

# PRESS INFORMATION

**18th Annual  
Austin African American Book Festival  
featuring  
Nikki Giovanni**



**Carver Museum and Cultural Center &  
Carver Library  
1165 Angelina Street,  
Austin, TX 78702**

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**10a.m.-4p.m.**

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# NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## 18th ANNUAL AUSTIN AFRICAN AMERICAN BOOK FESTIVAL WELCOMES NIKKI GIOVANNI AS FEATURED GUEST

Austin, TX — May 28, 2024 — Renowned poet and author Nikki Giovanni will headline the 18th Annual Austin African American Book Festival on Saturday, June 29, 2024, at the Carver Museum and Carver Library located at 1165 Angelina Street in Austin, Texas, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. This year's festival, Under the theme "Black Feeling, Black Talk: Activism in Poetry and Prose," the festival will highlight the transformative power of the arts to foster growth and connection in our community.

"We are thrilled to celebrate the festival's 18th year with our featured guest, Nikki Giovanni," said Rosalind Oliphant, festival founder. "She is a literary legend and her life embodies our theme and her story will inspire all generations of festival attendees."

In honor of the 30th anniversary of the Austin Poetry slam, the festival will stage an open mic session, hosted by Poet Christopher Michael. Because art is a necessary part of a well-rounded life, James Madison University's Furious Flower Poetry Center will lead a workshop for those wanting to integrate poetry into their school's curriculum. The session is open to everyone, and teachers can receive continuing education credits by participating.

Jessica Care Moore, international poet/producer/playwright and the Voice of Detroit will demonstrate the power of poetry to move as she performs her work on the Carver stage.

To close the adult section of the festival, the Festival's favorite scholar Dr. Michael Cunningham, will lead a discussion on the issues of censorship and advocating for banned books.

### Special Guests and Programs:

This year's festival also includes the following programming for students and families:

- **Wade Hudson**, Co-founder of Just Us Books: will share stories that highlight the importance of representation in children's literature.
- **China Smith**, founder of Ballet Afrique: will lead a workshop that teaches children to depict the meaning of a poem through movement and dance.
- Award-winning author and illustrator **Don Tate** returns with an art project that will inspire young readers and writers to illustrate their own stories.

Special outreach to schools, including the Texas School for the Deaf (TSD), will ensure accessibility and inclusion for all attendees. The festival aims to foster a welcoming environment where diverse voices are celebrated, and literature serves as a catalyst for meaningful conversations and connections. Through interactive sessions and engaging presentations, students will have the opportunity to explore themes of activism, identity, and social change in African American literature.

**About Austin African American Book Festival:** The Austin African American Book Festival is a community-focused event that engages directly with readers to foster creativity, activism, and positive change.

For more information and updates about the 18th Annual Austin African American Book Festival, please visit [aaabookfest.org](http://aaabookfest.org) or email [info@aaabookfest.org](mailto:info@aaabookfest.org).



# Nikki Giovanni

## Bio Highlights

### Early Life and Education:

- Born Yolande Cornelia Giovanni Jr. in Knoxville, Tennessee (1943).
- Raised in a family deeply connected to their Southern roots, despite facing discrimination in the North.
- Graduated magna cum laude from Fisk University, an historically Black college (1967).
- Briefly pursued social work but found her calling in writing.

### Activism and the Black Arts Movement:

- A prominent member of the Black Arts Movement, using poetry to empower Black identity and advocate for social justice.
- Played a key role in reviving the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) chapter at Fisk.
- Authored influential works like "Black Feeling, Black Talk" and "Black Judgment," reflecting the movement's spirit.

### Literary Career and Recognition:

- Self-published her debut collection.
- A prolific writer, creating poetry for adults and children, essays, and editing anthologies.
- Renowned for centering Black women's experiences in her work (similar to Gwendolyn Brooks and Lucille Clifton)
- Celebrated with numerous awards, including NAACP Image Awards (7), a Grammy nomination, and finalist for the National Book Award.
- Authored three New York Times and Los Angeles Times bestsellers.
- University Distinguished Professor with a strong legacy as an inspiring educator.

