

PS 39 Diversity and Inclusion Book of the Month: February
Theme: Black History

Book Title: The Book Itch: Freedom, Truth and Harlem's Greatest Bookstore
By Vaunda Micheaux Nelson

Grade Level: 4th / 5th

Book Introduction:

Lewis Henri Michaux has a book itch. He wants to help people -- especially African-American people -- educate themselves so they can fully understand their civil rights. He believes that reading and getting together to discuss ideas is the way to do it. So, he works, saves, and opens the National Memorial African Bookstore. This bookstore becomes the gathering place for people from all over the world who are committed to the struggle for civil rights. Michaux's bookstore, as seen through the eyes of his young son, brims with big ideas and historic moments.

Discussion Questions:

- Family history is important. What is the value in passing down stories from one generation to the next? In your own family, are there stories that have been passed down to you that have created a connection to the past or an inspiration for the future?
- What did you know of Lewis Henri Michaux before reading this book? Why is it important to learn the stories and contributions that have come from those living ordinary lives, as opposed to (and in addition to) those who have more public recognition?
- Why did Lewis Henri Michaux choose to open a bookstore? What obstacles did he face when he first began his journey? In addition to offering diverse titles and access to such books, how did his bookstore create and expand community?
- Harlem is described vividly and the value of community is celebrated. By reading the vibrant description of community, why do you think Lewis Henri Michaux's bookstore served as a platform and a safe space to discuss social justice?
- Lewis Henri Michaux's life work focused on putting books into the hands of the people in his community and he opened a bookstore to help support civil rights efforts. How can you use the things you're good at to help a cause that you're passionate about?
- How do you access books of interest to you in your neighborhood? Do you feel that there are diverse books available to you? Do you think that access to books and education is the same in all communities? Is there a way to advocate for greater access to books that represent diverse experiences?
- Lewis Michaux Jr. states, "Maybe someday I'll believe in something so much I'll have the itch to make it happen." How do you feel about this statement? Have you ever had an 'itch' to make something happen? What actions could you take? What barriers might you come up against?