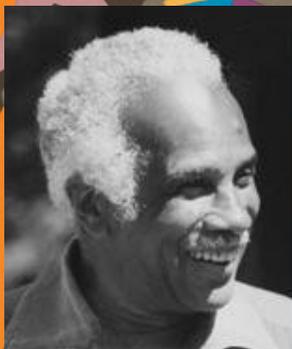




**STEAM—for the ARTS—  
Poetry, Storytelling, Song, and a  
Celebration of Our Shared Humanity:  
The Creations of  
Ashley Bryan**



### The Art of Ashley Bryan

Artist Ashley Bryan has utilized collages in four books that are especially child friendly: *Sail Away—Poems by Langston Hughes*; *Beautiful Blackbird*; *Let It Shine: Three Favorite Spirituals*; and *All Things Bright and Beautiful*. Three others—*Can't Scare Me!*, *The Night Has Ears*, and *What a Wonderful World*—are painted with tempera, gouache, and watercolors but could easily be reinterpreted as collage.

What is collage art? The term has migrated from its French roots, meaning “gluing,” to mean artfully cutting and pasting found materials. Although rarely representational, collage can be faithful to forms or totally abstract. The term arose in the early twentieth century with the rise of abstract art, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

### Infuse the ARTS into Language Arts

The most important step in teaching with any book is to allow children to hear the words and enjoy the illustrations. As teachers, librarians, and caregivers, we must pass on our love of reading through the pleasure it provides. For many children, that will be through the color and the art; for some, through the music or movement; for others, through the sound and beauty of the language. Ashley Bryan incorporates all of these in his books.

### Teachers, Librarians, and Caregivers

Read one of the books aloud to the children, and then let them read along with you if they are able. Even if they are not independent readers, they will enjoy the flow of language and join with you on repeated phrases.

### Talk About the Art

Pick a favorite book and ask the children about which illustration they would like to have created and which they would like to hang in their room. Ask them to analyze why Ashley Bryan chose the colors and the materials in the illustration. Explain that in order to create the art—either in collage or watercolors—an artist must create a draft. Some of Mr. Bryan’s drafts are sketched in pencil and are very geometric. Other sketches are flowing and done with pencil and watercolors. An artist takes his lead from the textual emotions.



## Create Original Art

Oftentimes, a professional artist receives input from many people before finishing the illustration. Children can conference with others to receive input on their drafts. Just like good writing, good art goes through revisions. Some artists now use specialized computer programs to test their artistic ideas. They can manipulate colors and textures simply with a keystroke.

### FOCUS ON SPECIFIC BOOKS:

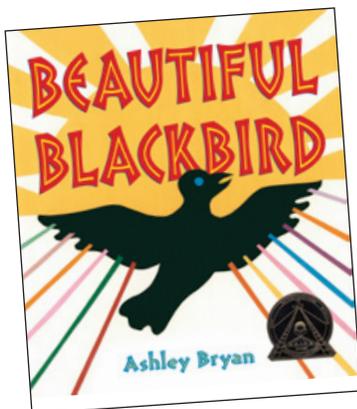
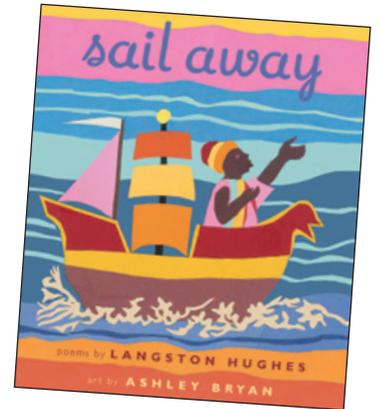
**Sail Away** • HC: 9781481430852

A beautiful poem in *Sail Away* is called “Seascape.” It is in a simple form—four lines with an A-B-C-B rhyme scheme. Children can substitute another city or country and use the Hughes poem as a framework for an original poem. For example, each first line reads: Off the coast of...

You might insert other countries or cities like “Galveston” or “Baltimore” or “Little Eagle Bay.” Real or imagined ports will make no difference. Continue in the same pattern as Hughes: “As our ship passed by/ We saw a...”

