

Young, Gifted, Black . . . and Country: A Community Situated Approach to Analyzing Black, Rural Giftedness in Contemporary Nonfiction Children’s Literature

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This article shares findings from a critical content analysis of five contemporary nonfiction children’s books. Each book centers on a gifted Black historical figure who spent at least part of their childhood in a rural setting. The analysis, using a funds-of-knowledge and community-cultural-wealth approach, revealed the situated nature of the child’s giftedness, including intersectional oppression they faced, various ways they enacted giftedness within their rural setting, and a reciprocal relationship with their community. In each book, the youth’s giftedness was supported by the community but also positively impacted the community.

Keywords: gifted Black students in nonfiction literature, rural Black youth in nonfiction literature

In 1969, the incomparable Nina Simone recorded and released the powerful call to attention, “To Be Young, Gifted and Black,” in which she exclaimed, “In the whole world you know, there are a billion boys and girls who are young, gifted and Black, and that’s a fact!” More than fifty years later, important concerns remain about the identification, support, and celebration of gifted Black youth (Henshon, 2020). These concerns are heightened further when considering that *rural*, gifted Black youth are doubly affected by a context in which they are “more likely to be less proportionally represented than their suburban and city counterparts” (Gentry et al., 2019, p. 98). This is not a new phenomenon, yet it deserves emergency attention from the field of gifted education.

All rural gifted students may be inhibited by several key challenges. Notably, there is an urban-rural excellence gap that affords urban students more opportunities for enrichment and cultivation than available to those in rural areas (Hernández-Torrano, 2018). Even once placed into gifted

education programs, students in rural areas experience fewer engaging learning opportunities compared to their peers in urban areas (Howley et al., 2009). Additionally, historically underrepresented populations in rural areas are denied access to gifted education programs at rates higher than in other areas (University of Connecticut, 2013). In a study of 462 school districts, the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented found that only about half of the districts had exact alignment between the percentage of Black children enrolled in the district and the percentage represented in gifted education programs (University of Connecticut 2013). Programs designed to increase access for such students do work, but they are scarce (Pendarvis & Wood, 2009). Exploration of the diverse resources that can benefit underrepresented gifted populations (e.g., Jones & Hébert, 2012) and programs to support teacher identification of underrepresented gifted populations (Lewis & Novak, 2019; Lewis et al., 2018) are among the most promising trends to combat the intersectional barriers that rural, gifted

Black youth face in receiving high-quality gifted education. In both these approaches, children's literature should be carefully considered as an important resource to improve teacher education and to improve the education that rural, gifted Black youth receive. Children's books are arguably the most popular pedagogical resource among elementary teachers; thus, they offer an access point for teachers and other authorities to consider new lenses to understand giftedness.

Through a community-situated approach, the findings shared from this content analysis illuminate how contemporary nonfiction children's literature about rural, gifted Black youth might help children and educators see giftedness in Black, rural children in new ways. In particular, we highlight how the texts situate giftedness within rural communities' funds of knowledge (González et al., 2006) and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005).

Literature Review

Contemporary Nonfiction Children's Literature

Contemporary nonfiction children's literature is the result of the evolution of literature trends cultivated by larger societal trends (Graff & Shimek, 2020). It is also rooted in older conceptions of informational text. How informational text is used in schools has changed over time. The underuse of the genre was documented in Nell Duke's (2000) groundbreaking study, which found that her first-grade participants were exposed to an average of 3.6 minutes per day of informational text. Duke classified informational texts into three categories: informational, narrative-informational, and informational-poetic. Each category shares a common set of features, including its "function to communicate information about the natural or social world, typically from one presumed to be more knowledgeable on the subject to one presumed to be less so" (p. 205). Today, children in primary classrooms are no strangers to informational text in the post-Common Core State Standards era, which heralded a marked shift in the types of texts privileged in classrooms around the United States (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). Notably, the core standards challenged the tradition of emphasizing narrative texts in primary classrooms and shifted more focus to informational

texts. Essentially, informational texts are designed to help the reader learn more about a topic, and in the era of contemporary nonfiction children's literature, that fundamental component remains true (Graff & Shimek, 2020).

While contemporary nonfiction children's literature often combines text structures and genre features, it may also challenge oppression and highlight ways for children to enact social justice (Graff & Shimek, 2020). Graff and Shimek's (2020) argument supporting use of nonfiction children's literature in this way is partially grounded in Rosenblatt's (1978/1994) transactional reader-response theory; they argue that new ways of thinking about informational texts change the reader's position along the reading continuum. According to Rosenblatt, a reader moves along an efferent-aesthetic continuum: reading for comprehension is an efferent stance, and reading for enjoyment is an aesthetic stance. A reader may move along the continuum in any given text, but classroom informational texts that focus on the "what" or "who" of a topic will be largely efferent. This distinction in purposes for reading is important for those who want children to consider a critical stance when reading informational text because explorations of critical issues are not aligned with standardized questions and answers that dominate many literacy experiences with informational text (see Graff & Shimek, 2020).

