
24. During the hearing for the third Ku Klux Klan Enforcement Act, how did the Klan try to intimidate John Wardlaw at the polls?
25. What was the Wormley? Who was James Wormley and what was his connection to politicians during the 19th century?
26. According to Aunt Carol, what impact did school desegregation have on her and the Black students and community?
27. What did Aunt Carol mean when she said that “fighting these same battles over and over

again gets real tiring”?

28. What is the significance of Alcorn State University (to Malcolm and the country)?
29. How does Cedric hope to help Malcolm and his family keep the farm?
30. What was the outcome of the Ku Klux Klan trial in 1871 that Cedric (Malcolm) witnessed? What message did it send to Cedric (Malcolm) and the African American community of South Carolina?

### Chapters 31-40

31. Who was Robert Smalls and what action did he take against the Confederacy during the Civil War?
32. What is the historical significance of the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church? What happened on June 17, 2015?
33. After the massacre at the Mother Emanuel AME church Uncle Leroy remarked that “America’s been showing me who she is my whole life, and I choose to believe her”. What do you think he meant by that observation?
34. What movie is playing when Malcolm and Jasmine enter the movie theater? What do you know about that movie? Why does it upset Malcolm?
35. How did P.B.S Pinchback trick the men at the card table? What do we learn about Governor Pinchback?
36. What souvenir did Malcolm and Isabel receive at the end of the Inauguration ball? What does that symbol signify?
37. What was Freedman’s Village?
38. What does the fourth of July mean to Uncle Corey?
39. Who do you think wrote the newspaper account that Cedric (Malcolm) read on the train depicting the Colfax Massacre and why do they refer to it as a “riot” instead of a “massacre”? Who does the newspaper blame for the massacre? Why do you think that?
40. After seeing the confederate monument in the park Jasmine concludes that “we’re in the South, everywhere you look there are reminders of a really painful history, but for the people that actually live here, you can’t spend your whole life angry. You just have to accept some things are the way they are”. Do you agree or disagree with that statement? Why or why not?

### Chapters 41-50

41. Who is Destiny? What does Jasmine teach Malcolm how to do?
42. According to Malcolm, what was the inherent tension in the “American experiment”?
43. Why does Jason not believe Malcolm about the Colfax massacre?
44. Why does Cedric tell Malcolm that it wasn’t Jason’s fault that he didn’t believe him about the Colfax Massacre? Do you agree or disagree with Cedric? Why?
45. How did the Supreme Court rule in U.S. v. Cruikshank? What impact did the ruling have on

those responsible for the Colfax massacre?

46. What happened to the Freedman's bank? What role did Congress play in its collapse? What happened to the tens of thousands of Black Americans that deposited money into the bank?
47. What did the veteran soldier at the rally tell Cedric (Malcolm) about the status of Black Americans in 1876?
48. Who did Cedric (Malcolm) encounter when he was riding back to the pastor's house? What happened?
49. What did Malcolm come to realize about the importance of his family owning land? According to Professor Rodgers, what happened to African Americans once confederates regained control of state governments?
50. What happened as a result of the commission meeting at the Wormley hotel? Who did the commission declare as the winner of the election of 1876?

### Chapters 51-Epilogue

51. What is Malcolm's plan to save Aunt Carol and Uncle Leroy's farm?
52. Why did Jason telephone Malcolm? What did he learn about history and what impact did it have on him?
53. How did Cedric die?
54. When testifying in front of the Mississippi National Register of Historic Places Review Board hearing, what is Malcolm's argument as to why the farm is historic and must be saved? How does Jason demonstrate that he is an ally to Malcolm and his family? Why does he say it is important to learn about Cedric?
55. What were some of the barriers mentioned in Professor Rodgers lecture that have kept Black Americans from exercising their right to vote since Reconstruction?
56. What did Malcolm leave on Uncle Corey's pillow? Why?
57. Who did Malcolm meet at the rally? Why did she speak to Malcolm and what did she have to offer? How did that make Malcolm feel?

### Extension/Higher Level Thinking

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 2 and 3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4 and 6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1-3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. What does the title *Black Was the Ink* mean to you after reading the book? Why do you think the author chose this particular title?
2. Throughout the text Malcolm wrestles with the white-washed version of Reconstruction that he learned in school and the fact that he never learned the truth about Black achievements and accomplishments after the Civil War. He also never learned about the systemic violence committed by White supremacists to deprive Black Americans of their civil rights or how the US government failed to intervene. Why do you think students are not taught the truth about Reconstruction? What was your experience learning about the history of Reconstruction?