**Create:** After conferencing and revising their draft poems, students can produce a collage to accompany their poems. Have students draw a picture of a ship sailing on the waves. They should have a ship, waves, clouds, people, sky, sun or moon, and city skyline—if they are picturing their ship near a city. Cut and then trace each part of the picture on colored construction paper. The scene does not have to be realistic. Provide sturdy paper or poster board for each child. Assemble the collage from the cut forms and glue them to the shirt board.

**Publish:** When ready, they can print a final copy of their poem on a ship or sail or even the sky of their collage illustration. Collect all poems and art into a class book that can be shared in the school library. Alternatively, individual poems and art can be framed with black construction paper and cardboard backing.



**Beautiful Blackbird** • HC: 9780689847318

**Research:** Ashley Bryan provides his source for this book on the copyright page. It is possible to download the public domain story of “How the Ringdove Came by Its Ring,” but since the publication dates are different, the page numbers may also vary (in the 1920 edition, the story is on pp. 351–353).

**Compare and contrast:** Read the original story of “How the Ringdove Came by Its Ring” and then compare it to *Beautiful Blackbird*. Make a chart of all the similarities and then another for all the differences. Why do you think Bryan changed the story? What are the themes in *Beautiful Blackbird*? Which version of the story do you like best?

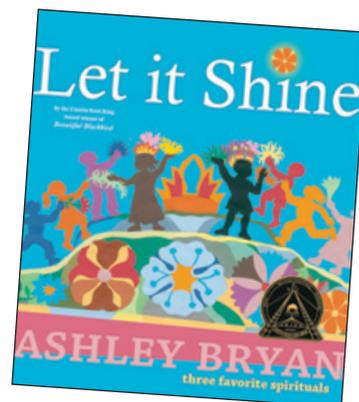
**Create:** Invite each student to draw a bird’s silhouette. One student can draw the silhouette of a blackbird that could be more detailed. Using foamcore board, trace each student’s bird on the foamcore. Depending on the age of the students, either they or an adult can cut out the birds with a utility knife. Students can color or paint their birds—or use the pattern they first created to glue on the foam board. Blackbird should be larger than the other birds. Attach thin grosgrain ribbon to the blackbird’s wings and then display it in the classroom.



## Let It Shine: Three Favorite Spirituals

HC: 9780689847325

Enlist the assistance of a musician, music teacher, or music librarian to find a recording of one or all of these spirituals. Listen to the songs. Invite the children to sing along and clap to the rhythm. If you have access to musical instruments—sticks, triangles, drums, tambourines, recorders—have the children accompany their singing. The music is in the back matter of this book.

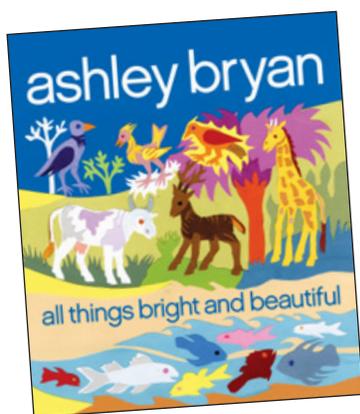


**Research:** What are the origins of the Negro spirituals? When were each of these songs first published and recorded? What do the words mean? Why are the words so easy to learn? (Teachers, librarians, and caregivers: you might want to provide specific guidance if students are using the Internet for their research.)

**Write:** Choose one of the spirituals and write an original verse for it. For example, a new stanza for “He’s Got the Whole World” might go like this: “He’s got the spider and the ant in his hands/ He’s got the cockroach and the beetle in his hands/ He’s got the earthworm and the lovebug in his hands/ He’s got the whole world in his hands.”

**Create:** Illustrate each new verse. Have students draw a picture of their scene. Cut, then trace each part of the picture on colored construction paper. The scene does not have to be realistic. Provide sturdy paper or poster board for each child. Assemble the collage from the cut forms, then glue to the shirt board. When the art is dry, trace the edges of each cut form with black marker if the student wants a stained glass effect.

**Perform** the original song—either as a musical performance or poetic reading—followed by the new verses. This is a good opportunity for collaboration. Two or three students can write new verses, and other small groups can create the art while others can produce a PowerPoint so that everyone can see the new words and participate. Individuals with strong vocal abilities can solo and others can be a chorus.



