

Welcome or Karibu\*  
***Fall for Fine Arts 2:  
African American Artists***

Before we learn about this week's artist, then draw as inspired by him; **Please mute yourselves (if not already), settle in, and enjoy listening to *Lift Every Voice* (known as the Black national anthem):** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z9VtllZctn0>

Happy Black History Month

\*Karibu = Swahili word for welcome



**“I bring to my work a quality which is rooted in the culture of Africa and expanded by the experience of being black in America.”**

—Tom Feelings

# Tom Feelings

(May 19, 1933 – August 25, 2003)

Artist who focused on the African-American experience in his work as a cartoonist, illustrator, author, teacher, and activist.

**“Since childhood I have been interested in drawing and painting.”**

He liked to walk around his neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York and draw neighbors, friends, and those he called ‘extraordinary ordinary people.’

He valued people, and was especially interested in helping black children see their own value and beauty.

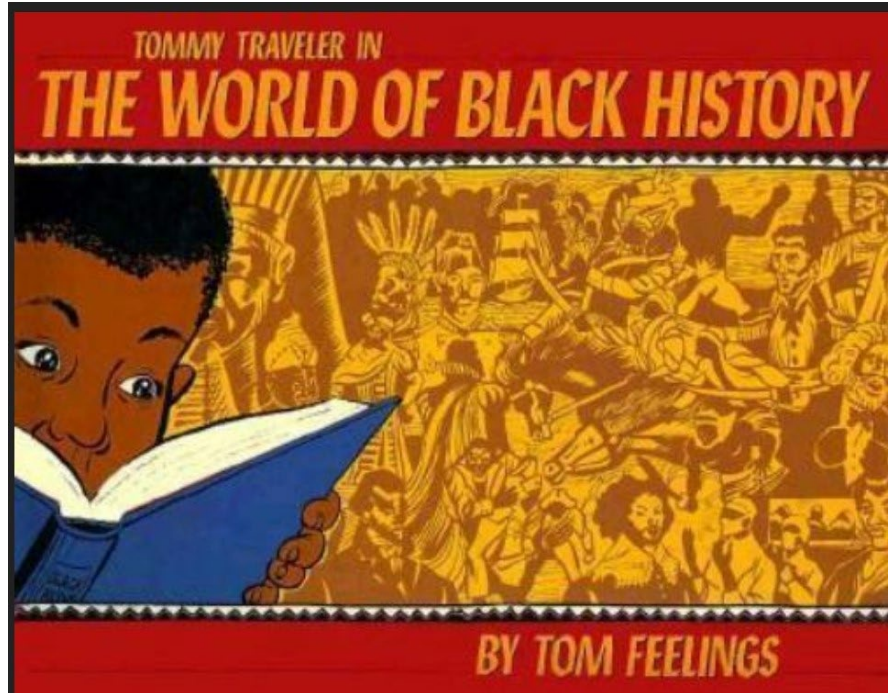


**“As a child [I wanted] to know more about the history of my people.”**

When he was 9 years old, he had a school project about Booker T. Washington and George Washington Carver. He was a strong reader and discovered the achievements of African Americans in library books for adults.



**“The books for children which I have illustrated... are the books I wanted to have when I was a child, and could never find.”**



**“I started out as a child, copying from the comics.”**

In 1958, he created his own comic strip series. *Tommy Traveler* told the story of a black boy who read his way through all the library’s books on African American history.

It was reissued in 1991. It is available at the Los Angeles Public Library.

**“My life in Ghana was one of the most meaningful and rewarding experiences of my life.”**

From 1964 to 1966, he lived in West Africa.

**“Feeling the warmth and pride of the people... Africa helped make my drawings more fluid and flowing; rhythmic lines started to appear in my work.”** Inspired by the happy carefree children, he returned to America with a new life mission: to create positive images of and for Black children.



