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INDIGO ARTS ALLIANCE PRESENTS THE BEAUTIFUL BLACKBIRD CHILDREN'S BOOK FESTIVAL
Community Arts Organization for Black and Brown Artists Hosts Virtual Children's Book Festival
Celebrating Creators of the African Diaspora

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Portland, Maine, April 1, 2021 Indigo Arts Alliance (IAA), an organization committed to cultivating the artistic development of artists of African descent, is pleased to present the Virtual Edition of the 2nd annual Beautiful Blackbird Children's Book Festival throughout the month of August 2021.

In partnership with I'm Your Neighbor Books and the Diverse BookFinder, the Festival seeks to educate and entertain children, and brings attention to the critical need for more characters from the African diaspora in children's literature.

"Black and Brown children are less likely to encounter books that depict their own life experience. Growing up, the stories of my ancestors, my elders, my family were passed on to me through the oral tradition. We didn't see ourselves in literature. Representation is vital. It has an impact on self-esteem, and also on developing strong reading skills. The Beautiful Blackbird Festival is giving kids access to characters who look like them, and cultivating artists who appreciate that necessity," says Daniel Minter, co-founder of IAA and 2020 Caldecott Medal winner for *Going Down Home With Daddy*, by Kelly Starling Lyons.

Honoring the themes of roots, identity, and resiliency of the BIPOC community, IAA along with their partners, will celebrate authors and illustrators from across the African diaspora, offering children of color an opportunity to see themselves reflected in literature created with them in mind, and to interact with the creators themselves as role models and storytellers.

The 2021 Beautiful Blackbird Children's Book Festival builds on the tremendous success of the inaugural Festival, which despite the challenges presented by COVID-19, successfully transitioned from a live festival to a virtual event throughout the summer of 2020.

Last year's event reached more than 100,000 audience members spanning 44 countries. This year, the hope is to reconnect with last year's attendees and spread the reach even further with read-alouds, creator interviews, dance instruction, art projects, and Educator Toolkits. The Beautiful Blackbird Festival also plans to provide and facilitate the distribution of more than 1,500 books to children of all backgrounds served by Portland Housing Authority and Portland Parks & Recreation. Last year's event provided books and activity kits to 750 kids.

The Festival is named after the classic picture book **Beautiful Blackbird** and its legendary Black author and artist Ashley Bryan. This year, the festival will feature **Ashley Bryan's ABC of African American Poetry** to not only highlight Ashley's art, but the Black poets he introduces on the colorful pages. IAA's Daniel Minter will be featured with his acclaimed biographical picture book **So Tall Within: Sojourner Truth's Long Walk Toward Freedom**, a book steeped in the resilience of Black people. The artistry of Black barbers will be celebrated with the award-winning picture book **Crown: Ode to the Fresh Cut** by Derrick Barnes and illustrated by Gordon C. James. Author Jamilah Thompkins-Bigelow's featured **Your Name is a Song** is a picture book balm to children whose names do not roll off the tongues of their white teachers. **Joseph's Big Ride** illustrated by Ken Daley, set in Portland's Sudanese community, explores a joyful immigrant identity. Also representing the Sudanese community will be the award-winning poetry novel **The Red Pencil** by Andrea Davis Pinkney. For older children, the Festival will feature the Coretta Scott King-honored novel **Tristan Strong Punches a Hole in the Sky** by Kwame Mbalia, a book that pulls the reader in to the roots and lore of the American South and West Africa.

“As the only multidisciplinary arts incubator in Maine dedicated to cultivating the artistic development of Black and Brown artists, we are uniquely positioned to bridge the divide between the arts and culture sector and the ever-growing communities of color relocating here. We are extremely proud of The Beautiful Blackbird Children’s Book Festival,” said Marcia Minter, Indigo’s co-founder, *“it perfectly exemplifies our mission of honoring diversity, amplifying the creative vision of artists of color, and building a strong sense of community and inclusion for all of us.”*

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ABOUT THE BEAUTIFUL BLACKBIRD CHILDREN’S BOOK FESTIVAL

The Festival was created to honor the legendary and highly acclaimed children’s author and illustrator Ashley Bryan, whose award-winning picture book *Beautiful Blackbird* is a celebration of Blackness. Maine’s own Ashley Bryan was one of the first Black writers and illustrators of children’s books, opening the doors for Black book creators worldwide to add their contributions to children’s literature and encourage the publication of other children’s books for Black children.

ABOUT INDIGO ARTS ALLIANCE

Indigo Arts Alliance’s purpose is to build global connections by bringing together artists from diverse backgrounds of the African Diaspora to engage in their creative process with an opportunity to serve as both mentors and mentees. An integral aspect of the Indigo vision is to provide Maine based artists of African descent access to a broader range of practicing Black artists and artists of color from around the world. To learn more, go to indigoartsalliance.me.

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