### Impact and Legacy:

- A champion for Black voices and transformative storytelling.
- Inspired generations through her writing and activism.
- Continues to be a vital figure in American literature, influencing poetry, social justice movements, and education.

### Additional Points of Interest:

- Friendship with Rosa Parks led to a commemorative poem for her funeral in 2005
- Overcame lung cancer, reflecting on the experience in her poetry.
- Encouraged Black participation in space exploration.
- Holds keys to several cities, including Dallas, Los Angeles, Miami and New York.

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# FESTIVAL HISTORY

Dr. Roz Oliphant Jones, a longtime educator and bookseller in Austin, Texas had a vision to organize a book festival in Austin similar to the Harlem Book Fair in New York. In 2006, she reached out to writer Evelyn Martin Anderson and together they established the **Austin African American Book Festival**. The inaugural festival was held in 2007. Since that time the festival has grown to include nationally recognized authors, a platform for local and regional authors, literary discussions, children's activities, and a vendor marketplace. The Austin African American Book Festival, held at the George Washington Carver Library and Museum, is a highly anticipated community event that attracts 400+ festival goers each year.

## **Dr. Roz Oliphant – Founder/Organizer**

Dr. Roz Oliphant is a dedicated advocate for diversity and equity in education, with a specialization in enhancing teacher effectiveness and student achievement. Her passion for promoting African American literature and fostering community engagement through literary events stems from her early career experiences. Oliphant's journey began with the founding of Folktales, a pioneering bookstore in Austin that focused exclusively on African American literature. Recognizing the importance of culturally specific books, she transformed Folktales into a vibrant hub for literary engagement, hosting renowned authors and fostering community groups like the Black Women's Literary Society and Teen Read and Rap Group.

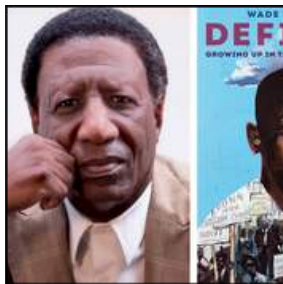
Inspired by the Harlem Book Fair, Oliphant co-founded the Austin African American Book Festival, which has since become a highly anticipated annual event. The festival attracts Pulitzer Prize winners, best-selling authors, and historians, serving as a dynamic platform to showcase African American culture and literature. Her visionary leadership, commitment to literacy and cultural appreciation continue to inspire and empower communities to embrace the transformative power of diverse voices in literature and education, leaving a profound impact on the literary landscape in Austin and beyond.

## **Evelyn Martin Anderson**

Evelyn Martin Anderson is a seasoned journalist and literary arts producer with extensive experience in community reporting and event management. For 15 years, she reported for a local community newspaper, maintaining an arts and culture column. Additionally, Evelyn developed a successful literary program, securing city funding and curating events. She owns The Literature Group, focusing on books and arts-related items, showcasing her passion for literature and community engagement.

# SPECIAL PROGRAMMING: STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

The Austin African American Book Festival is excited to present special programming featuring acclaimed figures in literature and the arts. Join us for engaging sessions with Don Tate, China Smith, and Wade Hudson. These distinguished guests will offer unique insights into children's literature, dance, and storytelling, enriching our understanding and appreciation of African American culture.



### Wade Hudson

Wade Hudson, a distinguished author, publisher, and CEO of Just Us Books, Inc., is a leading voice in children's publishing. With a portfolio of over thirty books, including acclaimed anthologies like "We Rise, We Resist, We Raise Our Voices," Wade advocates for diverse representation and social justice through literature. Co-editing impactful collections with his wife, Cheryl Willis Hudson, Wade amplifies underrepresented voices and addresses important social issues. His memoir, "Defiant: Growing Up in the Jim Crow South," exemplifies his commitment to sharing powerful narratives that resonate with readers of all ages. Hudson's leadership in independent publishing continues to shape the landscape of children's literature, inspiring communities to embrace diverse stories and perspectives.

