



2004

Free at Last!: Stories and Songs of Emancipation

AnnMarie Hamar

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Rappaport, Doreen. *Free at Last!: Stories and Songs of Emancipation*. Illustrated by Shane W. Evans. Candlewick Press, 2004. ISBN 0763614408. \$19.99. 63 pp.

Reviewer: AnnMarie Hamar

Reading Level: Primary, Intermediate

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Informational;

Subject: African Americans--History--1863-1877--Juvenile literature; African Americans--History--1877-1964--Juvenile literature; African Americans--Civil Rights--History--Juvenile literature; Book--Reviews;

On January 1, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, freeing the slaves in those states rebelling against the Union. This collection of poems, songs, and stories relates the struggles and the courage of African Americans from 1863 through the 1954 Supreme Court decision that the separation of educational facilities for blacks and whites is unconstitutional. The stories of such familiar figures as Booker T. Washington, Jackie Robinson, and Thurgood Marshall are included; but, the most affecting are those of the unknowns and the unsung. Harriet Postle was seven months pregnant when she fought off a group of Klansmen demanding to know where her husband was. John Solomon Lewis, a former Union soldier, refused to back down when a ship's captain denied his family passage to Kansas. Dramatic, engrossing and thought-provoking, the well researched text makes African American history accessible to young readers. Shane Evans' full-page oil paintings capture the spirit of the text and the dignity of the people who would not be kept down. The collection includes poems by celebrated African American poets Paul Laurence Dunbar and Langston Hughes and such traditional songs as "Free at Last" and "John Henry." As well, source notes, a detailed chronology, and a lengthy bibliography round out the text.