



Abe's Honest Words: The Life of Abraham Lincoln (Big Words)

By Doreen Rappaport

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From the time he was a young boy roaming the forests of the unsettled Midwest, Abraham Lincoln knew in his heart that slavery was deeply wrong. 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 towards greater equality and prosperity.

Despite the obstacles he faced as a self-educated man from the back woods, 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.

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*. Told in Doreen Rappaport's accessible, absorbing prose, and brought to life in powerful illustrations by Kadir Nelson, *Abe's Honest Words* is an epic portrait of a truly great American president.

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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

Starred Review. Grade 3–6—Written in prose as elegant and spare as that of its subject, this distinguished book takes readers from Abe's backwoods boyhood in Kentucky to his first harrowing witnessing of slavery in New Orleans, on to the Illinois legislature and the presidency. Each half-page of generously spaced text appears against a white background. Rappaport's carefully chosen words are both accessible and effective: "The war dragged on./Lincoln grew sadder and sadder/as more men died." Until, "The South finally surrendered./The job of healing the nation began./But Lincoln was not there to help./An assassin's bullet ended his life." Corresponding quotes from Lincoln appear in italics, e.g., *"The moment came when I felt that slavery must die that the nation might live!"* Handsome, larger-than-life paintings fill the remaining page and a half of each spread with powerful images—of Abe as a strong, lanky youth with a book or oar in hand, then later as a lawyer with unkempt hair, feather pen, and midnight candles burning. Readers see the somber, resigned faces of slaves—young and old—first in chains, then picking cotton under a blazing sun, and later the proud faces of an all-black regiment of the Union Army. From Lincoln's striking countenance on the cover—scruffy dark hair tinged with gray, big ears, bright eyes, and benevolent face, lined with worry and age—to the end, this is one Lincoln book that all libraries will want to have.—Barbara Auerbach, New York City Public Schools

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From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review This collaboration between Rappaport and Nelson provides a sweeping arc of Lincoln's life, jumping from his humble beginnings and his early political career through his struggles to preserve the Union and to help abolish slavery. Rappaport writes in a very free verse and on each page echoes her narrative with prescient samplings of Lincoln's words. In the generously sized artwork, which fills three-quarters of each spread, Nelson makes the familiar face, staring out at us from various currencies, exciting again, showing deep furrows and wearied creases, and on the few occasions when Lincoln falls prey to looking like a wooden statue, it is the faces of the people surrounding him, watching him and judging him, that carry the weight of the artwork's impact. Nelson has the uncanny ability to telegraph a full range of emotion in the faces, especially in the eyes of his subjects, and it is in these details that he displays the true immensity of his talent. Minimally, his work is compelling; at best, it's spellbinding. The exceptional art, along with Rappaport's and Lincoln's words, makes this a fine celebration of a man who needs little introduction. Grades 2-4. --Ian Chipman

Review

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Rappaport plainly explices the major events in Abraham Lincoln's life from his poor beginnings to the assassin's bullet. Her explanations of Lincoln's intellectual and social condemnation of slavery, and that condemnation's increasing influence on his decisions as President, arguably rank among the clearest in nonfiction for this age group (although as compressed as most): "The Emancipation Proclamation freed slaves only in the states and territories that were in rebellion. Lincoln wanted slavery ended in the entire nation." A design companion to Martin's *Big Words* (2001), Nelson's compelling illustrations, worked in a palette of umber, ochre, red and blue, epically render such scenes as the suffering of enslaved field workers, and Lincoln towering above the crowd at Gettysburg. By placing the viewer virtually at ground level in relation to the picture plane, Nelson evokes the heroism inherent in his compositions' central figures. Regrettably, the failure to contextualize the Lincoln quotations sprinkled throughout diminishes the historical verisimilitude of this otherwise remarkable achievement. (author's and illustrator's notes, timeline, suggested reading, selected bibliography of sources, *Gettysburg Address*) Kirkus"

With language as lean as our sixteenth president, Rappaport brings to light the major influences on and turning points in Lincoln's life. Excerpts from Lincoln's own speeches (although the sources are not uniformly acknowledged) ground these highlights—the death of his mother, his unsuccessful bid for the U.S. Senate, his fight against slavery, and his two inaugurations. Big events, such as the Emancipation Proclamation, receive eloquent quotes ("In giving freedom to the slave, we assure freedom to the free..."). But other aspects of Lincoln's life, such as his constant reading ("He had just a mite of schooling, yet he loved words the way his papa, a master storyteller, did"), are punctuated with plainer speech ("The things I want to know are in books; my best friend is the man who'll git me a book I ain't read"). Some of Nelson's handsome portraits glow with background light and luminous skin tones, evoking the remote majesty of the statue at the Lincoln Memorial. At other times, he lets Lincoln walk down those stairs and portrays an unassuming man reading under a tree or cajoling political leaders with a story or two. An appended timeline fills in some facts of Lincoln's biography; recommended readings, a bibliography, and the text of the *Gettysburg Address* complete the book. Horn Book"

Users Review

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