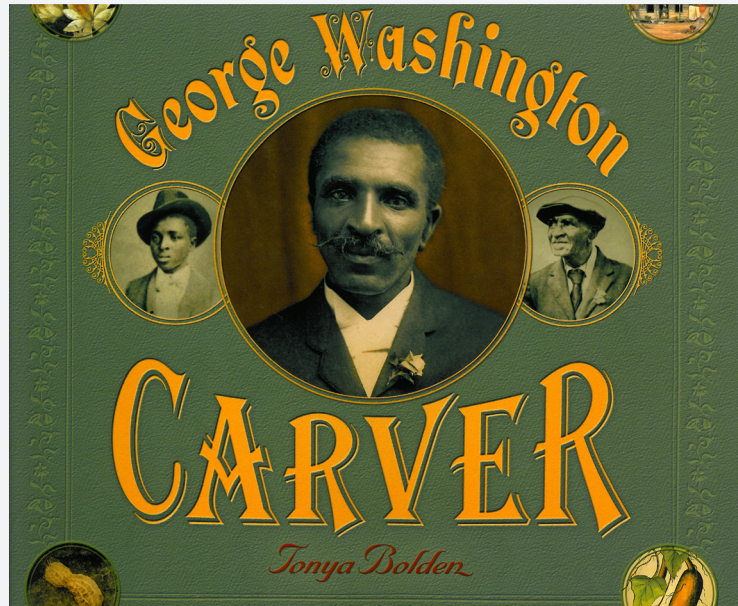


First Opinion: More than a “Peanut Man”

Bolden, Tonya. *George Washington Carver*. New York: Abrams, 2008.

Steven E. Clark

Tonya Bolden’s picture book biography about George Washington Carver is one that you might find on a living room coffee table. The warm and handsome earth-toned cover features vintage photographs of Carver at various stages of his life. The cover also features four circular corner seals that portray items that are significant to his life. These images stimulate and invite the reader to want to learn more about “the



peanut man.” The color palate of warm tones is continued throughout the book, which also includes rich illustrations and original drawings and paintings by Carver, along with many black and white photos.

Bolden’s creativity and sensitivity within *George Washington Carver* are aimed at younger readers, children in grades three through five in particular. Her writing style allows targeted readers to understand the character of her subject. She includes Carver’s own words and photographs to impart and reinforce a compassionate understanding of his love of drawing, painting, poetry, and all things related to nature.

This picture book biography follows Carver’s early childhood as an enslaved orphan to his adulthood. He was the first African American to attend Iowa State. Bolden includes the challenges he endured and conquered as an African American seeking an education and tells of to his days as a teacher, a researcher, and an “earth doctor” at Tuskegee Institute, where he was a professor of earth sciences. He was called on to speak to people all over the country during a time when open prejudice and hatred kept many African Americans from formal educational venues. Bolden’s story is densely worded and may be too long

to read in one session. However, she skillfully includes phrases to explain the words that represent the time period.

Overall, this biography is interesting and informative. As a pedagogical tool, it can be used as an eye-opener for understanding how individuals can overcome obstacles. It can also stimulate young people who are interested in earth sciences. As a visual artist, I would use this book to illustrate how drawing and painting are a natural extension of nature appreciation. Bolden is known for her outstanding writing for children and adults, and this is an excellent addition to her works. I enjoyed this book because Carver's quotes were strategically placed throughout to complement his drawings, portraits, and photographs of his artifacts.

Having this book displayed on a living room coffee table would encourage adults, children, and family members to share the book together.

About the Author

Steven E. Clark is a graduate student in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Purdue University. His areas of interest are multicultural education and evaluating visual images in youth literature and textbooks. He hopes to write and illustrate children's books.