

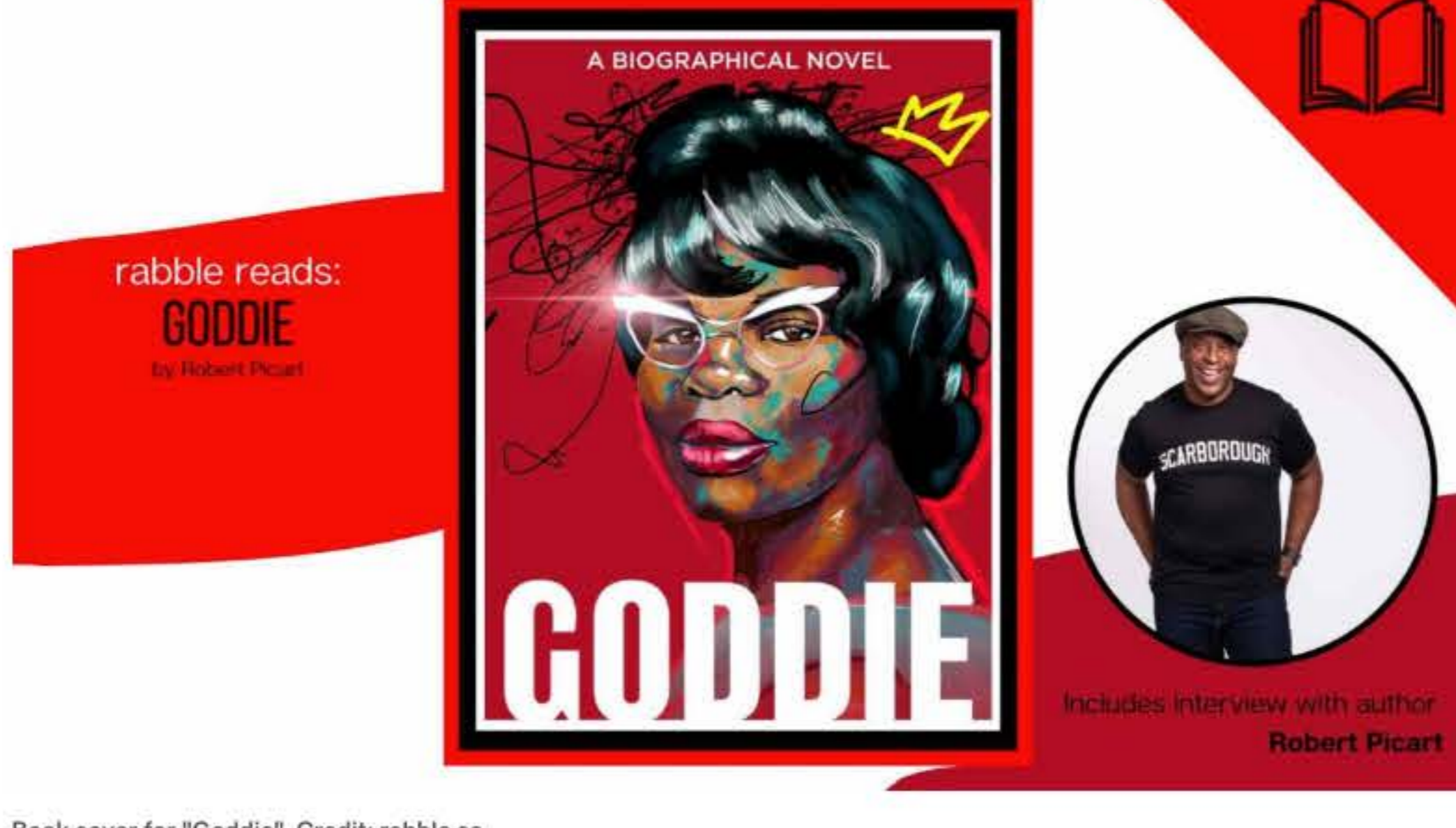


‘Goddie’ author wants book in Toronto classrooms

by [Stephen Wentzell](#) May 30, 2023

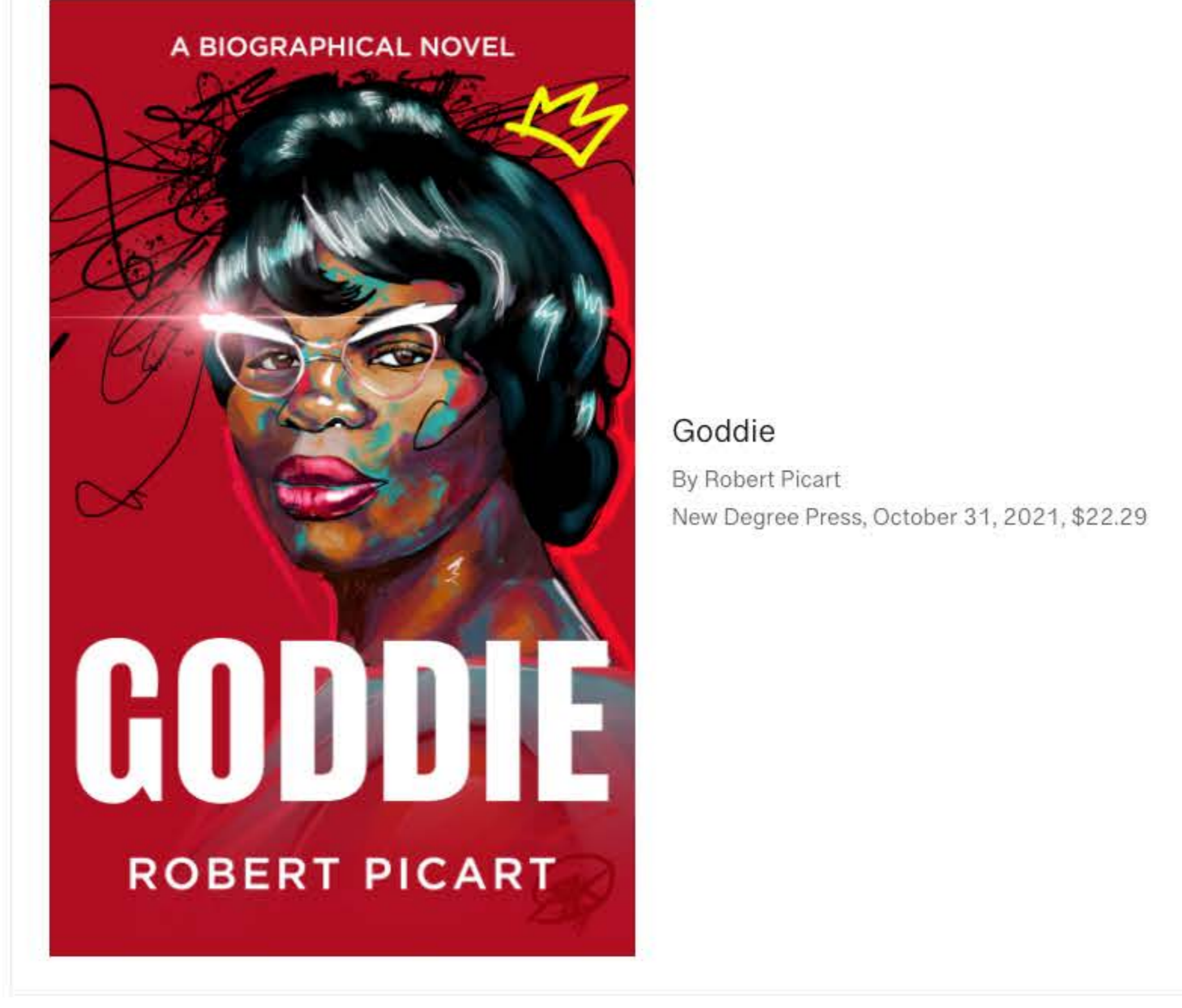


Author Robert Picart hopes that his mother's life story can be shared with youth to show young people what it means to persevere, to survive trauma, and celebrate "what it really means to come from somewhere or really leave something that you know."



Book cover for "Goddie". Credit: rabble.ca

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Goddie
By Robert Picart
New Degree Press, October 31, 2021, \$22.29

A biographical novel about a Jamaican woman who becomes a nurse in Canada after being subjected to indentured servitude as a young girl in the mid-1900s could soon find its way into middle-school curriculums in Toronto.

Inspired by author Robert Picart's mother, *Goddie* was never supposed to be a book. Instead, he envisioned telling her story through a series of audio recordings, like a podcast.

