



S is for soul sister

January 17 – March 20, 2020



**Arts +
Public
Life**

UCHICAGOArts

Presented by Arts + Public Life, an initiative of UChicago Arts, with generous sponsorship from the Arts, Science & Culture Initiative and Center for the Study of Race, Politics and Culture.

S is for soul sister

January 17 — March 20, 2020

Arts + Public Life presents **S is for Soul Sister**, an exhibition showcasing photographs by Okunola Jeyifous, an independent photographer and neurobiologist, at the University of Chicago.

2020 marks 50 years since children living in the Harold Ickes Homes sat for portraits that were used as visual aides in Chicago classrooms and libraries. Inspired by those portraits taken in 1970, Jeyifous has photographed the children of the “Black ABCs” today as adults, celebrating the beauty and historic impact that those images and individuals still hold.

Expanding on the definition of portraiture, Jeyifous blurs his practice as a photographer and scientist by creating rare digital art works. The collages, a combination of overlaid visualizations, includes the individuals’ cells combined with traditionally styled portraits. This blend of artistic, medical, and clinical styles of portraiture raises questions and critiques about the complicated and often problematic history of science, medicine and Black subjectivity.

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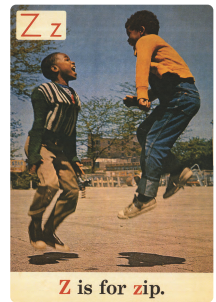
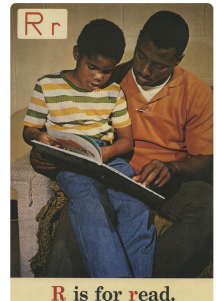
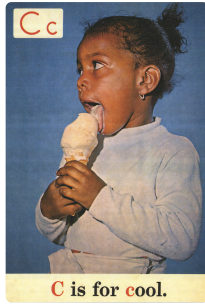
Okunola Jeyifous is a Nigerian-American born in New York City and currently living in Chicago. He is a neurobiologist at the University of Chicago, and his photographic practice is informed by his training as a research scientist specializing in advanced cellular imaging modalities. He employs a minimalist lens to study the complexities and layered nuances of interactions between and among people, objects, and landscapes.

Jeyifous has recently been experimenting with, and exploring the potential for, a visual aesthetic that fuses elements of his microscopy work with more traditional modes of portraiture. This is the approach he employs in the current exhibition, in which cheek swabs from subjects were stained, imaged with a microscope, and processed with digital software to produce collages of the individuals along with their own cells. He plans to utilize and extend this framework to create new visual narratives.

"Black ABCs"

Published in 1970, the Black ABCs were created and conceived in Chicago and distributed nationally. Published by the Society For Visual Education and conceptualized by activists and teachers, June Heinrich and Bernadette Triplett. The alphabet represented and reflected the backgrounds of Black children using positive and relevant letter association, while highlighting the power of community and pride. The children photographed for the alphabet were tenants of Harold Ickes, a public housing project located on State and 22nd, 23rd, and 24th Streets. Originally, the alphabet was printed as 13x17 inch posters with activities listed on the reverse side of the prints.





Black ABC's Spell

Black is beautiful, children learn, as they learn the alphabet with "Black ABC's," a new set of Picture-Story Study Prints from Society For Visual Education, Inc. (SVE).

From "A is for Afro" through "N is for Natural," "S is for Soul-Sister" through "Zip is for Zip," the emphasis is on black in this high-interest approach to reading readiness and the ABC's

Designed to make alphabet



Kids learn best when they see themselves in learning materials like "Black ABC's," a new alphabet set that puts black children in picture — and says it with soul. A recent release of Society for Visual Education, Inc. (SVE), a Chicago-based Singer Co. division, the set was developed by Chicagoans June S. Heinrich and Bernadette H. Triplett, who teaches second grade at Byrd Elementary School in Chicago.

learning a meaningful experience for black children and develop an appreciation for black culture, "Black ABC's" may be used as an essential part of any pre-primary or primary reading readiness program to teach recognition of letters and the sounds they represent.

While their greatest impact will be in an all-black class, the prints will be of equal value in a class of blacks and whites, or in an all-white class, to give pupils an appreciation of the black experience. They are also recommended for primary grade social studies programs

about people and life in urban communities.

