The Lincoln County News™

Seventh Annual Beautiful Blackbird Children's Book Festival

August 21, 2026

Portland, ME – Indigo Arts Alliance, in partnership with I'm Your Neighbor Books and Diverse BookFinder, is pleased to announce the 7th Annual Beautiful Blackbird Children's Book Festival, in which 3,000 books will be distributed free of charge to families throughout Maine. This celebration of children's literature will take place throughout five counties in Maine starting on September 12 and continuing through November. Presented with partners across the state, including for the first time in Kennebec County and the Midcoast region, the 2026 festival will host free author and illustrator events, book fairs, readings, performances, and exhibitions.

“We’re thrilled to bring the Beautiful Blackbird Children’s Book Festival to inner Midcoast communities for the first time this year,” said Jordia Benjamin, Executive Director of Indigo Arts Alliance. “The festival has always been about building community through the joy and power of children’s literature, and we’re excited to connect with new families, educators, and young readers across the region.”

Inspired by the children’s book *Beautiful Blackbird*, adapted and illustrated by artist Ashley Bryan, the festival celebrates children’s literature that affirms heritage and community. Bryan adapted the book from a story from the Ila people in Zambia, in which the birds of the forest learn to appreciate their own beauty and heritage. To date, the festival has given away over 19,000 books. Each featured book and event will provide an opportunity for young Black and Brown readers to see themselves reflected in literature created with them in mind and to interact with the authors and illustrators as role models and storytellers. By integrating reading and the Arts with explorations of roots, identity, and resilience, the festival provides a solid foundation for all children to build lifelong interest and skills in reading, writing, and language arts.

Particularly poignant to this year’s festival is a dialogue with illustrator and Marine Archeologist Gabrielle Miller at Indigo Arts Alliance, and participation in both the Maine Literary Festival in Waterville and the Kid Literary Festival at Portland Public Library.

The 2026 festival will feature a selection of nine books by Black & Brown authors and illustrators, including picture books, graphic novels, poetry, and middle-grade fiction. Featured titles include *Beautiful Blackbird*, *Fibbed* by Elizabeth Agyemang, *Hairstory* by Sope Martins and Briana Mukodiri Uchendu, *Korobá: The Case of the Missing Kolo* by Àlàbá Ònájìn, *Sail Away* by Langston Hughes and Ashley Bryan, *Saturday* by Oge Mora, *The Deepest Blue* by Shauntay Grant and Daniel Minter, *The Girl and The Robot* by Oz Rodriguez and Claribel A. Ortega, and *The Night Has Ears: African Proverbs* by Ashley Bryan.

The 2026 Beautiful Blackbird Children’s Book Festival is presented by Indigo Arts Alliance, I’m Your Neighbor Books, and Diverse BookFinder, with support from Auburn Public Library, the Children’s Museum & Theatre of Maine, Center for Maine Contemporary Art, Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens, Colby College Museum of Art, Farnsworth Art Museum, Hello Hello Books, L/A Arts, Lewiston Public Library, Maine Arts Academy, Maine Maritime Museum, Maine MILL, Maine Lit Fest, Portland Housing Authority, Portland Ovations, Portland Parks, Recreation & Facilities, Saccarappa School, Strand Theatre, The Third Place, Waterville Creates, and Waterville Public Library.

Major support for the 2026 Beautiful Blackbird Children's Book Festival is generously donated by Norway Savings Bank, Unum, and Martin's Point Health Care.

For more information about the 2026 book selection and partnering organizations, please visit www.beautifulblackbird.com. A full schedule of events is below. Events are free with RSVP unless noted otherwise.

September 12: Lost Treasures: Dive in to “The Deepest Blue”
Indigo Arts Alliance
60 Cove St, Portland, ME 04101
10:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.

Discover the journey and lost stories of *The Deepest Blue* by Shauntay Grant and illustrations by Daniel Minter. Experience a talk with guest speakers Gabrielle Miller, Marine Archaeologist and co-coordinator of the Slave Wrecks Project, and award-winning illustrator Daniel Minter, followed by an introspective zine workshop exploring the past, present, and future.

September 12: Read-Alouds of Beautiful Blackbird and The Deepest Blue
Hello Hello Books
316 Main St, Rockland, ME 04841
10:00–11:30 a.m

Hello Hello Books will present a read-aloud of featured festival books *Beautiful Blackbird* and *The Deepest Blue.* These books will be available in-store for giveaways throughout September and October.

September 12: Beautiful Blackbird Children’s Book Festival Kickoff
Waterville Public Library
73 Elm St, Waterville, ME 04901
10:30–11:30 a.m

The Waterville Public Library, Waterville Creates, and the Children’s Discovery Museum will present an in-person schedule of activities for the whole family, including a read-aloud of *Saturday* by Oge Mora, and the featured StoryWalk at the Reed Field StoryWalk trail located at 58 Drummond Avenue in Waterville, ME. The StoryWalk will be open to the public through December 12, 2026.

