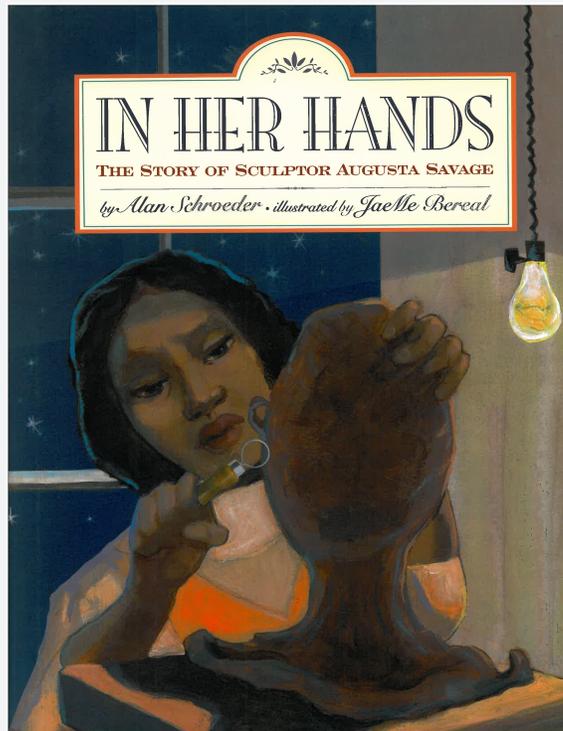


## First Opinion: A Breath of Fresh Air

Schroeder, Alan. *In Her Hands: The Story of Sculptor Augusta Savage*. New York: Lee & Low Books, 2009.

Shaylyn Barrie



Alan Schroeder does a wonderful job telling the story of Harlem Renaissance sculptor Augusta Savage in his book *In Her Hands: The Story of Sculptor Augusta Savage*. Reading this book is like a breath of fresh air. Within the book, Schroeder accomplishes the difficult task of writing historical fiction for the target age group without compromising the content of the text. One of the best qualities of the book is the way in which the author chooses to tell Savage's story; rather than discuss the accomplishments of her adult life with adult characters, Schroeder highlights and reveals Savage's accomplishments by focusing on her childhood and path to success. In doing this, readers of varying ages can easily relate to the story due to the common experience of childhood. The juxtaposition of her childhood and path to adult success work together in a way that highlights and

brings her accomplishments to life. The story itself is a great tale of perseverance and has the potential to inspire and empower young readers.

Although the content of the text is very informative and written for a young audience, Schroeder also includes an afterword with additional information about Augusta that readers of all ages would enjoy and appreciate. While reading the book, it becomes very obvious that that the author did a considerable amount of research on Augusta Savage prior to writing the text. The overall knowledge base that Schroeder has about the book is obvious and works to enhance the overall story.

Although I thoroughly enjoyed the book, the one component that I might critique is the lack of information about the Harlem Renaissance. Generally speaking, I appreciated that Schroeder was able to stay focused on the main character for the duration for the story, but when reading a book about a Harlem Renaissance artist, I expect some information or inclusion of Harlem Renaissance influence. More of a glimpse of what or who inspired her as a young adult to continue to follow her dream of becoming a sculptor would have supplemented the text

The illustrations by JaeMe Bereal are just as wonderfully done as the story itself. Rich and vibrant, the illustrations really work with the text seamlessly. Although the illustrations are lively and energetic, they assist in the storytelling in a way that does not overpower the text. Not only does the story encourage a reading of the written text, but the warm earth-tone colors within the pictures invite readers to read them to emphasize points within the story. For really young readers, the illustrations can assist them in decoding meaning from the text. The liveliness of the illustrations alone could captivate a younger audience and give much of the same information that the text provides. Overall, there is a nice relationship between the text and the illustrations; they really complement one another and work to enhance the reading experience.

In thinking about the book overall, I would definitely recommend *In Her Hands* for a number of different occasions and settings. As a middle school teacher, I can see interesting uses for this book within the classroom. This is a great book to study the written language, the art of storytelling, artwork, the ways in which it can enhance a story, and the list goes on and on. I can easily see teachers from a variety of grade levels and backgrounds being able to incorporate this into their lessons as a way of enhancing content within the classroom curriculum. Although I can easily envision this book being used within classrooms, *In Her Hands* also makes for a great bedtime story and topic of conversation with children.

### **About the Author**

**Shaylyn Barrie** currently teaches seventh grade language arts at Westfield Middle School. She is working on her doctorate degree within the Curriculum and Instruction Department at Purdue University, specializing in English Education.