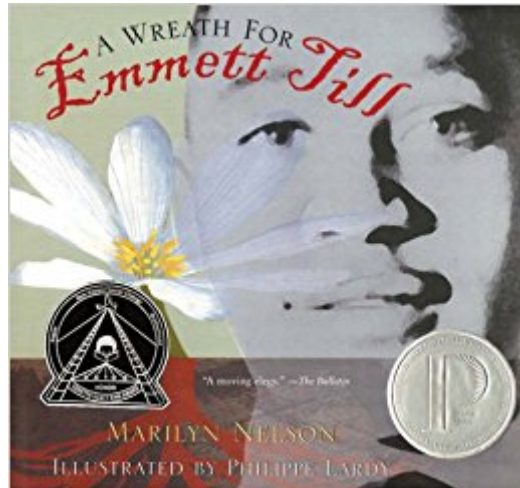




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A Wreath For Emmett Till



Synopsis

A Coretta Scott King and Printz honor book now in paperback. *A Wreath for Emmett Till* is "A moving elegy," says *The Bulletin*. In 1955 people all over the United States knew that Emmett Louis Till was a fourteen-year-old African American boy lynched for supposedly whistling at a white woman in Mississippi. The brutality of his murder, the open-casket funeral held by his mother, Mamie Till Mobley, and the acquittal of the men tried for the crime drew wide media attention. In a profound and chilling poem, award-winning poet Marilyn Nelson reminds us of the boy whose fate helped spark the civil rights movement.

Book Information

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Grade 9 Up—This memorial to the lynched teen is in the Homeric tradition of poet-as-historian. It is a heroic crown of sonnets in Petrarchan rhyme scheme and, as such, is quite formal not only in form but in language. There are 15 poems in the cycle, the last line of one being the first line of the next, and each of the first lines makes up the entirety of the 15th. This chosen formality brings distance and reflection to readers, but also calls attention to the horrifically ugly events. The language is highly figurative in one sonnet, cruelly graphic in the next. The illustrations echo the representative nature of the poetry, using images from nature and taking advantage of the emotional quality of color. There is an introduction by the author, a page about

Emmett Till, and literary and poetical footnotes to the sonnets. The artist also gives detailed reasoning behind his choices. This underpinning information makes this a full experience, eminently teachable from several aspects, including historical and literary. --Cris Riedel, Ellis B. Hyde Elementary School, Dansville, NY Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Library Binding edition.

Starred Review Gr. 9-12. "I was nine years old when Emmett Till was lynched in 1955. His name and history have been a part of most of my life," writes the creator of award-winning *Carver* (2001) in the introduction to this offering--a searing poetry collection about Till's brutal, racially motivated murder. The poems form a heroic crown of sonnets--a sequence in which the last line of one poem becomes the first line of the next. "The strict form became a kind of insulation, a way of protecting myself from the intense pain of the subject matter," writes Nelson. The rigid form distills the words' overwhelming emotion into potent, heart-stopping lines that speak from changing perspectives, including that of a tree. Closing notes offer context to the sophisticated allusions to literature and history, but the raw power of many lines needs no translation. Nelson speaks of human history's deep contradictions: "My country, 'tis both / thy nightmare history and thy grand dream." But there's also the hope that comes from facing the past and moving forward: "In my house, there is still something called grace, / which melts ice shards of hate and makes hearts whole." When matched with Lardy's gripping, spare, symbolic paintings of tree trunks, blood-red roots, and wreaths of thorns, these poems are a powerful achievement that teens and adults will want to discuss together. Gillian Engberg Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to the Library Binding edition.

Great addition to my classroom library. Moving poems all surrounding and inspired by the tragic death of Emmett Till.

