



**Mississippi  
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**Pure Imagination and Diversity in Children’s Picture Books**  
**Drawn inside the Margins: The Diverse World of Ezra Jack Keats**  
*opens February 5 at The MAX*

MERIDIAN, Miss. (January 4, 2022) – Ezra Jack Keats forever changed the world of children’s literature when he authored and illustrated *The Snowy Day*, published in 1962. Written during the height of the Civil Rights Movement, it was the first children’s picture book to feature an African American as a leading character.

The Mississippi Arts + Entertainment Experience celebrates Keats and the diverse characters he brought to life in its newest exhibition, *Drawn inside the Margins: The Diverse World of Ezra Jack Keats*. The exhibition opens on Saturday, February 5.

“None of the manuscripts I’d been illustrating featured any Black kids – except for token Blacks in the background,” Keats said. “My book would have him there simply because he should have been there all along.”

Considered the grandfather of diversity in children’s literature, Keats came from humble beginnings. The son of Polish Jewish immigrants, he came of age in Brooklyn, New York, during the Great Depression and served in the U.S. Army Air Force during World War II. Keats experienced poverty and racism and thus could relate to members of other ethnicities who faced the same. His books were set in the inner city and featured ethnically and economically diverse characters. Before Keats’ untimely death in 1983, he illustrated over 80 children’s books, 22 of which he authored himself. In 1963 he won the Randolph Caldecott Medal, which recognizes the most distinguished American picture book, for *The Snowy Day*. In 1970 he was a Caldecott honor winner for *Goggles!*



Keats' impact on children's literature was profound. In 2012 the Library of Congress named *The Snowy Day* as one of 88 books that shaped America, along with the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), *Goodnight Moon* (1947), *Charlotte's Web* (1952), *The Cat in the Hat* (1957), and *Where the Wild things Are* (1963).

This exhibition focuses on the books Keats authored and illustrated, and more specifically the books that feature diversity. "The beauty of Keats' illustrations lies not only in the symbolic message but also in his technique," said Stacey Wilson, Curator of Exhibitions at The MAX. "I never realized the illustrations were collages, and to see them in person – they are amazing."

*Drawn inside the Margins: The Diverse World of Ezra Jack Keats* features over 30 original illustrations and collages from books such as *The Snowy Day*, *Goggles!*, *Louie*, and *My Dog Is Lost* along with photographs and other related ephemera. It will be on display February 5-April 16, 2022.

### **About The MAX**

The Mississippi Arts + Entertainment Experience (The MAX) explores the state's creative legacies in one immersive attraction. Come discover the Mississippi roots of some of the world's arts and entertainment icons – Elvis Presley, Oprah Winfrey, B.B. King, Faith Hill, Sela Ward, Margaret Walker, Eudora Welty, and Jim Henson, to name just a few.

Admission to the special exhibit is free with regular museum admission. The MAX is open Tuesday through Saturday from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. The museum is located at the corner of Sela Ward Parkway (22<sup>nd</sup> Avenue) and Front Street, overlooking the railroad at the edge of Meridian's historic downtown. Street parking is available, with shops and restaurants within walking distance. For more information visit [msarts.org](http://msarts.org) or call 601-581-1550.

*Image credits (left to right): Crunch, crunch, crunch, his feet sank into the snow, final illustrations for The Snowy Day, 1962, collage and paint on board, Ezra Jack Keats Papers, The de Grummond Children's Literature Collection, The University of Southern Mississippi Libraries; Peter's mother asked him and Willie to go on an errand to the grocery store, final illustrations for Whistle for Willie, 1964, collage and paint on board, Ezra Jack Keats Papers, The de Grummond Children's Literature Collection, The University of Southern Mississippi Libraries.*

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