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PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

John Henry as an Education and Literacy Tool

August House features *A Natural Man: The True Story of John Henry* for Black History Month.

Atlanta, Georgia – February 12, 2015 – As a kickoff for Black History Month, August House featured their publication *A Natural Man: The True Story of John Henry*, written by Steve Sanfield and illustrated by Peter J. Thornton, as the Book of the Week on their Twitter and Tumblr pages. Through an assortment of fun book highlights, author facts, illustrations, and John Henry trivia, August House affirmed John Henry as a strong role model for young African American boys and introduced *Natural Man* as an excellent resource to use in the classroom during Black History Month.

A Natural Man: The True Story of John Henry recounts the classic story of John Henry—the man who could drive steel more quickly than a steam hammer—with “a dynamic, poetic retelling” (*Chicago Sun Times*). Sanfield’s rendition of the story has been praised for bringing greater life and motivation to John Henry’s character. Jane Yolen, from the *New York Times Book Review*, explains how Sanfield “has filled in the story in places where balladry drops transitions and folk tales skim over motivations. In other words, this is a standout retelling.”

Sanfield’s *Natural Man* not only makes for a fun afternoon read—it’s also quite effective as a teaching tool. The story of John Henry is an excellent introduction to the form and structure commonly used in folktales. *Natural Man* playfully infers facts without adding mystical explanations of John Henry’s strength, helping children identify the story of John Henry as a folktale and distinguishing it from fairy tales, and classic narratives. Additionally, Sanfield’s *Natural Man* can help teachers attract young African American boys to read literature with African American heroes who are brave, educated and strong. Currently, “only 14% of African American eighth graders score at or above the proficient [reading] level” (*PBS*, “Outcomes for Young, Black Men”). To close this gap, a number of studies repeatedly indicate that connections to characters with similar backgrounds and cultures help children sustain interest in reading. African American boys desperately need books, such as Sanfield’s *Natural Man*, that positively feature

cultures and characters that they can relate to and apply as role models in their lives.

August House, Inc. is a highly acclaimed and award-winning multimedia publisher of children's stories, folktale anthologies, and resource books. Located in Atlanta, GA, August House has developed one of the most highly respected collections of folktales from the world's great oral traditions.

You can find more information about August House at <http://www.augusthouse.com> .

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