

Harlem Renaissance or Momentary Aberration? An Analysis of the Newbery's Progress
Toward Inclusiveness

When Kwame Alexander accepted his Newbery Medal for *The Crossover* in 2015, he said, “the community of children’s literature is a Harlem Renaissance for me.” To Alexander, winning the Newbery represented a new era in African American children’s literature. 2015 did prove to be a landmark year for minority representation in children’s literature, as it was the same year that Jacqueline Woodson won both a Newbery Honor award and the Coretta Scott King award for *Brown Girl Dreaming*. In claiming these honors, Alexander and Woodson began to answer the calls for more diverse children’s literature that Walter Dean Meyers and Christopher Meyers memorably made in their *New York Times* opinion pieces the year prior. This talk will analyze how much progress the Newbery has made in choosing books that fulfill Meyers and Meyers’ goals by comparing the reception of *The Crossover* (2015) and *Brown Girl Dreaming* (2014) with the reception of the first two Newbery Medal winners by African-American authors: Virginia Hamilton’s *M.C. Higgins, the Great* (1974) and Mildred Taylor’s *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (1976). It will analyze how these four books from two different periods in Newbery history have presented different “maps” to minority children, how this has changed between the mid-1970s and 2015, and whether the 2015 books represent a true paradigm shift in children’s literature or constitute a momentary aberration.