Black Representation and Nonfiction Children's Literature

In addition to requiring a shift in stance, critical explorations of children's literature also require access to texts that feature people of color as protagonists. In a survey of over 5,000 trade books for children published in 1962–1964, Larrick (1965) found that only 6.7% included one or more Black figures, and of these, "many show only one or two dark faces in a crowd" (p. 2). Since then, there have been some improved metrics in diverse children's book publishing (Cooperative Children's Book Center, 2019), but despite scholarly attention, sparse representation of Black people in children's books remains a problem (Koss, 2015).

Gilton (2020) explains that Black people have been stereotyped and continue to be

underrepresented in children's literature. Moreover, biographies of Black Americans have often been limited, as the publishing industry historically has been reluctant to feature a broad range of accomplished people of color. Gilton explains that, despite a dramatic increase in the number of children's books about and written by people of color, as of 2017 only "24 percent of children's books published in the United States were about people of color and 14 percent were by authors and illustrators of color" (p. 92). Thus, children of color are still not equitably represented in text.

Giftedness and Nonfiction Children's Literature

Representation in nonfiction children's literature might be especially important in gifted education because of the long-standing practice of bibliotherapy. *Bibliotherapy*, as described by Halsted (2009), is a process by which readers identify with one of more figures in the text, experience cathartic and emotional reaction to the text, apply their life situation to that of the figure in the text, and universalize their experience by understanding that their experiences are often shared by others. Bibliotherapy has been recognized as an effective strategy to nurture the social and emotional development of gifted students but relies on the identification of texts where gifted students can identify with main characters (Schlichter & Burke, 1994). Ford et al. (2000) advocated for particular benefits of bibliotherapy for gifted Black youth and identified 10 books with gifted Black protagonists as resources for bibliotherapy. However, none of their choices were nonfiction literature and thus did not provide interdisciplinary opportunities to also learn more about particular content topics (e.g., history, science). Other limitations also exist when identifying giftedness in literature because of the stereotypes and myths about giftedness in the media (Cross, 2005).

Rural Contexts and Nonfiction Children's Literature

Defining ruralness is a complex process that involves considering administrative, land use, and economic concepts; many experts do not agree on what constitutes a rural designation (Cromartie & Bucholtz, 2008). Even through disagreements,

stakeholders concur that rural areas need support in a variety of areas, as evidenced by the creation of the Rural Policy Research Institute (RUPRI) and its subsequent actions designed to support facets of rural life such as education and economics (RUPRI, 2020). For this study, we define *rural* as areas where people live and work in largely agricultural and low-population-density areas, and we recognize that rural communities, although not monolithic, often share common values and practices, such as sense of place, family, tradition, spirituality, differing definitions of success, and community (Stambaugh & Wood, 2016).

While stereotyping of rural community members is widespread, the RUPRI (2020) affirms the assets of people in rural areas in its vision statement: "Rural people and places have the resources and capacities to create strong, viable, meaningful, and sustainable futures that can both withstand and turn to advantage the forces of globalization and economic, demographic, and social change" (para. 3). It is this multifaceted perspective that speaks against stereotypes of rural residents often represented in children's literature. Gilton's (2020) account of the history of children's literature in the United States situates it within historical contexts that include poor educational resources in rural areas, particularly in the south. For example, according to Gilton, no public schools were available in the Southern United States until after the Civil War. Access to education for people of color was inequitable for the next century and in many ways continues to be so today.

Arguably, the isolation and lack of access to formalized education and newer technologies contributed to stereotypes of rural community members. Regardless of the reasons, stereotypes about rural people have been pervasive in literature. People who were rural and Black were often portrayed as lacking intelligence in children's literature, as documented by Harris (1990), who researched the first 100 years of literature that includes African Americans. The rural region of Appalachia in particular is portrayed in children's books with limited and deficit-oriented stereotypes of the region, including the misrepresentation of Appalachia as all White (Brashears, 2012). However, some nonfiction texts gently respond to

monolithic-type misconceptions of the region (Brashears, 2012; Chick, 2003). When they go unquestioned, imagined representations of rural areas as all White can cultivate othering within rural communities (Neal & Walters, 2008), and lack of any representation of the rich resources and giftedness in rural spaces is detrimental to a fair vision of rurality.

Intersectional Rural, Black, and Gifted Identities in Nonfiction Children's Literature

As complex beings in complex social structures, children are situated within systems of power that identify them as Black, gifted, and rural all at once. Even the youngest of children perform their intersectional identities by participating in multiple discourses simultaneously that signify their belonging or nonbelonging to various groups (Kustatscher, 2017). While rural, Black gifted youth may see one aspect of their identities represented in discourses around them, such as children's nonfiction literature, they are unlikely to find mirrors of their intersectional identities. For example, while increases in representation of Black figures might make it easier to find books that mirror their racial identity, when seeking books that center on rural, Black people in positive ways the challenges are compounded. Finding a book about a Black person who is rural and also gifted is nearly impossible. Certainly, many young, gifted Black children live in rural areas, but they are not likely to see themselves in their classroom libraries. Extensive research has been done on the importance of seeing ones' self in the text and on the importance of seeing others as prominent, positive figures. Bishop's (1990) landmark work highlights the notion of windows and mirrors. She posits children should be able to see the world outside of themselves through books that act as windows, and children should also see their own lives reflected through books that act as mirrors.

