

Issue 792

Thursday, February 2, 2012

# NEW ORLEANS ADVENTURE

**YAK ON THE ROAD PAGES  
4 AND 5.**

**DETROIT WRITER HAS NEW  
BOOK, PAGES 2 AND 3.**

**TIGERS IN TOWN, PAGE 3.**



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## YAK CHAT

February is fabulous. Here are three reasons the Yak loves this month:

**1)** It's African American History Month. Take time to see some of the excellent exhibits and shows here that bring history to life. Start by checking out the DIA Friday evening for an arts workshop. Next week, read about Yak's visit to the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History.

**2)** February has its own celebrations, including Mardi Gras. Learn about the Mardi Gras city of New Orleans and its comeback spirit on Pages 4 and 5.

**3)** February is for readers. Those cold winter days are perfect to get the jump on Reading Month in March. We talk with Michigan writer Christopher Paul Curtis about his new book on Pages 2 and 3.

### ALSO INSIDE:

- A tiny frog, Page 6.
- Presidential trip, Page 6.
- Your Art, Page 7.

### ON THE COVER:

Photo by Per Kjeldsen

**Horse-drawn carriages take tourists through the historic French Quarter in New Orleans, Louisiana. At top is one of the Louisiana artist George Rodrigue's famous Blue dog paintings, "Dependence."**

Photo courtesy of George Rodrigue

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# Christopher Paul Curtis, A Mighty Michigan Author

The Yak is a huge fan of Michigan writer Christopher Paul Curtis. Born and raised in Flint, he now lives in Detroit, where he likes to do most of his writing at local libraries. The Yak recently caught up with Christopher by phone from Miami, Florida, where he was making a stop on his tour for his new book, "The Mighty Miss Malone." Christopher hasn't been on the road touring since his last book, "Elijah of Buxton," was published in 2007 so he's super happy to be out meeting fans across the United States. "Oh, it's one of my favorite parts of being an author," says Christopher, who will be back soon for some Michigan events.

January was a big month for the author. "On the tenth, 'Deza' came out and on the eleventh, my wife, Habon, delivered a baby," said Christopher. Christopher was out on tour at the time and had to rush home for a few days. Baby Ebyaan wasn't expected until February. Christopher and his wife also have a 1-year-old daughter, Ayaan. (Christopher also has two grown-up children, Cydney, a college student and Steven, who served in the Navy and now is pursuing business opportunities.)

"The Mighty Miss Malone," has been in the works for years. Back in 2007, Christopher told the Yak he was thinking about a companion story to "Bud, Not Buddy," featuring the spunky Deza Malone, who gives Bud a quick but memorable smooch in the story. Christopher says one of the reasons he wanted to write about Deza is that whenever he would visit schools, "girls would say to me, 'Why don't you write a book about a girl?'" "After lots of fan requests (even from moms!),