3. At one point in the book Malcolm states that "I'm just tired of not feeling welcome in my own country". Explain what you think Malcolm means by that statement/realization. Have you ever felt that way? Why or why not?
4. Throughout the book Malcolm uses his sketchpad and art to process the events that he sees and experiences. What role can art play in helping process traumatic events and situations? How has art been used as a tool for activists in social justice movements?
5. Which rights central to America citizenship do you most cherish? Which rights do you think formerly enslaved people were most excited about finally having? How was this demonstrated?
6. Uncle Corey expresses his disillusionment with the fourth of July holiday as a formerly incarcerated man. Compare his perspective on the holiday with Frederick Douglass's in his speech *What to a Slave is the Fourth of July* (<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4h2927t.html>). Even though Frederick Douglass delivered this speech in 1852, what similarities do you find in the two perspectives? What differences? What does the fourth of July mean to you?
7. Uncle Corey told Malcolm that his dad once asked, "what was I doing with my freedom and was I using it to set others free". This is similar to something the late Toni Morrison once said: "if you are free, you need to free someone else" (<https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/10-toni-morrison-quotes-to-celebrate-her-birthda-2/#:~:text=I%20tell%20my%20students%2C%20%22When,grab%2Dbag%20candy%20game.%E2%80%9D>). What did Malcolm's dad mean when he asked that question of Corey? How can you use your freedom to free someone else? What would that look, sound, feel like? Do you think it is a person's responsibility or duty to work to set others free? Why or why not?
8. Malcolm told Jasmine that he believed that Black people in the present day have a lot in common with Blacks folks during Reconstruction. What experiences did Malcolm have (in the past and present day) that would cause him to make this comparison? Do you agree or disagree with his assessment?
9. What role do public historical monuments and commemorations play in how our society remembers the past? Why were confederate monuments erected across the United States? Who advocated for these monuments and for what purpose? Are there any historical figures in *Black Was the Ink* that you were surprised to learn about for the first time?
10. While visiting the Emanuel AME church for the first time as Cedric, Malcolm comes to a realization about his own history: "Despite what he had been told or not told about his history, he now knew he was part of a proud, strong, resilient, and beautiful legacy. Each generation, from his mother, father, and Uncle Corey, to Grandma Evelyn, Aunt Carol, and Uncle Leroy, to Mama Lucille, to Cedric and Isabel, to countless others whose names he would never know, had found its own unique way to resist oppression and overcome the obstacles set in their path. He would do no less." How did the different generations of Malcolm's family both experience and resist oppression? How does Malcolm carry his history with him and continue the work of his ancestors? How does his ancestors' experiences (including both moments of joy and pain) bring him comfort and give him strength? In what ways do you honor your ancestors?

11. When Malcolm visited Professor Rodgers at Alcorn State they discussed the legacy of Reconstruction. He asked Professor Rodgers, "So if this country has basically been stuck in a holding pattern since the Civil War, how do we get out of it?" Please provide your own answer to Malcolm's question. How can this country accept the truth and move towards reconciliation? How can this country make amends for the legacy of slavery and the broken promises of Reconstruction and the terror that followed?
12. Malcolm attended one of Professor Rodgers' lectures when he was discussing the evolution of voter disenfranchisement efforts over time. How would you answer the question Professor Rodgers' posed to his class: does disenfranchising a segment of a population threaten the viability and validity of a democracy? Explain.
13. What are some examples of White allies throughout the text? Can you think of other allies in history? What about the present day? What role do allies play in social justice movements? What are some ways that allies can support racial justice movements in the present day?
14. Pick one historical figure discussed in the book that you had never heard of before to research further. Write a paragraph describing what else you discovered about that person.

### Reader's Response

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)

Use the following questions and writing activities to help students practice active reading and personalize their responses to the book. **Suggest that students respond in reader's response journals, essays, or oral discussion.** You may also want to set aside time for students to share and discuss their written work.