When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a mirror. Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience. (p ix)

This quote illustrates the ability of literature to illuminate the intersectional nature of identity. When we find mirrors in our windows, we find the spaces and borders (Anzaldúa, 1987) between our own intersectional identities and others (Crenshaw, 1990).

Excluding books about young, gifted Black children from classrooms inhibits every child's capacity for change, and it harms those children who are already marginalized. Additionally, it prevents teachers and other authority figures from also participating in discourses that make space for Black, rural, gifted intersectional identities. Books that illuminate these identities instead of excluding or ignoring them should be sought out and examined for their potential as mirrors, windows, and sliding doors (Bishop, 1990) in gifted and general education. This article shares findings of a critical content analysis of five contemporary nonfiction children's books to understand their representation of rural, Black, gifted youth and their potential as mirrors, windows, and sliding doors in gifted education.

Methodology

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that inspired our initial engagement with the research question and guided our research process assumes a social construction of knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978). Within this position, we further focus on the research by employing concepts of intersectionality, rurality, giftedness, funds of knowledge, and community cultural wealth (see Figure 1).

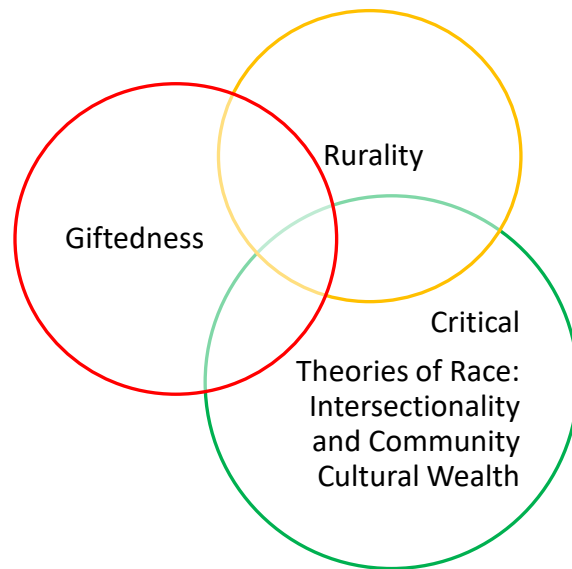
Critical Theories of Race and Intersectionality

While critical theories of race are not monolithic (Gottesman, 2016), they originated in legal theory (Bell, 1995), and most critical theories of race share several axioms, assumptions, or tenets (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Race is historically and socially constructed and organizes people into a system of hierarchy. Race is ubiquitous, unstable, and ocular; it transforms time and again to reform racial meanings in order to keep systems of hierarchy intact (Omi & Winant, 2014). Race is also an oppression that interacts with other social identities to create intersectional forms of oppression

(Crenshaw, 1990). Critical ideas about race, in particular, the theory of intersectionality, were employed as a theoretical lens in this content analysis.

Figure 1

Theoretical Frameworks Used in This Study



Note: Critical theories of race, including intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1990) and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), were used to understand the intersections of giftedness and rurality in the texts.

Rurality

Similar to race and, as described below, giftedness, there is no singular or monolithic meaning to *rurality*, which “is defined relationally, within a shifting context that includes scale” (Kingsolver, 2017, p. 219). Conceptions of rural spaces range from human to nonhuman, cultural to political. In addition to an overarching theoretical stance assuming the social construction of knowledge, we employ a “minor theory” of rurality as advocated by Cloke (2006) and described by Katz (1996) as “interstitial” and “a way of working through the contradictions and limits more imaginatively” (p. 490). By layering rurality onto our theoretical lens in this way, we hope to illuminate the implications of rurality in this research that expose the “complex interweaving of power relations, social conventions, discursive practices

and institutional forces which are constantly combining and recombining” (Cloke, 2006, p. 24) in rural settings. Therefore, the lens of rurality was employed as a focus through which we understand the content of the books, as well as understanding race and giftedness within it.