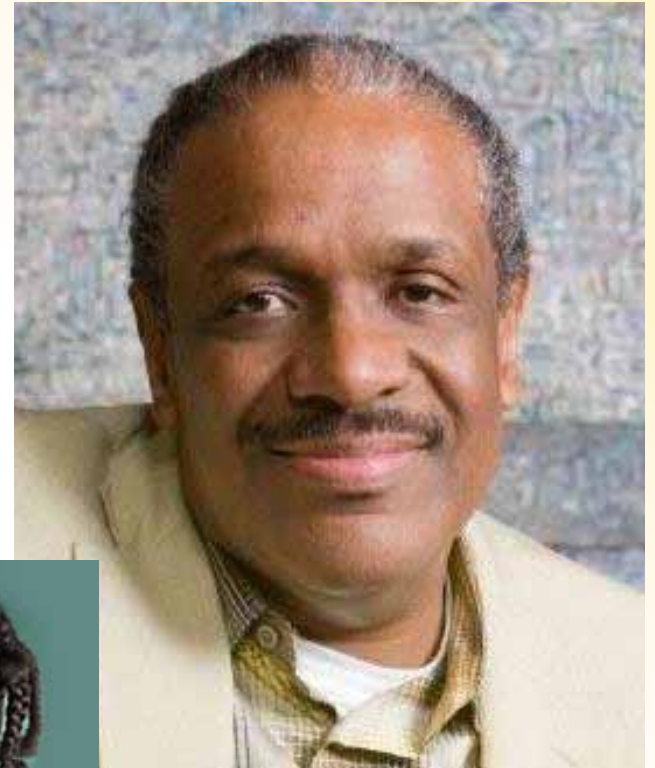
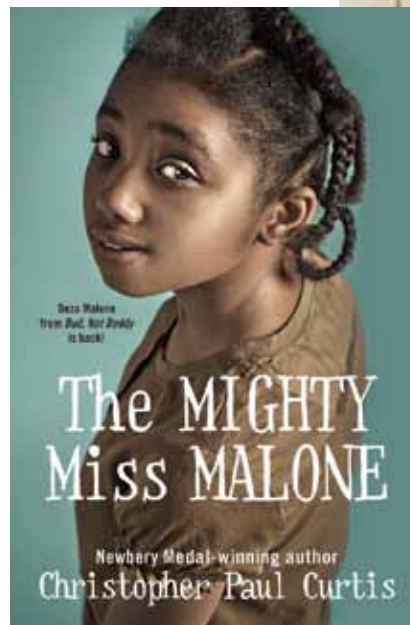


Photo Courtesy of Random House

**Michigan author Christopher Paul Curtis brings history to life in his award-winning books for young readers.**



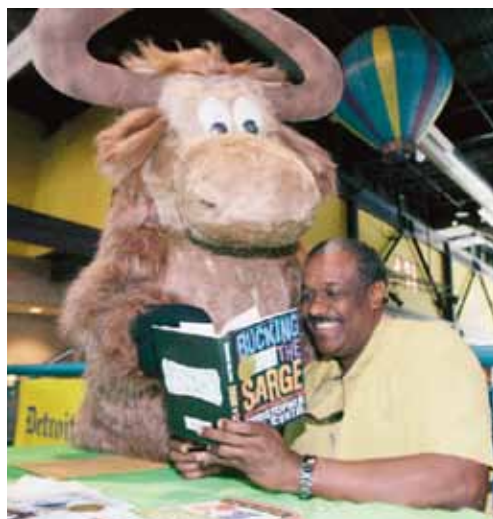
Christopher finally said OK, and got busy working on a book with a mighty female lead. "I finally got the courage up to try and do it," says Christopher. "I was hesitant to try and write from a girl's point of view, but once I jumped into it, it came just as easily" as other characters. Christopher says of writing the story about 12-year-old Deza: "I had to take a while to get to know the character, but I finally got to know her, and I'm glad I did."

What else has been keeping Christopher busy? In 2009 and 2010, he spent time as a visiting professor at UM-Flint, where he received his degree. For the past three years, he has been working on a writing program with all fourth

graders in Flint schools. The Christopher Paul Curtis Writing Project celebrates and promotes the importance of writing and recognizes student achievement.

In addition, Christopher is writing two spinoff stories from "Elijah of Buxton," with the next novel to be published in 2013. And something else that Christopher really likes is seeing his work on stage. "Bud, Not Buddy," his Newbery-winning novel has been adapted and performed. Right now, "Mr. Chickee's Funny Money," is being turned into a musical. Christopher is going to New York City at the end of the month to watch auditions.

So what were Christopher's growing up years like in nearby Flint? Christopher, the second oldest of five kids, says his parents were very strict and set early curfews and bedtimes for the children. "Curfew, nothing, we were in bed by 6:30 every night," says Christopher. He adds that his mother always knew exactly where everyone was "and didn't let us do a lot of things with

