



2003

America the Beautiful

Irene Halliday

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Bates, Katharine Lee. *America the Beautiful*. Illustrated by Minor, Wendell. G.P. Putman's Sons, 2003. ISBN 0399238859. \$16.99. 48 pp.

Reviewer: Irene Halliday

Reading Level: Primary;

Rating: Excellent;

Genre: Historical poetry;

Subject: United States--Juvenile poetry; Patriotic music--United States--Juvenile poetry; Books--Reviews;

In an American culture where sophistication, cynicism and excessive preoccupation with "political correctness" run rampant, how refreshing to open the covers of a book that celebrates America with unabashed patriotism. Katharine Lee Bates' stirring poem, which has captured the hearts of Americans for generations, is fittingly adorned with beautiful double-page watercolor and gouache paintings by one of America's premier artists, Wendell Minor. Not only do the paintings celebrate memorable locales from coast to coast and border to border, but they capture historical moments along the way, from an early pilgrim settlement through westward expansion by wagon train along the Oregon trail, to the "alabaster cities gleam" of New York City with twin beams of light memorializing the twin towers destroyed on September 11, 2001.

Enhancing the color-filled presentation of the text is an index of locations painted, with brief information about each, illustrated by a colorful vignette from the larger painting. A double-page map of the United States that follows pinpoints each location by number. Biographical sketches of Bates and Samuel A. Ward, composer of the music, along with a facsimile of one of Bates' handwritten copies of her poem add further interest. Young readers with piano training will enjoy playing the song from a reproduction of an early church hymnal edition.

"America the Beautiful" is a fitting tribute to the grandeur of a great country and to those earlier Americans who have left the legacy we so enjoy today. Young readers' hearts will be stirred as they turn its pages and inevitably sing the patriotic song that is America's favorite.