The set contains twenty-six (26) large (18" x 13") beautifully photographed full-color prints — one illustrating each letter of the alphabet — portraying black people at school, at play, and at home in the inner city. Black children see themselves in the majority (as they are, in fact, in many areas and many schools) as important, — capable, attractive, responsible, and with a long history of contributions to our country.

In place of the non-personal words (apple, umbrella, xylo-

S-O-U-L

phone) of traditional alphabet learning this new sort of soul primer uses key words that will have "extra special" appeal to the black child. Included are personal words that relate to feelings, self-respect and individual goals, along with words that are meaningful for black people. All are words the children know or can easily learn.

The alphabet letter, in upper and lower case, and a key word beginning with that letter appear in large, easy-to-read type on each picture. Printed on the reverse of the picture are a brief biography of a famous black American who last name begins with the letter pictured, suggestions for games and activities, discussion questions, and a vocabulary list. The prints, in SVE's popular Picture-Story Study Print format, are on durable, extra strength stock, with rounded corners and pre-punched holes for thumb-tacks.

"Black ABC's was originated for SVE by June S. Heinrich,

M.A., well-known author of educational programs for early childhood education, in consultation with Bernadette H. Triplett, a black inner city teacher in the Chicago public schools. The set of twenty-six (26) Picture-Story Study Prints in a heavy-duty vinyl storage portfolio, is priced at \$26.00.

For further information concerning these and other early childhood learning materials for and about minority groups, write: Society for Visual Education, Inc., Dept. No. 70-28, 1345 Diversey Parkway, Chicago, Illinois 60614.

Black ABCs Spell S-O-U-L

Chicago Daily Defender (Big Weekend Edition)
(1996-1973); Aug 15, 1970; ProQuest Historical
Newspapers: Chicago Defender pg. 32

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"Black ABC's"

Back side of 13x17 posters with suggested teaching activities as originally published by the Society For Visual Education, 1970.



INFORMATION ABOUT

the SVE Picture-Story Study Print Set BLACK ABC's PSSP 1200

WHAT IS IT?

Black ABC's is a set of 26 Picture-Story Study Prints® in full-color photography with suggested classroom activities printed on the reverse of each photograph. The set is designed for use with preschool and primary-grade children to help teach recognition of the letters of the alphabet and the speech sounds they represent. In addition, the study prints are intended to develop an appreciation of and respect for "being black."

WHY IS A SET OF BLACK ABC'S NEEDED?

Black children, like all children, need to identify with the characters portrayed in the teaching materials used in their instruction. For years, instructional materials pictured only non-black children. In recent times, integrated materials have been and are being produced, but usually only two or three black children are portrayed within a larger non-black group. *Black ABC's* focuses clearly on black children and adults, reflecting their majority position in many parts of big cities and in many city schools. *Black ABC's* will help black children see themselves as members of a group of capable, attractive, and responsible people with a long history of outstanding contributions to the United States and to the world.

HOW WERE THE KEY WORDS IN THE BLACK ABC'S CHOSEN?

The key words in the *Black ABC's* were chosen for these reasons:

1. They are personal words—words that relate to feelings, aspirations, self-respect, self-pride, and personal goals. The words are not the usual alphabet words for non-personal things like apple and umbrella or xylophone and zipper. They are words that have or should have a special meaning for black children: afro, beautiful, cool, dream, natural, proud, soul.
2. They are words that children know or can easily learn.

IS IT IMPORTANT FOR CHILDREN TO LEARN THE ALPHABET?

Educators today are in general agreement that one of the most important steps in preparing children to learn to read is the learning of the alphabet. A child must gain the ability of instant discrimination between letters, both capital and lowercase. Research studies have shown that one of the best indications of beginning reading success is the extent to which a child can recognize and name the letters.



HOW SHOULD THE BLACK ABC'S BE USED?

Black ABC's should be used as an essential part of the readiness or reading program in all schools where appreciation of and respect for black Americans are sought. The Study Prints can also be used effectively in primary-grade social studies programs about city people and city life.

CAN BLACK ABC'S BE USED IN ALL-WHITE OR INTEGRATED CLASSROOMS?

Black ABC's can be used in all schools to provide awareness and appreciation of black children and black history. It can be especially useful in city, suburban, and rural area schools where many children do not have an opportunity to know black children personally.

ARE THE BLACK ABC'S USEFUL WITH OTHER MINORITY GROUPS?

