

# A CCSS-aligned Text Set Companion for

# BLACK WAS THE INK



In **BLACK WAS THE INK**, sixteen-year-old Malcolm is sent on a fantastical journey through Reconstruction-era America with the help of a ghostly ancestor, while working in the present day to save his family's farm in Mississippi from being claimed by the State. After a harrowing interaction with the police at a local D.C. park, Malcolm is angry and despondent and feels like nothing good ever happens for teens like him. All he wants is to be left alone in his room for the summer to draw or play video games—but no such luck. With growing violence in his neighborhood, his mother ships him off to his father's family farm in Mississippi, and Malcolm is anything but pleased.

A few days after his arrival, his great-aunt tells him that the State is acquiring the farm to widen a highway. It's not news Malcolm is concerned about, but someone plans to make it his concern. One minute Malcolm is drawing in the farmhouse attic, and the next, he's looking through the eyes of his ancestor Cedric Johnson at an America radically transformed by the Civil War.

Written by Michelle Coles  
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Tu Books

As Cedric, Malcolm meets the real-life Black statesmen who fought for change during the Reconstruction era: Hiram Revels, Robert Smalls, and other leaders who made American history. But even after witnessing their bravery, Malcolm's faith in his own future remains shaky, particularly since he knows that the gains these statesmen made were almost immediately stripped away. If those great men couldn't wholly succeed, why should he even try? Malcolm must decide which path to take. Can Cedric's experiences help him construct a better future? Or will he resign himself to resentments and defeat?

Perfect for today's youth activists who are making their hopes for the future known as they battle frontline issues of 2021, *Black Was the Ink* is a powerful coming-of-age story and an eye-opening exploration of an era that continues to define modern America.

Michelle Coles is a debut novelist, experienced civil rights attorney, and mother of four. For the past decade, she served as a career civil rights attorney at the U.S. Department of Justice. As a 9th generation Louisianan, she is highly attuned to the struggles African Americans have faced in overcoming the legacy of slavery and the periods of government-sanctioned discrimination that followed. She is a proud alumna of Howard University School of Law and the University of Virginia. Her goal in writing is to empower young people by educating them about history and giving them the tools to shape their destiny. She lives in Maryland with her family.



## THEMATIC OVERVIEW

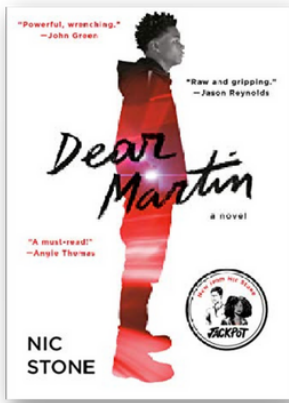
racism || empowerment || prejudice || cross-cultural friendship || Black History || reconstruction  
American History || Civil War || freedom || justice || equality || time travel || slavery || pride

## COMPREHENSION CONVERSATION

- What does it mean to be *resilient*? How do you demonstrate resilience even though something may be challenging? Why is it important to be resilient? Do you think it can be learned? How so? Identify someone from history that you consider to be resilient. Explain why.
- Explain all that you know about the history of Reconstruction (1865-1877). What happened to Black Americans once the Civil War ended and the 13th Amendment abolished slavery? What is the legacy of Reconstruction and how does it impact your life in the present day? How do you know?



# Fiction Pairing for BLACK WAS THE INK



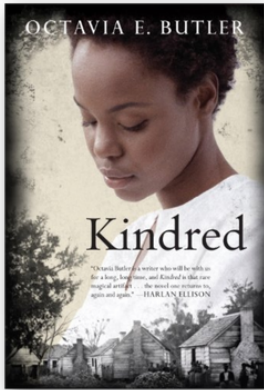
## Dear Martin by Nic Stone

Justyce McAllister is a good kid, an honor student, and always there to help a friend – but none of that matters to the police officer who just put him in handcuffs. He looks to the teachings of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. for answers.



## Angel of Greenwood by Randi Pink

A piercing, unforgettable love story set in Greenwood, Oklahoma, also known as the “Black Wall Street,” and against the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921.



## Kindred by Octavia E. Butler

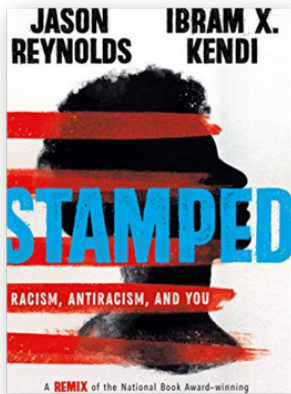
The visionary author’s masterpiece pulls us—along with her Black female hero—through time to face the horrors of slavery and explore the impacts of racism, sexism, and white supremacy then and now.



## Ghost Boys by Jewell Parker Rhodes

A heartbreaking and powerful story about a black boy killed by a police officer, drawing connections through history, from award-winning author Jewell Parker Rhodes.

# Non-fiction Pairing for BLACK WAS THE INK



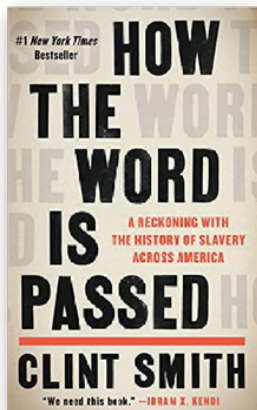
## Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You by Jason Reynolds

Through a gripping, fast-paced, and energizing narrative written by beloved award-winner Jason Reynolds, this book shines a light on the many insidious forms of racist ideas--and on ways readers can identify and stamp out racist thoughts in their daily lives.



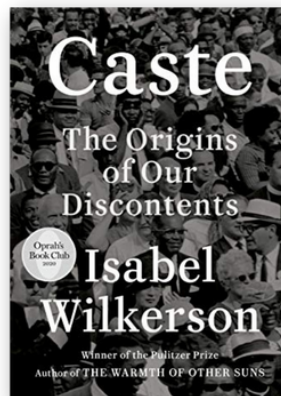
## The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story by Nikole Hannah-Jones

A dramatic expansion of a groundbreaking work of journalism, *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story* offers a profoundly revealing vision of the American past and present.



## How the Word Is Passed by Clint Smith

Clint Smith leads the reader on an unforgettable tour of monuments and landmarks—those that are honest about the past and those that are not—that offer an intergenerational story of how slavery has been central in shaping our nation’s collective history, and ourselves.



## Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents by Isabel Wilkerson

A masterful portrait of an unseen phenomenon in America through deeply researched narrative and stories about real people, how America today and throughout its history has been shaped by a hidden caste system, a rigid hierarchy of human rankings.