

Neal A. Lester is a professor of English at Arizona State University, where he teaches African-American literature. He is the author of *Ntozake Shange: A Critical Study of the Plays* (1995) and a forthcoming casebook on Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1999). He has published on womanism and dance, neo-slave narratives, African-American homoeroticism, African-American children's games, brown angels in American culture, and black female sexuality.

Neal A. Lester

Roots That Go Beyond Big Hair and a Bad Hair Day: *Nappy Hair* Pieces

In our last issue, David Rudd began an occasional series on controversial books for young people with a discussion of *Junk* by Melvyn Burgess (published as *Smack* in the United States). In this article, Neal A. Lester discusses the controversy surrounding a picture book, *Nappy Hair*, by Carolivia Herron. The uproar that developed when a white teacher read this book to her black students raises very fundamental questions about race, voice, and authority. Neal Lester addresses these issues and adds his own views.

Although there is no single definition of "nappy"—words like "kinky" and "wild"¹ are often interchangeable with "nappy" but without the loaded historical baggage for African-Americans—the term's impact is markedly different depending upon the social contexts.² African-American linguist Geneva Smitherman, in *Black Talk: Words and Phrases from the Hood to the Amen Corner*, identifies nappy hair as kinky hair: "extremely curly hair, the natural state of African-American hair, curled so tightly it appears 'wooly.'" Clarence Major's edited *Juba to Jive: A Dictionary of African American Slang* offers that nappy hair is synonymous with kinky and wooly hair. Most generally, nappy hair resists a fine-tooth comb's easy movement through it. Acknowledging hair as one of the central components of discrimination within African-American communities, African-American poet Maya Angelou offers: "A hundred years ago, . . . there were churches in Philadelphia, in Virginia and in New Orleans which had a pine slab on the outside door of the church and a fine-tooth comb hanging on a string. And when you tried to go into the church you had to be able

Geneva Smitherman, *Black Talk: Words and Phrases from the Hood to the Amen Corner*, p. 150

Clarence Major (ed.), *Juba to Jive: A dictionary of African-American Slang*, p. 315

The Oprah Winfrey Show, 12 May 1987

to stand beside that pinewood and be no darker than that, and take that fine-tooth comb and run it through your hair without snagging. That's how you could get into the church."

Carollivia Herron,
Nappy Hair

African-American author and educator Carollivia Herron's controversial children's book *Nappy Hair* focuses on an African-American female child's "nappy hair," as detailed in her family's ritual of storytelling. Through Uncle Mordecai's narration and the family members' participation in the storytelling, Herron's text "performs" African-American cultural identities of resistance and of individual and collective cultural affirmation.

In early 1998, when one of my undergraduate students and I did a duet reading of *Nappy Hair* as part of a youth session of the Arizona Alliance of Black High School Educators Conference, the mostly teenage black audience was ecstatic. They laughed and smiled and understood that the book celebrates an aspect of African-American culture not often talked about in academic settings and in a way that is accessible and fun. In fact, after our reading, in which the student and I alternated the calls and responses—an African-American oral performance ritual involving a leader and a respondent—as typographically formatted in the book, several students wanted to know where they might purchase copies of the book. I used Herron's book to demonstrate how pursuing African-American Studies is a way of exploring the complexities of African-American experience, specifically pointing out how Herron takes something traditionally perceived negatively by blacks—nappy hair—and transforms it into something to talk and think about positively. My student then read one of her own original poems, also called "Nappy Hair," as a companion to Herron's book's celebratory message. The student's autobiographical poem challenges and invites African-Americans to luxuriate in the wonders of nappy hair, even when family and friends insist that she do something about those kinks on her head. Her poem concludes: "Nappy hair is natural hair and natural hair is the key to the recipes of life." Students laughed and cheered the attitude of public self-acceptance.

