

**Call for Proposals:**  
**“Towards Inclusion and Authenticity: Addressing Cultural Dilemmas in Black Children's Audiobooks”**

**ChLA Guaranteed Session for MLA 2025**  
**(9-12 January, New Orleans, LA)**

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In the contemporary digital era, there has been a notable transition of Black children's literature towards the audiobook format, facilitated by platforms such as Audible, Overdrive, and Libby. This shift has significantly expanded the accessibility of Black children's literature beyond the traditional confines of physical books (Rubery, 2011). The role of audiobook narrators in this context becomes crucial, as they are instrumental in bringing stories to life, thereby enhancing the listening experience, comprehension, and the overall success of publishing ventures (Schor, 2018).

Nevertheless, this transition is not without its cultural challenges. A predominant issue is the underrepresentation or alteration of African American Vernacular English (AAVE), a vital linguistic component in many Black children's books. In numerous audiobook adaptations, AAVE is often diminished or substituted with standard English (Rickford, 1999). This practice restricts the breadth and reach of Black children's literature rich in AAVE, potentially limiting its audience compared to literature targeting white audiences, which typically does not encounter such linguistic barriers. The upcoming session aims to critically examine the significance of incorporating AAVE in audiobook narrations of Black children's literature. It will explore the cultural ramifications of omitting AAVE from these adaptations, a practice that may lead to a loss of cultural authenticity and representation (Baker-Bell, 2020).

We invite papers for a panel discussion on selecting narrators for children's audiobooks, with a focus on African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and related cultural nuances. Topics may include but are not limited to:

- The significance of authentic narrative representation in audiobooks.
- The impact of narrator choice on the portrayal of Black characters and cultural authenticity
- Exploring racial and dialect diversity in audiobook voice acting.
- The role of AAVE in children's literature and its adaptation in audiobooks; aligning audiobook production with cultural integrity
- Developing selection criteria for narrators to reflect cultural richness.
- The responsibilities of authors and publishers in this process.

Our end goal is to collaboratively work towards formulating a set of principles for selecting narrators who can authentically represent these cultural nuances. This framework will draw upon Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017), Africanist Theory (Asante, 1988), Black Authenticity (Taylor, 2005), and Black Authorship (Smith, 2013), ensuring a comprehensive and balanced approach to this important aspect of children's literature.

This session serves as a call-to-action for publishers to acknowledge and act on the need for a more diverse and inclusive literary landscape. It emphasizes the vital role publishers play in accurately representing the cultural and linguistic intricacies of Black children's literature, thereby expanding the reach and impact of these narratives (Tucker, 2020). We will discuss the

importance of promoting inclusion and authenticity in Black children's literature through audiobooks. Our commitment is towards contributing to a literary future where all voices are respected and celebrated equally. This discussion is not just an exchange of ideas but a step towards creating a more inclusive and representative children's literary world.

Proposals of approximately **400-500 words** and inquiries should be submitted to Vashalice Kaaba (voh09@fsu.edu) by **March 1, 2024**. Scholars (especially students) from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds are highly encouraged to submit.