September 19: Beautiful Blackbird-inspired Craft Workshop and Book Giveaway
Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens
105 Botanical Gardens Drive, Boothbay, ME 04537
10:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.

Guests visiting Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens on September 19 can participate in a Beautiful Blackbird-inspired craft and take home a free copy of *Beautiful Blackbird* or *The Deepest Blue*. All activities are located in the Gardens' Alfond Children's Garden between 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. and are included in the price of admission.

September 25: Art Walk LA: Beautiful Blackbird Children's Book Festival
LA Arts
72 Lisbon St, Lewiston, ME 04240
5:00–8:00 p.m.

Art Walk LA fosters community and celebrates the vitality of Lewiston / Auburn by turning the downtown into a bustling arts district on the final Friday of each month in the summer. The final iteration of this year's Art Walk will be centered around the Beautiful Blackbird Children's Book Festival. More details will follow in early September.

September 26: Beautiful Blackbird Children's Book Festival Day
Maine MILL
1 Beech St, Lewiston, ME 04240
10:00am–4:00 p.m.

Hosted by Maine MILL, in partnership with Indigo Arts Alliance and The Third Place, this free family program features hands-on activities inspired by this year's Beautiful Blackbird Children's Book Festival featured books. In addition to a Storytime & Activity event and Art Workshop inspired by *Koroba: The Case of the Missing Kolo*, families will be able to pick up free copies of this year's festival books, make their own Beautiful Blackbird button, and explore Design Lab activities inspired by the festival's books and themes.

September 27: Beautiful Blackbird Children's Book Festival at CMTM
Children's Museum & Theatre of Maine
250 Thompsons Point Rd, Portland, ME 04102
9:00am–4:00 p.m.

This special event will include art-making experiences, read-alouds, and interactive literary activities for the whole family. Stay tuned for more details! Admission to the festival is FREE, part of CMTM's ongoing commitment to removing barriers that families may face in accessing the Museum & Theatre. Free admission applies to children and their caregivers; adult visitors must be accompanied by a child.

September 30: Beautiful Blackbird Art Exhibition & Reception
Lithgow Public Library
45 Winthrop Street, Augusta, ME 04330
5:00–7:00 p.m.

Maine Arts Academy presents a reception for the month-long exhibition highlighting *Hairstory* by Sope Martins, illustrated by Briana Mukodiri Uchendu; *The Night Has Ears* by Ashley Bryan; and *Sail Away* by Langston Hughes, illustrated by Ashley Bryan.

October 2: Beautiful Blackbird Children's Book Festival + Maine Lit Fest
Paul J. Schupf Art Center
93 Main Street, Waterville, ME 04901
5:00–7:00 p.m.

The Paul J. Schupf Art Center will celebrate the joy of books, art, and community with free books and a hands-on art activity. A reading of *Saturday* by Oge Mora will be presented by the Waterville Public Library, followed by a workshop to create art inspired by the book. Presented in collaboration between Waterville Creates, the Colby College Museum of Art, the Waterville Public Library, and the Colby Arts Office.

October 3: "Responding to the Moment": Beautiful Blackbird Kids Lit Book Fair
Portland Public Library
5 Monument Square, Portland, ME 04101
10:00 a.m.–2:00 p.m.

Presented in collaboration with the Maine Lit Festival, this book fair will bring together more than twenty authors and illustrators to share their books and meet with children and families. The event will also feature readings, characters, activities, and book sales.

October 16: Beautiful Blackbird Children's Book Festival Read-Aloud & Performance
Strand Theatre
345 Main Street, Rockland, ME 04841
9:30–10:30 a.m.

The Strand Theater will celebrate the Beautiful Blackbird Children's Book Festival with a live read-aloud of *Saturday* by Oge Mora followed by a performance by educator, actor, and theatre-maker, Mélissa Smith. This free school-time program will be offered to local students, homeschool groups, and families with kids not yet in school. The program is recommended for ages 3-8, or grades Pre-K to 2nd.

October 17: ArtLab for All Ages: Poems + Paper Collage
Villager Cafe
25 Mechanic Street, Camden, ME
1:00–2:00 p.m.

Hosted by the Center for Maine Contemporary Art and Midcoast Villager, this program invites participants to create a colorful cut paper collage inspired by the ocean. In the book *Sail Away,* poet Langston Hughes and artist Ashley Bryan celebrate the sea. Take home a free copy of the book as part of the Beautiful Blackbird Children's Book Festival.

October 18: Rockland's Sunday Stroll
Farnsworth Art Museum
16 Museum St, Rockland, ME 04841
11:00 a.m.–3:00 p.m.

Celebrate the Beautiful Blackbird Children's Book Festival as part of Rockland's Sunday Stroll with a book giveaway of Ashley Bryan's *The Night Has Ears: African Proverbs* and a family craft activity inspired by the book.

Continued programming will be available throughout the month of November, including in-school events. More information will be released in the coming months.