During the final moments of the session, I asked students to share a "snap"—an intraracial ritual of insults—that deals with black people's hair, an exercise that had students and myself rolling out of our chairs with laughter; not self-mockingly but as a celebration of the art of storytelling and redefinition. One student offered, "Yo momma's hair is so nappy, she had to take painkillers to comb it." Another chimed, "Yo momma's hair is so short and nappy, her head looks like it's full of stitches." The students understood the exercise of snapping—also termed dissing, cracking, or playing the dozens—as a display of verbal gymnastics, and they understood that somehow the act of "dissin' "

about hair was one way of appropriating a negative image from a Eurocentric culture that does not value nonstraight, non-European hair, and making that the source of a communal storytelling ritual.

Having had such a positive response to the book from this youth audience and just previously with my own two children, then ages six and nine, I left the session and the conference even more excited about what Herron's book had achieved politically and culturally. Needless to say, when the whirlwind of controversy surfaced in national headlines in the United States last fall—"Brooklyn Parent Who Stepped Forward Still Dislikes *Nappy Hair*," "Threatened Over Book, Teacher Leaves School," "After Objections to a Book, a Teacher Is Transferred," "Furor Over Book Brings Pain and Pride to Its Author," "School Officials Support Teacher on Book that Parents Call Racially Insensitive," "Author of Disputed Book Is Criticized in Brooklyn," "White Teacher Accused of Racism Fears for Life," "White Teacher, Black Parents, Unthinking Condemnation," "Caught in the Cross-Fire: A Young Teacher Finds Herself in a Losing Racial Battle with Parents"—I was stunned. I was shocked that parental objections to the book had led to threats of violence against Ruth Sherman, the white teacher who had shared the book with her black and Hispanic third-grade students in Brooklyn, New York. As I read headline after headline dealing with the controversy, it was clear to me that the problems some black parents had with the book were politically, historically, and psychologically bigger than Ruth Sherman and Herron's book.

For one, some parents had problems with Herron's use of the word *nappy*. Perhaps the white teacher Ruth Sherman, as a non-African-American, was unaware of the political, historical, and emotional baggage still connected with a word that Raymond S. Ross includes in his list of "Racially Potent Words" alongside other racially offensive and loaded words like "the n word," darkie, Sambo, Mammy, and spook. What had not occurred to me was the extent to which some African-Americans have been unable to redefine as positive that which has been traditionally perceived as negative—as unattractive and ugly—especially among many blacks. The controversy highlights fundamental connections between language and perception and between language and identity, and demonstrates how certain words consciously or unconsciously carry with them loaded emotional and psychological responses. As controversy over this book reveals, some words have a history bigger than the historians and the students of history.

That Ruth Sherman is not black is for many a major issue here. As an African-American, I could have gone into that third-grade classroom as I did at the Arizona youth conference and read the book, re-creating its linguistic cadences and rhythms without parental resistance. Be-

Charlemae Rollins *We Build Together: A Reader's Guide to Negro Life and Literature for Elementary and High School Use*, p. xvi

cause of the ever-present tensions between European standards and African-American realities—everything from standards of physical beauty to “standard” English—Ruth Sherman never really had a chance with this book as a performance of multicultural celebration. When the reality of the book's title and subject along with the white teacher's reading the text in its vernacular format reached some black parents, those offended could see only a white teacher imitating black folks' talking and laughing at black folks' hair. In fact, my guess is that her white face reading aloud and in the black vernacular of Herron's text became for some an echo of 1800s minstrelsy—whites who mocked and ridiculed blacks through burntorked face, exaggerated language, behavior, and gesture. To draw a parallel about real and perceived cultural and racial territorial claims, I offer this example. At my predominantly white university and in my predominantly white department, I have an office decorated with black “Americana”—racist memorabilia from pickaninny and mammy dolls to coon and Uncle Ben advertisements and Aunt Jemima pins—that I use in my multiple media, interdisciplinary teaching of African-American literature. I cannot imagine my white colleague—who also teaches African-American literature but not without suspicions from many a black student—getting away with an office decorated as and proclaimed a “colored museum.” Indeed, in such intense historical black-white race dialogues, lines of privilege and authority are for some clearly drawn and fiercely policed.

