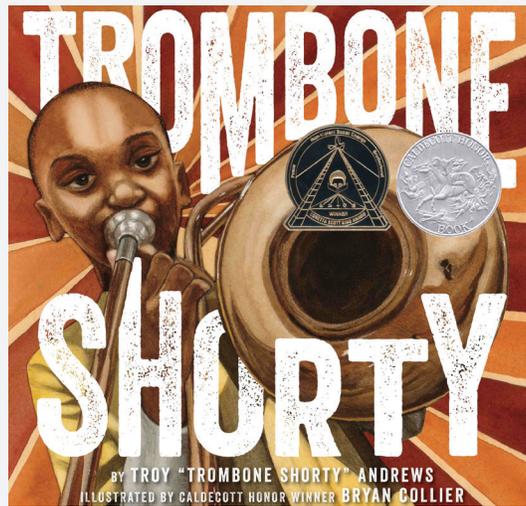


## First Opinion: Call-and-Response in Troy Andrews's and Bryan Collier's *Trombone Shorty*

Andrews, Troy. *Trombone Shorty*. Illustrated by Bryan Collier,  
Abrams Books for Young Readers, 2015.

Cara Byrne



"Where Y'At? Where Y'At?" With the jubilant sound of the trombone's telescoping slide, Troy "Trombone Shorty" Andrews begins his lively autobiographical picture book, *Trombone Shorty*, with the question "Where Y'At?" This staccato phrase calls out to readers and introduces them to a way that New Orleans locals "tell a friend hello" (unpaged). Andrews' warmth shines through in this picture book as he tells readers about how his passion for jazz music and his role models helped him become one of the most renowned contemporary trombone players. By starting the book with this call-and-response phrase, signaling a staple practice of musicians playing in reaction and response to one another, Andrews invites readers to listen closely and interact with his story. Call-and-response is present both in the rhythmic narrative and in Bryan Collier's 2016 Caldecott Award-winning multimedia illustrations. Collier's illustrations of Andrews and his Tremé neighborhood echo a long history of African American picture books commemorating the lives of great celebrities. Here, Collier's art also responds to the genre by shining a light on Andrews's community. From Bo Diddley, who pulled young Andrews on stage to play with him, to Andrews's brother James, who gave him his nickname, Collier shows how, as Andrews claims, "the city of New Orleans raised [him]" (unpaged). When exploring Collier's unique collage style in this soulful autobiography, one can see that Collier makes significant

contributions to the contemporary picture book genre through imaginatively rendering Andrews's community-building personal narrative.

Collier's illustrations, which feature layered cut-out bits of photographs and acrylic paintings on textured backgrounds, are full of movement and are visually intricate. By further adding complexity to each page with pen, ink, watercolor, and collage, Collier depicts Andrews's neighborhood of Tremé, the stage on which he performs at the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival, and Andrews's international travels. Careful study of each page will illuminate visual symbols of balloons and patterns suggestive of vintage wallpaper in the homes and on people in Tremé. When Collier shows Andrews enjoying a Mardi Gras parade, he layers a photograph of a man playing a drum beneath angled paintings of other musicians playing trumpets and saxophones. He fits hundreds of faces on several pages of this book, showing the community as participants in Andrews's exciting music. Other contemporary illustrators, including R. Gregory Christie and Christopher Myers, similarly use collage or layered paintings in order to produce vivid and active portraits of African American communities. Collier's artwork, however, depicts his protagonists interacting with others as well as in deep thought, prayer, or even dream-laden sleep, adding a sense of calm reflection and contemplation of one's life and community to an otherwise bold text. Through his color pallet of deep blues, goldenrod yellows, and bold bronzes, Collier's artwork of Troy and his family simultaneously maintains a sense of intimacy and serenity in the cacophony of Andrews's jazz scene.

*Trombone Shorty* marks Collier's first collaboration with Andrews, but this first collaborative effort garnered Collier his fourth Caldecott Honor for similar picture book biographies of great African Americans, including *Martin's Big Words* (2001), *Rosa* (2005), and *Dave the Potter: Artist, Poet, Slave* (2010). These picture books focus on the achievements of great, deceased African Americans—from notable civil rights leaders (Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks) to a gifted enslaved artist (David Drake). *Trombone Shorty*, like *Martin's Big Words*, begins with a story of childhood and humble beginnings, slowly showing the reader how, through hard work and determination, Andrews achieves his goals. As one of several picture books featuring protagonists of color illustrated by artists of color that won a Caldecott Honor in 2016, *Trombone Shorty* helps make this group of honorees one of the most racially diverse classes in the Caldecott award's long history. This picture book also breaks the mold in representing the story of a great contemporary African American. Instead of focusing on the life of someone tied directly to civil rights or slavery who is deceased, like fellow 2016 Caldecott honoree Ekua Holmes's beautiful celebration of civil rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer in *Voice of Freedom*, Collier spotlights a living artist who is currently helping underserved youth gain music and business education through his nonprofit, the Trombone Shorty Foundation. In showing how Andrews's resilient spirit and love for his community helped him find success, Collier and Andrews highlight the efforts of a current movement to improve the opportunities for those in New Orleans. While telling the history and the stories of both forgotten and well-known

African American heroes in children's literature is important, commending the hard work and community ties of contemporary African American artists can be just as powerful.

In celebrating Andrews's great achievements as a jazz musician while also demonstrating the key role that the communal support of family, friends, and fellow musicians plays in his life, *Trombone Shorty* highlights both the strength of resourceful, artistic New Orleans people and the poignant, resonant music the city creates and enjoys. Collier's artwork is a wonderful compliment to Andrews's text, which honors his legacy and gives a current impact to community ties with reverence. While the illustrations also call upon a history of Caldecott-winning picture books that celebrate the lives of great African American men and women, these new pictures both respond to the past and reflect on new stories to be told as Collier and Andrews interweave Andrews's fame within his community, showing its love and support for him. *Trombone Shorty* not only presents a significant story of overcoming hardship and of determination, but it is also joyful, visually interesting, and a distinct contribution to contemporary African American picture books and biographies for young readers alike.

### Works Cited

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### About the Author

**Cara Byrne** is a lecturer in English at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio, where she teaches general education courses in children's literature, American literature, and visual culture. Prior to earning her PhD and MA in English, she earned a BA in English and a BS in secondary education at Bowling Green State University and worked at an educational nonprofit in Akron, Ohio. Her current research interests include the history of African American picture books and Ezra Jack Keats's legacy. She has published articles in *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* and *ImageText*, and in edited collections, including *Looking for the Enemy: The External Internal Gender Wars of Our Sisters*.