Giftedness

There is no singular definition of giftedness within the field of gifted education (Reis & Renzulli, 2010). Traditional definitions and theories of giftedness “are normed and conceptualized on middle class whites” (Wright et al., 2017, p. 51). More critical frameworks of giftedness no longer focus giftedness solely on a high IQ and instead encompass a variety of behavioral characteristics (Henshon, 2020). When selecting texts for the content analysis, we employed Renzulli’s (1978)

theory of creative-productive giftedness that describes those aspects of human activity and involvement where a premium is placed on the development of original ideas, products, artistic expressions, and areas of knowledge that are purposefully designed to have an impact on one or more target audiences. (Renzulli, 1999, p. 9)

This theory served as a basis for the Enrichment Triad Model (Renzulli, 1977), in which type III enrichment activities (individual projects) are when “students use real-world methods of inquiry to become ‘first-hand investigators’ in the particular area in which they choose to work” (Renzulli, 1977, p. 232). This part of the model was also part of the framework in which we selected and analyzed books.

However, a second theoretical stance on giftedness allowed us to see these aspects of giftedness and gifted activities not as merely individual phenomena but as situated knowledge, behaviors, and activities. In addition to the conceptual shift of giftedness from IQ to creative-productive, there has also been a stark shift from understanding giftedness as natural aptitudes to understanding it as behaviors impacted by various environmental factors. In fact, some writers have gone so far as to frame giftedness through a lens that identifies only the privileges and opportunities afforded to an individual. Syed (2010) wrote, “Practically every man or woman who triumphs against the odds is, on closer inspection, a beneficiary of unusual circumstances” (p. 9). However, history provides innumerable examples of brilliance, skilled aptitude, or giftedness of individuals who were not the beneficiary of privileged unusual circumstances but, rather, subjected to exclusion from power and privilege. For this content analysis, we employed a funds-of-knowledge approach to giftedness in addition to creative-productive giftedness. A funds-of-knowledge approach to analyzing the environmental factors of giftedness allows us to see the situated support of marginalized yet gifted individuals not as privileges but as diverse bases for knowledge (González et al., 2006). During the content analysis process, we specifically explored how the texts showed the diverse resources of

knowledge present in the child’s context that supported their giftedness.

Funds of Knowledge and Community Cultural Wealth

As González et al. (2006) put it simply, the concept of funds of knowledge is based on the assumption that “people are competent and have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge” (pp. ix–x). These authors theorized funds of knowledge by interviewing and analyzing families about their daily lives, as daily activities “are a manifestation of particular historically accumulated funds of knowledge that households possess. Instead of individual representations of an essentialized group, household practices are viewed as dynamic, emergent, and interactional” (p. 41). Yosso (2005) furthered funds of knowledge through a critical-race-theory lens that identified various forms of capital students of color possess, although they are not always valued in educational settings. Taken together, these forms of capital represent community cultural wealth. In this content analysis, we employed a theory of knowledge that valued the funds of knowledge in the situated activities of families and communities and valued how those activities represented forms of capital that cultivated the extraordinary gifted behaviors of the central figures in the text.

Positionality Statement

We identify as White females and recognize the privileges associated with our identities. This is an etic position compared to the historical figures of the texts we analyzed and the rural, Black, gifted learners whose education we make connections to in this article. In any research, an etic positionality bears important consideration; in qualitative research, it bears even more important consideration because of the researchers’ role in constructing the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). We also align with an antiracist stance (Kendi, 2019) and believe in the power of equity literacy (Gorski & Swalwell, 2015) to transform schools and learning. We hope this added lens to our positions was enough to critically analyze the texts in ways that support equity and justice. Through these lenses and critical content analysis design, we explored

how rural Black gifted youth are represented in five contemporary nonfiction texts.

Critical Content Analysis Design

Content analysis is both a methodological perspective and tool for analysis; it offers a way to gain qualitative insights into existing texts through close analysis (Krippendorff, 2018). Scholars may take content analysis a step further by bringing a critical lens to existing texts via critical content analysis (Short, 2016). In so doing, researchers acknowledge a twofold experience of power dynamics (Freire, 1970/2000) and potential transactions (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994) that readers may have with texts. Thus, critical content analysis assumes that the researcher has taken a critical stance prior to analyzing text, and all findings are grounded in theory that seeks to illustrate and eradicate oppression.

Text Selection

To select the texts for this study, we relied on lists compiled by advocates for social education—Socialjusticebooks.org and the National Council for Social Studies Notable Trade Book List—within the last 15 years. Our search criteria were as follows: informational text, picture book, elementary level, Black protagonist, childhood experience, displays characteristics of giftedness, and at least a partial rural setting. We chose five texts that met these criteria (see Table 1). After selecting the texts, we elicited the assistance of a graduate student and collected information about the texts, authors, and illustrators. Like Gilton (2020), we value the role of illustrators and recognize the importance of who is creating the texts that feature Black children in positive ways (see Table 1). Notably, *Nina: Jazz Legend and Civil Rights Activist* (Brière-Haquet, 2017) has received no awards for either the author or the illustrator. Despite this, we believe this was a text worthy of analysis, and it features the only female protagonist of the selected texts.