Black ABC's can help Mexican, Puerto Rican, Indian, and other minority-group children appreciate the black minority when the study prints are presented thoughtfully and sympathetically. Becoming aware of similarities and differences among people can help children understand and respect themselves, whatever their color or origin.

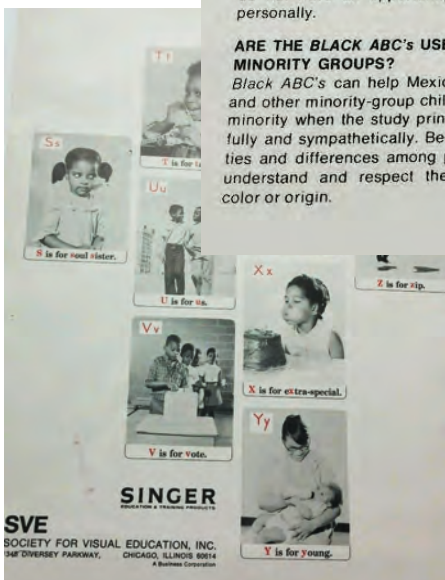
WHAT TEACHING ACTIVITIES ARE SUGGESTED FOR EACH STUDY PRINT?

Three kinds of activities are suggested for teachers to adapt to the needs of their students:

1. Discussion questions regarding the pictures—to encourage children to think about and talk about the picture content.
2. Games and activities to help teach recognition of the letters of the alphabet and the sounds they represent.
3. Enrichment activities—reading, writing, and oral language activities related in many ways to the letter being studied. A brief biography of a famous black American whose last name begins with the letter being learned is included for each letter. The 26 black men and women were chosen to represent a broad variety of work, professions, and talent so that children of all origins may understand that black Americans have made significant contributions in all fields of endeavor.
4. Included also on the reverse of each picture is a vocabulary of useful words that begin with the letter being learned—words the teacher can use in a variety of teaching activities.

26 Study Prints in vinyl portfolio U.S. PATENT OFFICE \$26.00

PICTURE-STORY STUDY PRINTS® • Registered in the U.S. Patent Office



Images from <https://www.worthpoint.com>.

Bb



B is for **b**eautiful.



Okunola Jeyifous

Denise

2019

Epithelial cellular sample

Inkjet Print

24 in x 36 in

“You had to have been there. Everybody knew everybody. Everybody took care of everybody.”

Cc



C is for cool.



Okunola Jeyifous

Sabrina

2019

Epithelial cellular sample

Inkjet Print

24 in x 36 in

“At any given time, you heard music blasting down the hallway, out the window. Somebody had a speaker in the window. Or, you know, we had dance offs. Dance was definitely a part of what we did all the time.”

L I



L is for learn.