But, like for much of the world, the COVID-19 pandemic had a different plan. Lockdowns weren't easy to adapt to for anyone, but the elderly uniquely suffered by being isolated in long-term care facilities and dying in hospitals without a loved one to hold their hand.

Knowing he shouldn't take the time with his mother for granted, Picart began sitting down with his mom, retracing the steps of her life and the adversity she overcame.

Picart listened intently to the audio recordings where his mother talked about the tribulations of losing her parents at a young age, which opened the door for her to be sent away.

Why did Goddie's family decide to send her away after the death of her parents? As backwards as it may seem, they wanted to give her a better life. After all, Goddie was bright, innovative and tenacious. She loved learning and worked hard to set herself up for success.

With her parents having died in short succession, her orphaned siblings, who couldn't afford to help Goddie reach her potential, were left with an impossible decision.

But the young girl refused to give up, running away from her servitude and escaping to the U.K. to start fresh as a nursing student. She never gave up, her resilience paving a future that would eventually center around raising twins Robert and Richard Picart.

As he listened back to the hours of interviews with his mother, Picart realized there was more than a podcast — there was a much bigger story around the idea of being sent away and navigating life as an immigrant.

"I also felt that there was a sense of urgency with her being such an elderly person that I wanted her to read her own book, to read her own story," he said in an interview with [rabble.ca](#).

Picart said he believes readers "really resonated with the idea of an immigrant story."

"A lot of folks in Canada come from somewhere else," he said. "They can understand the tenants behind a young Jamaican girl making her way from the West Indies through the U.K. to Canada trying to figure it out."

Bringing Goddie to the classroom

Picart does not consider himself a seasoned writer by any means, but he says he harnessed his energy to push through the imposter syndrome to capture his mother's story with the respect and dignity she deserved.

"I think sometimes when we allow that imposter syndrome to take over, it keeps us from achieving great things," Picart said.

Released in 2022, Picart didn't realize the journey of his book had only just begun.

Robert, along with Richard, are following up on the success of *Goddie*, having produced a six-part secondary school series of literary resources. With *Goddie's* story at the center of the curriculum, Robert noted the series equips young people with knowledge about the authentic histories, cultures and perspectives of Afro-Caribbean Canadians.

Ultimately, the brothers want to work with the Ontario Ministry of Education as well as local school boards, to incorporate the series into its curriculum in order to help broaden the perspectives about how African, Afro-Caribbean and Black people have shaped Canada since the 1940s.

"As we progressed down the journey, we felt that there was a real sense of mission here," he said, noting a lot of kids of colour in Toronto and across Canada haven't always seen themselves in literature.

Honouring Jamaican culture

While Picart says books like *Lord of the Flies* are "phenomenal classics," it's important for students to be taught about the contributions made by people from different backgrounds and experiences.

By bringing *Goddie* to the classroom, Picart hopes to teach young people what it means to persevere, to survive trauma, and celebrate "what it really means to come from somewhere or really leave something that you know."

"We're all coming in based on a dream that we may have had at one point to do right for our kids and better ourselves," Picart said. "And if we can take the opportunity to bring that type of perspective into the classroom, I think we as Canadians are better for it."

Targeted at students in grades nine and ten, the series hopes to meet students where they are — at the same time many are starting to discover themselves. With *Goddie's* story beginning at age 16, students can uniquely identify with her character and the circumstances she faces that will determine her future.

Along with learning about *Goddie's* story, Picart says the series also explores migration, equity, inclusion and diversity, and more.

"... Understanding how Black people fit into a society with folks who don't look like them and maybe don't get treated the same," he added.

It was also important to Picart to tell the story of Jamaica in a way that helps people understand the richness of the country's culture in ways beyond "jerk chicken and Bob Marley."

"Let's take them into the mountains of Jamaica and help them understand the culture of Jamaica, help them understand the richness of the food, the richness of the family life, understand what it meant to be in the hills, to run your farms and do all the things that maybe a lot of people aren't really aware of," he said.

Along with the new understanding of Jamaican culture, Picart hopes young people can also take away a key lesson from his book: "With every bump in the road, there's a victory... There's always a victory at the end. No storm lasts forever."

[Goddie is available now online and in bookstores.](#)

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