This guide was created by Tracie Vaughn Zimmer, a reading specialist and award-winning children's book author. Visit her Web site at www.tracievaughnzimmer.com to find hundreds of other guides to children's and young adult literature.

Abe's Honest Words
The Life of Abraham Lincoln
By Doreen Rappaport
Illustrated by Kadir Nelson
Trade edition 978-1-4231-0408-7 $16.99

Martin's Big Words
The Life of Martin Luther King, Jr.
By Doreen Rappaport
Illustrated by Bryan Collier
Trade edition 978-0-7868-0714-7 $15.99
Caldecott Honor
Coretta Scott King Illustrator Honor

John's Secret Dreams
The Life of John Lennon
By Doreen Rappaport
Illustrated by Bryan Collier

Also Available

Eleanor, Quiet No More!
The Life of Eleanor Roosevelt
By Doreen Rappaport
Illustrated by Gary Kelley
Trade edition 978-0-7868-5141-6 $16.99

We Are the Ship
The Story of Negro League Baseball
Written and Illustrated by Kadir Nelson
Trade edition 978-0-7868-0832-8 $18.99

Moses
When Harriet Tubman Led Her People to Freedom
By Carole Boston Weatherford
Illustrated by Kadir Nelson
Trade edition 978-0-7868-5175-1 $15.99
Caldecott Honor
Coretta Scott King Illustrator Award

Also Available

Disney • Hyperion
114 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10011
www.hyperionbooksforchildren.com
About the Book

From the time he was a young man, Abraham Lincoln was pained by the cruelty and evil of the institution of slavery. A voracious reader, Lincoln spent every spare moment of his days filling his mind with knowledge—from history to literature to mathematics—preparing himself to one day lead the country he loved toward greater equality and prosperity.

Despite the obstacles he faced as a self-educated man from the backwoods, Lincoln persevered in his political career, and his compassion and honesty gradually earned him the trust of many Americans. As president, he guided the nation through a long and bitter civil war and penned the document that would lead to the end of slavery in the United States. Told in Doreen Rappaport's accessible, absorbing prose, the passion for humanity that defined Lincoln's life shines through in this momentous follow-up to Martin's Big Words and John's Secret Dreams.

The quotes in this book have been taken from Lincoln's notebooks, letters to friends, campaign speeches for state legislature, campaign speeches for president, his first inaugural address, the Gettysburg Address, and the second Inaugural address. His words have been edited and shortened without changing their meaning.

Pre-reading

Brainstorm a list of everything you know or believe about Abraham Lincoln.

Questions to Consider

1. Why do you think the author makes a point to tell us in the first sentence that Lincoln was born in a slave state?
2. Describe Lincoln's early years and compare them to your own.
3. Why are some of the words in the book printed in italic? Why do you think the author decided to include them?
4. Why do you think Abraham Lincoln lived in so many different places? Why do people move? Has that changed over time?
5. Who did Abraham Lincoln like to listen to? Who do you like to listen to? Why?
6. What did Lincoln see happen in New Orleans? Do you think it changed him or only convinced him of the feeling he already had? Defend your answer.
7. What jobs did Lincoln have? Did they correspond to what he liked to study? How did he get them to match? Which job would you most like to have? Which jobs would you least like to do?
8. Why did people like Lincoln? Did he always win the office in government that he wanted?
9. What happened just as Lincoln was elected President? Did he think of the South as the enemy of the Union? What makes you think so or not?
Projects

Language Arts
Inspired by the clear and lyrical prose of Doreen Rappaport, write a biography of another important American hero inspired by *Abe’s Honest Words*.

Public Speaking
Encourage students to learn sentences at the back of the book from the Gettysburg Address. In groups or in front of the whole class or school, have them perform the speech, in a suitable manner. Ask them how it feels to speak the words of Abraham Lincoln.

Reading
In the following chart, pull important facts, quotes, or details from the book and list them on the left side. On the right, share your reactions including feelings, thoughts, memories, or connections you made to the text.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Important Quotes, Facts or Details</th>
<th>Connections and Reactions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ex. “He had just a mite of schooling, yet he loved words.”</td>
<td>Wow! I just figured that Lincoln didn’t have much schooling, but his passion for education came from reading books.</td>
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</tbody>
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Music
Learn the lyrics for both "Yankee Doodle" and "Dixie." After singing them, discuss what the lyrics mean.

Social Studies
Create a three-dimensional map of the United States as it looked during the Civil War. Be sure to label which states fought for the Union and which for the Confederacy.

Dates to Remember
February 12, 2009, is the 200th anniversary of Lincoln's Birth. His birthday is a legal holiday in some U.S. States, but even if it's not, remember to celebrate the anniversary of his birth.

November 19, 1863, is the date he gave the Gettysburg Address, students may enjoy revisiting the speech on or around that date.

Other important dates of interest can be found at the back of Abe's Honest Words.

About the Author
Doreen Rappaport has written numerous award-winning books for children, including: Freedom Ship and The School Is Not White!, both illustrated by Curtis James; Martin's Big Words: The Life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a Caldecott Honor Book, a Jane Addams Children's Book Award winner, and a Coretta Scott King Honor Book; and John's Secret Dreams: The Life of John Lennon, both illustrated by Bryan Collier. She lives and writes in Upstate New York.

An Interview with Doreen Rappaport

1. You grew up in a family of musicians—what inspired you to go in a different direction and become a writer?
   I was teaching music in a junior high school in the '60s and wanted to find some books for children on the evolution of the black musical experience. I couldn't find any. This was right before I went to Mississippi to teach in a freedom school. The Civil Rights Movement was making me aware of the many great true stories about black Americans that had been excluded from our history. These two "missing" threads made me move to write books on neglected history subjects.