1. What is one big thought you have after reading this book? Think about how Malcolm navigates and experiences his family history as well as trauma throughout *Black Was the Ink*. How does he process trauma and change during the story? How does this change him moving forward?
2. What do you think is Michelle Coles's message to the reader? Think about possible motivations behind Michelle Cole's intentions for writing the book. What do you think she wanted to tell her readers?
3. Have students make a text-to-self connection. What kinds of connections did you make from this book to your own life? What do Malcolm's experiences, thoughts, and feelings mean to you? Did reading *Black Was the Ink* make you think differently about freedom? How so?
4. Have students make a text-to-text connection. Did you think of any other books while you read *Black Was the Ink*? Why did you make those connections?
5. Have students make a text-to-current events connection. What kind of connections did you make between this book and what you have seen in current news events, including online, on television, or in a newspaper? Why did this book make you think of that?
6. Have students make a text-to-world connection. Chinua Achebe, a prominent Nigerian novelist and essayist, once said: "There is that great proverb – that until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter." What does this mean to you?

What is the value in considering historical events from different perspectives?

7. Have students write a book review after reading *Black Was the Ink*. Consult ReadWriteThink's lesson plan on how to teach students how to write book reviews (<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/what-think-writing-review-876.html>). Students can also refer to other book reviews for references. What did they enjoy about *Black Was the Ink*? What would they tell a friend or another person who wants to read the book? Students can share their book reviews with small groups or the whole class.

### ELL Teaching Activities

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 4–6)  
(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English Language Learners.

1. Assign ELL students to partner-read the story with strong English readers/speakers. Students can alternate reading pages, repeat passages after one another, or listen to the more fluent reader.
2. Have each student write three questions about the story. Then let students pair up and discuss the answers to the questions.
3. Depending on students' level of English proficiency, after the first reading:
  - Review several chapters and have students summarize what happened, first orally, and then in writing.
  - Have students work in pairs to retell either the plot of the story or key details. Then ask students to write a short summary, or opinion about what they have read.
4. Have students give a short talk about what they learned about Reconstruction and something they hadn't learned before from school in *Black Was the Ink*.
5. The book contains several content-specific and academic words that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary. Expose English Language Learners to multiple vocabulary strategies. Have students make predictions about word meanings, look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, list synonyms and antonyms, create an action for each word, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

### Social and Emotional Learning

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1-3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4-6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–2 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 6)

Social and emotional learning involves being aware of and regulating emotions for healthy development. In addition to understanding one's own feelings, strong socio-emotional development allows individuals to develop empathy for others and to establish and maintain relationships.



Use the following prompts to help students study the socio-emotional aspects of this book.

1. Malcolm experienced a wide range of emotions throughout the novel, especially when he realized that he had been taught a version of the past in school that did not accurately reflect the truth about Reconstruction and the resilience of Black Americans. What kinds of emotions did he express upon this realization? How did he turn his emotions into action?
2. Malcolm experienced a physical and emotional reaction when he visited Emanuel A.M.E. church after the Hamburg massacre rally. Many historians, scholars, and mental health experts (including the American Psychological Association <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2019/02/legacy-trauma>) talk about how generational trauma can affect survivors and their descendants mental and physical health for generations. What is generational trauma and what impact could it have on individuals who are part of communities who have experienced trauma, genocide, displacement, incarceration, racial violence?
3. After Malcolm was unfairly blamed for the fight at the county fair and arrested, he told Uncle Corey "I'm getting my butt kicked by these country White boys and thrown in jail by some racist cop. He didn't see me, a kid getting jumped. He just assumed it was my fault or didn't care enough to find out. Think what would've have happened if he saw a White boy getting stomped on by a bunch of Black kids". In this scene Malcolm continued to refer to himself as a "kid" to remind the reader of his youth. The American Psychological Association (APA) has published research showing that Black boys are viewed as older and less innocent than White children and that police officers are more likely to accuse Black boys of crimes or experience police violence (<https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2014/03/black-boys-older>). What emotions was Malcolm grappling with in this scene? How did the cop see and view Malcolm? How did the police officer view the White boys who jumped Malcolm? Malcolm then remarks that when he was in the cell at the police station he felt so alone and "So powerless". How did Cedric use the past to inspire Malcolm to keep fighting the good fight?
4. Throughout the book we see how Uncle Corey struggles to find work, realize that he will never be able to vote, or break free from the negative perception society has of formerly incarcerated persons. What are some strategies and/or relationships that helped Uncle Corey stay focused and not get brought down by the system that continues to treat formerly incarcerated persons as second-class citizens??
5. This book covers a large chunk of United States history. Part of that history includes racial violence, traumatic events, and grave injustice. What are some of the different ways that the characters in the book took care of themselves when confronted with traumatic events? How did they support each other? How do you take care of yourself when faced with traumatic situations or difficult truths?
6. When speaking to Ms. Sojourner Truth she reminds Malcolm "You know as well as I how we tilled the soil of this country for centuries and reaped nary a reward from its rich harvest. White folks seem to think that freedom alone is payment for our service, but what they gave us was never theirs to give. We're human, created equal as any man or woman before the Lord. We was born free, and they took that from us". According to Ms. Truth, how can the U.S. government begin to make amends to African Americans for nearly two centuries of theft, violence, and enslavement?

## INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

(Introduction to the Standards, page 7: Students who are college and career ready must be able to build strong content knowledge, value evidence, and use technology and digital media strategically and capably)

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas. These can also be used for extension activities, for advanced readers, and for building a home-school connection.

### English/Language Arts

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Encourage students to prepare a presentation or write an essay about how *Black Was the Ink* reflects the long history of Black Americans fighting for full citizenship.** Students can conduct additional research online about the historical events, people, and legislation mentioned in the Background section of this guide. How does Malcolm's experiences in the past as Cedric and in the present day shed light on the continued struggle for voting rights for Black Americans. What can you do to support equal access to the ballot and expanded voting rights in your community?
- **Examine the different literary elements that author Michelle Coles uses throughout *Black Was the Ink*.** Have students come up with a list and select portions of the text that showcase a specific literary device (i.e. foreshadowing, flashback, metaphor, etc). Afterward, students can select one literary device and write about how that was impactful when reading *Black Was the Ink*. How do literary devices make the story engaging, and how do they contribute to the story overall? See PBS's Literary Elements and Techniques video for more information about how to teach about literary devices (<https://ny.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/litel18-fig/literary-elements-and-techniques-figurative-language/>).
- **Analyze the role of White allies and what it looks like in *Black Was the Ink*.** What does Malcolm learn about the importance of allies in the Black freedom movement? Show evidence from the text about how Malcolm's perspective on the role of White allies changes in *Black Was the Ink*. Education scholar Bettina Love writes/speaks about the difference between an ally vs. co-conspirator (<https://vimeo.com/502300589>). According to Love, what is the difference between an ally and a co-conspirator? In the text did we meet any co-conspirators? How so? What would it mean to be a co-conspirator today in the fight for voting rights? Students can share their opinions in an essay.
- **Have students come up with a list of questions to ask author Michelle Coles.** What do students want to know about the process behind writing a young adult book? How did the author come up with the idea to write *Black Was the Ink*? How did she conduct her research on Reconstruction? Consider contacting Michelle Coles and inviting her to your school, library, or other relevant setting for a virtual author visit (<https://www.michellecoles.com/contact>).
- **Assign students different characters from *Black Was the Ink* and have them**

**brainstorm about a guiding question: what and how can this character teach us?**

Students can think about different characters to examine as a whole class and then break into smaller, specific character groups. Encourage students to think about how characters have shown resilience in the face of adversity and ultimately what they learned from that character. Have students share their findings: How is this character important to the book, and what lessons did they teach us over the course of the story? How did their actions develop the narrative, and why are they crucial to understanding the meaning of the book?

**Social Studies/Geography**

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Conduct a research study on the history of Reconstruction.** Refer to the Background section of this guide for additional resources on teaching about Reconstruction. Guiding questions to ask include: What was Reconstruction? When was it? Why was it called Reconstruction? What were some major legislative accomplishments during this time period? How did the federal government work to support formerly enslaved persons? What were some setbacks during this time period? How did confederates work to take back power and control during this time period? In what ways did federal and state governments turn their backs on Black Americans at the end of Reconstruction? How did Reconstruction end? How does the unfinished business of Reconstruction impact our lives today?
- **Encourage students to learn about the movement to provide reparations to the descendants of those who were enslaved in the United States.** The United Nations has outlined that reparations should be provided when there is evidence of gross human rights violation. The organization notes that reparations must be "...proportional to the gravity of the violations and the harm suffered." Many have argued that reparations would help heal the wounds that continues to exist within present day society for the countless abuses African Americans have endured in this country: from the centuries of abuse and the loss of wages during enslavement, to the broken promise of land during Reconstruction, the collapse of the Freedman's bank, to racial violence that targeted Black Americans, discrimination from the federal government, and the murder of unarmed Black citizens in the present day. Consider other historical reparation programs, including the reparations that the United States of America paid to Japanese Americans following their internment during World War II and reparations that Germany paid to Holocaust survivors. What would it take to repair the harm caused by slavery and the decades of legal discrimination that followed? (<https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/remedyandrepairation.aspx>) (<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>) (<https://qz.com/1915185/how-germany-paid-reparations-for-the-holocaust/>)
- **Have students read more stories and consult primary sources about the experiences of Black elected officials during Reconstruction.** To help students with content knowledge about the various Black congressmen during Reconstruction they can consult Dray's (2008) book *Capitol Men: The epic story of Reconstruction* through the lives of