That offended black parents and community members launched an attack on Herron for writing the book is intriguing; she admits receiving a death threat via e-mail. A hostile public response echoes the backlash against Spike Lee after he aired gritty linens of African-Americans' intraracist cultural perceptions and discriminatory practices in his movie *School Daze* (1988). In Sherman's case, her students loved the book and wanted pages to read and take home. To my knowledge, no criticisms of the book have included actual negative responses from Ruth Sherman's students. Sherman's third graders' excitement over Herron's book parallels that of my youth conference audience. In a March 1999 intergenerational interview, part of the midterm project in my African-American children's literature course, a seven-year-old African-American girl cites *Nappy Hair* as her favorite book: “I just got *Nappy Hair* and I like it. It's my favorite [book]. It is funny and the hair is funny. I like the pictures too.” In the companion interview, the child's African-American mother shares her excitement about the book as well: “I bought *Nappy Hair* for my kids after I read it myself. I liked the pictures, thought they were colorful. And [my daughter] loves that book. She won't put it down.”

Not surprisingly, the national attention generated by this controversy dramatically increased the sales of the book. Yet what intrigues me is

that at the root of this controversy is the lingering racial, emotional, and psychological pain regarding hair, of which some African-Americans cannot rid themselves.

Indeed, within African-American culture, head hair is a big deal—so many choices in hair styles: twisted, locked, “natural,” curled, faded, braided, straightened, permed, cornrowed, afroed, and even shaved bald. Hair is also big business, and hair care products for “ethnic” (commercially translates as African-American) folks’ hair is a multi-million-dollar industry. In truth, many African-Americans are extremely preoccupied with hair care, perhaps even unhealthily obsessed with hair textures, grades, and lengths. Even after the 1960s “Black Is Beautiful” movement, there persists an intracultural tendency to rate African-American adults and children on the “good” and “bad” hair scale: “Good” hair is perceived as hair closest to white people’s hair—long, straight, silky, bouncy, manageable, healthy, and shiny; “bad” hair is short, matted, kinky, Brillo pad wooly, coarse, brittle, and *nappy*.

Treatments of head hair abound in African-American folklore, literature, and popular culture. Richard M. Dorson’s *American Negro Folktales* includes the tale “Why the Negro Has Kinky Hair,” and Eldridge Cleaver’s “As Crinkly as Yours” maintains that, “To an excruciatingly painful degree, Negroes were very much aware of their ‘burden of color and bad hair.’” Black feminist theorists bell hooks and Michelle Wallace have written extensively on the culturally, racially, and gender-specific communal rituals around hair straightening among black women. Noliwe M. Rooks’s *Hair Raising: Beauty, Culture, and African American Women* is one of the most comprehensive scholarly treatments of the hair issue. African-American writers Maya Angelou, Tina McElroy Ansa, Gwendolyn Brooks, Ed Bullins, Lorraine Hansberry, Zora Neale Hurston, Adrienne Kennedy, Dominique LaBaw, Melissa Linn, Audre Lorde, Toni Morrison, Dudley Randall, Dori Sanders, Ntozake Shange, Natasha Tarpley, Alice Walker, and George C. Wolfe—to name a few—include hair politics in their explorations of African-American culture generally and of African-American women’s realities specifically.

In music, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century white-authored and -performed minstrel and plantation songs, in particular, commonly include details of “nappy,” “kinky,” or “wooly” hair to ridicule blacks: “Come and lay your kinky head on Mammy’s shoulder,” from “Mammy’s Chocolate Soldier” (1918); “Your hair is nappy, who’s your pappy?” from “Ugly Chile (You’re Some Pretty Doll)” (1918); and “You lay your kinky head in a bed on a pillow of white/ . . . Ev’ry little kinky headed girl and boy has the cutest silver pony for a toy,” from “Pickaninny’s Paradise” (1918). Even African-American songwriter

Richard M. Dorson’s
*American Negro
Folktales*

bell hooks,
“Straightening Our
Hair”

Michelle Wallace,
“Anger in Isolation: A
Black Feminist’s Search
for Sisterhood”

Noliwe M. Rooks, *Hair
Raising: Beauty,
Culture, and African
American Women*

Gussie Davis capitalized on black folks' alleged nappy hair problem in his popular minstrel song, "When They Straighten All the Colored People's Hair" (1894):

Oh, you jolly little "nigger." You make a funny figure. For your wool kinks up just like the letter "O." And you seem so happy altho' your head is nappy. But then never mind 'twill always not be so. They have got a new invention, and they say it's their intention to experiment on darkies everywhere. Oh, your face it may be dark, but you'll be happy as a lark when they straighten all the colored people's hair.