Data Analysis

This research was grounded in the axioms and implications of qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Our data analysis was guided by the processes for critical content analysis outlined by Short (2016) and Bradford (2016) and our theoretical framework. In phase 1, we selected a research question grounded in existing research and our own observations about texts. Then, we selected texts based on the criteria described above. We conducted independent, first readings of the five texts from an aesthetic and descriptive exploratory stance (Saldaña, 2016), and we followed up our readings with an informal discussion of our thoughts and initial codes.

In phase 2, our analysis took a more deductive stance, and we reread the texts and looked for prominent features in each, to develop a more refined categorical coding structure (Saldaña, 2016). We collected this information into a semantic feature analysis table and discussed how the codes aligned with our research question and theoretical framework (see Table 2). At this time, we used our first set of codes, personal notes, and research question to create a coding frame. Independently, we each reread the texts and coded them using our agreed-upon codes.

In phase 3, we discussed our independent coding results by examining each code for all five texts until we reached 100% agreement. Throughout this process, we referred back to our theoretical frameworks to ensure we were maintaining a critical stance in our analysis. Finally, we independently created concept maps to show the relationship among our codes, refining where necessary. Then we compared our categories against our final coding frame to arrive at three critical themes and underlying subthemes as our findings.

Table 1*Titles Selected for Analysis in This Study*

Title	Summary	Sample of Awards	Additional Elements
<i>Before John Was a Jazz Giant: A Song of John Coltrane</i> (Weatherford, 2008)	Highlights the childhood of John Coltrane, a gifted jazz musician. Coltrane grew up in rural North Carolina, and this informational narrative shows all of the ways John learned to absorb music in the world around him. Lexile: AD1090	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2009, Coretta Scott King Award • 2009, National Council for the Social Studies Notable Trade Books for Young People • 2009, Golden Kite Award for Picture Book Text 	Author's Note; Selected Listening; Further Reading
<i>Carter Reads the Newspaper</i> (Hopkinson, 2019)	Shows Carter G. Woodson's journey from being the child of enslaved people to the founder of Black History Month. Woodson was born in rural Virginia and spent his childhood enacting his propensity for advocacy. Lexile: 810	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2019, Eureka! Nonfiction Children's Book Award Silver Honor • 2019, Parents' Choice Silver Honor Award • 2020, Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People • 2020, Notable Children's Books 	Learn More Section; Bibliography; Author's Note; Illustrator's Note; List of Black Leaders; Timeline; References; supporting quotations
<i>The Secret Garden of George Washington Carver</i> (Barretta, 2020)	Explores the childhood of scientist and environmentalist George Washington Carver. Carver applies his giftedness to teach others about agriculture and advocates for reform along the way. Lexile: approximately 810	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2017, Carolyn W. Field Honor Book Award • 2017, Children's Book Council Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People • 2016, The New York Public Library Best Books for Kids 	Timeline; Bibliography; Further Reading
<i>Nina: Jazz Legend and Civil Rights Activist</i> (Brière-Haquet, 2017)	This visually stunning text takes the reader through an important event in Nina Simone's childhood. Simone was a world-renowned musician and activist from rural North Carolina. Lexile: 560		
<i>Poet: The Remarkable Story of George Moses Horton</i> (Tate, 2015)	Shares the story of gifted writer George Moses Horton. Born into slavery in rural North Carolina, Horton taught himself to read and write and then monetized his skills, as well as using them to advocate for abolition. Lexile: 730	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2016, Ezra Jack Keats Book Author Award • 2016, Christopher Award • 2016, Texas Institute of Letters H-E-B/Jean Flynn Award for Best Children's Book 	Author's Note; Bibliography; References; supporting quotations

Table 2*Semantic Feature Analysis From Phase 2*

Semantic Feature	Text				
	Barretta, 2020	Brière-Haquet, 2017	Hopkinson, 2019	Tate, 2015	Weatherford, 2008
Gifted	x	x	x	x	x
Black	x	x	x	x	x
Rural	x	x	x	x	x
North Carolina Connection	—	x	—	x	x
Race-based discrimination and oppression	x	x	x	x	—
Poverty	x	—	x	x	x
Church	—	x	—	x	x
Child supported community	x	x	x	x	x
Black community supported giftedness	x	x	x	x	x

Findings

While the texts varied in how they substantiated the historical claims they were making (see limitations section), we focused our analysis on the content as presented by the authors. We attribute internal and external dialogue to the historical figure in each given text and cited the author of the text. The three critical themes we identified were intersectionality, enacting giftedness, and reciprocal relationships with community.

Intersectionality

Using Crenshaw's (1990) theory of intersectional oppressions, we identified a number of themes that illustrated the socially constructed barriers the historical figures faced in the texts, as well as relationships among them.