the first Black Congressmen (<https://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/28/books/review/Reynolds-t.html>) or watch the PBS Reconstruction documentary presented by Henry Louis Gates Jr. (<https://www.pbs.org/weta/reconstruction/>) or read Congressman John Roy Lynch's first-hand account in *The Facts of Reconstruction*. There are also a number of picture books about some of the men mentioned in this book: *The Amazing Age of John Roy Lynch* by Chris Barton (<https://www.zinnedproject.org/materials/amazing-age-of-john-roy-lynch/>) and *Seven Miles to Freedom: The Robert Smalls Story* by Janet Halfmann ([leeandlow.com/books/seven-miles-to-freedom](https://leeandlow.com/books/seven-miles-to-freedom)). The Library of Congress <https://www.loc.gov> has a number of primary sources about the congressmen. Students can conduct research about these men and then write their own children's book about the lives and experiences of the first Black congressmen and Reconstruction. This book would be a book that Malcolm should have had when he was little to learn about the truth about Reconstruction.

- **Have students create a timeline of the historical events mentioned in the book--from 1619 to the present day.** As a class you can go through the book and make a list of all of the historical events, people, legislation that is mentioned in the book (and/or consult the vocabulary section of this teacher's guide). Then, split students into small groups and assign groups vocabulary words and people to research. Pass out sentence strips or large notecards to each group and task them with writing a summary of their person, place, or historical event. I would also recommend having students locate and print off a primary source to attach to their vocabulary note card. Then, assemble a large timeline in the classroom. This activity can be completed while reading the book. That way, you can continue to come back to the timeline to remember the historical events and place them in relation to other events. This timeline could also be completed digitally using websites such as <https://time.graphics>, <https://www.visme.co/timeline-maker/>, <https://www.adobe.com/express/create/timeline>, or <https://creately.com/lp/timeline-maker-online/>.
- **Encourage students to learn more about the history of Black farmers and landowners in the past and present day.** By learning about the history of African Americans' connection to the land and the history of farming in the Black community, students will begin to see the connections between agriculture and freedom. According to scholar Monica White in her book *Freedom Farmers: Agricultural Resistance and the Black Freedom Movement*, this history can teach students a great deal about "...reconnecting with the land as a strategy of self-determination and self-sufficiency". Within the U.S. historical narrative people in power have painted Black farmers in deficit ways by positioning Black farmers either as enslaved people picking cotton or in poverty trapped in the sharecropping system. Instead, it is vital that teachers paint a broader and fuller portrait of Black Americans' ties to land and the impact they have had on American food culture and agriculture. To learn more, you can check out all books and resources surrounding Jessica B. Harris (<http://www.africooks.com/wordpress/>). This history allows us to honor Black intellectual traditions and how they have sparked modern day conversations about sustainability, farm to table practices, farming cooperatives, environmental justice, and food security. You can learn more about the history of Black farmers from recent news stories (<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/apr/29/why-have-americas-black-farmers-disappeared>), (<https://www.npr.org/2021/04/06/984802878/we-are-each-others-harvest-the-past-present-and-future-of>

black-farmers), and episode 5 of *the New York Times* 1619 podcast (<https://www.nytimes.com/column/1619-project>). Students can research this history and present their findings via an infographic map (via [eas.ly](https://www.easel.ly) <https://www.easel.ly>, [canva](https://www.canva.com) <https://www.canva.com>, or [pik-to-chart](https://piktochart.com) <https://piktochart.com>).

