

2009

Review: Abe's Honest Words

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Recommended Citation

Schwedt, Rachel and DeLong, Janice A., "Review: Abe's Honest Words" (2009). *All Children's Book Reviews*. Paper 6.
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Rappaport, Doreen, *Abe's Honest Words*. Illustrated by Kadir Nelson. Hyperion Books for Children, c2008. ISBN: 9781423404087 Ages 5-7

Awards: Bulletin Blue Ribbon Book, Capitol Choices, Irma Simonton and James H. Black Award for Excellence in Children's Literature (Bank Street), Volunteer State Book Award

Description

Rappaport shows readers Abe's humble beginnings in the wilderness of Kentucky, and his early years in New Salem, Illinois. She showcases his love of reading as he supports himself with jobs as farmhand, store owner, postmaster, and surveyor. She describes his early attempts and failures at becoming a lawmaker and his final victory as he became president of the United States. The book climaxes with the struggle and sadness of the Civil War as Lincoln steadfastly resolves to see an end to slavery in America. The text takes up a half-page with the rest of the double page spread filled with exquisite paintings by award-winning Kadir Nelson.

Critique

Rappaport gives children a spare factual outline of Lincoln's life in such a way that the character of the man and the emotional drama of the time shine through. The author is able to present complex historical issues in prose that is understandable to young people without losing validity. She conveys the seriousness of the events of the Civil War without overwhelming the young reader. The text is augmented with words from Lincoln's speeches and writings. Nelson's illustrations are a perfect complement to Rappaport's elegant prose. His use of light and shadow and vibrant color illuminate the pages. Facial expressions portray the resignation, the pride, the sadness, and the determination of the characters adding flesh and blood to the words of the author. The last pages of the book lists important dates in Lincoln's life, give a bibliography of books available for further reading, name useful websites, and reproduce the text of the Gettysburg Address. This is an excellent introduction to one of the heroes of American history. Readers might want to read other books written and illustrated by Rappaport and Nelson