Race-Based Discrimination in Learning

Each of the historical figures experienced race-based discrimination in the selected texts, except John Coltrane (Weatherford, 2008). While racism pervaded the lives in the other texts, there were many specific similarities of how racism related to their opportunities to learn. George Washington Carver's story illustrated powerful examples of race-based discrimination related to education, both as a younger child, when he exclaimed, "I wish I could go to school with the white children" (Barretta, 2020,

n.p.), and as a young adult in 1885 when, after being accepted to Highland College, the school refused to admit him when they learned he was African American. The scenes in *Poet: George Moses Horton* also illuminate the exclusion George Moses Horton must have felt to be restricted from educational opportunities because of his race, when it is explained that, "when white children studied their books, he lingered nearby. He listened as they repeated their letters of the alphabet" (Tate, 2015, n.p.). Despite circumventing these barriers to excel enough in language to become a published author, Horton was still unable to live his life freely when he reached adulthood. Into the twentieth century, the text about Carter G. Woodson reports that he was told by a professor at Harvard that "Black people had no history" (Hopkinson, 2019, n.p.). Nina Simone's opportunities to learn and perform music were impacted by racism through the narrowed types of music she learned and restrictions on her performances; it even affected how she saw the white and black keys on the piano: "Yes, that's the way it was. White was whole. Black was half. It was that way everywhere and for everyone." (Brière-Haquet, 2017, n.p.).

Obstacles of Poverty

In addition to race-based discrimination, obstacles and barriers experienced by the historical figures were compounded by poverty. While not all

texts analyzed in this study included examples of poverty, it was an important part of the life stories of several of the historical figures. In particular, poverty, or needing economic resources, was a key factor in the stories of those who had been enslaved. Food was in scarce supply, as Woodson noted that he and his siblings “would leave the table hungry to go to the woods to pluck the persimmons” (Hopkinson, 2019, n.p.). Clothing was also limited, and illustrations often depicted the protagonists wearing tattered outfits. In the case of Woodson, he would go to bed early on Saturday nights so his mother could wash his only set of clothes in preparation for church on Sunday (Hopkinson, 2019). When it was time for Nina Simone to perform her first concert, her mother made her dress instead of buying one, which suggests a scarcity of resources (Brière-Haquet, 2017). Lack of economic resources pushed Woodson and Carver into early adult-like work. To illustrate, as a teenager Woodson drove a garbage wagon instead of going to high school, and he even risked his life to work in coal mines (Hopkinson, 2019). Carver set out on his own at age 12 to look for more work opportunities (Barretta, 2020); he did not have the chance to pursue further education until later in his life.

Enacting Giftedness

The historical figures represented in the analyzed texts cultivated their giftedness according to their unique area—music, science, literacy, and advocacy. However, their gifted behaviors shared common features. In particular, the young, Black, gifted children in these texts were largely curious, self-propelled, and resourceful in childhood and beyond.

Curious

All five of the historical figures represented in the texts showed curiosity about the world around them in relation to their area of giftedness. Nina Simone questioned her teacher and wondered about the racial injustices that she saw in her community and her role as a Black, female pianist in the midst of an all-White, all-male musical canon (Brière-Haquet, 2017). George Washington Carver conducted his experiments in his outdoor garden as he “[wanted] to know the name of every stone and flower and insect and bird and beast” (Barretta,

2020, n.p.). He continued experimenting through his adult life as he documented over 300 ways to use peanuts and ran a research lab. George Moses Horton pretended to read by mimicking and watching those around him, which later turned into word play through poetry (Tate, 2015). Likewise, Carter G. Woodson’s curiosity was fed by reading and he found his “interest in penetrating the people of [his] past was deepened” (Hopkinson, 2019, n.p.). John Coltrane “was all ears” as he developed his musical gifts at first from consuming the music of his home and community (Weatherford, 2008, n.p.).

Self-Propelled

In each of the biographies, the children created some of their own opportunities for growth by making learning situations for themselves and developing their giftedness in these spaces. For example, Coltrane was always watching and listening; then eventually he “picked up that horn, blew into the mouthpiece . . . and breathed every sound he’d ever known into a bold new song” (Weatherford, 2008, n.p.). Horton taught himself to read in a similar way by listening to privileged, White children learn the alphabet; he used his emergent literacy knowledge to teach himself to read from a discarded spelling book (Tate, 2015). Carver struggled to master botany as a child, but “the more he experimented, the more he learned” (Barretta, 2020, n.p.). He continued to expose himself to science in nature, until he was able to not only understand it but also capture its nuances in his paintings. Woodson and Simone received some formal training, yet the authors still presented Woodson as enhancing his giftedness on his own as he sought out learning opportunities related to concepts like economics and politics (Hopkinson, 2019). Simone’s self-directedness is portrayed in the illustrations, which always show her alone at the piano. The front cover shows a picture of an inquisitive Black female child with one finger on a black key, which suggests how on her own Simone used her talent for beauty and to raise awareness (Brière-Haquet, 2017).

Resourcefulness

As children, these historical figures used the resources that were available in order to pursue

their interests, which in turn developed their giftedness. In some ways, the children's resourcefulness was organic as when Coltrane was listening to music every chance that he had (Weatherford, 2008). However, most examples of resourcefulness were driven by the children's economic hardships rooted in racial discrimination. The children were determined to learn, and whether they used books discarded by their White peers or read old, outdated newspapers, they found a way. Nothing was wasted. As noted in Carver's biography, he made needles from turkey feathers and dyes from nuts and berries, and used plants for medicine and paint (Barretta, 2020).