Okunola Jeyifous

Kevin

2019

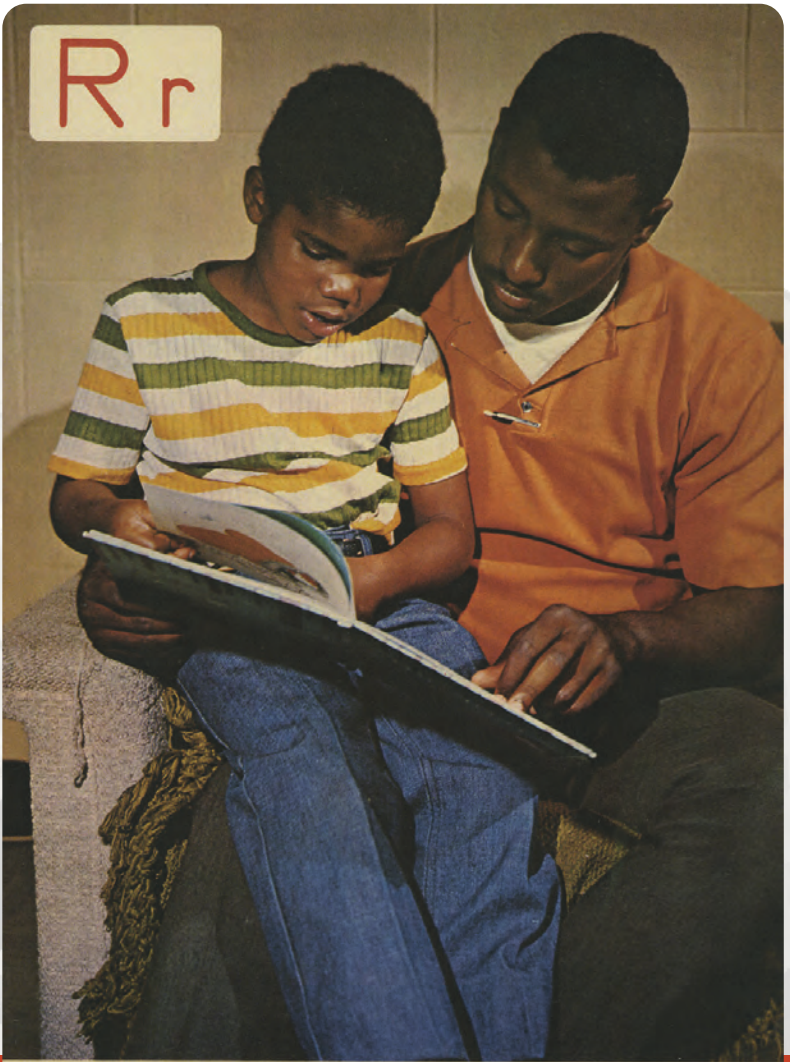
Epithelial cellular sample

Inkjet Print

24 in x 36 in

“When the news came down, you knew something bad happened. They never came in to say ‘Hey, here’s a feel good story’ — they never saw what we were doing.”

R r



R is for **r**ead.



Okunola Jeyifous

Reggie

2019
Epithelial cellular sample
Inkjet Print
24 in x 36 in

“We had a community. We became family—everybody. That’s why they still have reunions, because a lot of us feel like we’re still related.”

T t



T is for talk.