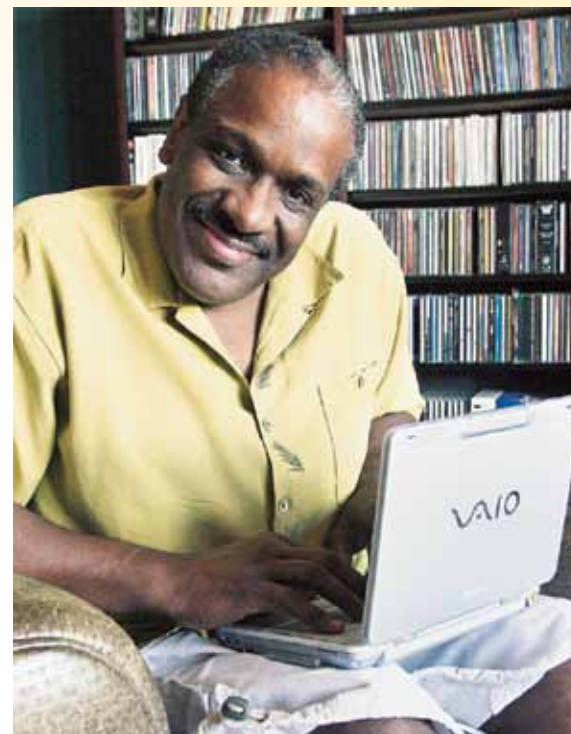


people or children she didn't know. We felt like we were too, too sheltered," remembers Christopher. But curfew complaints aside, Christopher says the main thing was that "we were brought up with a lot of love. And humor. My father was a joker, and both my grandfathers were jokesters, too, and we kids teased each other incessantly, as kids do."

Christopher was also an early and avid reader and loved history stories and MAD and Cracked, both humor magazines. Christopher proudly says his mom, now 87, still reads a book a night!

After high school, Christopher signed up for classes at Flint's University of Michigan campus. After landing a

factory job hanging doors on Buicks as they went down the assembly line, he found that college took a backseat to earning a good paycheck. Christopher spent the next 13 years at the car factory, but began writing during his breaks and lunch hours. Christopher finally decided to take a year off and go for his dream as a writer. That year, he wrote "The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963." And as the saying goes, the rest



Yak's Corner file photos

**We've been fans of Christopher's for years. Here he is in 2007, taking time to yak with us. At left, Christopher met up with the Yak at the Yak's Corner Book Fair.**

is history. And it really is for this award-winning writer who spins wonderful tales with historical facts.

By Janis Campbell

## LOOK WHAT THE YAK SAW!

January was jumpin' and jammin' when the Detroit Tigers held their first Kids Convention at the Fox Theatre. The team is now in Florida for spring training, but their winter visit last month gave fans a chance to cheer on players and celebrate the team. The Yak stopped by just in time to see Max Scherzer, Ramon Santiago, Brennan Boesch and Don Kelly challenge kids and each other in some fun games from bubble-blowing contests (Don Kelly was the best, thought the Yak) to relays. They also took questions from kids. At right, two fans, friends Angelo Diciatca, 7, of Roseville, and Kate Pirker, 7, of Grosse Pointe, got on stage to ask the players about favorite movies. ("Cars" was one of the favorites!) Max Scherzer shared the fact that he liked the new Bobblehead statue because it has his eyes right with "one blue eye and one brown eye."



Photo by Cathy Collison

## YAK ON THE ROAD

# NEW DAYS IN NEW ORLEANS

**W**e took our first trip of the New Year to New Orleans, Louisiana, 1,065 miles south of Detroit on the Mississippi River.

It was our fifth trip to the official U.S. Mardi Gras capital. But we hadn't visited since Hurricane Katrina in 2005, when the city's flood system failed, causing water to rise to the rooftops of hundreds of homes. Television images of helpless families and dead pets and people horrified the nation.

But New Orleans survived, and has a lesson to teach: resilience (ree-ZIL-ee-unse), or the ability to recover from hard times. You can't keep a great city down, it seems – are you listening, Detroit? New Orleans has lost almost a third of its population, yet those who stayed behind or have since returned once again feel pride in their city's fabled heritage and post-flood progress.