Hudson will share empowering stories and insights into diverse children's literature, enriching young minds with stories that beautifully represent Black boys and girls.



### China Smith

China Smith, Founding Director of Ballet Afrique and East Austin Performing, is dedicated to arts education and community empowerment. Raised in East Austin, she recognized the need for exposure to African American art among her students. With extensive experience as Director of Performing Arts at Texas Empowerment Academy, China fosters creative expression through dance. Her background in dance, theatre, and choreography enriches her innovative approach, creating transformative experiences for youth.

China Smith, along with Ballet Afrique, will lead a captivating workshop titled "Dance A Poem," where children will bring the words of a poem to life through movement and dance.



### Don Tate

Don Tate is a distinguished award-winning author and illustrator, recognized for his contributions to children's literature. Beyond his creative endeavors, Don is a founding host of The Brown Bookshelf, a platform dedicated to amplifying African American voices in children's literature through book reviews, author interviews, and insightful discussions. His passion for storytelling extends to speaking engagements at schools, public libraries, and writing conferences, where he shares his expertise and inspires young readers. Don Tate's impactful presence at book festivals enriches literary communities, highlighting the importance of diverse narratives.

Tate returns with engaging storytelling and interactive art projects that inspire and entertain young audiences.

# FESTIVAL IMAGES



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# 2023 Austin African American Book Festival Recap

Adult programming began with 14 writers, who discussed their work during our indie author showcase. Christopher Michael introduced the authors and entertained the festival goers with his dynamic spoken word poetry.

Headlining the festival was New York Times bestselling author and multiple award-winning poet, producer and educator Kwame Alexander. Mr. Alexander entertained the crowd with stories about his journey as a writer and how his life was enriched by his relationship with literary icon Nikki Giovanni.

Dr. Peniel Joseph explained why strident eras of racial progress are followed by racist backlash as he discussed his book "The Third Reconstruction: America's Struggle for Racial Justice in the Twenty-First Century." For this book Dr. Joseph received the Robert F. Kennedy Book Award, which recognizes exemplary work that explores issues of human rights, social justice, and the power of individual action.

In a conversation with Dr. Mark Cunningham, journalist and Jefferson descendent Gayle Jessup White discussed the trials and triumphs experienced as she traced her lineage back to a founding father. She documented her journey in the book, "Reclamation." Ms. White is the public relations and community engagement officer at Monticello, Thomas Jefferson's legendary estate.

Historian kYmberly Keeton's genealogy workshop was a favorite activity for aspiring genealogist. Due to space and time constraints the workshop was limited to 25 people. Ms Keeton emailed workshop materials to those unable to participate in the session.

For the kids the festival was a day with books, story time, art, movement, library tours, and snacks in the Carver library.

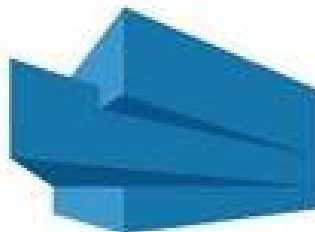
Young festival goers watched Outreach Productions puppet show "Cool Ride In the Sky" Puppet Show. Then indie children's authors presented their work in Children's Story Time. This opportunity was created to both support new authors and give young readers the chance to stock up on the latest in Black children's literature.

The Ezra Jack Keats award-winning author Anne Wynter read from her latest book, "Nell Plants a Tree," a delightful story about family heritage and a pecan tree.

Using social justice issues, personal and career aspirations, and visual arts, literary activist Patrick Oliver engaged young people in a vision board activity to foster optimism and productive citizenship. Later in the afternoon, kids were treated to Kona Ice and entertained with a reading of "Wynter, Take A Bow!" by Willie Sue Anderson.

# SPONSORS

The 2024 Austin African American Book Festival is sponsored by:



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