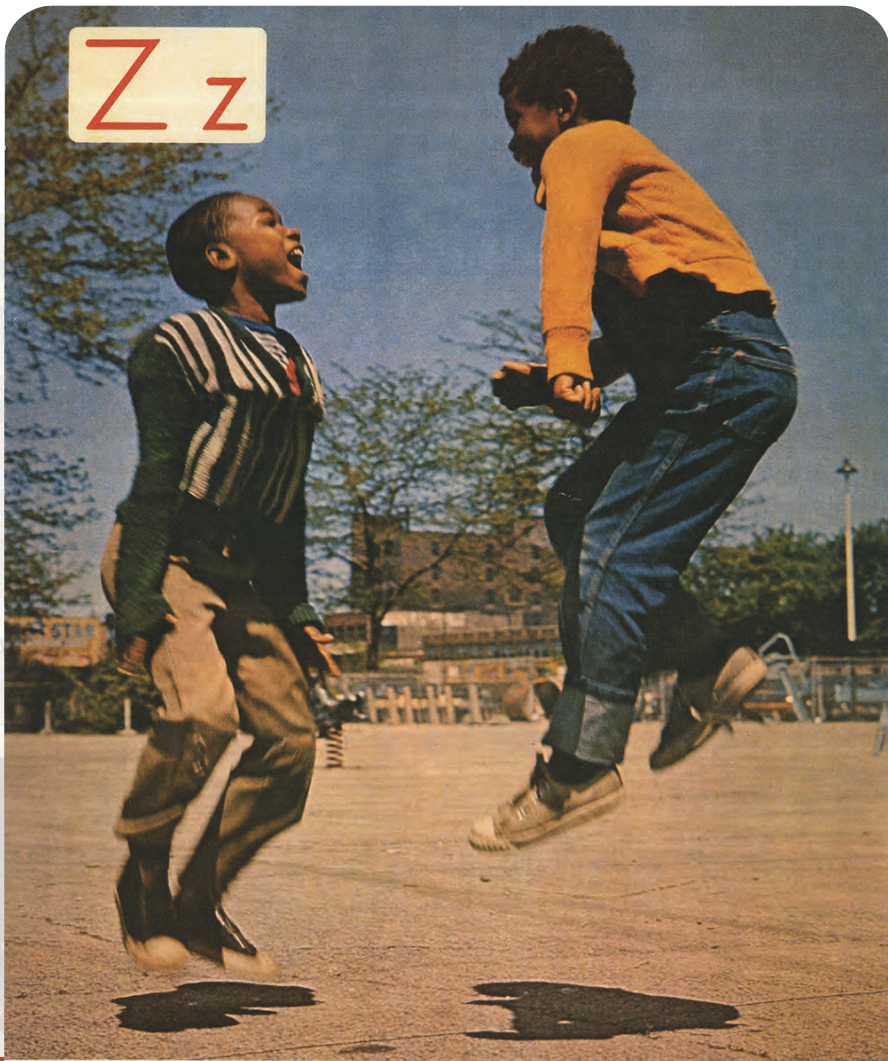
Okunola Jeyifous

Cheryl

2019
Epithelial cellular sample
Inkjet Print
24 in x 36 in

“I look back at how beautiful all of our siblings and friends were, you know? Everybody had afros, how proud they were of who they were. That’s the beauty of the Ickes, we showed a lot of Black pride.”

Z z



Z is for **z**ip.