Everyone we met had a positive outlook:

**“You have to take the good with the bad.”**

**“Things could be worse.”**

**“I almost lost my daughter in Katrina, so (now) I just smile.”**

## COMEBACK STORY

The city's special magic is rooted in its long history and unique, celebratory spirit. Like Detroit, New Orleans was founded by the



Photos by Per Kjeldsen

**It's fun to wander the historic streets in New Orleans' French Quarter, where there is never a dull moment. The graceful buildings are known for their lovely balconies.**

French — in 1718. Spain ruled, too – then France again, which sold the colony to the United States. Today, the majority of residents are African American, many of mixed French or Spanish ancestry. The rich cultural stew seems to permeate everything, even the air.

In the historic French Quarter, you can always hear live music, mostly jazz. A young street musician's clarinet no sooner fades than you're drawn toward the rhythm of a band you can't yet see, as if in a dream. On the way, you pass old tiled street signs, in Spanish, and sidewalk artists selling paintings. Happily, you invent a little game: “Count the fleur-de-lis.” The elegant French flower symbol adorns everything, from jewelry and teddy bears to wallpaper and garbage containers.

Signs of resurgence are everywhere. During Katrina, 10,000 people sought shelter

at the Superdome, home of the New Orleans Saints. The roof was ripped off, water leaked in, the power failed, toilets overflowed, and fights broke out as food and water supplies were exhausted.

“We were there for five or six days,” said waitress Deshuntine Cotton. “My 10-month-old daughter developed a fever that hit 106 degrees. Luckily, they had medical staff and they put us on a helicopter and got us out of there.”

Today, the damaged, terror-filled stadium is a distant memory. In early January, the week we visited, the Superdome was dubbed, “the center of the American sports universe” for hosting three major events: the Sugar Bowl (The University of Michigan vs. Virginia Tech), an NFL playoff (The Detroit Lions vs. the New Orleans Saints) and the college football championship (The University of





In the French Quarter, fleur-de-lis can be seen everywhere, as on these flags. The pretty French flower symbol is a reminder of the city's French founding.

Alabama vs. Louisiana State University).

So many fans swarmed the French Quarter and the downtown and warehouse districts that it felt like Mardi Gras. But then every day is Mardi Gras in New Orleans. The festival was still seven weeks away, but bakeries, souvenir shops and even vendors on bikes already were selling king cakes, a Mardi Gras treat.

## FOOD IS KING

Great food reigns supreme. At Cafe du Monde (French for Café of the World), the line often stretches out the door for beignets (BEH-nyays), a cousin of Polish paczkis. The airy pastries arrive warm, four to a plate, and are dusted with so much powdered sugar that kids playfully smear their noses, chins and cheeks with it. The beloved café will be 150 years old this year.

The city is famous for its French, Cajun and Creole restaurants. The Cajuns are an ethnic group whose French-speaking ancestors were exiled by the British from what today is Canada. The Creole people are descended from early settlers of mixed French, Spanish and African ancestry.

All three cuisines teem with seafood fresh from the nearby Gulf of Mexico, especially crayfish, or tiny spiny lobsters, and shrimp. We ate our fill of gumbo, jambalaya, red beans and rice, crab cakes and yummy classic desserts, including bread pudding, baked apples in cream (for breakfast!) and lemon icebox pie.



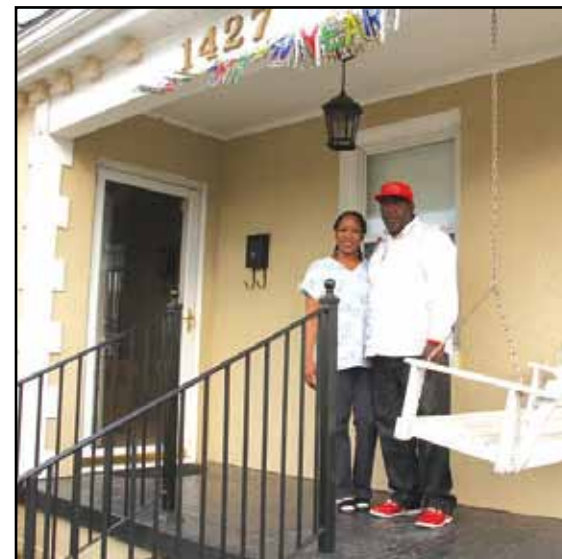
Above, Hurricane Katrina destroyed much of the city's largest neighborhood, but new houses are being built on the empty land, this time on cinder blocks to protect against flooding. At right, Reginald and Michelle Thornton rebuilt their home, but it's still one of only two on the block.

