Author Kosoko Jackson is a vocal champion of diversity in YA literature, the author of YA novels featuring African American queer protagonists, and a sensitivity reader for Big Five Publishers. He is also a digital media specialist and freelance political journalist. When not writing, he can be found obsessing over movies, drinking his (umpteenth) London Fog, or spending far too much time on Twitter. His YA debut, Yesterday is History, publishes in early February through Sourcebooks Fire. Read on to hear about the book, his style, and inspiration.

Q. Give our CATS readers an introduction to Yesterday Is History.
Of course! Yesterday Is History follows Andre Cobb, a seventeen-year-old queer Black boy recovering from a liver transplant that gives him the ability to time travel. He then engages in a love triangle between Michael Gray, an activist who lived in his house 50 years prior, and Blake McIntyre, the younger brother of Andre’s donor who is charged with teaching him how to master time travel. It’s a love story to queerness, science fiction, and grief! I’ve worked on Yesterday Is History for about 2 years and rewrote the book twice. It has been a long journey, but I’m very happy with it.

Q. What is your writing process? Do you outline, do you try to read a certain word count every day? Where’s the strangest place you’ve ever written?
I’m a speed drafter, and generally draft a book in about 3 months. To start, I write a “fake” book jacket summary of the book. Then I write a detailed (5+) page synopsis and chapter summary (1-3 sentences) to help the book take shape. Once done, I make a playlist, (right now it’s been Evermore), and get to drafting. I don’t write every day, but I try to write 5 days a week on average. The strangest place I’ve written...would have to be during Halsey’s Badlands concert! I had a novel idea that struck me like lightning and I wrote the prologue during her first 5 songs!

Q. Where did the idea of the book come from and has the idea changed over time? If so, how?
While in NYC for BEA 2 years ago I visited Stonewall and thought, “how can I tell a story that involves LGBTQ history without the usual letters motif used in fiction?” I’m a HUGE science fiction nerd, and I knew I wanted to tap into that. The book started with blood donation, but it didn’t allow enough personal storytelling like I knew I wanted. During my second round of edits, I made the decision to completely rewrite the book by using an organ to tie the past and the present together. I think it turned out pretty well, honestly!
Q. Who is your favorite character in the book and why? Which character was the most difficult to write and why?
Honestly? I love Claire McIntyre. Without giving away spoilers, she’s a truly bad-ass woman who is the perfect balance between success, grace, confidence and flaws. There’s one heartbreaking chapter of hers, my favorite chapter, that has stayed through all the edits. As for hardest, I’d have to say Blake McIntyre, her son and one of Andre’s love interests. I don’t have much of a reference point for cocky, athletic brazen boys, so it was a reach to accurately display grief and growth with someone who is...let’s say emotionally stunted just a bit. But I grew to love him so much.

Q. Is there a specific library that had an impact on you growing up (name it!) and why, OR, how has the library influenced your life as a reader and a writer?
I got one of my first books that got me into writing, The Bartimaeus Trilogy, from Charles County Public Library. I was a pretty solitary kid, so having books really helped expand my world and make me feel not alone. I was lucky enough my parents never said no to books. I don’t think, professionally or as a writer, I’d be where I am without the worlds explored and lessons taught to me through books and I had access to so many of them thanks to my public library.

Q. What do you hope readers of any age will take away from reading Yesterday Is History?
Yesterday Is History is a story, at its core, about a queer Black boy finding his own power, finding love, and realizing his worth even when he isn’t sure where to go. I hope readers, but especially queer teens, and queer teens of color, take away that you don’t always have to know where you’re going in life (I could spend hours talking about the mistakes I made because I listened to what other people wanted for me), and that’s okay. As one of my mentors said, find comfort in being uncomfortable. I promise, it’ll pay off.

Q. Were there any books you loved growing up that you think had influence on Yesterday Is History?
The Pendragon Series by D. J. MacHale, The Magic Tree House series by Mary Pope Osborne, A Wrinkle In Time by Madeleine L’Engle and to some extent If I Stay by Gayle Forman.