Okunola Jeyifous

Dwain

2019

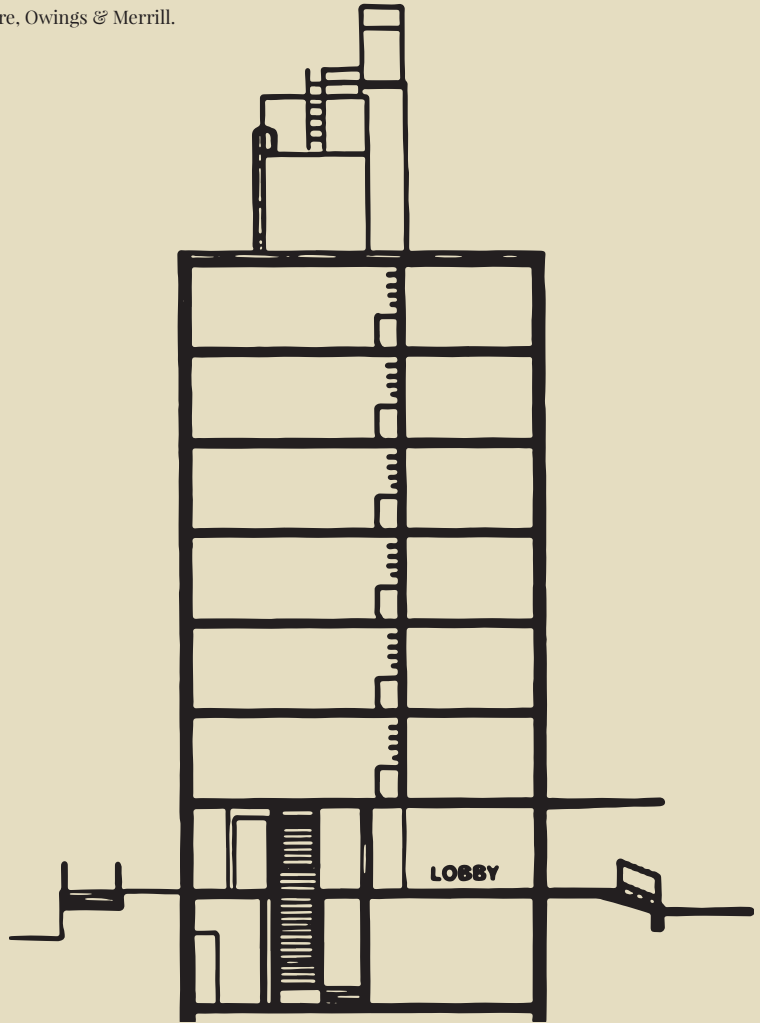
Epithelial cellular sample

Inkjet Print

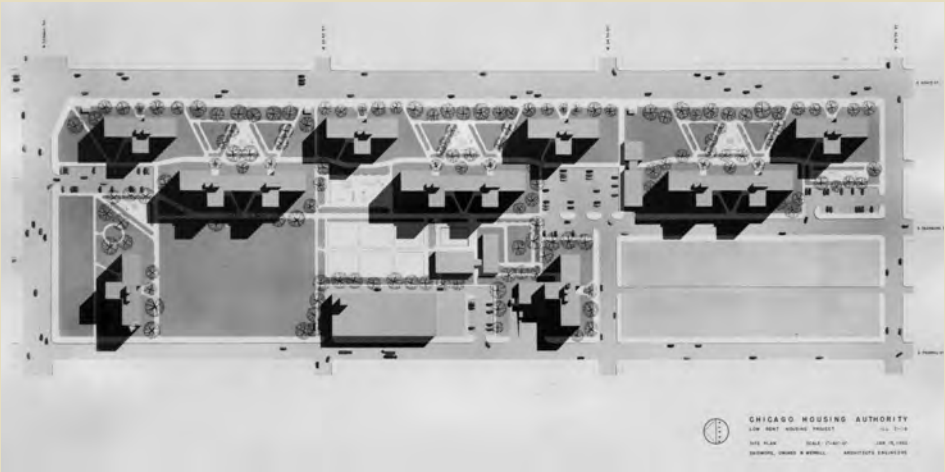
24 in x 36 in

The Harold Ickes Homes opened in 1955. The 11-building, 1,006-unit public housing development was designed and built by Chicago-based architecture firm Skidmore, Owings & Merrill. The Ickes were part of the Chicago Housing Authority's State Street corridor, which included the Robert Taylor Homes, Dearborn Homes, Stateway Gardens and Hilliard Homes.

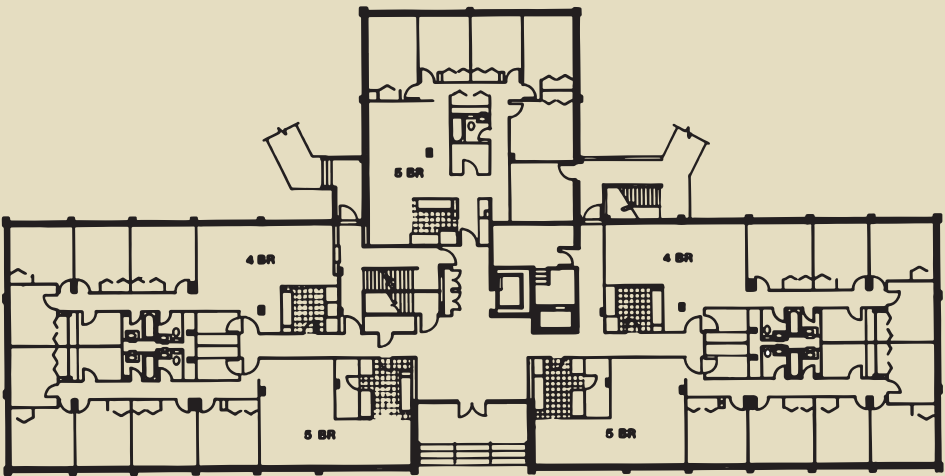
Blueprints courtesy of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill.



Harold Ickes building section



Harold Ickes ground floor plan



Harold Ickes site plan

“One may not think of housing developments as large neighborhoods, but in the case of Chicago, politics and architecture converged to make this so.”

— Audrey Petty, *High Rise Stories: Voices From Chicago Public Housing* (Voice of Witness/McSweeney’s Press)

Suggested Exhibition-Related Reading List

Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City, St. Clair Drake, Horace R. Cayton, et al.

Blueprint for Disaster: The Unraveling of Chicago Public Housing (Historical Studies of Urban America), D. Bradford Hunt

The Color of Law, Richard Rothstein

The Dignity of Resistance: Women Residents' Activism in Chicago Public Housing (Environment and Behavior), Roberta M. Feldman and Susan Stall

Ghosts in the Schoolyard: Racism and School Closings on Chicago's South Side, Eve Ewing

High-Risers: Cabrini-Green and the Fate of American Public Housing, Ben Austen

Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago 1940-1960 (Historical Studies of Urban America), by Arnold R. Hirsch

Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership (Justice, Power, and Politics), by Keeanga-Yamahtta

The South Side: A Portrait of Chicago and American Segregation, Natalie Y. Moore

There Are No Children Here: The Story of Two Boys Growing Up in The Other America, Alex Kotlowitz

High Rise Stories: Voices from Chicago Public Housing (Voice of Witness), Audrey Petty

The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration, Isabel Wilkerson

Thank You

Arts + Public Life is very grateful to everyone who contributed to the *S is for Soul Sister* exhibition, and would like to extend a special thank you to:

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Arts Incubator Gallery

301 E Garfield Blvd
Chicago, IL 60637

Gallery Hours: 12pm-6pm, Wed-Fri

arts.uchicago.edu/apl

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