(We walked off one meal at the new Audubon Insectarium, where we sampled fried crickets and cookies topped with worms. Come back on March 1 for a story on the Insectarium.)

Like the fleur-de-lis, the Blue Dog kept popping up everywhere. Images of Cajun artist George Rodrigue's famous pop icon



At Cafe du Monde, part of the fun of eating pastry is powdering your face with powdered sugar! School kids like to stop there on field trips to the French Quarter.



grace countless posters and large building murals.

But it was our last image of New Orleans that was the most moving. On our way to the airport, cab driver Reginald Thornton took us on a tour of the city's largest neighborhood, which was devastated by the flood. He lost his cab and his home, but was able to keep his family together. "So many families broke up," he said. "Without (jobs and) money, they couldn't stay together."

The day before the flood, Reginald and his family fled to Baton Rouge, an hour away, to stay with relatives. For two years, he and his wife, Michelle, visited the rubble of their house on Sundays. "It made me feel good just to sit on my porch," he said. "We'd have a barbecue just to think, 'This is still ours.'" The couple has since rebuilt the house, though it's still one of only two on the block. "I love this city and had to come back," Reginald said, adding: "I just don't want to live anywhere else."

By Patricia Chargot



Mardi Gras, which means Fat Tuesday in French, is the big celebration the day before the Christian fasting season of Lent begins. People eat rich, fatty foods, especially treats, and in some cities, including New Orleans and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, even wear masks and costumes and ride in parades.

# YAKKING ABOUT THE NEWS

A weekly wrap-up for young readers

## Tiny Frog Discovered

Small discoveries sometimes make big news. That's true about news of possibly the world's smallest frog. The online science magazine, PLoS One, reported that a team of U.S. scientists believes they have found the world's littlest frog in Papua New Guinea. The frog is about ¼ inch long. And the tiny critter was sure hard to find! "The New Guinea forests are incredibly loud at night; and we were trying to record frog calls in the forest, and we were curious as to what these other sounds were," said research leader Chris Austin from Louisiana State University to BBC News. "It was night, these things are incredibly small; so what we did after several frustrating attempts was to grab a whole handful of leaf litter and throw it inside a clear plastic bag.



Photo by Christopher Austin, LSU

The tiny frog pictured is perched on a dime, to give you an idea of its size.

When we did so, we saw these incredibly tiny frogs hopping around," he told BBC News.

## Presidential Travels

President Barack Obama made a visit to Disney World, but it wasn't a vacation for the president. He was making a stop to promote tourism and his stop included the announcement that he had made several executive orders for a plan to focus on tourism. Said President Obama, "The more folks who visit America, the more Americans we get back to work. It's that simple." It was a busy January at the White House, too, where the president was host to the Tuskegee airmen and 2011 World Series Champs (St. Louis Cardinals). And during a trip to New York, the president even sang a bit of an Al Green song at a fund-raiser. Who knew the president had a nice singing voice? You can follow the president's schedule at [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov).

## Campaign 2012

At Yak's Corner press time, the Republican candidates were on the road, too, and had just finished the South Carolina primary and Florida was next on the primary calendar. This week, the states of Nevada and Maine are having caucuses (caw-Cus-es). Republican candidates Mitt Romney and Newt Gingrich appeared to be battling it out for the top spot with Rick Santorum and Ron Paul still in the race. Stay tuned.



Horace H. Rackham Memorial Fountain at the Detroit Zoo



Are you headed out to the Zoo this February? The Yak told you about visiting the zoo in every season, and now there's a poster of the Rackham Fountain, celebrating those seasons.

## KIDS MAKING NEWS

### Super Volunteers!

Lots of students are making news in Indianapolis this weekend when Super Bowl XLVI hits town. There is outreach beyond the Lucas Oil Stadium. Just like when the Super Bowl teams came to Detroit, the National Football League works with the host city for charity events. In Indianapolis, the Super Kids-Super Sharing program is collecting gently used and new sporting equipment, books, and school supplies. Students from close to 100 schools had signed up to help. Now that's what the Yak calls a super effort!