Reciprocal Relationships with Community

All of the books illuminated the situated nature of each historical figure's giftedness. The most coherent theme related to this was the reciprocal relationship between the historical figure's giftedness and their community. In each of the texts, there were clear references to how the community supported the child and also how the child supported their community.

Community Supported Gifts

Findings included coded excerpts in all of the texts that identified representations of how the historical figure's giftedness developed within a context of community and familial support. In many instances, it was clear how the gifted behaviors were connected to the community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) and the family's funds of knowledge (González et al., 2006).

Family. Even though George Moses Horton's mother could not read, she gave him her most valuable possession, her hymnal, as support for George's desire to learn how to access written language (Tate, 2015). Similarly in *Carter Reads the Newspaper*, even though Carter G. Woodson's father couldn't read, his value of being informed provoked an opportunity for Woodson to read the newspaper aloud to him. In addition, Woodson's father supported his son's ambition with his talents by teaching him "to look anyone in the eye and declare, I am your equal" (Hopkinson, 2019, n.p.).

Church Place. The church was also an important community support for the historical

figures in the texts. In *Before John was a Jazz Legend*, the narrator relays all the sounds that Coltrane heard growing up, including hearing "Grandpa's Sunday sermons, Mama playing hymns for the senior choir" (Weatherford, 2008, n.p.). These were illustrated as important influences on a further page where a church building is pictured in the background of Coltrane playing his horn. In *Nina*, the church invited Simone to share her abilities in front of an audience, although the problematic events regarding seating, described below, ensued (Brière-Haquet, 2017).

Broader Community. In addition to family and church, broader community resources also supported the central figures' giftedness. Largely, the authors rightly focused on the capital of the Black community from which the children in the texts benefited. The Black community was largely present, even in the short simple texts of *Before John was a Jazz Giant*, for example, through a reference to the scoutmaster's call to join the band (Weatherford, 2008, n.p.). While George Washington Carver's (Barretta, 2020) broader community originally discouraged his pursuit of flowers, they later encouraged his inquiries by calling him the "Plant Doctor" when they would bring him their unhealthy plants for care. The text also shares how Carver was supported by various Black mentors after leaving his home at age 12 to pursue more education. Forced to work in the coal mines at a young age, Woodson even found support for his talents from a community of coal miners in Oliver Jones's house, where he had access to books written by African Americans. His abilities were engaged through the opportunity of informing others what was in the daily newspapers (Hopkinson, 2019). Horton was the only central figure of the texts who was additionally and substantially supported by a White community. Although first teasing Horton when he sold fruit and vegetables on campus, the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill community supported the newly famous poet by giving him books, supporting his poem business, and garnering influential support for his writing and quest for freedom (Tate, 2015).

Gifts Supported Community: For Others and the World Through Activism

In both big and small ways, the central figures in the texts used their gifts for the benefit of others. In *Before John was a Jazz Giant*, Coltrane participated in a community band toward the enjoyment of others (Weatherford, 2008). Woodson's reading of the newspapers benefited his father and his fellow coal miners (Hopkinson, 2019), and Horton wrote poems for others, although he eventually benefited financially (Tate, 2015).

Using one's giftedness to take action against injustice or in support of the Black community was common among the biographies, and it was portrayed in both childhood and adulthood. For instance, Simone (Brière-Haquet, 2017) withheld her gift from a concert audience until her mother was returned to her rightful place in the front row. Woodson helped miners learn about their rights as a young adult. However, his best-known activism occurred in response to a college professor who told him "Black people had no history" (Hopkinson, 2019, n.p.). Woodson's answer was to work to show the world the powerful history of Black people via his creation of Negro History Week, the predecessor to Black History Month. Horton used his gifts as a writer to protest enslavement (Tate, 2015). Also, Carver's initial altruistic efforts to cure the plants of community members spurred a lifelong career in activism through educating and improving rural farming practices (Barretta, 2020).

Limitations

Our findings are described using direct quotes, paraphrased text, and illustrations from the selected texts. The ways in which the authors of the texts substantiated their historical claims varied and could be observed from various included text features (see Table 1). Therefore, the internal and external dialogue in the selected children's literature may or may not be historically accurate; however, our purpose was to investigate how young, Black, gifted children were represented in text, not to verify the historical nuances. Additionally, we do not claim these are the only texts that present rural, Black, gifted historical figures during youth; however, these five met our criteria and served our research purpose of analyzing the intersectionality of

historical rural Black gifted figures in contemporary nonfiction children's literature.

Discussion

The purpose of this inquiry was to understand how gifted Black, rural youth are represented in selected contemporary nonfiction children's literature. Our findings revealed that the selected texts included substantial representations of enacted giftedness as well as contextual connections between the gifted individuals and their rural communities. These representations are important for a number of reasons.