## All Things Bright and Beautiful • HC: 9781416989394

**Listen:** Listen to John Rutter’s arrangement of this poem that was originally written in 1848 by Mrs. Cecil Alexander in *Hymns for Little Children*. Here it is sung by the Mark Thallander Foundation Choir Festival at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels, Los Angeles, California: [YouTube.com/Watch?v=bjbktntuV30](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bjbktntuV30)

**Read:** Copy the lyrics of the song onto a piece of paper so that everyone can practice reading the words before seeing Ashley Bryan’s collage illustrations.

**Create:** Invite the children to illustrate a portion of the hymn as they imagine it. Use colored construction paper to turn the illustrations into collages as Mr. Bryan did.

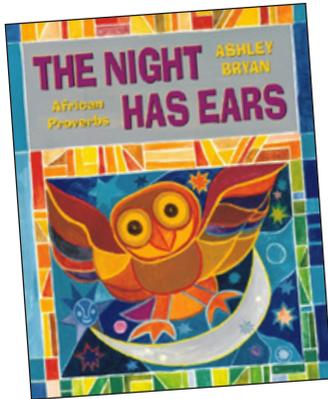
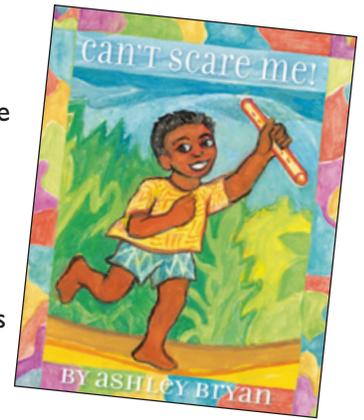
**Sing:** The music for the hymn is part of the back matter of *All Things Bright and Beautiful*. Collaborate with the music teacher or another musical resource to learn how to sing this lovely song. Share your singing, your illustrations, and what you have learned about this hymn with your family and friends.

**Visit:** Simon & Schuster’s Ashley Bryan site to watch a video in which Mr. Bryan talks about his love of art and music: [Authors.SimonandSchuster.com/Ashley-Bryan/706174](https://www.authors.simonandschuster.com/Ashley-Bryan/706174)

## Can't Scare Me! • HC: 9781442476578

**Create:** Using poster paints or even chalk, create a monster that would scare you. Notice how Ashley Bryan outlines his figures sometimes with black, sometimes with bright colors. Try this technique with your monster.

**Publish:** Copy the chant that the little boy repeats throughout the book on a large poster board, "Tanto, tanto. I'm wild and I'm free...No many-headed giant scares me at all." Use the poster as the center of the display, with giants and monsters dancing around it. Be sure to display Ashley Bryan's book along with the monsters.



## The Night Has Ears: African Proverbs • HC: 9780689824272

Ashley Bryan has collected proverbs from numerous African nations. He notes that his mother had a proverb for every situation. What is your mother's favorite proverb? If you can't think of one, try one of the sayings in this book. How would you illustrate it?

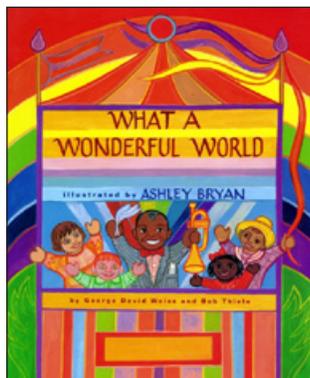
**Create:** Ask each child to write their favorite proverb and its source on a piece of paper. Have them turn to their neighbor to explain what the proverb means. Talking about any form of literature—even something as short as a proverb—can help us to understand better. Next, sketch the picture they want to paint. Be sure to fill up the entire paper. Allow the children to select the medium that best expresses their proverb.

**Publish:** After all the art is complete, frame the creations with white paper on which a student (or an adult helper) has typed the proverb and its source. Have each artist sign his or her art then place the paper frame over the art and glue the two papers together. Display for the entire community to see.

## What a Wonderful World • HC: 9780689800870

**Create:** Puppets seem most appropriate for this project, especially for young children. Depending on available time and materials and the age of the children, the puppets can be made from socks, paper plates, or craft paper. Each child can create a puppet that looks like himself or herself, a favorite pet, or a generic child. Color with crayon, paint, or pastels. Attach a Popsicle stick or ruler to each puppet. For older children, the puppets can illustrate parts of the song, such as "skies of blue, clouds of white..." as Ashley Bryan did in the book.

