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From the Special Issue Guest Co-Editors... “Rooting to Rise”: Centering Student Voices & Equitable Literacy Practices Through Joy and Social Justice

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From the Special Issue Guest Co-Editors...

“Rooting to Rise”: Centering Student Voices & Equitable Literacy Practices Through Joy and Social Justice

by **Raven L. Jones & Zuri Hudson Stanbrough**

We remain thankful and eagerly excited for the opportunity to have guest co-edited this special issue as mother-daughter literacy activists and native Detroiters for *Michigan Reading Journal (MRJ)*. Literacy means a lot to us. To our people. To our colleagues and friends. And to our communities. We are happy to have engaged with literacy and learning through another interactive and fun year of homeschooling, attending gymnastics classes, going to the library, and engaging with meditation and yoga at Griffin Gardens, a community garden on the West side of Detroit and owned by master gardener, Marilyn Griffin. Marilyn is a graduate of Henry Ford High School and holds a B.A. in Animal Science and African American History from Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University. Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCUs), represent! She also earned a Masters in the Art of Teaching from Wayne State University. The ways in which Marilyn has fostered an inviting space for people to experience nature’s beauty in Detroit is something special. Please plan to visit her space when you can. This past summer, we also got dressed up, went on mother-daughter dinner dates, and became regulars at the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. Our appreciation for music is real!



**Raven L. Jones &
Zuri Hudson Stanbrough**

Literacy is always around us. It is connected to our daily engagement with our culture, learning, and the joy we experience to enact change towards justice for all. As a Black woman and young girl, we believe in demonstrating humanity in our interactions with others, while amplifying the voices and stories of those who are marginalized in education, in the streets, and in society. We believe one way to tend to such humanity is to engage in what Detroit native and resident, Jasmin DeForrest, Director of Arts and Culture for the Gilbert Family Foundation, reminds us are ‘courageous conversations,’ which are essential for unpacking bias(es) and learning from communities that have been historically silenced and minoritized and moving toward equitable opportunities for citizens. This special issue is dear to us. We take it personally when children are sad from unjust practices experienced in schools. When parents are tired from trying to navigate schooling spaces not designed with their child(ren) in mind. When teachers are not supported. When BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) youth are bullied and killed for simply breathing and being--whether in classrooms or other nurturing spaces. We are committed to love, forging a path forward for a more just future, engaging in self-reflection, and collaborating with those seeking to dismantle racism, oppression, and other systems of inequality that leave us divided, instead of practicing solidarity.

In preparing for this special issue, we recognize(d) that the pandemic is still very real, that there are tensions in education and schooling, and that life as we knew/know it is just different! In the state of Michigan and across the country, the school year has begun—some students are attending in-person; some virtually; and some are being homeschooled. Whichever modality is being prioritized, it is our hope that the lives and stories of all students are being affirmed and centered. That their names are being pronounced correctly by their teachers and instructors. That their brilliance is being honored. We are tired of BIPOC children being called racial slurs, having their hair or locs cut off because of the continued onslaught and ugliness of anti-Blackness. We are exhausted from crying and attending homegoing services because people are not making it home to their community of caretakers. We are drained from injustices on all fronts! Aren't you? The time is now to (re)imagine teaching and teacher education for liberation and justice. We are rooting ourselves in more equitable (teaching) practices that allow us to rise up—even when all manner of evil is present. We all need to just do better. Or leave the profession altogether, if we are inflicting harm in our spaces of connecting and learning, especially harm on children and youth. We said what we said!

Our call for proposals invited scholars, practitioners, community activists, and K-12 youth to dream boldly and imagine with us. To become literacy activists in y(our) own backyards. To stand up for justice. To tap in. And to know that imagining is revolutionary. Specifically, we asked individuals to submit works related to the following themes: a) Equitable Literacy Teaching; b) Past, Present, and Future Teaching Within the Pandemic; c) Reading and Writing for Wellness; d) Celebrating Students' Innate Brilliance; and e) Building Support for Literacy Teaching. And we are thrilled with the outcome and labor of love and intentionality from everyone involved. The front and back cover art features work from Detroit artist and musician, Play Staples, whose work connects creative imagination with reality. His pieces, "LOvE Is" and "Frequency #8" are bold and courageous and evoke inspiration from his 3-year-old daughter, Dorian (Uno) Staples. Play is the recipient of an emerging artist award, and his work has been featured at art collectives and exhibits in Detroit, Grosse Pointe, and other cities. The other two pieces of artwork on the journal, "Homeschool Happiness" and "Black & Brown Freedom" were created by guest co-editor, Zuri Hudson Stanbrough. After receiving a special package from Crayola Education, which included their Colors of the World collection, she shared that her thinking behind her work was "I love being homeschooled and wearing my afro anytime I want to. I'm also proud to be Black and think that it's always time for freedom for Black and Brown people."

We could not have guest co-edited this special issue without the invitation and the endless support of *MRJ* co-editors, Drs. Carlin Borsheim-Black, Meghan Block, and Troy Hicks!!! They have been a dream to collaborate with and learn from. They supported every single idea we had, made time and space to brainstorm with us, and were present from start to finish. They are now a part of our family, and we are already looking forward to future collaborations, while rooting for our children's joy and thriving.

