

Teaching History with Poetry and Teaching Poetry with History

Using novels and other books in verse in the classroom is a good way to engage young readers, even reluctant ones. Shorter text passages are less intimidating and can draw the reader in more quickly, while the intimacy of each poem connects students more closely to the subject at hand.

Below is a selection of titles that can be used to teach history along with poetic forms and structures. Each of these books in verse touches on a moment in history using the lyrical power of language to render bravery, tragedy, and triumph with a human face.

U.S. History



Lady Liberty: A Biography

by Doreen Rappaport

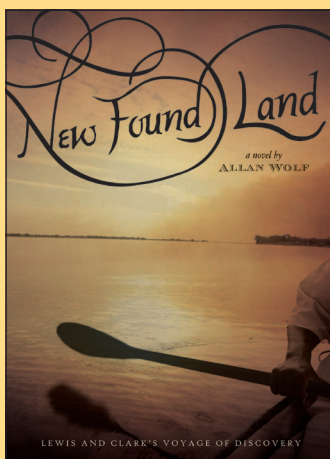
illustrated by Matt Tavares

This powerfully moving, authentic portrait of the Statue of Liberty is told through the eyes of those who created her and illustrated in glorious detail.

HC: 978-0-7636-7114-3

PB: 978-0-7636-7115-0 (ages 8–12)

Teachers' guide available online



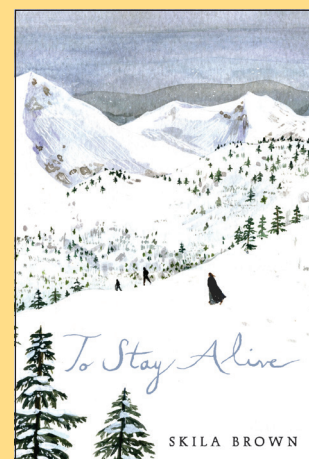
New Found Land

Lewis and Clark's Voyage of Discovery

by Allan Wolf

In powerful, lyrical language, here is the journey of Lewis and Clark told by the two explorers and their diverse crew in a narrative that resonates long after the book is closed.

PB: 978-0-7636-3288-5 (age 10 and up)



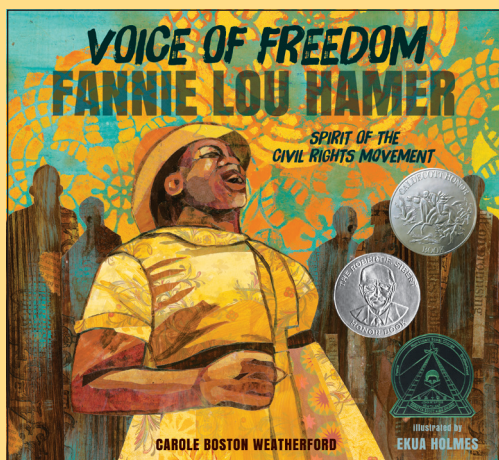
To Stay Alive

Mary Ann Graves and the Tragic Journey of the Donner Party

by Skila Brown

Told in riveting, keenly observed poetry, this moving first-person narrative describes the experience of a young survivor of the tragic Donner Party of 1846.

HC: 978-0-7636-7811-1 (ages 10–14)



Voice of Freedom

Fannie Lou Hamer,

Spirit of the Civil Rights Movement

by Carole Boston Weatherford

illustrated by Ekua Holmes

A 2016 Caldecott Honor Book

A 2016 Robert F. Sibert Honor Book

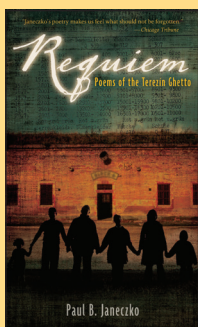
A 2016 John Steptoe New Talent
Illustrator Award Winner

Stirring poems and stunning collage illustrations combine to celebrate the life of Fannie Lou Hamer, a champion of equal voting rights.

HC: 978-0-7636-6531-9 (age 10 and up)

Teachers' guide available online

The Holocaust



Requiem

Poems of the Terezin Ghetto

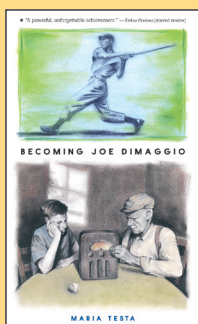
by Paul B. Janeczko

This stirring collection of poems goes inside the walls of the notorious camp to portray the indomitable spirit of those incarcerated there.

