

'8Ridge Drive
Great Neck
Friday

Dear Mrs Mitchell,

I went up to the 135 (TK) Street Harlem Library yesterday. They have one whole floor up there of childrens books and about four childrens librarians. And they have about four colored authors writing for children among all those books. Uncle Remus is hardly read at all. Mrs Baker, the librarian said they didn't understand the dialect, even when they tried to read it to them in reading groups. There was also a white(-trash) imitator of Uncle Remus dialect for Nursery ages who wrote a book called Uncle Pappy sings. It had good rythm, but it seems the children both resented and didn't understand the dialect. Yet she said they liked Dunbars poetry even though it wasn't written for children. Some of that is in dialect. I asked her about Weldon Johnson, and she said, of course he was too reactionary for children to like or too "above it" to condescend to write for children. She seemed to have a deffinate opinion of him. She said she had spoken to several negro writers about the need there was for good childrens books by and about negroes but none of them were interested or felt able to do that kind of writing. There is only one negro writing for children today. That is Arna Bontemps who wrote The Sadfaced Boy (about Harlem and therefore quite popular up there), and You Can't Pet a Possum, and one other. Although these books got good reviews, she didn't feel that they were really good books, but she said that there is so little out that they are forced to take anything. She said she wasn't sure whether Bontemps was doing this childrens writing because his heart was in it or because it was a clear commercial field. She thought he ought to know more about children.

I told her about the writers laboratory, and she thought he would be a good person to aproach if his good reviews hadn't spoilt him. He used to write for adults and then suddenly switched. She said that she and some of the other Librarians had been talking the other day and wondering what was behind his impulse. She also suggested Carter Woodson, author of "Negroe Makers of History" and editor of The Associated Publishers, 1538 Ninth St. N.W. washington as a person who would be most likely to know of any young negroe writers who were interested in writing for children, and also Stirling Brown, professor of English at Howard University.

I told her I would send her a copy of the announcement of the Writers Laberatory -- hope, this was all right -- She seemed a very intelegent person and in contact with people who might possibly be interested from the Negroes point of view.

There was one other writer, Erich Berry who writes about African Children. And a good

book called KINTU a Congo Adventure by Elizabeth Enright (I think she was white) and then of course Mrs Evens whos books she said were quite popular. Little Black Sambo, however is the most popular book up there for younger children. Of course she said, popularity changed from year to year, and it was hard to judge sometimes how much of it was the children themselves, and how much was a pointing up by the librarians. There is one other interesting book by a negroe teacher of white children, - Marion Cuthbert- "We Sing America," which is "Introducing Negroe Americans" for white children, 4th and 5th grades. They want to try it on the colored children to see how much they detect the difference of approach and see if they resent it.

I caught a fish the other day that our boatman who used to be a diver said had "a deep sea smile." Don't you think such a fish could come and go in the Read em and Weep Readers. I've been out on a potatoe farm at the end of the island working on Uncle Remus. The more I work on that the more inevitable it seems and the more lost I am in admiration of the form and vitality of some of those stories. It is the rythm and timing and the underlying cadence that gives to them their strength and charm, not the dielect. But I had just about decided to leave most of the dielect, in a comprehensible form, in the animals speeches untouched. Now after going up to Harlem, I am not so convinced and may modify it a little more. White children I think would love for Brer rabbit to talk funny. Harpers is very interested but whether they decide to take it or not I'm going to do it. It seems one tangible thing that can be done, and inevitable. If any one can do it better, I hope they do, sooner or later, only I think I can do it.

I would like to send you a story about The WONDERFUL kitten that is going into the Duttons book to read. It is the only story out of the past half year that I really truly like. I was watching a tiny little kitten all the time I wrote it. Also I would like to dedicate that book to you, if you will accept it.

Sincerely yours,

Margaret Brown