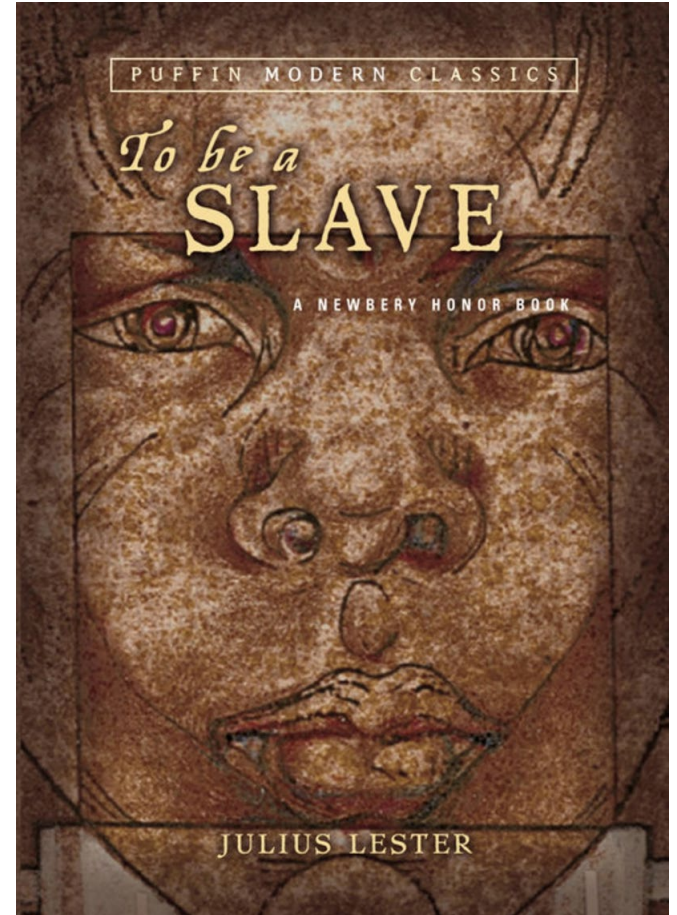


TO MAYA WITH DEAR LOVE TOM HEALING

# Children's Book Awards



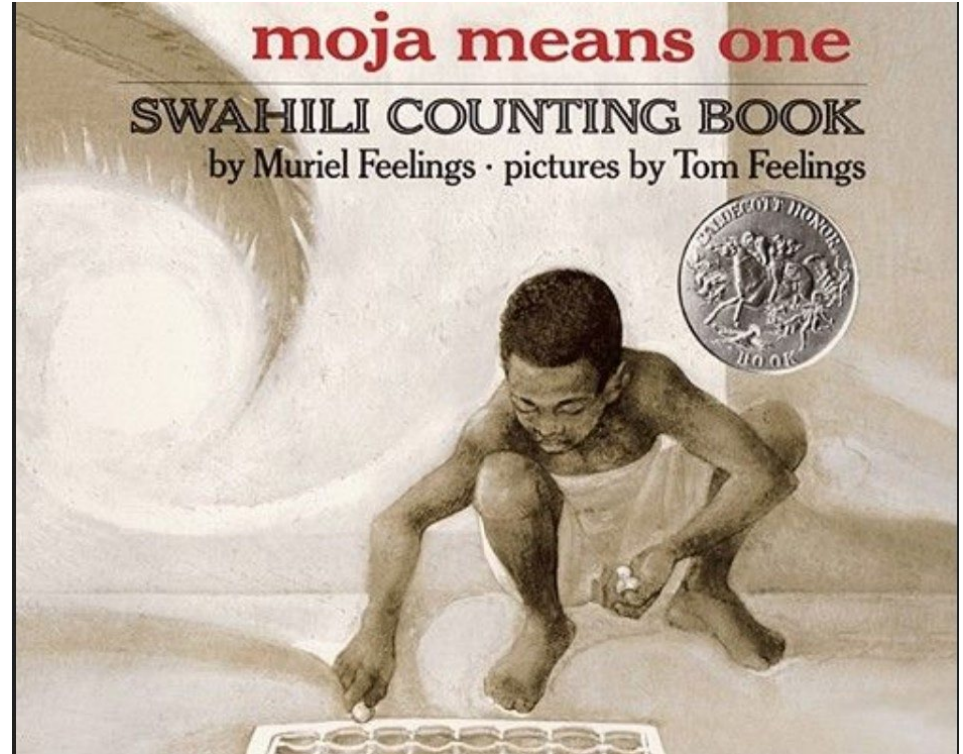
His first wide recognition in children's books came when he illustrated *To Be a Slave* by Julius Lester, named a Newbery Honor Book in 1969.



