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### I Heard God Talking to Me: William Edmondson and His Stone Carvings

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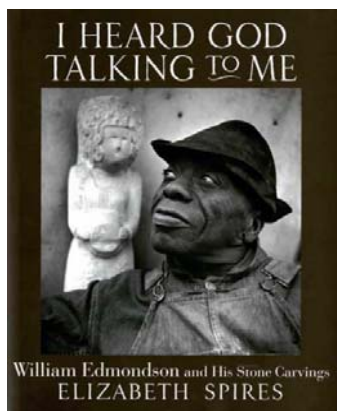
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Spires, Elizabeth. *I Heard God Talking To Me: William Edmondson and His Stone Carvings*. Illustrated by William Edmondson. Frances Foster Books/Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009. ISBN 9780374335281. \$17.95. 56 p.

Reviewer: Gabi Kupitz

Reading Level: Intermediate, Young adult

Rating: Outstanding

Genre: Children's poetry, American; American poetry;

Subject: Edmondson, William, 1882?-1951--Juvenile poetry; African American poets--Juvenile poetry; African American artists--Poetry; Books--Reviews;

The second child of freed slaves, William Edmondson worked as a field hand in his youth. Later, he worked at other jobs and for other employers, including the Nashville, Chattanooga & St. Louis Railway, and as a janitor and orderly at the Women's Hospital in Nashville, Tennessee. He never attended school nor did he learn to read and write. Rather, since early teenage years he had visions of which he said, "God, He just showed me how." The visions continued into his later years. When William was into his fifties, it was God who told him to cut figures out of stone and to make tombstones. Those two instructions set William on a course that would take him from Nashville to New York and the Museum of Modern Art. In 1937, William Edmondson became "the first black artist to have a solo show at that prestigious institution."

Using only crude tools, William transformed found and donated stone into tombstones and then, as he became more confident, into garden ornaments, birdbaths, animals, and finally, the human form. His art is now worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. William is a nation's treasure. He saw in stone something waiting to be released and used inspired determination to bring that about. God saw in William that same potential. William passed away in 1951. The poems that accompany the art have been crafted by Elizabeth Spires with the "four poems set in italics--"A Vision," "The Gift," "A Conversation," and "Wisdom"--..."composed of direct quotations from Edmondson, excerpted from interviews with him in the 1930s and 1940s." A fairly comprehensive author's note--"About William Edmondson"--and "Selected Bibliography" plus "Photo Credits and Acknowledgments" are found in this excellent and inspiring book.

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