**Publish:** Work together to create a performance. Use the Louis Armstrong version of the song to play in the background or as a singalong. Take your show on the road to another class, to a book group at the library, or to a nursing home. Invite others to sing along with the lyrics.

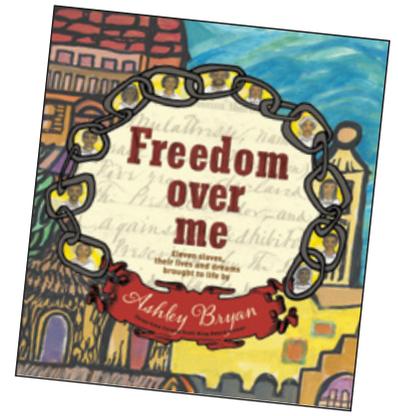


## Freedom Over Me • HC: 9781481456906

### Close Reading and Interpretation:

1. Working in small groups, answer the following Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How questions about each of the eleven people documented in *Freedom Over Me*.

- **Who** is the person?
- **What** jobs did this person perform on the Fairchilds' estate?
- **When** did this person work? Play? Celebrate?
- **Where** did this person work? Play? Celebrate?
- **Why** did this person do the kind of work that he or she did?
- **How** did this person add to the value of the estate? Did he or she add value to the existence of the other enslaved peoples?



2. There are two spreads of text and illustrations in the book about each of the slaves. One spread comments on the slave's reality, and the other is about their dreams. Compare and contrast the two illustrations of each person. How do the illustrations differ between the "reality" spread and the "dreams" spread?

3. Ashley Bryan discovered a real document about the sale of a houseful of slaves when a plantation's properties went up for auction. Bryan imagined how each person might look and drew them all together—almost like a family, or a class photograph at the beginning of the book. Why do you think some people were "worth" more than others?

### Craft and Structure:

1. Here are some unfamiliar words, embodied in phrases that might help explain them to younger readers. Ask students to think about what the underlined words mean. Tell them all the words are part of what Mrs. Mary Fairchilds says. (Allow them to work with a partner.)

- "He never hired an overseer."
- "... apprenticed slaves to learn trades ..."
- "The profits increased the value of our estate."
- "I hear stories of ... slave insurrections."
- "I am having the estate appraised."

After the students have had enough time for this brief exercise, have the pairs of students explain what they think the words mean to another pair of students. Finally, engage everyone in a class discussion about the meaning of the words. Have the students use dictionaries if necessary.

2. Then, to see if the children comprehend the *connotations* of the above words, ask the following questions, adapting them to the ages of the children.

- What is the main topic of Mrs. Fairchilds's words?
- Why would life be impossible for her now that she is alone?
- What does the estate mean to Mrs. Fairchilds now?
- What do the slaves mean to her?
- Does she value them?
- Does she act like the slaves are individual human beings?
- What does Mrs. Fairchilds plan to do now that her husband is dead?
- Some words mean more than the letters on the page signify. Discuss the last three lines of Mrs. Fairchilds's words: "... where I may live without fear, / surrounded by my own / good British people."

### Writing:

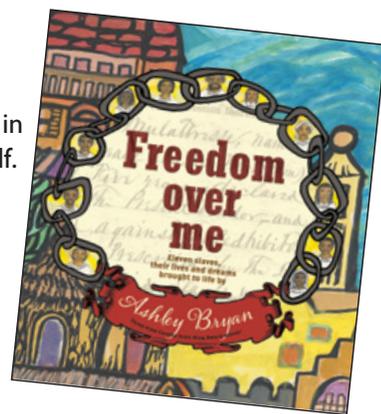
*Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) stress the development of three mutually reinforcing writing capacities: writing to persuade, to explain, and to convey real or imagined experiences. In the early grades, CCSS emphasizes writing informative and explanatory text. The writing activities below provide experience writing to give an opinion, to inform, and to explain a sequence of events.*

1. In the beginning of *Freedom Over Me*, Mrs. Fairchilds writes to persuade readers that she and her husband were good slave owners. Find examples in each of the eleven slave “dreams” that contradict her assessment of herself. Based on the ages of the students, have them write arguments from the point of view of one (or more) of the slaves, making sure to incorporate the slaves’ dreams, as well as the students’ own words.