In more contemporary terms, rapper KRS-1 Parker's "Ya Strugglin'" comments on the dilemma faced by those African-Americans trying to mold themselves into a celebrated Westernized ideal of beauty: "Africa is so strong that once she puts a stamp on you, four hundred years of cold weather, lye and frying your hair shall not disguise you. As a matter of fact, she's so strong that no matter what chemicals you put in your hair she will come back and snatch it out."

Treatment of the black folks' hair issue has not been dealt with so prolifically and critically in children's texts, especially ironic since much of African-American "adult" literature deals with little black girls coming to terms with their hair in the face of culturally competing beauty mythologies. Barbie's long, flowing, blonde, straight hair and television commercials about innocuous detanglers for little white girls offer striking contrast to the potentially dangerous chemical relaxers celebrated in television commercials and *Essence* and *Ebony* advertisements aimed at African-American mothers and their pre-adolescent daughters. While *Essence* and other black readership magazines regularly attend to the complexities of African-American identity as it relates to beauty ideals and black hair—Kim Green's "The Pain of Living the Lye" and Stephanie Stokes Oliver's "A Hair-Raising Story—the celebration of non-straight hair in Whoopi Goldberg's "My Luxurious Long Hair" routine (HBO, 1985), where she pretends a white shirt on her head is her "long luxurious blonde hair," eventually abandons the shirt, and accepts her short, matted dreadlocks even if they don't "cas-sca-sca-dade down her back" or "blow helplessly in the wind," has not found extensive treatment in children's books.

Ayoka Chenzira, *Hair Piece: A Film for Nappy Headed People*

Augusta Goldin's *Straight Hair, Curly Hair*

Camille Yarbrough's *Cornrows*

Interestingly though not surprisingly, Augusta Goldin's *Straight Hair, Curly Hair* includes two drawings of brown children—presumably African-American—with curly hair but no attention to the cultural and racial specificity of textures and grades and the specific political dynamics operating on many levels within black communities. Camille Yarbrough's *Cornrows* explores the artistry of cornrows as a special braiding style, Alexis DeVeaux's *An Enchanted Hair Tale* celebrates the imaginative wonders of a little boy's dreadlocks,³ and Tololwa

Alexis DeVeaux, *An Enchanted Hair Tale*

Tololwa M. Mollel's *The Princess Who Lost Her Hair*

Fred Crump Jr., *Rapunzel*

Natasha A. Tarpley, *I Love My Hair!*

M. Mollel's *The Princess Who Lost Her Hair* is an Akamba legend that speaks to the damage wrought by vanity on a young African girl because of her hair. Fred Crump Jr.'s *Rapunzel* recasts the long, blonde, silky-haired white-skinned Rapunzel as a brown Rapunzel with Afrocentric braids that are realistically more rope-like and easier for a prince's climb than silky straight strands even when plaited. Natasha A. Tarpley's upbeat and politically uncomplicated *I Love My Hair!* concludes: "I love my hair because it is thick as a forest, soft as cotton candy, and curly as a vine winding upward, reaching the sky and climbing toward outer space." Certainly Carolivia Herron's *Nappy Hair* is one of the richest contributions to this important and ongoing intraracial discussion of hair politics as it relates to specific gender and racial mythologies of beauty. Autobiographical, the book is "based on her experiences as a Visiting Scholar at Harvard Divinity School and on the fun her own family poked at her nappy hair when she was a girl" (book jacket). While the book revises notions of black female beauty, it also teaches and entertains as it celebrates African-American oral traditions.