For this special issue, we also wanted to also pay homage to two of our muses, favorite humans and scholars, dope Black women, and community advocates, Drs. Geneva Napoleon Smitherman and April Baker-Bell. They continue to inspire so much of who we are, how we speak, what we do, and how we show up in Detroit, (home)rooms, and elsewhere. Whether you hear their names or about their scholarship in the streets, in churches, in boardrooms, or otherwise, you know you are hearing about greatness and Black excellence. Put some respect(t) on their names! We feel blessed to continue to be supported and loved by them in all seasons. They both took time out of their very busy lives to reflect on their teaching, learning, activism in Detroit, and thinking related to their current books, *Linguistic Justice: Black Language, Literacy, Identity, and Pedagogy* (Baker-Bell, 2020), and *My Soul Look Back in Wonder: Memories from a Life of Study, Struggle, and Doin Battle in the Language Wars* (Smitherman, 2022). Both

Drs. Smitherman and Baker-Bell have tirelessly contributed to various learning communities locally and globally, including Detroit, Chicago, Michigan State University (MSU), Wayne State University, University of Michigan, Eastern Michigan University, Harvard University, and South Africa. Additionally, their scholarship has impacted and shifted educational narratives related to literacy, Black English, and language. From creating longstanding mentoring programs for youth, to facilitating antiracist workshops for teacher educators, and providing curricula support for Detroit Public Schools Community District, they are about the work!

Dr. Baker-Bell, Associate Professor of Language, Literacy, and English Education at MSU, spent time with us after her dynamic keynote address, titled, “Standing Up and Fighting Back: Revolutionary Pedagogies of Resistance,” at the Michigan Reading Association Conference in Spring of 2022. Conference attendees raved about her work and book, and she received a standing ovation afterwards. Personally, we loved her Detroit shout outs and vibrant presentation unpacking Black English and Negro spirituals, all while inviting audience participation. It was like church for us. During our interview with her, we hugged. Laughed. Reminiscenced. And shared our collective joy! Similarly, in a 2-part, 4-hour Zoom interview with Dr. Geneva Napoleon Smitherman, University Distinguished Professor Emerita of English and Co-Founder of the African American and African Studies Doctoral Program at MSU, we rooted each other on, discussed her family’s legacy, her early childhood genius, the moment she decided to embark upon pursuing academia, and how language and literacy continue to inspire her thinking and doing. With red velvet cake being her favorite dessert and W. E. B. Du Bois’s *The Souls of Black Folk* being her favorite book, Dr. Smitherman is indeed a living legend who has nurtured countless scholars, teachers, parents, and children. Her commitment to liberation and the struggle will never be forgotten by us. Our home includes the beautiful works of Drs. Smitherman and Baker-Bell. In fact, we even named two of our household plants after them. And their growth this year alone has been mad real! We offer up endless Detroit hugs and ‘What Up Does’ to them both!

Next, throughout this special issue, artwork and writing from K-12 youth across the state of Michigan is included. Preschoolers Demi Grandison, Emmanuel Robinson, Laila Profit, Isaac Robinson, and Raylee Thomas, from Just Imagine Child Development Center in Redford, Michigan submitted lovely drawings that featured bright colors, sight words, and lots of happy emotions. Similarly, Alix B. Dorsey, a 1st grade Detroiter, reveals images and reasoning about her appreciation for renowned scholar, W. E. B. DuBois. Likewise, 2nd grader, Miles Black, from Mt. Pleasant, Michigan, showcased his creativity by writing about showing love through helping each other with our writing. Guest co-editor and 2nd grade student, Zuri Hudson Stanbrough, shares an art drawing of her interpretation of “Birds of a Feather Flock Together.” Representing Kalamazoo, Michigan, 3rd grader, Emma Pitts’ thinking comes to life with her piece titled, “It’s Exquisite: Finding Fun in Literacy,” which teaches us all to play the fun game, “Exquisite Corpse.” Also, 5th grade student, Marcus Black, from Mt. Pleasant, Michigan, reveals his artistic talents with his drawing of the famous soccer player, Lionel Messi. Middle schooler, Madeline Langlois from Grand Rapids, Michigan, inspires with her gorgeous poem, “We Do,” and middle schooler, Henry Block, from Haslett, Michigan, encourages readers to consider what it is like to wear a mask when you have asthma. Finally, with keen details and infusion of vibrant colors and constructions, Dontez Tinsley, a sneaker aficionado and senior from Garden City, Michigan includes three beautiful drawings—“soles,” “City” and “Off.” We are extremely appreciative of the K-12 youth submissions. Moreover, we value the thinking and genius of young people and believe all (educational) spaces should center their brilliance.

In closing, we want to extend a heartfelt THANK YOU to the *Michigan Reading Journal* and to the readers of the publication. We could not have envisioned this special issue without you. We hope that you read

every single page and feel the love that emanates from each word, phrase, sentence, and photo. Similar to the call for proposals, this special issue is a call to action to root yourselves in justice and love, and rise up to center equitable thinking and teaching.

WRITE ON,
Raven L. Jones & Zuri Hudson Stanbrough