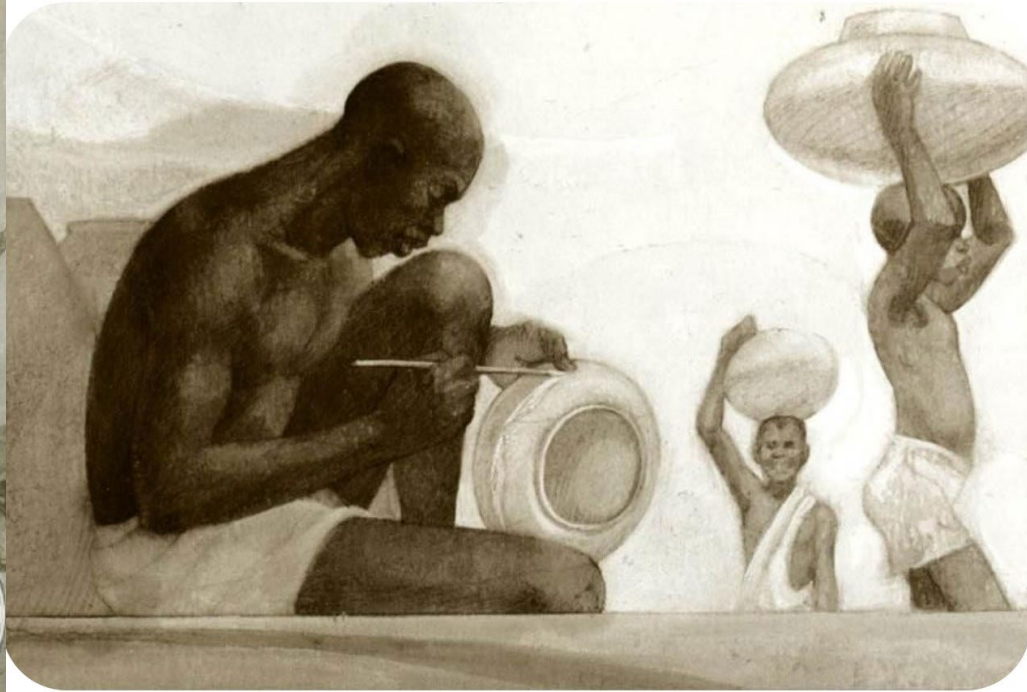
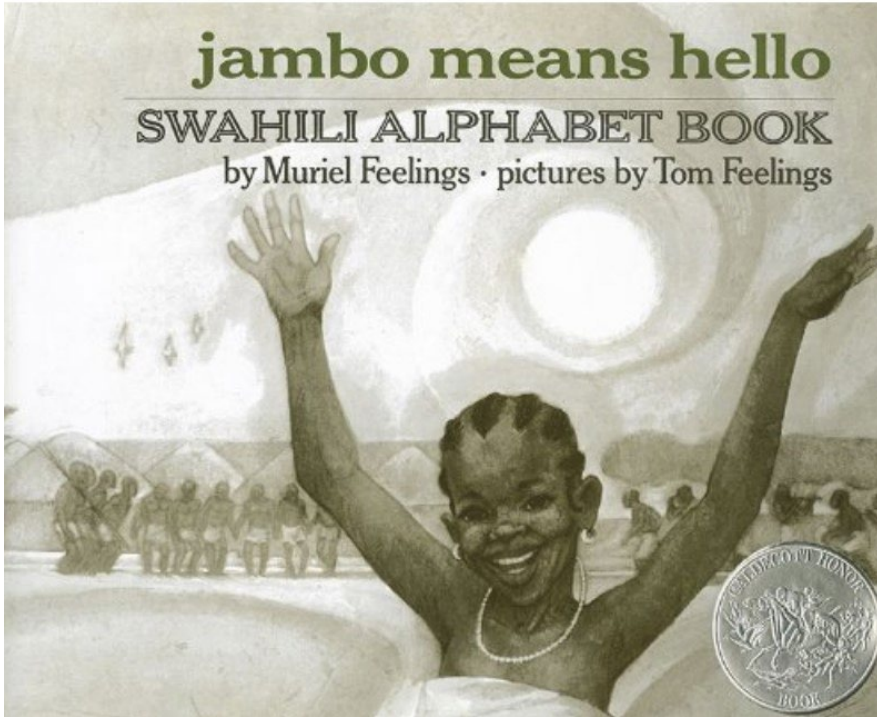


# First African-American to win Caldecott Honor Award

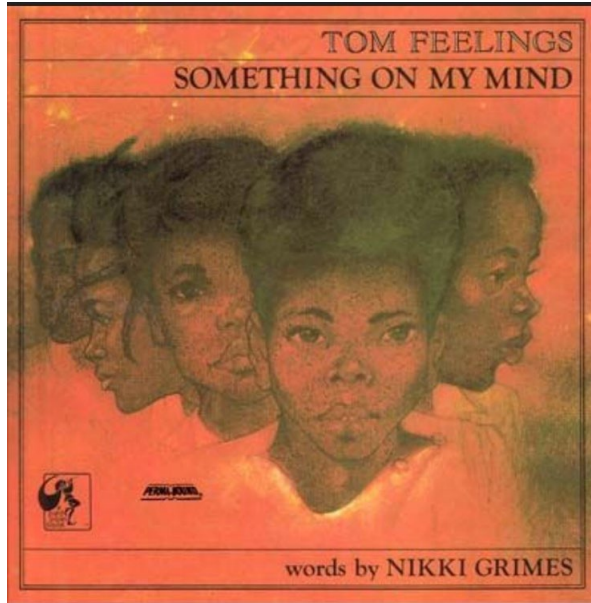
Tom Feeling won numerous and varied awards in his life time. In 1972, he became the first African-American artist to win the Caldecott Honor Award with his illustrations for *Moja Means One*, a counting book written by his 1<sup>st</sup> wife, Muriel. The book explained numbers in Swahili, a language spoken by peoples of East Africa.



