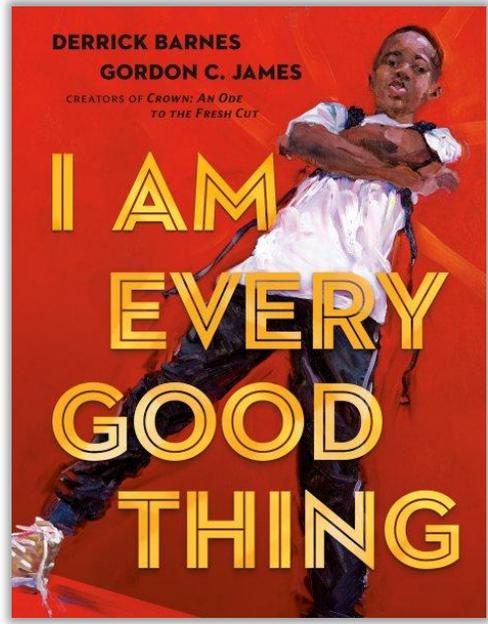


Derrick Barnes wrote, and Gordon C. James illustrated, the critically acclaimed picture book *Crown: An Ode to the Fresh Cut*, which received, for its writing, a Newbery Honor, a Coretta Scott King Author Honor, the 2018 Ezra Jack Keats New Writer Award, and the 2018 Kirkus Prize for Young Readers. The illustrations garnered a Caldecott Honor, a Coretta Scott King Illustrator Honor, an Ezra Jack Keats New Illustrator Honor, the 2018 Kirkus Prize for Young Readers, and a Society of Illustrators Gold Medal. On September 1st, this powerhouse duo releases a new picture book, *I Am Every Good Thing*, an upbeat, empowering story of Black boyhood. Read on to hear about their process, their inspiration, their advice, and more.



Q. For Derrick, what is your writing process?

DB: No matter what age group I'm writing for, I always start off thinking about and taking notes on 1) who I'm actually writing the book for; the demographic. And 2) crafting the character profile(s). If I keep my target audience in mind throughout the entire process, the story will be as authentic as I can possibly make it. The main character and the supporting characters have to be developed before the story is told.



Derrick Barnes

I do a full fleshed out character profile from physical traits, to like and dislikes, family make up, etc. It's like giving birth to a protagonist that hopefully the readers identify with and fall in love with.

Q. Also for Derrick, you've mentioned Langston Hughes and Stevie Wonder as inspiring you. Can you tell us why you chose them and if and how they have influenced your writing?

DB: Langston taught me how to craft and create memorable characters. I became a fan in the fifth grade after reading his poetry, but even more so, his short story collections. In particular, his Jesse B. Simple stories. I also learned how to pace a story, and how dialogue between characters has to be authentic, and it has to move, and keep pace with the story. From Stevie, I learned how to use adjectives and descriptors, and all five senses as notes, colors, emotions. He could have been an amazing author.

Q. For Gordon, does Impressionist Art factor into your newest book *I am Every Good Thing*? Who are some of your favorite artists?

GJ: Yes, my favorite figurative artists are John Singer Sargent and Edgar Degas. I also enjoy the composition of art deco art, the energy and pure color that can be found in some abstract work and I'll be sculpting soon.



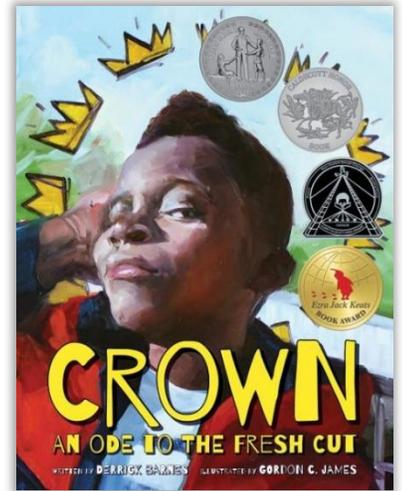
Gordon James



Q. How do you collaborate on your picture books?

DB: We work similarly to other writer-illustrator duos. The process goes as such; the author writes the manuscript, passes it on to the publisher/editor, and then they usually are the ones that pick the illustrator. We have been fortunate enough to request another collaboration following 2017's *Crown: An Ode To The Fresh Cut*. It did okay. So, since we live in the same city, and have been knowing each other for over twenty years, it's easy for us to share work, via email or in person.

GJ: Derrick and I talk a lot. We've known each other of almost 20 years. Sometimes he'll bounce idea or two off of me or tell me what he's working on. When I get a finished manuscript that's when I get to work thumb nailing, pacing out the image, hiring models, etc. Derrick likes to check in and give his opinion on how things are going so there is a back and forth when the sketches are done and on the final art. When I work on any book I try to bring something to the project visually that the author may not have thought of. I don't want to hijack the project but I do work to add value and my creative prospective.



Q. What advice would you like to give aspiring writers and artists?

DB: No matter what stage or level you may be on in your career, continue to read as much as you can, and continue to develop and strengthen your own voice. Your stories, your creativity, your ideas are needed in the world. Pick up as much as you can, here and there, from writers and other creatives to add to your cache.

GJ: I believe aspiring artists should practice the basics like observational drawing and painting. Good traditional skills will always be there for you and those basics will help you no matter what style you choose to work in.

Q. What are some of your favorite picture books?

DB: *I Want My Hat Back* by Jon Klassen, *Uptown* by Bryan Collier, and *Ellington Was Not A Street* by Ntozake Shange.

GJ: My all time favorite picture book is the Jerry Pinkney illustrated *John Henry* by Julius Lester. That book is absolutely beautiful. I love the virtuosity in Jerry's work. Every stroke is saying something, and it's the right thing. I know you asked about "books" but that book is my all-time fave.

Q. Public librarians from all over the world will read this interview. Is there something you'd like to say to them?

DB: Please continue to give your children as many 'windows' and 'sliding doors' as possible. Also, dig deep to find the resources to teach them through literature and nonfiction, the true history of America as it relates to African Americans, and the plight of African Americans (Trans-Atlantic slave trade, 250 plus years of bondage, the 12 US presidents that owned slave s, slave codes, Jim Crow laws, lynching, redlining, GI Bills after WWII that built the American suburbs, Black Wallstreet, etc.).

GJ: Thank you for reading this and for making the modern library such an inviting, fun and interactive space for young readers.