I loved Donna Janell Bowman’s, Abraham Lincoln’s Dueling Words, for multiple reasons. One reason is that it affords us the opportunity to teach students real-life lessons. By presenting to students how powerful words can be, I believe teachers are able to not only create a deeper love of word learning, but also instill empathy in students of all ages. The illustrations are captivating as well and serve to engage students. Additionally, providing a more personal background into Abraham Lincoln’s life is fascinating. This story is most likely one in which many people are unfamiliar. Even in sharing this story with colleagues, a few were shocked as they read.

Are there any reasons I do/do not want to share the book with my students? None at all!

The students and I began with a picture walk. We talked through various images, then moved into a discussion revolving around new words to learn. Most of the students I was working with had prior knowledge of Abraham Lincoln, so they were excited to read this text from the beginning. I read
the text to students in a single sitting as a read-aloud. I stopped every two to three pages and allowed students to ask questions, share insights or talk to a peer. The further we got into the story, the longer the conversations seemed to be. Students were enjoying making predictions and connections, as well as storytelling of their own.

I thought everything flowed very nicely. While there were some Tier II vocabulary words present in the text, I used them as an opportunity to teach students these new words. Students were engaged throughout the entire reading, which is no small feat. This text is a perfect choice right now as we near a presidential election.

My students thoroughly enjoyed not only the story, but also the illustrations. I had a few students make and share personal connections to when they had experienced someone saying hurtful things about or to them. Many were thankful they did not have to duel! A few students talked about other past presidents and asked whether they had similar stories. This could launch a fun follow-up research activity.

I would love to ask students to explore other presidents to see if they can find interesting, uncommon stories about them. There were so many wonderful conversational pieces from this text, I would love to continue that engaged learning and build from it.

About the Author

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