*Jambo Means Hello* won a second Caldecott Honor in 1975. See it read here:  
[https://www.instagram.com/tv/CLrvlpMJkVq/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/tv/CLrvlpMJkVq/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)



# Coretta Scott King Illustrator Awards



1978



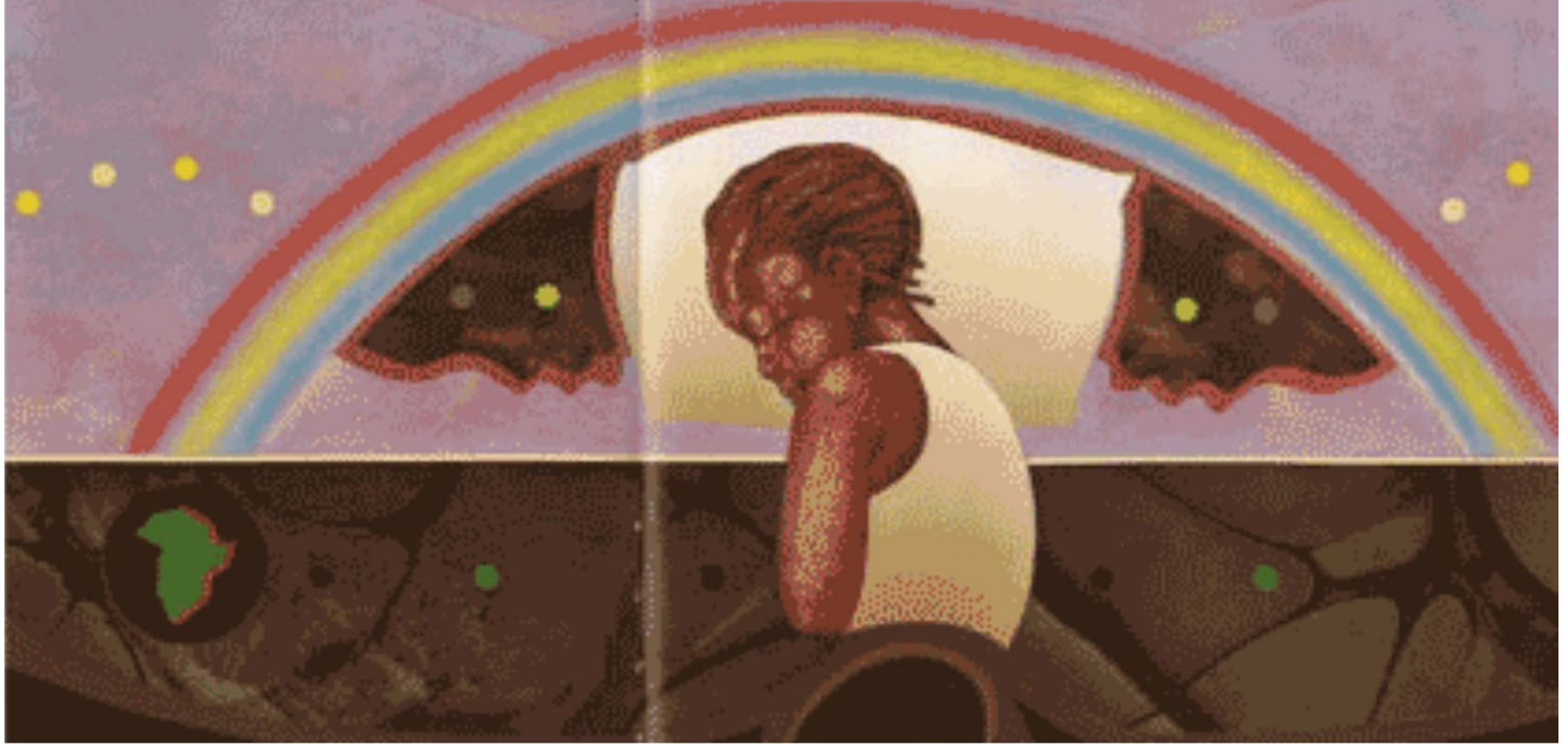
Daydreamers won CSK Honor Award.

Dinah Johnson (2<sup>nd</sup> wife of Tom Feelings), talked about his work:



To make the art for the book ***Soul Looks Back in Wonder*** (1994 CSK Award), he used all kinds of papers, including wallpaper, colored paper, and marbled papers, along with colored pencils and spray paint.