Framed as stories-within-stories, the book opens with a storyteller preparing to share the story of Brenda, a "sweet and cute little brown baby girl chile"—probably between five and eight years old—who has some of the nappiest hair the family has ever seen. After his announcement of narrative intention, the storyteller/narrator becomes the preacher, launching into Brenda's story through folklore, rap—"It's your hair, Brenda, take the cake, And come back and get the plate"—American history, and the Bible. As the preacher/storyteller presents Brenda's story, other listening family members chime in to create a familiar southern black church call-and-response worship service ritual. The text itself then becomes a sermon "performed" to celebrate the richness of African-American cultural traditions and a spirituality which, according to Herron's premise, is achieved through communal fellowship and collective redefinitions of identity and beauty.

The orality rituals of traditional black churches ground Herron's book. From the reverend-like Uncle Mordecai's opening announcement of his "text"—Brenda's nappy hair—the book becomes a moment in a church service full of "talkin' back" to the preacher. With vocal responses rhythmically punctuating the preacher/storyteller's words about Brenda and her hair, the family members, as the vocally responsive church congregation, become integral in the rendering of the tale, forming a necessary symbiosis between the performer/storyteller and his audience. As the sermon is preached, the family audience/church congregation members acknowledge Brenda's story as theirs, the storyteller taking them through Brenda's ancestral slave history of

being brought from Africa to America, and through the horrors of family separations at the slave block—"sold your momma for a nickel or a buffalo" and "your daddy for a dime." The subsequent social and political resistance of African-Americans in the New World is also recreated as Brenda aggressively challenges—even as a child—any efforts to restrain or straighten her nappy hair—"the kinkiest, the nappiest, the fuzziest, the most screwed up, squeezed up, knotted up, tangled up, twisted up, nappiest . . . hair you've ever seen in your life."

As to how Brenda got this nappy hair, the preacher/storyteller dramatizes, improvises, incants, and draws upon folklore to challenge western mythologies that God favored those with white skin, blue eyes, and long stringy hair. Herron's revisionist text presents a presumably Afrocentric God who, in moments of creating the world, wanted very specifically to have nappy hair on the earth. As brown angels approach God to discover "Why [he] gotta be so mean, why [he] gotta be so willful, why [he] gotta be so ornery, thinking about giving that nappy, nappy hair to that innocent little child," Herron presents a God who creates a child with hair that symbolizes spiritual completion—"Napping up her hair, five, six, seven, maybe eight complete circles per inch. . . . I'm talking about eight complete circles per inch." Herron draws upon Afrocentric philosophy that emphasizes circularity of existence rather than linearity, fluidity rather than stasis, orality rather than literacy, ritual rather than ceremony. Symbolically, Brenda's hair is resistance and rebellion against Western servitude. It is also life and survival—"an act of God that came straight through Africa"—that will not and cannot "be permanently hot-pressed or relaxed into surrender" (Wolfe).

Herron's book is about family; the family has gathered to commune and fellowship, and a common activity at such gatherings is to share stories that they all know and love to hear and perform again and again. It is also about familiarity with black folk rituals of talking from the pulpit to the picnic. As Herron offers this book with little black girls in mind—hair and beauty ideals plague them in ways from which little black boys are exempt—she offers it simultaneously to little girls' parents who feel the need to straighten and hot-comb their daughters' hair allegedly to make it more manageable and attractive.

As a speakerly text, *Nappy Hair* is meant to be read aloud with multiple voices that highlight the performative art and drama of traditional southern black church services. Herron's use of black vernacular allows the rhythmic cadences and textures of black speech to define and decorate African-American identity, and the detail that Brenda can "talk the king's English [and] the queen's English too" perhaps ad-

dresses recent national debates regarding the legitimacy of Ebonics in black children's education process. That Brenda grows up in and communicates effectively with those who speak a different "standard" of English does not hinder on any level her ability to simultaneously learn and master "standard" English.

"Beauty Answers,"
Essence, p. 18

As a sermon, the book beckons Herron's reading and listening audience to re-examine the psychological and spiritual implications behind the negativity associated with nappy hair. A question regarding the safety of pressing a child's hair addressed to an *Essence* beauty consultant expresses Herron's extended lesson in this sermon:

It's difficult to pinpoint a specific "safe age" when you can be sure you can press your child's hair without causing damage. The texture of a child's hair doesn't develop fully until around the age of six or seven. . . . However, what's more important to realize is that pressing the hair can be a traumatic experience for youngsters. The very procedure of tugging on the hair with extreme heat can frighten a child and implant in her negative thinking about her hair. Therefore you need to take into account your reasons for wanting to press your child's hair. Why are you pressing it? Do you want more control of the hair, or just a straightened look? There are easy and stylish alternatives to pressing to achieve both.

