

Middle School Book Day: Exploring the history of racism and the Civil Rights movement in the US

February 26, 2008

As the song from *South Pacific* reminds us, "You have to be taught to hate and fear/ you have to be taught from year to year/ it has to be drummed in your dear little ear/ you have to be carefully taught. You've got to be taught to be afraid/ of people whose eyes are oddly made/ and people whose skin is a different shade/ you've got to be carefully taught!"

These potentially discomfoting words were hauntingly sung as an introduction to the many activities that comprised the Middle School's first annual Book Day, an event that, this year, explored the history of racism and the Civil Rights movement in the United States.

In advance of the day, 5th and 6th graders read *The Watsons Go to Birmingham* by Christopher Paul Curtis, a highly amusing fictional work that records the antics of an African-American family from Michigan. Things take on a serious note, however, when the Watsons travel south to Birmingham, Alabama for a visit with grandma. There the children experience segregation for the first time, and the daughter is caught up in the racist bombing of the local church.

7th and 8th graders read the autobiographical account *Through My Eyes* by Ruby Bridges, who, at six years old, was the first black student to attend an all-white public school in New Orleans, where, for a year, she was literally in a class by herself, all alone with her teacher.

These photos capture only a small part of the excitement of a program of magnitude, breadth, and depth that was conceptualized and designed by Librarian Noreen Wachs.