**"The selections [in *Soul Looks Back in Wonder*] are uniformly uplifting, with affirming messages about the heritage, strength and dreams of African Americans."—*Publishers Weekly***

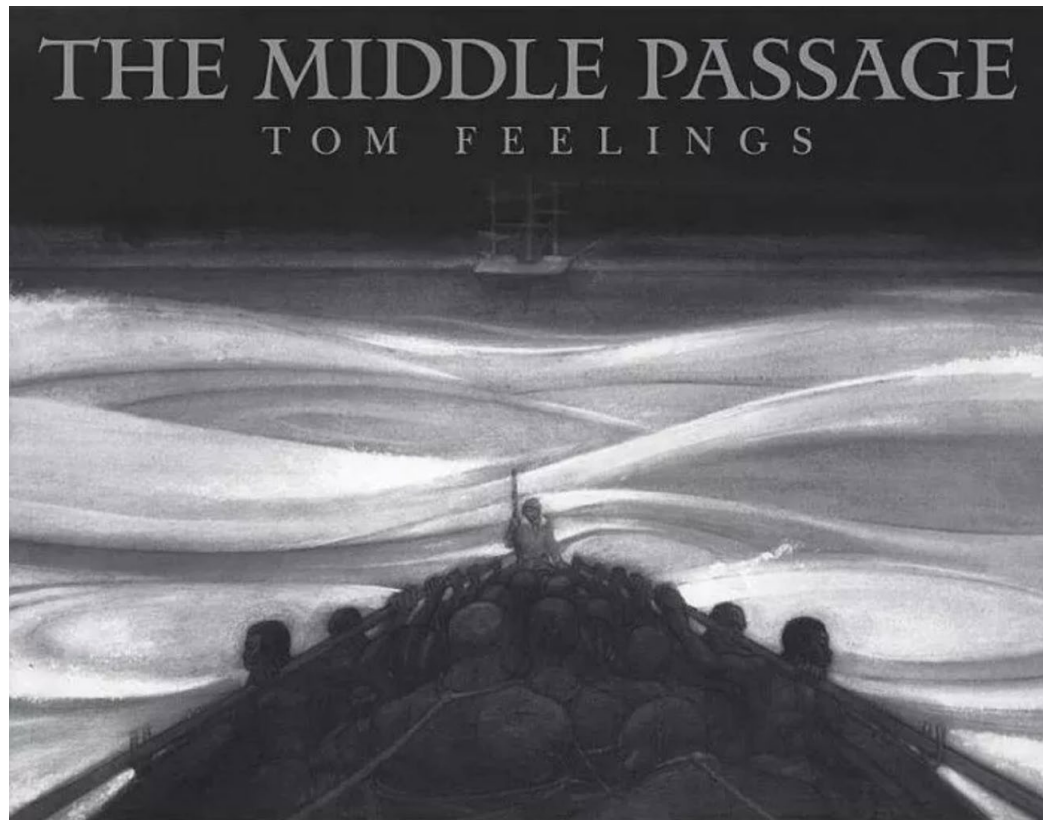


Look closely at the page with Lucille Clifton's poem, "Under the Rainbow." Instead of there being a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, Africa is at the rainbow's tip.

*“I am a storyteller in picture form”.*

By telling the story with pictures, anyone (regardless of age, reading ability or language), can understand what happened to slaves uprooted from Africa.

