

Publisher fills in the gaps in African-American story

'Sweet Words So Brave,' a literary history for children

By Valeria Davis-Humphrey

Suburban reporter

MIDDLETON — "Sweet Words So Brave: The Story of African American Literature," is a Middleton publisher's latest attempt to fill a nationwide void on children's books featuring black history.

"Sweet Words" is the second volume in Zino Press' three-part documentary that focuses on the history of African Americans. The first was "Be a Friend: The Story of African American Music in Songs, Words, and Pictures" featuring local musician Leotha Stanley and artist Henry Hawkins.

Zino Press publisher Liza Di-Prima says there is a surprising void in comprehensive children's texts about African Americans. Work will begin next year on a third volume about African-American artists.

"Sweet Words" uses a fictional grandfather telling his granddaughter about her heritage in lit-



IF YOU GO:

Illustrator Jerry Butler will be featured at a presentation and book signing of "Sweet Words So Brave" Sunday at 1 p.m. at University Book Store for Kids in Hilldale, 702 N. Midvale Blvd. Hardcover copies are now available for \$24.95.

erature and history to weave an American saga.

The book is written by two East Coast African Americans, educator Barbara Curry and journalist James Michael Brodie. The book also features illustrations by renowned local artist Jerry Butler, art department chairman at Madison Area Technical College and a nationally exhibited artist. He brings "Sweet Words" to life through his illustrations and overall design.

Unlike other publishers' collec-

tions of black historical vignettes, "Sweet Words" places each author in her or his historic era and explains how that author struggled to be free to write or express the views of African Americans.

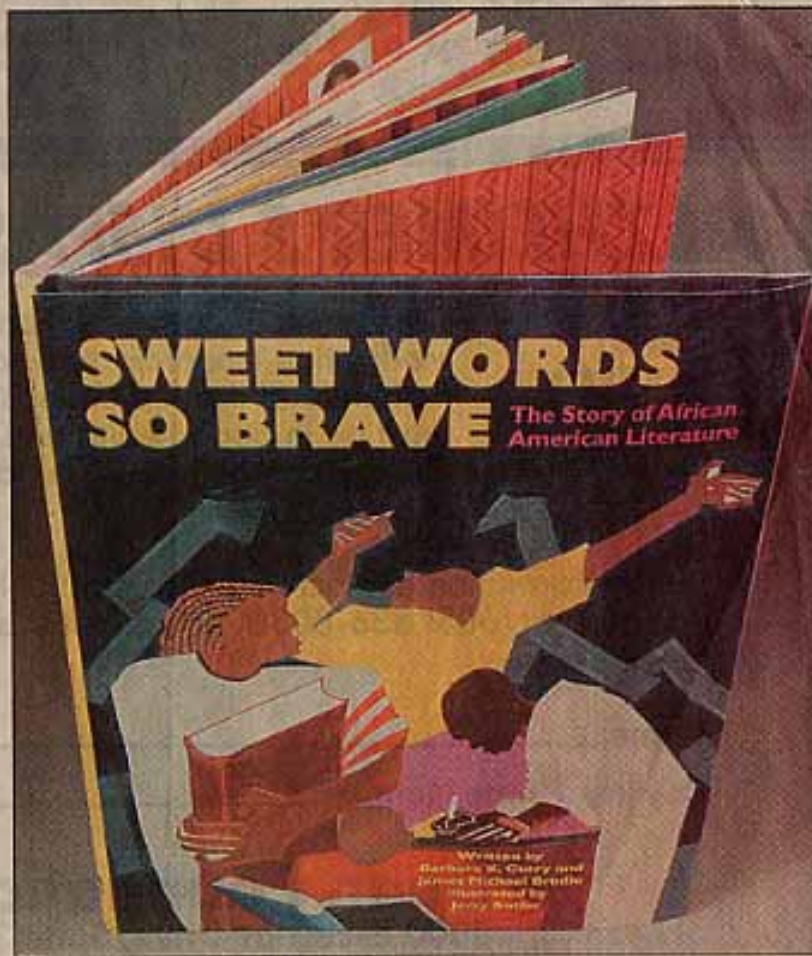
"The first thing I wanted to do as an illustrator and as an African American was to convey the context of the time," Butler said. Throughout the text Butler's illustrations juxtapose subtle images of historic social conflicts, such as the conflict between black churches and the Ku Klux Klan.

"Sweet Words" begins in Nigeria and Senegal, painting a historic continuum of African-American authors from Olaudah Equiano's 1789 slave narrative to the 1996 children's poems of Nikki Giovanni.

By reaching out to readers through the fictional grandfather,

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State Journal photos/CAROLYN PFLASTERER

"Sweet Words So Brave," a children's story book about the history of African-American writers, is colorfully illustrated and designed by Madison artist Jerry Butler. It will be released nationally on Dec. 1.