HC: 978-0-7636-4727-8

PB: 978-0-7636-6465-7 (age 12 and up)

Immigration



Becoming Joe DiMaggio

by Maria Testa, illustrated by Scott Hunt

This novel in verse honors the timeless bond between a grandson and his immigrant grandfather — and the process of finding one's own place in a brave new world.

PB: 978-0-7636-2444-6 (age 10 and up)

Discussion guide available online



Something About America

by Maria Testa

A thirteen-year-old from Kosova thinks of herself as a typical American schoolgirl. But for her parents, moving to Maine is just a sad necessity, a way to escape from war and find medical care for a daughter scarred by conflict.

PB: 978-0-7636-3415-5 (age 12 and up)

Discussion guide available online

Civil War



Caminar

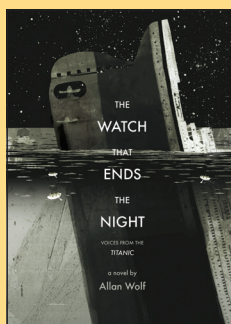
by Skila Brown

Set in 1981 in Guatemala, this lyrical novel tells the powerful tale of a boy who must decide what it means to be a man during a time of war.

HC: 978-0-7636-6516-6

PB: 978-0-7636-9094-6 (ages 10–14)

Tragedy



The Watch That Ends the Night

Voices from the Titanic by Allan Wolf

Twenty-four haunting voices of the *Titanic* tragedy, as well as the iceberg itself, are evoked in this verse novel. Slipping in telegraphs, undertakers' reports, and other records, poet Allan Wolf offers a breathtaking, intimate glimpse at the lives behind the tragedy.

PB: 978-0-7636-6331-5 (age 14 and up)

Teachers' guide available online

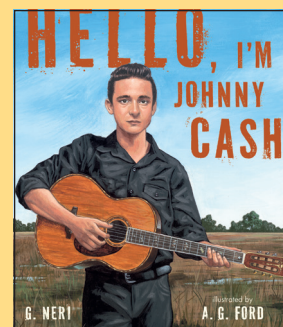


Worlds Afire by Paul B. Janeczko

One summer afternoon in 1944, circus goes crowded under the big top in Hartford, waiting for the show to begin. Minutes later, a fire broke out. This spare, startling book in verse leaves an emotional impact that readers will not soon forget.

PB: 978-0-7636-3400-1 (age 12 and up)

Cultural Icons

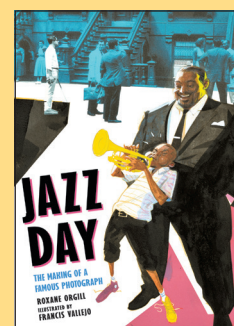


Hello, I'm Johnny Cash

by G. Neri, illustrated by A. G. Ford

This picture book gives a stirring look at the early life of Johnny Cash, from his harsh but music-filled childhood to the first flush of stardom.

HC: 978-0-7636-6245-5 (ages 9–12)



Jazz Day

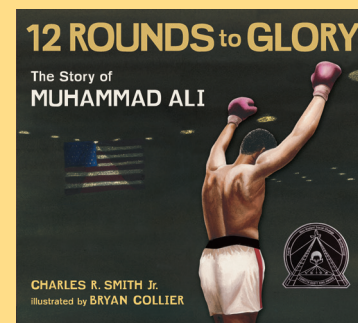
The Making of a Famous Photograph

by Roxane Orgill

illustrated by Francis Vallejo

Playful verse and glorious artwork capture an iconic moment in American jazz.

HC: 978-0-7636-6954-6 (ages 8–12)



Twelve Rounds to Glory

The Story of Muhammad Ali

by Charles R. Smith Jr.

illustrated by Bryan Collier

A dynamic author-illustrator team follows the three-time heavyweight champ through twelve rounds of a remarkable life.

HC: 978-0-7636-1692-2

PB: 978-0-7636-5002-5 (age 10 and up)



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