## NEW STAMP

This stamp showing a guide dog is one of a series of stamps to be released by the U.S. Post Office in honor of working dogs.



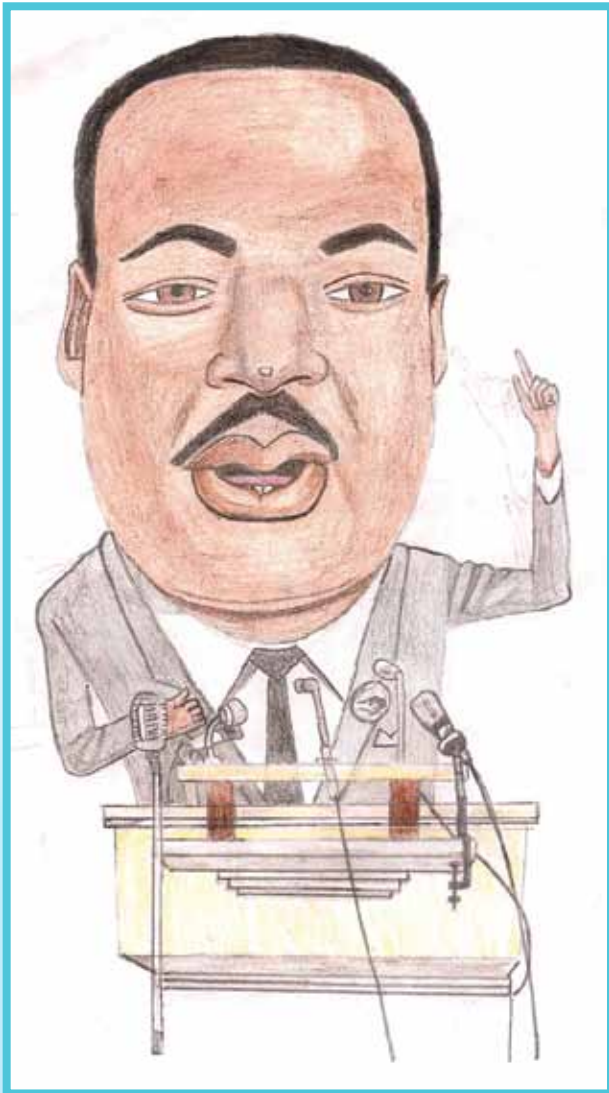
# Your page

A place where young yakkers read, write and yak!

## THINK ABOUT ART

One of today's artists drew a portrait of Martin Luther King Jr. Think about people who inspire you – in everyday life today – or from history. You may want to use a photo to inspire you. Use pencil first to sketch the face before you use markers or paint. Share your portrait with the Yak!

See more art online in the Yak Art Gallery at [www.yakscorner.com](http://www.yakscorner.com)



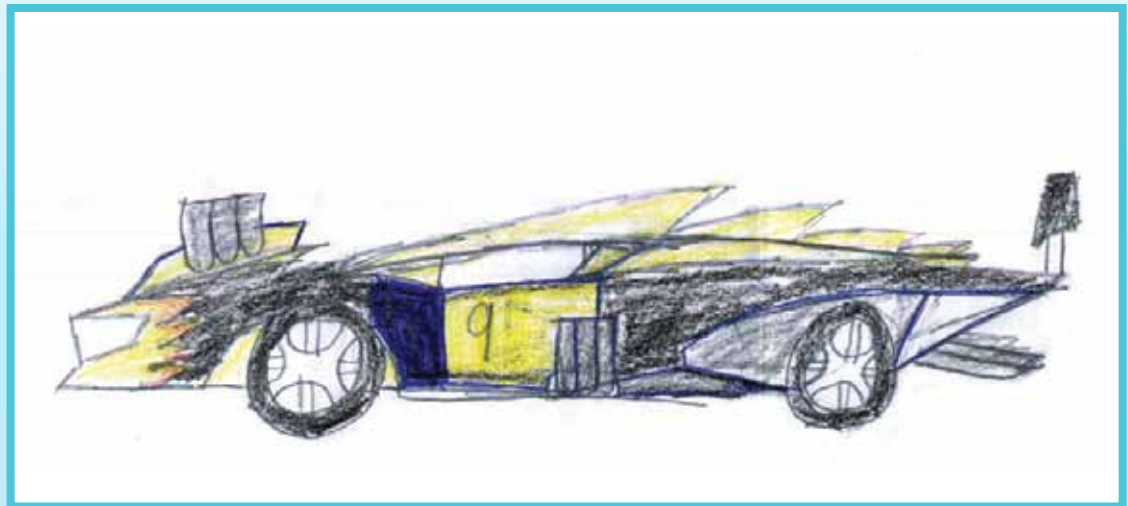
By Sophia Rousseau, 6th Grade, Middleville