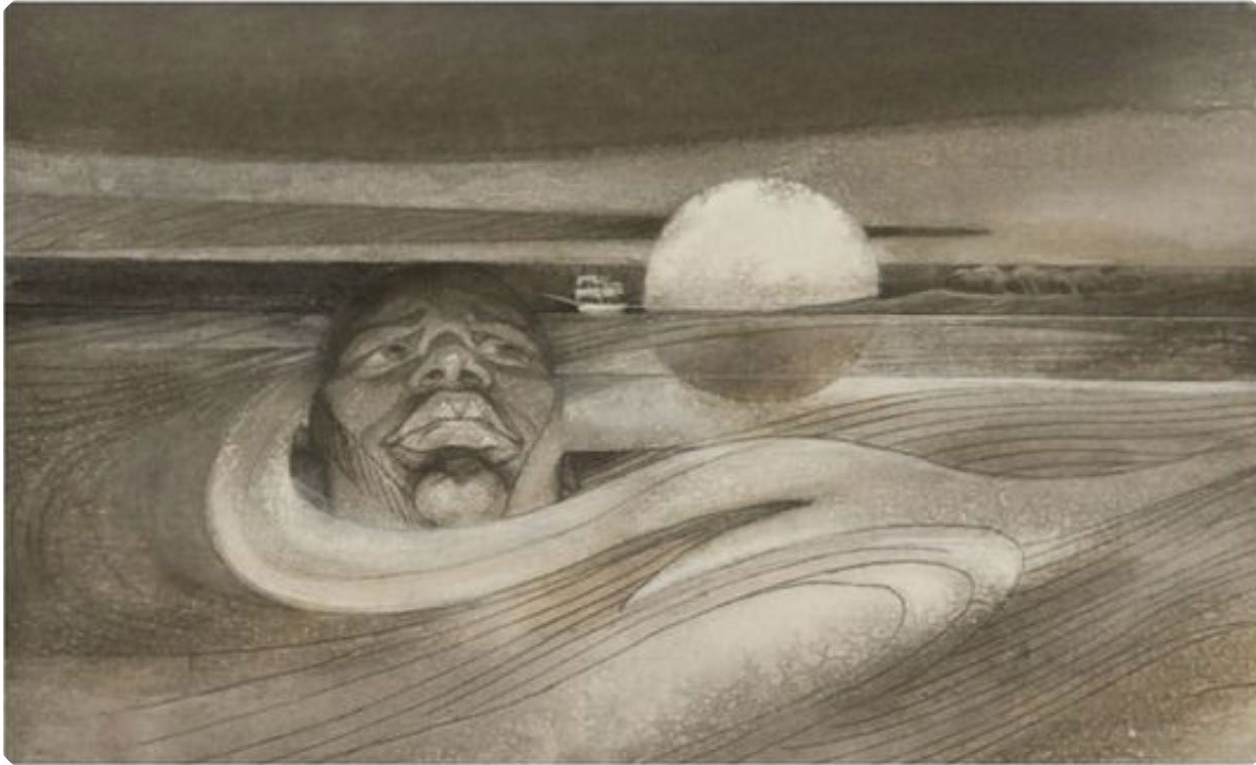
Tom Feelings was perhaps best known for this poignantly illustrated book.



Coretta Scott King Illustrator Award winner, 1996.

He worked on the The Middle Passage drawings for years, because the topic of slavery was very difficult for him. Yet, he encouraged black youth not to feel depressed or angry about this but to feel uplifted, and say to themselves: **“You mean we survived this? We made it through all this and we are still here today?”**