Jet, 27 October 1997

Challenging individuals and industries insisting as does one *Ebony* advertisement that "Mommy gives us PCJ Pretty-N-Silky No-Lye Conditioning Relaxer because she loves us!" and another in *Jet* proclaiming that Pro-Line's Soft and Beautiful Just for Me is "America's #1 Children's Relaxer . . . The Answer to a Mother's Prayer, A New Formula for Coarse Hair!" Herron offers in Brenda's story an alternative in family perception: Brenda's family sees Brenda's nappy hair as her uniqueness, as their spiritual and cultural identities.

Uncle Mordecai's narrative is a revival sermon meant to bring lost ones back into the fold. His sermon, which might be called "Happy to Be Nappy" or "Bein' Thankful for Whatcha Got," challenges each listener and reader to rethink negative perceptions of black people's hair and blind subscriptions to traditions that mock black people because of hair textures and styles. Herron has in this book done more than write a children's story. Since we really never get any sense of Brenda's own attitudes about her hair one way or the other—the story is presented as a parable about Brenda and her hair—the book is as much about the adults who need to be saved from their own misperceptions about themselves. From the opening announcement of its subject or "scriptural text" to its improvisational call and response and final "Ain't it the truth," *Nappy Hair* "builds, its spirit draws you in, rolls you around, and doesn't let you go" (book jacket). Herron catches us up in the spiritual energy of a church revival that,

in the words of poet-playwright Ntozake Shange, is a celebration of life and living: "the roots of your hair/what turns back when we sweat, run, make love, dance, get afraid, get happy: the tell-tale sign of living" (epigram to *Nappy Edges*).

Illustrator Joe Cepeda's rich dark colors—browns, oranges, golds, greens, and pinks—make this book especially inviting to kindergarten and elementary school youngsters, and his decision to make Brenda's hair almost crown-like reiterates the book's message of Afrocentric celebration. The shape of Brenda's hair even forms the silhouette of an African women's headdress. Cepeda also pays attention to variations of black people's skin tones and hairstyles. Brenda's family members are different shades of brown and have braids, dreadlocks, and afros. With its visual appeal, its cultural celebration laced with humor in familiarity, its revisionist history, and its emphasis on black community sustained through talking, storytelling, preaching, and teaching, *Nappy Hair* appeals to young and old and boys and girls in one historical, cultural, and rhythmic shout!

In a recent conference⁴ session I moderated with author Carolivia Heron as a special guest, she outlined what she perceives as the three components of the controversy over her book: the fact that parents received photocopies of selected pages from the book and pictures of African-Americans do not photocopy without dangerous distortion; the fact that the teacher reading the black-voiced book was white; and the fact that many African-Americans are still very sensitive about the word *nappy*, both interracial and intraracially. For her, she added, what has been missing from all the controversy is the reality that the children to whom Ruth Sherman read the book enjoyed it tremendously. The children, according to Sherman's account to Heron, responded to Sherman's calls with wild gestures, creative body movements, and funny voices. They then begged Sherman for copies of some of the pages. Perhaps African-American adults offended by the book might witness children's responses. Relates Heron,

All the children I've talked to love the book. . . . I talked with a fourth grade in Washington, D.C., one hundred percent African-American. When I came in and said "I'm going to read you a book called *Nappy Hair*," they all went "Huh?!" Within an hour, they were competing to see who had the nappiest hair. . . . In Binghamton, New York, that's all white, there were two or three black families with two or three black girls. We chanted the story back and forth, with everyone getting into it. You should have seen the look on the three black girls' faces as they looked at their own kind—all happy about nappy hair—and then at the white faces all enchanted about how wonderful this hair is. It's about pride and respect. Everybody was speechless. They couldn't even talk after that.