First, because the focus of the content analysis was on Black figures, often in times when they were nearly completely excluded from traditional schooling, the texts trouble scholarly debunked yet popular notions of *schoolhouse giftedness*: giftedness identified only by traditional forms of identification, such as cognitive ability tests and other abilities valued in traditional school learning situations (Renzulli, 1999). None of the texts focused on the identification nor the cultivation of gifted abilities within school classrooms. Instead, the historical figures displayed productive-creative giftedness in the form of artistic expression and original thinking that was fueled by curiosity and self-driven inquiry. Instead of within the classroom, the enactments of giftedness took place in more community-based settings, where they had an authentic impact on others—another characteristic of creative-productive giftedness (Renzulli, 1999). Therefore, the texts offer a situated representation of giftedness in which community funds of knowledge (González et al., 2006) both affect and are affected by the gifted individual.

The findings of this content analysis also offer hope that counternarratives are available that resist the deficit views of Black and rural potential. While the text selection process revealed just how few mirrors of these intersectional identities there are among contemporary nonfiction titles, the books selected might offer important support for gifted Black, rural youth, who need to see themselves more in books. They also could be resources for teachers who need to see giftedness in more of their Black, rural students. In particular, the books might help teachers recognize the various forms of capital

(Yosso, 2005) their rural, gifted Black youth possess. For example, many of the books shared stories of aspirational capital—the ability to maintain hope for the future even in the face of barriers—as four of the five texts included substantial context of the intersectional barriers the gifted individuals faced and the determination they had to keep performing and cultivating their gifts. Linguistic and resistant capital was also maximized in many of the figures' stories, such as George Moses Horton's gifts in poem writing and Nina Simone's actions to resist segregation during her recital.

In addition to highlighting underrepresented types of giftedness and underrepresented identities associated with giftedness, the findings also share connections to enrichment models and goals of enrichment models that have been advocated for in gifted education literature. Type III enrichment activities of the enrichment triad model (Renzulli & Reis, 1997) make students firsthand inquirers and “encourage them to practice problem solving, complex thinking and higher-order executive functioning tasks, while simultaneously exposing the students to a complex, changing and challenging world that gives rise to self-reflection on diversity, human concerns, altruism, and ethics” (Renzulli & D'Souza, 2014, p. 161). It is advocated that this type of enrichment might cultivate the propensity of gifted individuals to use their talents to improve the human condition. Working toward this goal has been sometimes titled Operation Houndstooth (Renzulli & D'Souza, 2014). Within the selected texts of this content analysis, four of the five gifted historical figures shared traits related to the service component of Operation Houndstooth and perhaps extend this enrichment to robust activism: Simone used her music to protest injustice, Woodson created Negro History Week (which later became Black History Month), George Carver educated others on healthy agricultural practices, and Horton used his writing to protest slavery.

Our findings offer an extension to the Enrichment Triad Model and Operation Houndstooth by illuminating the importance of the reciprocal role of the community in supporting the gifted individual. Yes, these gifted individuals worked to improve their various communities, but

their gifts were also supported and cultivated by community cultural wealth—capital that even in nontraditional identification processes of giftedness is often undervalued. Taken together, the text set analyzed here shares evidence of all six of Yosso's types of cultural capital that are supported by communities of color: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant (Yosso, 2005). This is an important caveat to the often decontextualized identification processes and apolitical enrichment models that ignore the role of community cultural wealth and funds of knowledge in the cultivation of giftedness.

Conclusion

Nearly 40 years ago, author and illustrator Celia Berridge pleaded with the literature and journalism world to take children's books more seriously. Berridge (1981) hoped to demonstrate “that it is possible to find a lot to say about a really good picture book” (p. 157). Since then, not only have picture books been taken more seriously in literature, but their power as a tool in education has also become a topic of multiple scholarly fields within education. Thanks to the work of Johnson et al. (2016) and a number of other critical content analysis methodologists and scholars, rigorous analysis of children's literature can serve a wide variety of educational inquiries. The present content analysis has integrated a critical, antiracist stance into the selection of resources for rural gifted education by highlighting funds-of-knowledge and community-cultural-wealth perspectives. It is our intention that rural, Black, gifted learners have more opportunities to see mirrors of themselves in books and that those mirrors include how their rural communities are assets to their giftedness rather than deficits. It is also our intention that the findings can help teachers utilize strategies with contemporary nonfiction children's literature to build on existing community cultural wealth as part of their antideficit approach to teaching rural, gifted Black students. We share the belief that “gifted education need not be limited to academic components, but can also include preparation for a life-long pursuit of the common good and ethical and responsible leadership” (Renzulli & D'Souza, 2014, p. 159). The historical figures represented in these texts are admirable examples of Black, rural youth using

giftedness to improve the human condition, including transforming barriers they faced in their own lives.

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