By Angela Jolly, 9, Detroit



By Zinah Daniel, 10, Troy

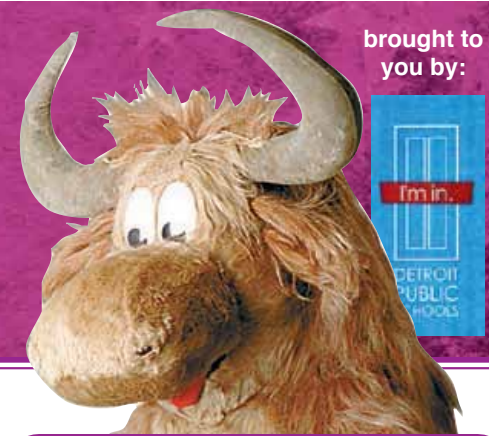


By Jubair Ahmed, 9, Detroit

**SEND US YOUR ART** >>>

Draw on only white 8½-by-11 paper and use bright colors. Be sure to print your name, age, city and phone number clearly on the back of your drawing. Send your art to **Yak's Corner Art, c/o DNIE, 615 W. Lafayette Blvd., Detroit, MI 48226**

# YAK'S TAKE-HOME PAGE



## Q&A

### Test your knowledge:

What is segregation?

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What is a non-violent protest?

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What was Dr. King's dream?

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## Build skills for reading – tips to try

Imagine growing up in an era when you were not able to sit at the front of a bus, or drink from a certain water fountain at your school. How would that make you feel? Write an essay about how Dr. King and his dream impacted your life.

Source: Detroit Public Schools

## Remember Dr. King's Dream

As many people around the country celebrate African American History Month, students at Detroit Public Schools are experiencing first-hand the hardships that historic African Americans endured in order for all people to have freedom and equality.

In honor of the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. holiday, King High School organized the Third Annual MLK Legacy March. The theme of the rally was "Dreaming ahead . . . Building the road to the future with the stones of our past."

Event organizers hoped the march would allow students and members of the community to experience one of the nonviolent methods used to advance change. The event showcased a community rally, guided tours, and skits including:

- **Birmingham Jail Cell Exhibit:** Dr. King wrote a letter from the city jail in Birmingham, Alabama, where he was confined after being arrested for a planned non-violent protest against racial segregation.
- **Central High School Skit:** A group of nine African-American students were enrolled in Little Rock Central High School in 1957. The students were initially prevented from entering the racially segregated school, but were allowed to attend the school at the intervention of President Dwight Eisenhower. On their first day of school, troops from the Arkansas National Guard would not let them enter the school and they were followed by mobs that threatened their lives.
- **Rosa Parks Bus Boycott:** In 1955, Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to give up her seat to a white passenger on a public bus in Montgomery, Alabama. The boycott lasted more than a year, until the bus company surrendered and segregated seating was discontinued.

Other exhibits at the MLK Legacy March included: "Strange Fruit" in the Jim Crow Era, Voting Booths, Motown Music, and Detroit Auto Displays.



The Birmingham Jail Cell exhibit showcased Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as he was jailed for planning a non-violent protest against racial segregation.

### FACT BOX:

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was one of the most important leaders of his era by using non-violent strategies to advance equal rights.