

# Westchester Turns Out for Multicultural Children's Books

Oct 23, 2012



Speakers Gloria and Jerry Pinkney at the first Westchester Multicultural Children's Book Festival.

“You know what I like about this event? That it comes from a fresh point of view,” said author and illustrator Jerry Pinkney, discussing the inaugural Westchester Multicultural Children’s Book Festival. “It has brought together people from all different cultures. It truly is multicultural – and you learn from it.”

Pinckney was one of more than 20 authors and illustrators who attended the festival, held at the White Plains (N.Y.) Public Library on October 13. More than 500 children, parents, and educators crowded into the library to attend workshops and readings – which took place throughout the day at four concurrent venues –

as well as visit with authors and illustrators for book signings.

“Our intention is to create a self-affirming celebration, through books and story, that mirrors and acknowledges our children,” said Max Rodriguez, who created the festival and is the founder of the Harlem Book Fair and the publisher of *QBR/The Black Book Review*. “This event celebrates contribution – white, red, yellow, black, brown – and the mosaic of humanity that girds the life our children inherit.”

Barnes & Noble, White Plains booksellers Main Street Books, and individual exhibitors handled books sales. Publisher support was provided by the Macmillan Children’s Publishing Group, Running Press Kids, Sterling Publishing, and Candlewick Press.

“This is a great way for the library to respond to the needs of the community, and we’re proud to be a part of it,” said Grace Cantwell, communications manager for B&N, White Plains. “It’s also a wonderful chance for me to be meeting educators and interacting with them about things we are both doing.”

## An Author for Every Reader

Headliners included a presentation by Eric Velasquez (*Grandma’s Gift*) about his life as a multicultural author and illustrator. Caldecott Medalist and Coretta Scott King honoree Jerry Pinkney and his wife, author Gloria Pinkney, offered a talk over lunch about their 50-plus years of artistic collaboration. Illustrators Jerry Craft (*Mama’s Boyz* comic strip) and George O’Connor (the Olympians series) showed rapt onlookers – including plenty of middle-school boys – how cartoons and graphic novels are created.



Readers included Ginger Pate (*Would You Invite a Skunk to Your Wedding?*), Mayma Raphael (*I Love the Skin I’m In!*), Yumi Heo (*A is for Asia*), Jason Edwards (*Monster Detective Agency*), Sudipta Bardhan Quallen (*Hampire*), Nick Bruel (*Bad Kitty* series), Mary Keefe Young (illustrator, *Curious George*), Yona Zeldis McDonough (*The Doll Shop Downstairs*), Danette Vigilante (*The Trouble With Half a Moon*), Torrey Maldonado (*Secret Saturdays*) and David Ezra Stein (*Because Amelia Smiled*).

Cartoon workshop with Jerry Craft (*Mama's Boyz*).

Wade Hudson, president and CEO of Just Us Books, moderated a panel on the importance and impact of multicultural books. The panel, targeted to parents, librarians, and educators, centered on shifting the perception of multicultural books as “other.” Panelists included publishers Cheryl Willis Hudson of Just Us Books, Jason Low of Lee & Low Books, and authors Mark Weston (*Honda: The Boy Who Dreamed of Cars*) and Torrey Maldonado (*Secret Saturdays*).



Author Yumi Heo (*A Is for Asia*).

### Looking Ahead

Next year’s festival will be held on Saturday, September 21, and plans call for expansion onto the surrounding library plaza. “This will allow us to have a stage right behind the library – perfect for readings and performances. We will also have room for more author and publisher exhibitors, and integrate music and food vendors as well,” Rodriguez said. “Our civic partners – the White Plains School District, the White Plains Parent Teacher Association, the Office of the Mayor of White Plains, and Shop Rite Supermarkets – are especially excited about the growth of the event.”

Next year’s festival will also embrace YA authors; the Edge, a [new 3,000-square-foot center for teens](#), which is expected to open on the library’s first floor in June. “The center will be completely flexible—all of the furniture is on wheels—and can become one, big performance space,” said library director Brian Kenney. “It will be perfect for an event like this.”