



Book of Americans

Rosemary Benét , Stephen Vincent Benét

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Sixty rhymes about personalities in American history, some witty, some humorous , some robust, all dramatising events ad drawing on the nation's past for background. This is true history taken lightly. The subjects range from Cotton Mather to Captain Kidd, and the locale from New England and the clipper ships to the trail of Western wagons.

Book of Americans Details

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Author : Rosemary Benét , Stephen Vincent Benét

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From Reader Review Book of Americans for online ebook

Pam says

Loved it. Short and fun.

Melissa Mcavoy says

A very useful book with 50 plus poems about individual famous Americans. (A couple explores of America are thrown in.) Written in 1933, a few of the poems are dated, but not as many as one might expect, and always in an way that would be interesting to discuss. Looking through the book is a history lesson, delivered in a painless, and often amusing way:

David Glasgow Farragut 1801-1870

"Damn the torpedoes!"
Bold Farragut said,
"Damn the torpedoes!"
Full speed ahead!"

And, lashed to his rigging
With never a squeal,
He led his fleet into
The Bay of Mobile.

The Southern forts thundered
With vigor and vim
But grapeshot and canister
Never touched him.

The waters were mined
With death-dealing load,
But Farragut simply
refused to explode.

And fought till the Southerners
Gave up the fray.
(He'd captured New Orleans
In much the same way.)

So remember if ever
You face such a plight,
There's a pretty good chance,
"Straight ahead!" will be right.

And while "damn," as you know,

Is a word to eschew-
He knew when to say it-
So few people do.

Alyse says

This is a good book for students to learn more about the history of America.

Stephy says

More Poetry! Word Biographies not in prose form. Fun, accurate, Steven Vincent Benet and his wife Rosemary, both noted writers and contributors to "The New Yorker" in it's prime, have collaborated to produce these nifty verses about such "Americans" as Christopher Columbus and Hernando de Soto to Clara Barton and Woodie Wilson. A delight at any time!

Mckinley says

Awesome.

Melissa says

Fun rhymes, though not entirely historically accurate, I'm sure. The illustrations are eye-catching and caricaturist.

Melvin Marsh, M.S. says

This is a wonderful little book of poetry for kids. Each poem is a minibiography about an important figure in American history. Although many books around the time of publication (my edition was published in the 1960s) do not feature much in the way of important women in US history, this book features several poems about famous women.

Krista the Krazy Kataloguer says

Poems about famous Americans.

Katie Fitzgerald says

From Columbus to Woodrow Wilson, this lighthearted poetry collection introduces dozens of personalities and groups of people who contributed, for better or for worse, to the history of the United States.

Accompanied by caricatured illustrations of each figure, the poems give little glimpses into the lives, quirks, mistakes, and triumphs of presidents, pioneers, scientists and statesmen.

A Book of Americans was published in 1933, but there is very little about it that makes it feel outdated. Each poem is surprisingly contemporary-sounding, with lots of jokes about the foibles of these historical figures and subtle admonishments about the treatment of Native Americans and slaves. Even the poems which represent a larger group, such as Indians or French Pioneers, or Puritans, give a personality to these segments of the population and have some clever or poignant insight about their role in the development of our country.

What I liked most, though, is the very even-handed way the authors seem to view American History. There is no shying away from negativity - James Buchanan is all but torn apart, for example - but neither is there any romanticized urging for the next generation to correct all the wrongs that have gone before them. The authors seem to accept historical happenings matter-of-factly, and their poems simply convey the facts of these events in an engaging style and format. The final poem of the collection, "U.S.A." also indicates the poets' reasonable understanding of their own place in history. "All our novelties and platitudes," the end of the first stanza proclaims, "Will be Rather Ancient History in 2033."

Later, the final stanza of the poem goes on to say:

So instead of prophesying
(Which is fun, but rather trying)
Who they'll pick to be our great ones when the books are on the shelves,
Here's the marching panorama
Of our past and present drama
-And we shan't know all the answers till we're history, ourselves.

Thinking about our current political climate, in which so many are concerned with being on "the right side of history" this struck me as a particularly clear-headed and rational way of considering our own place in the timeline of significant events. I like that the book doesn't emphasize the here and now as superior in any way to days gone by. It's all a part of the history of the same country, and it's all worth knowing, even if we don't fully understand our role until we're gone. I prefer this outlook to the alarmist "we must stop reading about old white men!" messages much of the children's literature community seems to have adopted.

When we study American history in our homeschool, I look forward to supplementing our lessons with some of these poems. They are a great way to introduce the different characters who will appear in our history books, and they would make good memorization exercises too. This book also covers some people who might not get much attention in history books at all, such as the first real Americans ("They were only babies. / They didn't care. / Peregrine White / And Virginia Dare.") and Nancy Hanks (whose ghost might ask "Where's my son? / What's happened to Abe? / What's he done?") While not an essential resource by any means, I think A Book of Americans will be a welcome addition to our curriculum and a fun way to bring history to life.

This review also appears on my blog, Read-at-Home Mom.

Ann says

Poems that make historical Americans real.

Susanna - Censored by GoodReads says

I memorized many a poem from this one, growing up.