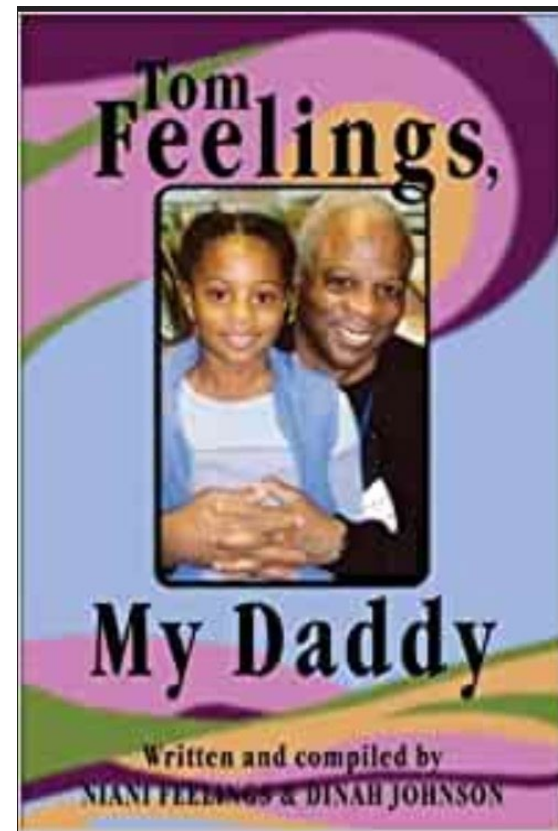
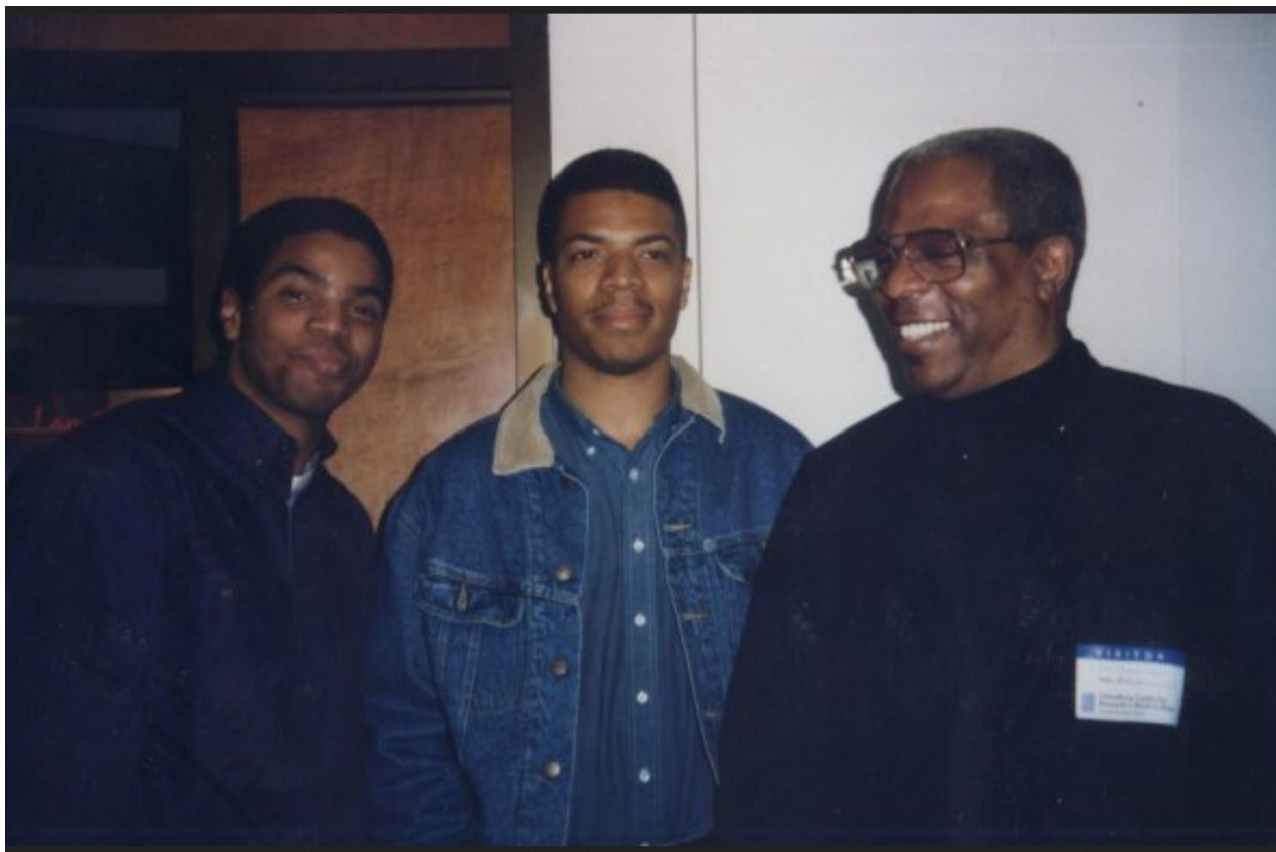
It took him 20 years to complete. *The Middle Passage*. He used to explain that he had to come up for air sometimes and work on joyful projects before returning to the hull of the ship with his enslaved ancestors.