I cannot recall if back in 1968 my eighth-grade American history teacher Mrs. Auryansen taught us about the death of Emmett Till. But one of the things I loved most about that year of studying with an enthusiastic teacher who often made American history come alive for me was the series of quarterly independent projects we had to plan and complete. Each marking period we would have to do an American history-related visual piece as well as a written piece and an oral piece."BY the flow of the inland river,Whence the fleets of iron have fled,Where the blades of the grave-grass quiver,Asleep are the ranks of the dead:Under the sod and the dew,Waiting the judgment-day;Under the one, the

Blue, Under the other, the Gray. "Whence the fleets of iron have fled, Where the blades of the grave-grass quiver, Asleep are the ranks of the dead: Under the sod and the dew, Waiting the judgment-day; Under the one, the Blue, Under the other, the Gray." That's the first of the seven verses of "The Blue and The Gray" by Francis Miles Finch (1827-1907). I memorized and proudly recited those seven verses to my American history class, and that memory has stuck with me. Having just celebrated my personal half-century mark, I'm all for turning around and returning to eighth-grade. And if I could do so, this is what I would memorize this time around for one of my oral pieces: "Pierced by the screams of a shortened childhood, my heartwood has been scarred for fifty years by what I heard, with hundreds of green ears. That jackal laughter. Two hundred years I stood listening to small struggles to find food, to the songs of creature life, which disappears and comes again, to the music of the spheres. Two hundred years of deaths I understood. Then slaughter axed one quiet summer night, shivering the deep silence of the stars. A running boy, five men in close pursuit. One dark, five pale faces in the moonlight. Noise, silence, back-slaps. One match, five cigars. Emmett Till's name still catches in the throat." That is one of the fifteen sonnets that comprises *A WREATH FOR EMMETT TILL* by Marilyn Nelson. After reading the book to myself and then reading it aloud to Shari, my thoughts kept wandering off yesterday to brainstorming how I might somehow set up an event down in the City on Sunday, August 28th--fifty years to the day since Emmett was kidnapped--in which someone who would both have known the Civil Rights movement and whose presence could attract a major audience (a Danny Glover or a Bill Russell or someone else of that stature) would read this powerful series of poems aloud to a crowd to commemorate the anniversary of the brutal death of Emmett Till, a death which horrified the world and made clear what had gone on for so long. I can imagine having a choir and soloist perform at such an event, but definitely not a bunch of droning speakers whose verbosity might take away from the carefully chosen words of Marilyn Nelson's heroic crown of sonnets about Emmett Till. As Marilyn explains in her preface (*HOW I CAME TO WRITE THIS POEM*): "A crown of sonnets is a sequence of interlinked sonnets in which the last line of one becomes the first line, sometimes slightly altered, of the next. A heroic crown of sonnets is a sequence of fifteen interlocking sonnets, in which the last one is made up of the first lines of the preceeding fourteen." Thus, it's like a literary crossword puzzle. Get one word wrong and it simply doesn't fit together. Get all the words exactly right and you've got something worthy of public performances by famous personalities and recitations by today's and tomorrow's American history students. Marilyn Nelson got it right.

This bracing work of art, complete with illustrations depicting just enough of the story to know that it

was true, will haunt me always. Written in iambic pentameter, a form familiar to students of Shakespeare, with allusions to crimes both historical and current, it teaches without preaching, making it an excellent resource and starting point for a discussion on civil rights.

The poem is beautiful and profound, and the artwork goes along with its own story to tell. The book is an excellent addition to any collection of literature that covers America's past with racial segregation. The book may be categorized as "Children's" or "young adult" literature, but adults (like me) will find it very impressive and informative (especially since the author and artist included notes in the back of the book).

great teaching tool. This arrived in a good condition. It uses a strange form of poetry, symbolism, sonnets?, and it teaches history. What more could you want in such a cheap little package?

I loved the poem but I do not like the kindle for a poem. All the lining up the poem had was lost in the Kindle, and I had to struggle to figure out how it should look on a page. They offered a page here and there that showed the way the poem should look but it was so small I could not read it.

Nelson's ambition here - to write about lynching for children - is staggering. Her craftsmanship allows her to pull it off. I used this text in a college classroom poetry unit - use your judgement about what educational level it is appropriate for.

Though a very tragic and heart wrenching story about Emmett's short-lived life; A Wreath For Emmett Till is beautifully written.

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