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Angela Johnson visits Scioto Correctional and Delaware Arts Academy

By Chuck Steinbower, Librarian
Scioto Juvenile Correctional Facility/William K. Willis High School

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Author Angela Johnson visited the [Scioto Juvenile Correctional Facility](#)/William K. Willis High School and the [Delaware Arts Academy](#) alternative high school on May 3, 2011. Scioto Librarian Chuck Steinbower wrote and administered an IMLS [Choose to Read Ohio](#) Library Services and Technology Act ([LSTA](#)) [Special Grant](#), collaborating with [Delaware County District Library](#) librarians Connie Pottle and Amanda Henning. [Janet Ingraham Dwyer](#), Youth Services Library Consultant at the State Library, helped provide focus and direction in the writing of the grant. Henning was able to make the connection with the Arts Academy, which is an art school for students from three area Delaware County school districts.

Students from both schools read Ms Johnson's trilogy of titles, *Heaven*, *The First Part Last* and [The Sweet Hereafter](#). They discussed the titles in their classes and also did art projects based on the books. One group of students from the Arts Academy wrote a very amusing song based on one of the books that caused the audience to laugh out loud.

Ms. Johnson shared that she originally wanted to be a teacher because she wanted to work with kids, but found that did not suit her. Instead, she became a nanny for award winning children's author [Cynthia Rylant](#). Rylant encouraged her to share her writings, which Ms. Johnson at first was reluctant to do. She finally gave some of her writings to Rylant who sent them to her publisher. The publisher loved Johnson's work and decided to publish them. Thus started a career in which Ms. Johnson has written 40 books, among them winners of the prestigious [Coretta Scott King](#) and [Printz](#) awards.

In giving advice to several prospective authors in the audience, she told them to write what they *know* and to write what they *feel*. She said that writing is something that you can have for your own and that no one can take away from you. She said that not everyone is meant to write a book, but that everyone has a story, whether it is poetry, journaling, short stories or reflections from one's life experiences.

This experience was one that will resonate in the lives of these youths for a long time to come. An author visit from Ms. Johnson brought a ray of sunshine and inspiration on this wet and dreary May day in Ohio to some amazing and talented youth.