

# • Meet the Author •

## Donna L. Washington

Grades  
K-2

Interview conducted by Toni Buzzeo, career media specialist and author (visit [www.tonibuzzeo.com](http://www.tonibuzzeo.com)).



Donna L. Washington is a published author, artist, teacher, and professional storyteller who started her career in 1989 after graduating from Northwestern University. She has performed and taught all over the world. Donna also has nine multiple-award-winning CDs. Her publishing credits include *The Story of Kwanzaa*, *A Pride of African Tales*, and *Li'l Rabbit's Kwanzaa*, published by HarperCollins Children's Books; *A Big Spooky House* published by Hyperion

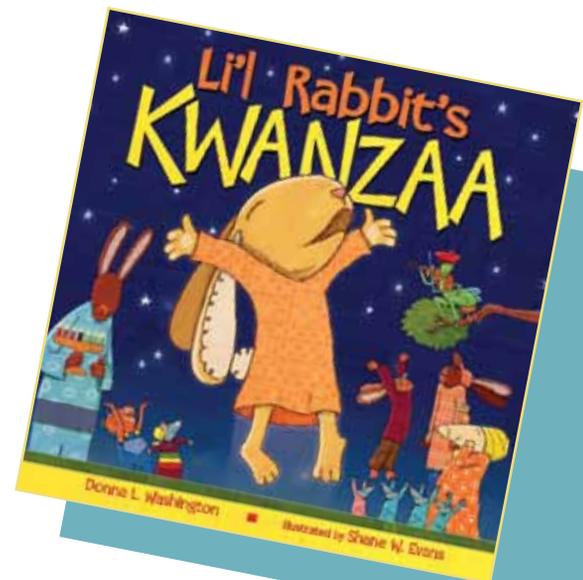
Books for Children; and *Boo Stew*, which will be published by Peachtree. She lives in Durham, North Carolina, with her husband and manager, David, their children, Devin and Darith, and their two mischievous cats, Love Bug and Flash.

**You are known as a live storyteller, and *Li'l Rabbit's Kwanzaa* has such a storyteller's voice to it. Can you talk about how your storytelling experience influences your writing, especially in stories for children?**

**DLW:** I feel strongly that books for children should sound like they are being spoken when they are read. I work hard to write in something I call "true voice" instead of a "literary voice." I want parents, teachers, older brothers and sisters, and anyone else who picks up one of my books to feel the rhythm of the story and the life in the characters' voices.

**Tell us about the origin of this book. Was it a story you "told" before you wrote it down?**

**DLW:** Most of the material I write, with the exception of the articles and nonfiction pieces, come out of my voice before I put them on paper. *Li'l Rabbit's Kwanzaa* is an exception. It was an exercise for me more than a planned story, but it turned out well.



### Are there (other) stories you tell orally that you think about someday publishing in book form?

**DLW:** Lots! I have a new one that is working its way through Peachtree Press out of Georgia. It is called *Boo Stew*, and we are just entering the illustrator phase. I hope to have more stories out there in the future. Many are oral tales for me, but a number of them are simply literary.

### Thirteen years before you published *Li'l Rabbit's Kwanzaa*, you published a book titled *The Story of Kwanzaa*. Tell us about that first book and why you decided to return to writing about the holiday in fictional form.

**DLW:** When I put out *The Story of Kwanzaa*, there weren't very many books on the subject for children that were a "quick and dirty" take on the event. There were workbooks, adult nonfiction pieces, longer works, and craft books, but there didn't seem to be any quick books for reference for kids. I wanted something you could sit and read in ten or fifteen minutes that encapsulated it all. I returned to the subject for fiction for the same reason. There didn't seem to be that many fun picture books that took place at Kwanzaa time but weren't didactic or somehow linked to Christmas. I thought it might be fun to have a little character

deal with a Kwanzaa event. By the same token, I didn't want the reader to have to know anything about Kwanzaa in order to enjoy the book.

### I see from your dedication that your mother, Gwendolyn Washington, is the "Granna" in your family. Is she like her namesake in the story? Tell us more about your mother and her role in your life when you were a child and now.

**DLW:** My mother is the person I always aspire to be. She was a stay-at-home mom who kept everything humming, the house clean and food on the table; shuttled us to practice, rehearsal, jobs, and friend's houses; shopped; made appointments; tended the bruises (both emotional and physical) of childhood; attended games, plays, awards events, and contests; and did it all while keeping up a sunny disposition and looking absolutely amazing. She encouraged, nurtured, and supported seven kids, all while traveling all over the world as an army wife. I could go on, but I think you get the drift.

### How can readers learn more about you and your other books?

**DLW:** I live at [donnawashington.com](http://donnawashington.com)! If you head over there you can read about my books and CDs, and you can link over to my blog, *Language, Literacy and Storytelling*.

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*Toni Buzzeo, MA, MLIS, is both an author and a career library media specialist. Her credits include, among nineteen picture books, the 2013 Caldecott Honor Book One Cool Friend, as well as But I Read It on the Internet! (Upstart, 2013) and Just Like My Papa (Hyperion, 2013). She has also authored many professional books and articles. Visit [www.tonibuzzeo.com](http://www.tonibuzzeo.com) or e-mail [tonibuzzeo@tonibuzzeo.com](mailto:tonibuzzeo@tonibuzzeo.com).*