Notes

1. Nikki Grimes's elementary school reader *Wild, Wild Hair* (New York: Scholastic, 1997) might be considered a companion to Carolivia Herron's *Nappy Hair*. Grimes's is the story of an African-American girl probably between the ages of five and seven whose "hair was long and thick and wild," and "full of knots." *Wild, Wild Hair* uses humor to talk about Tisa Walker's efforts to escape her Monday morning school day combing ritual. The book presents Tisa's efforts to escape getting her hair combed and braided as a game of hide-and-seek for all of Tisa's family members. While Tisa's hair might be considered "nappy," the words *nappy* and *kinky* are strategically euphemized as *wild* and *knotty*. Interestingly, while Tisa's hair is eventually braided in an African style, it is still long and cascades heavily down her back.
2. Used by whites to refer to black people's hair, the term *nappy* is always condescendingly negative. However, among African-Americans, according to economist Julianne Malveaux, in "Just a Nappy-Headed Sister with the PC Blues" (*Black Issues in Higher Education*, 24 December 1998), "nappy" has multiple meanings: "a term of endearment" [as in] "Come on over here with yo' nappy-headed self"; "a term of derision" [as in] "Who that nappy-headed sista think she is?"; "a symbol of seduction" [as in] "Let me run my fingers through that nappy, red stuff"; "and a token of rejection" [as in] "She doesn't even have that much hair—can you hear the finger snap?—and it's nappy" (30).
3. Although not a children's book, Alile Sharon Larkin's children's storytelling with collage art video *Dreadlocks and the Three Bears* (Inter Image Video, 1991) recasts the traditional blonde, straight-haired Goldilocks as a "cinnamon brown child [Nimi] with lots of pretty African curls on her pretty little cinnamon brown head." Nimi's nickname in her family and her Caribbean village derives from her hair texture and style: she has "curly-curly-kinky-curly-nappy-curly hair." Her "curly-curly-kinky-curly-nappy-curly twists and locks of hair called dreadlocks [are] so *divine* that everyone just called her Dreadlocks" (emphasis added). Dreadlocks must be an adolescent/teenager since she cooks delicious cheese grits for the bear family at the story's end.
4. Twenty-ninth Popular Culture Association and Twenty-first American Culture Association Annual Conference, San Diego, CA (March 31–April 3, 1999). The session was on the controversy over Carolivia Herron's *Nappy Hair*.

References

- Angelou, Maya, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. New York: Bantam, 1971.
- Ansa, Tina McElroy, *Baby If the Family*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989.
- "Beauty Answers." *Essence* (August 1993): 18.
- Brooks, Gwendolyn, "To Those of My Sisters Who Kept Their Naturals (Never to Look a Hot Comb in the Teeth)." In Amiri and Amina Baraka, eds., *Confirmation*. New York: William Morrow and Co., 1983.