2. African American history has been a major influence on much of your work. What sparked the interest and passion for these often unknown stories?
   The extraordinary courage of black Americans during the Civil Rights Movement propelled me to learn more about other black Americans, starting back in the days of slavery. And what I learned in my reading was that there were so many courageous black Americans all through American history—people who had fought against overwhelming odds, who had suffered but persevered, who had blazed trails that were picked up by the next generation or two generations. These Americans created my passion for telling their stories.
Your newest picture book offers a portrait of Abraham Lincoln. Tell us a little about your research for this project and any interesting discoveries you made.

My research began with the great biographies of Lincoln, including Carl Sandburg’s poetic vision and Stephen Oates’s deconstruction of the Lincoln myths, to give us the man behind the various myth, and David Herbert Donald’s dense and riveting biography with details that illuminated Lincoln’s character. Gary Wills’s book on the Gettysburg Address led me to reread all of Lincoln’s speeches and think about his choice of language in every instance. I could feel Lincoln’s great burden as he tried to keep this country together and the torment he must have felt as he struggled to finally make the decision that he had to free black men, women, and children, a decision that threatened the fragile alliance of the border states with the North.

Much has been written for children and adults about Abe. How did you approach your biographical sketch to make it different and new?

In writing biographies for young people, I try to find what I believe is the “essence” or “essences” of a particular person. Lincoln’s eloquent words are a guide into his thoughts and offer children a way into the heart of the man.

Was it difficult to narrow down all of the information on Lincoln and make it accessible for a young audience?

ABSOLUTELY! It’s the big challenge in writing for a young audience. You do tons of research, know so much more than you can put in the book, and have to work hard to simplify but NOT dumb down.

Kadir Nelson illustrated Abe’s Honest Words. Did you two work collaboratively throughout the process or was the writing and art creation separate?

I saw Kadir’s sketches and made comments that he received. My comments are about historical accuracy or focus, never about an artist’s vision.

In 2009, we will celebrate the bicentennial of Lincoln’s birth. What do you hope young readers take away from Lincoln’s life and accomplishments?

I hope children will see what is possible under great leadership in this country. A great leader who follows his heart and convictions can help a nation find its way. Our leaders must take moral stands without worrying about criticism and the polls and their reelection. As Lincoln said, “If I were to read, much less answer, all the attacks made on me, this shop might as well be closed for any other business. I do the very best I know how—the very best I can; and I mean to keep doing so until the end.”

While working on your own book, did you come across any other books (for children and/or adults) that you can recommend?

I loved the poetic voice and first-person approach used by Ann Turner in her biography, Abe Lincoln Remembers. Older readers will devour Russell Freedman’s dense, beautifully written Lincoln: A Photobiography.

Any recommendations for bookstores or libraries that are hoping to throw a kid-centric Lincoln bicentennial celebration?

When I was young, we had to memorize various speeches of famous people, including Lincoln’s speeches. It was tough, but it felt great to get up in front of people and pretend to be a famous person speaking his or her words. Let’s have Lincoln marathons in bookstores and libraries celebrating Lincoln’s words with kids of all ages. Call up the schools, have children memorize his speeches, then come in and read them. Let them stand in front of a loudspeaker and let the great words of this man ring through the stores. And don’t eliminate the younger children; in the early grades, each child can memorize one sentence and we will hear various voices of the young strung together.

What’s next?

Eleanor, Quiet No More! The Life of Eleanor Roosevelt, illustrated by Gary Kelley.

Anything else you’d like to add?

Kids, read, read, read! There’s so much that can be learned through reading history.
**About the Illustrator**

**Kadir Nelson** is a two-time Caldecott Honor illustrator of many books for children, including *Moses: When Harriet Tubman Led Her People to Freedom* by Carole Boston Weatherford, an NAACP Image Award winner; a Caldecott Honor Book; and a Coretta Scott King Illustrator Award winner. He also wrote and illustrated the book *We Are the Ship: The Story of Negro League Baseball*. He lives with his family in southern California.

**An Interview with Kadir Nelson**

1. **What kind of research did you do before beginning your illustrations for *Abe's Honest Words*?**

   As part of my research for the artwork, I read a couple of biographies about Lincoln. I also traveled to Springfield, Illinois, to see firsthand where Lincoln lived and came into his own before he became president. Camera in hand, I visited New Salem, a replica of a village just outside of Springfield, where Lincoln lived a short while after he left home. I walked through Lincoln's Springfield home, the Old State Capitol where Lincoln gave his famous “House Divided” speech, and his old law offices. I found wonderful reference at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum and library there, as well as in Washington D.C., where I toured the U.S. Capitol building and spent time at the Lincoln Memorial. I did all of this to get a clearer picture of Lincoln's journey, and found the experience to be invaluable and inspiring.

2. **Were there any specific challenges in capturing such an iconic historical figure in what is arguably a fresh new way?**

   The only challenge I found when creating images of Lincoln was showing him from angles that are different from those I found in existing paintings and photographs. I was able to paint his likeness from new perspectives by using a life-size cast of Lincoln's bust. It enabled me to light the sculpture in any way I wished and draw and paint Lincoln from any angle I needed.

3. **What medium did you use for the illustrations, and can you tell us a little about your process?**

   The illustrations for *Abe's Honest Words* were rendered in pencil, watercolor, and oil on paper (in that order). My process is pretty straightforward. I create each sketch, and then find supporting historical and visual reference in books, photography, on the Internet, and in this case, on location. I then drew the sketch to size, painted over the pencil drawing with watercolors, and then finished the painting with oils.