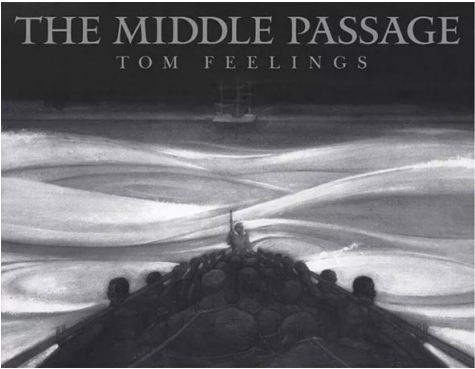
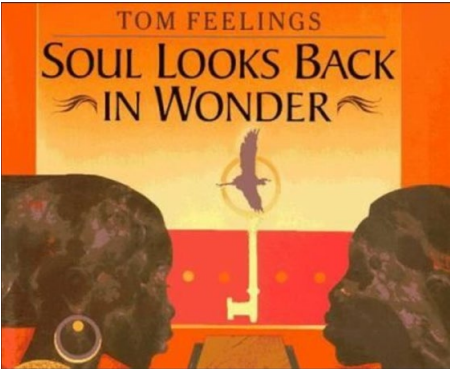
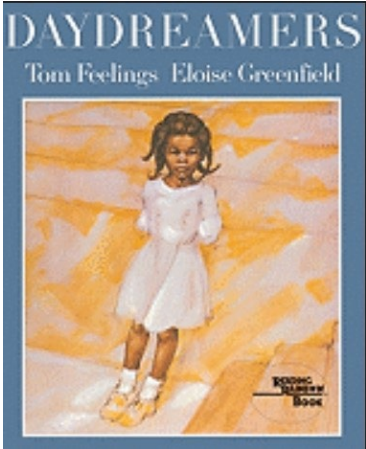
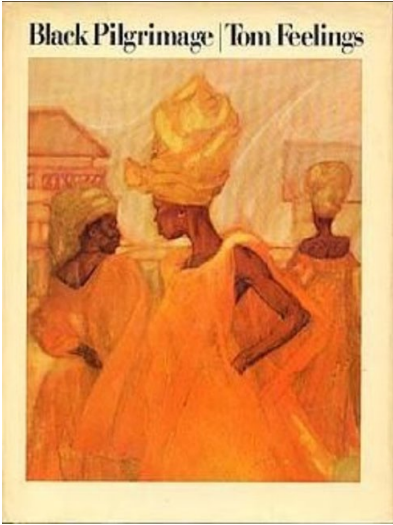
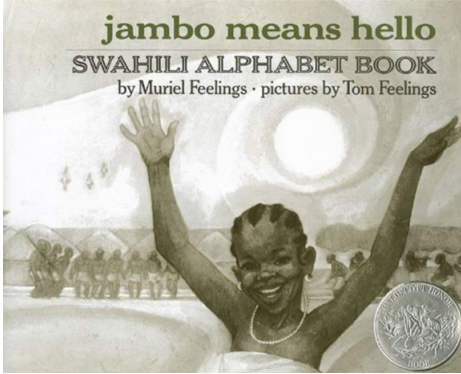
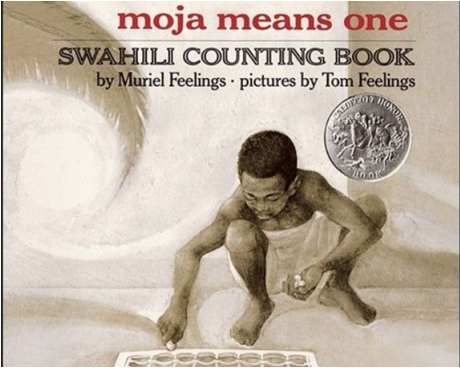
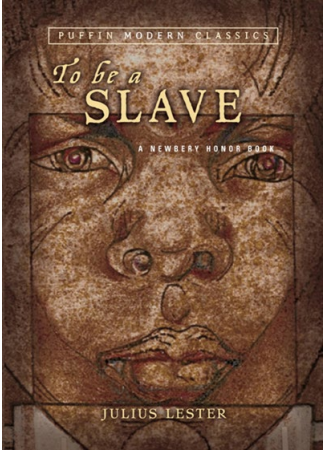
**“Children can make our world what it should be for everybody.”**

Tom Feelings had three children: Kamili, Zamani, and Niani:



The boys were from his 1<sup>st</sup> marriage to Muriel Feelings, and the girl from his 2<sup>nd</sup> marriage to Dinah Johnson.

# Related Books at Los Angeles Public Library



Tom Feelings is best remembered as having illustrated many beautiful black children within award winning books driven by his life's mission and purpose: to encourage black children to see and know their own spiritual and physical beauty. He was part of the Black Is Beautiful cultural movement that stated in the 1960s. **“I have dedicated my career to showing... that there is tremendous beauty in Black people ...”**



For today's art making portion of class, we will sketch a child's portrait. A portrait is a depiction of a face.

Take few minutes to gather paper, a drawing instrument like graphite/charcoal pencils or other, and an eraser if needed.

First watch this video tutorial, *How to draw Children's faces and expressions*:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ud\\_kKTZfTjs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ud_kKTZfTjs), then replay and sketch along like I did →



For older kids, art option:

Draw a self-portrait; either look in a mirror or draw from your memory/imagination.

When you draw your self-portrait think about your potential, purpose and passions that can help you and others feel valued. Perhaps add objects in the background that symbolize your purpose or passions. If you are uncomfortable drawing yourself, draw someone else from memory who brings value to your life.

Submit signed work for IG exhibition or any notes at: [durant@lapl.org](mailto:durant@lapl.org) due by February 28, 2121.

# References

*Eighth Book of Junior Authors & Illustrators*, 2000, Biography Reference Bank, EBSCOhost.

Meet the Author Recordings with Dinah Johnson and Tom Feelings

<https://www.teachingbooks.net>

<https://biography.jrank.org/pages/2346/Feelings-Tom.html>

<https://www.knowitall.org/photo/tom-feelings-national-book-month>

<https://www.thefeministwire.com/2014/11/artist-in-revolutionary-struggle/>

<https://www.pinterest.com/tomshieh/tom-feelings/>

Presented by Aida Bartoletti on February 2021 for the Los Angeles Public Library program: Fall for Fine Arts 2: African American Artists as based on the first Fall for Fine Arts program:

<https://programminglibrarian.org/programs/fall-fine-arts.>

PP compiled by Aida Bartoletti & Kim Woo.