- Bullins, Ed, *Street Sounds: Dialogues with Black Experience*. In *The Theme Is Blackness*. New York: Morrow, 1973.
- Chappe, Kevin, "How Black Inventors Changed America." *Ebony* (February 1997): 40-50.
- Chenzira, Ayoka, *Hair Piece: A Film for Nappy Headed People*. New York: Women Make Movies, 1985.
- Cleaver, Eldridge, "As Crinkly as Yours." In Alan Dundes, ed., *Mother Wit from the Laughing Barrel: Readings in the Interpretation of Afro-American Folklore*. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1990. pp. 9-21.
- Crump, Fred, Jr., *Rapunzel*. Nashville: Winston-Derek, 1991.
- Davis, Gussie L., "When They Straighten All the Colored People's Hair." *Remember That Song* 3 (October 1983): 8-9.
- De Veaux, Alexis, *An Enchanted Hair Tale*. New York: Harper Trophy, 1991.
- Dorson, Richard M., "Why the Negro Has Kinky Hair." *American Negro Folktales*. Greenwich, CT: Fawcett, 1956.
- Goldin, Augusta, *Straight Hair; Curly Hair*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1966.
- Green, Kim, "The Pain of Living the Lye." *Essence* (June 1993): 38.
- Grimes, Nikki, *Wild, Wild Hair*. New York: Scholastic, 1997.
- Hair Advertisement. *Jet* (27 October 1997): 17.
- "A Hair-Raising Story." *Essence* (February 1997): 18, 148, 150.
- Hansberry, Lorraine, *A Raisin in the Sun*. New York: Random House, 1958.
- Herron, Carolivia, *Nappy Hair*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997.
- hooks, bell, "Straightening Our Hair." In Diana George and John Trimbur, eds., *Reading Culture: Contexts for Critical Reading and Writing*. New York: HarperCollins, 1992, pp. 290-299.
- Hurston, Zora Neale, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1978.
- "Intra-racism." *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. 12 May 1987. Transcript #W172.
- Kennedy, Adrienne, "Funnyhouse of a Negro." In *In One Act*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988.
- LaBaw, Dominique, "Bad Hair." *Interrace Magazine* (August-September 1994): 17.
- Larkin, Alile Sharon, *Dreadlocks and the Three Bears*. Inter Image Video, 1991.
- Lee, Spike, "Straight and Nappy: Good and Bad Hair." *Uplift the Race: The Construction of School Daze*. New York: Fireside, 1988.
- Linn, Melissa, "All That Hair." In Bill Mullen, ed., *Revolutionary Tales: African American Women's Short Stories, from the First Story to the Present*. New York: Dell, 1995.
- Lorde, Audre, "Is Your Hair Still Political?" *Essence* (September 1990): 40, 110.
- Major, Clarence, ed., *Juba to Jive: A Dictionary of African-American Slang*. New York: Penguin, 1994.
- Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. New York: Ballantine, 1964.
- Malveaux, Julianne, "Just a Nappy-Headed Sister with the PC Blues." *Black Issues in Higher Education*, 24 December 1998: 30.
- Mollel, Tololwa M., *The Princess Who Lost Her Hair: An Akamba Legend*. Troll Associates, 1993.
- Morrison, Toni, *The Bluest Eye*. New York: Washington Square Press, 1970.
- Oliver, Stephanie Stokes, "Word from the Editor." *Heart and Soul* (October-November 1995): 55.

- Parker, KRS-1, "Ya Strugglin.'" *Edutainment*. Boogie Down Productions, 1990.
- Randall, Dudley, "On Getting a Natural, for Gwendolyn Brooks." In Woodie King, Jr., ed., *The Forerunners: Black Poets in America*. Washington: Howard University Press, 1975.
- Rollins, Charlemae, ed., "Introduction." *We Build Together: A Reader's Guide to Negro Life and Literature for Elementary and High School Use*. Campaign: National Council of Teachers of English, 1967.
- Rooks, Noliwee M., *Hair Raising: Beauty, Culture, and African American Women*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996.
- Russell, Kathy, Midge Wilson, and Ronald Hall, *The Color Complex: The Politics of Skin Color Among African Americans*. New York: Anchor Books, 1992.
- Sanders, Dori, *Clover*. Chapel Hill: Alonquin Books, 1990.
- Shange, Ntozake, *Nappy Edges*. Epigraph. London: Methuen, 1978.
- Shange, Ntozake, *Spell #7*. In *Three Pieces*. New York: Penguin Books, 1982.
- Smitherman, Geneva, *Black Talk: Words and Phrases from the Hood to the Amen Corner*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994.
- Tarpley, Natasha. "Haircut." *Obsidian II: Black Literature in Review* 6 (Winter 1991): 83.
- Tarpley, Natasha, *I Love My Hair!* New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1998.
- Walker, Alice, "Oppressed Hair Puts a Ceiling on the Brain." *Ms.* (June 1988): 52-53.
- Wallace, Michele, "Anger in Isolation: A Black Feminist's Search for Sisterhood." *Invisibility Blues*. New York: Verso, 1990, pp. 18-25.
- Wolfe, George C., "The Hairpiece." *The Colored Museum*. New York: Broadway Play Publishing, 1987.
- Wright, Richard, "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow." *Uncle Tom's Children*. New York: Harper and Row, 1965, pp. 3-15.
- Yarbrough, Camille, *Cornrows*. New York: Coward-McCann, 1979.

Copyright of Children's Literature in Education is the property of Kluwer Academic Publishing and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.