## Art & Media

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1-3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4-6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7-9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7-9, and Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1-3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4-6)

- **Have students draw a cover image for the book *Black Was the Ink*.** What kind of materials do they want to use for the cover? Encourage students to think about what happened in this book, and how that reflects the artwork for the cover. How can they use the current cover to inspire their work?
- **Take a look at the artwork of Titus Kaphar** <https://www.kapharstudio.com>. This is a from Kaphar's website <https://www.kapharstudio.com/about/>: "Titus Kaphar is an artist whose paintings, sculptures, and installations examine the history of representation by transforming its styles and mediums with formal innovations to emphasize the physicality and dimensionality of the canvas and materials themselves. His practice seeks to dislodge history from its status as the 'past' in order to unearth its contemporary relevance. He cuts, crumples, shrouds, shreds, stitches, tars, twists, binds, erases, breaks, tears, and turns the paintings and sculptures he creates, reconfiguring them into works that reveal unspoken truths about the nature of history. Open areas become active absences; walls enter into the portraits; stretcher bars are exposed; and structures that are typically invisible underneath, behind, or inside the canvas are laid bare to reveal the interiors of the work. In so doing, Kaphar's aim is to reveal something of what has been lost and to investigate the power of a rewritten history." Kaphar highlights the voices and perspectives that have been erased by those in positions of power. Have students reflect on his artwork and what they have learned from his paintings and sculptures. Compare Kaphar's work with Malcolm's in *Black Was the Ink*. How can art be used to center marginalized perspectives in history and challenge the dominant historical narrative. How can artwork help process difficult histories, truths, traumas, histories? Afterwards, students can create their own artwork modeled after Kaphar's work-- search for historic paintings that privilege White Americans and reinsert Black voices and perspectives.

## School-Home Connection

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 7 and 9)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strand 4, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7-9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1-3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4-6)

- **Interview a family member about the history of their family.** Why is it important to understand your family history? Why is it important to know the different parts of the world where your family is from? If students do not know their family history, have them interview someone about the history of your town or city.

- **Learn about Black history and support Black-owned businesses.** Visit your local African American history museum to learn Black history in spaces that center Black voices and histories. If you do not have one locally, consider visiting the National Museum of African American History and Culture website (<https://nmaahc.si.edu>) and exploring their digital collections and resources. It is important to support Black owned businesses such as independent book stores (<https://www.oprahdaily.com/entertainment/books/a33497812/black-owned-bookstores/>). The National Black Farmers Association is an organization that supports Black farmers across the United States. You can also consult the following resources for more information (<https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/exhibitions/reconstruction/voting-rights>) and (<https://museumandmemorial.eji.org/museum>).





## Ordering Information

### General Order Information:

[leeandlow.com/contact/ordering](https://leeandlow.com/contact/ordering)

### Secure Online Ordering:

[leeandlow.com/books/black-was-the-ink](https://leeandlow.com/books/black-was-the-ink)

**By Phone:** 212-779-4400 ext. 25

**By Fax:** 212-683-1894

### By Mail:

Lee & Low Books, 95 Madison Avenue,  
New York, NY 10016

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Michelle Coles** is an accomplished civil rights attorney and a proud alumna of the University of Virginia and Howard University School of Law. As a ninth-generation Louisianan, she is highly attuned to the struggles African Americans have faced in overcoming the legacy of slavery and the periods of government-sanctioned discrimination that followed. She hopes that by revealing oft-hidden Black history, her debut novel will empower young people with tools to shape their destiny. Find her on the web at [michellecoles.com](https://michellecoles.com).

## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

**Justin Johnson** credits his mother and grandmother, both teachers, with inspiring his love of picture books and storytelling. He studied children's book illustration as well as animation at the Rhode Island School of Design, and now works as an illustrator, GIF animator, and aspiring art teacher. Justin lives in Washington, D.C. Find him on the web at [justinjohnson.work](https://justinjohnson.work) or on Instagram as [@the.k.in.cmyk](https://www.instagram.com/the.k.in.cmyk).

## REVIEWS

"Meticulous details and a leisurely pace lead to a realistic but uplifting conclusion. Malcolm's anger over the plight of Black Americans will resonate with many readers and open the minds of others. A dynamic look at how the past informs the future." —*Kirkus Reviews*

"In Malcolm Williams, Michelle Coles does just that when she has 16-year-old Malcom confront the Black Reconstruction past of his fore parents in order to understand and appreciate his Black life and lineage and his present purpose, which always matters." —*Tony Medina*

## ABOUT LEE & LOW BOOKS

**LEE & LOW BOOKS** is the largest children's book publisher specializing in diversity and multiculturalism. Our motto, "about everyone, for everyone," is as urgent today as it was when we started in 1991. It is the company's goal to meet the need for stories that children of color can identify with and that all children can enjoy. The right book can foster empathy, dispel stereotypes, prompt discussion about race and ethnicity, and inspire children to imagine not only a world that includes them, but also a world where they are the heroes of their own stories. Discover more at [leeandlow.com](https://leeandlow.com).