2. Students should reimagine one day in the life of a slave on the Fairchilds plantation and write down their story. They should explain what the slave’s work on the plantation was, and how the master or mistress treated the slave. An example could be how Peggy burned the chicken while she was cooking for Mrs. Fairchilds and her guests one night, which caused dinner to be served late. After the students write down their stories, they should share them with the class.

3. Ashley Bryan has used his skills as an artist and a poet to draw and write about each of these eleven enslaved people. Select one slave’s dreams and compare them to that person’s reality. How do the words and illustrations emphasize the differences?

4. In *Freedom Over Me*, Ashley Bryan imagined the aspirations of eleven slaves who were sold when a plantation’s properties went up for auction. But, what if these slaves were given their freedom, instead? Do you think they would then have a chance to achieve their dreams during this time period? Have students write a few sentences, or paragraphs (depending on the ages of the class), about whether these slaves would be able to achieve their dreams if they were given their freedom. Students should refer to the slaves’ dreams mentioned in the book.



#### Speaking and Listening:

1. Share *Freedom Over Me* with another classroom of students. Practice reading the story and the dreams of each of the slaves aloud as a class. When the students feel comfortable performing—and this can be a choral or an individual reading—invite another class to hear the stories Ashley Bryan has written. Have one person or team act as narrator to introduce each speaker. Be sure to make it clear to the other students that all of these poems were written and illustrated by Ashley Bryan. This is a valuable way to share Ashley Bryan’s important story to even more children.

2. For younger students, the teacher or librarian can read selected excerpts from the 1969 Newbery Honor book, *To Be a Slave*, by Julius Lester. If students can read the book on their own, ask them to select a passage that emotionally speaks to them. Compare and contrast the real words of slaves in Julius Lester’s book with Ashley Bryan’s interpretations of slave documents.

Lester, Julius. *To Be a Slave*. (Illus. by Tom Feelings). New York: Dial Books for Young Readers, 1970.

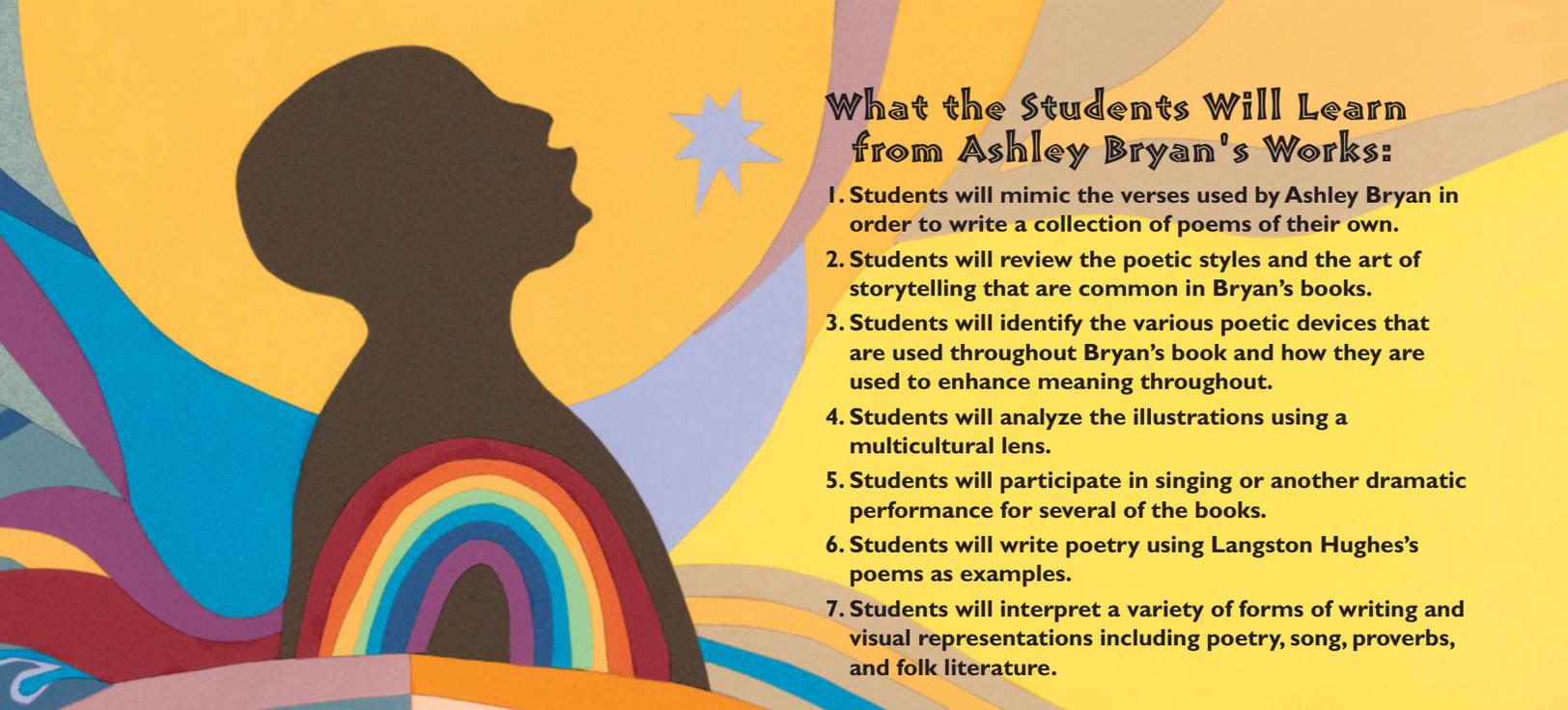
Additional books that could be used in this way:

Hansen, Joyce. *I Thought My Soul Would Rise and Fly: The Diary of Patsy, a Freed Girl*. New York: Scholastic, 1997.

Lester, Julius. *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road*. (Illus. by Rod Brown). New York: Dial Books for Young Readers, 1998.

Levine, Ellen. *Henry’s Freedom Box: A True Story from the Underground Railroad*. (Illus. by Kadir Nelson). New York: Scholastic, 2007.

McKissack, Patricia, and Fredrick McKissack. *Christmas in the Big House, Christmas in the Quarters*. (Illus. by John Thompson). New York: Scholastic Press, 1994.



## What the Students Will Learn from Ashley Bryan's Works:

1. Students will mimic the verses used by Ashley Bryan in order to write a collection of poems of their own.
2. Students will review the poetic styles and the art of storytelling that are common in Bryan's books.
3. Students will identify the various poetic devices that are used throughout Bryan's book and how they are used to enhance meaning throughout.
4. Students will analyze the illustrations using a multicultural lens.
5. Students will participate in singing or another dramatic performance for several of the books.
6. Students will write poetry using Langston Hughes's poems as examples.
7. Students will interpret a variety of forms of writing and visual representations including poetry, song, proverbs, and folk literature.

## Common Core State Standards ELA-Literacy

### Some of these books and activities align with the following Common Core State Standards:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.K.4 Ask and answer questions about key details in a text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.K-5.1 Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.K-5.2 Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.K.7 Describe the relationship between illustrations and the story in which they appear (e.g., what moment in a story an illustration depicts).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.2 Recount stories, including fables and folktales from diverse cultures, and determine their central message, lesson, or moral.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.7 Use information gained from the illustrations and words in a print or digital text to demonstrate understanding of its characters, setting, or plot.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.7 Explain how specific aspects of a text's illustrations contribute to what is conveyed by the words in a story (e.g., create mood, emphasize aspects of a character or setting).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.1.1 Write opinion pieces in which they introduce the topic or name the book they are writing about, state an opinion, supply a reason for the opinion, and provide some sense of closure.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.1.2 Write informative/explanatory texts in which they name a topic, supply some facts about the topic, and provide some sense of closure.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.1.3 Write narratives in which they recount two or more appropriately sequenced events, include some details regarding what happened, use temporal words to signal event order, and provide some sense of closure.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.1.5 With guidance and support from adults, focus on a topic, respond to questions and suggestions from peers, and add details to strengthen writing as needed.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.6 With guidance and support from adults, use technology to produce and publish writing (using keyboarding skills) as well as to interact and collaborate with others.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.1.2 Ask and answer questions about key details in a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.

**Caitlyn Dlouhy Books • Atheneum Books for Young Readers**  
**Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing**

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