



The Price of Freedom: How One Town Stood Up to Slavery

Dennis Brindell Fradin , Judith Bloom Fradin , Eric Velásquez (Illustrations)

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When John Price took a chance at freedom by crossing the frozen Ohio river from Kentucky into Ohio one January night in 1856, the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 was fully enforced in every state of the union. But the townspeople of Oberlin, Ohio, believed there that all people deserved to be free, so Price started a new life in town-until a crew of slave-catchers arrived and apprehended him. When the residents of Oberlin heard of his capture, many of them banded together to demand his release in a dramatic showdown that risked their own freedom. Paired for the first time, highly acclaimed authors Dennis and Judith Fradin and Pura Belpre award-winning illustrator Eric Velasquez, provide readers with an inspiring tale of how one man's journey to freedom helped spark an abolitionist movement.

The Price of Freedom: How One Town Stood Up to Slavery Details

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Author : Dennis Brindell Fradin , Judith Bloom Fradin , Eric Velásquez (Illustrations)

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From Reader Review The Price of Freedom: How One Town Stood Up to Slavery for online ebook

Joan says

I predict this will win some awards this coming year when the ALA awards are announced. I think it is a shame he never got much recognition for his writing. After a quick check I find that he has won several awards but never anything from ALA. I wonder if this isn't some snobbery at ALA? He got his start writing series nonfiction on the fifty states for Children Press. So he wrote to a format. I certainly consider the Children's Press state and country series the standard to try to beat. They are still the best books on the market for this category. Nonetheless, he and his wife wrote many non series books, including this one. I have had doubts about several standard series writers but several of them have gone on to write the books they wanted to write and become successful. I suspect the series nonfiction and fiction is a valuable training experience for aspiring writers. Applegate (One and only Ivan) is an example of this.

This simply written book is very moving as well as exciting. Who would believe that a large part of any town or village would be willing to break the law of the land for someone they hadn't met, or didn't know well? The town of Oberlin did this. When an escaped slave who found refuge in Oberlin was captured, large numbers of people turned out to retrieve him, by force if necessary. The illustrations are well done and present a great contrast to the final striking black and white photograph of the "Rescuers" after their jail sentence of 3 months for breaking the law of the land. The Fradins wisely only tell the story of what happened. They tell that the rescued man spent one night at a well known Underground Railroad operator but then was moved to an Oberlin College professor's house. He stayed there for a short period then vanished. The Fradins also comment that nothing is known of his two companions in the original escape. By not trying to give this a happy ever after ending, they pointed out in a safe way how little is often known of historical events or of what will happen in the reader's own life.

One final comment: On the cover of the book, Judith Fradin got first billing. The CIP has her listed as the main author as well. Goodreads seems to have decided to list the book under the better known writer of the pair. I am sure that Dennis Fradin wanted his wife to receive recognition for her work on this book. It sounds as though they partnered on many of the books together. I hope Goodreads sees fit to put this book as being by Judith Bloom Fradin instead of Dennis. Fradin died last year after a battle with bone cancer.

Tasha says

In 1856, John Price and two other slaves escaped to Ohio and freedom. But the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 was in effect and even free states were required to allow slave owners to capture escaped slaves anywhere in the United States. John and his friend Frank spent the winter in Oberlin, Ohio, a hub of Underground Railroad activity. They decided to stay and not travel to the safety of Canada. So when a group of slave catchers came to Oberlin specifically hunting for John and Frank, the residents of the city had no legal grounds to help the two men. When John was captured though, the city rose up against the slave catchers, forcing a showdown that would be one of the defining moments in fueling the Civil War.

Filled with informational facts, this book reads more like a fictional story thanks to its inherent drama. It begins with John Price's escape across the ice on stolen horses, continues through the Underground Railroad but the most amazing part is the final showdown, where your heart almost stops with the bravery and daring the Rescuers demonstrate. Fradin offers just the right mix of information and heroism.

Velasquez's illustrations add to the dramatic feel of the narrative with their deep rich colors, drawn guns and historical details. There are so many gorgeous night images filled with danger but also with hope.

This is a nonfiction picture book that is sure to inform children about an aspect of slavery that they will not have heard of as well as a tale of what a group of brave citizens can do. Appropriate for ages 7-9.

Jim Erekson says

The focus on a specific historical incident is something I usually like. And John Price's rescue is a dramatic and gripping story. Maybe I'm in a bad mood this week, but I found it annoying that so little was done to make the visual experience of this story complementary to the text. While the pictures could probably stand on their own as a storyboard of this narrative, they mirror the words almost exactly. Velasquez moves back and forth between a somewhat impressionistic style and a photorealistic one, which felt inconsistent across the book. The actual moment of the rescue felt a little bit confusing--mostly I was wondering where Jennings and his guards went. Neither the pictures nor the words explain this.

Overall, the past two weeks it has been difficult to find a book where it feels like the illustrator and author(s) spent time together to create a unified work of art. In general, I would fault editors for this, because it seems they are the ones who have to determine the nature and agreement on what a project is, and broker the relationship between the author and illustrator. Since the 1980s the glut in the picturebook market has ensured that a lot of medium quality books get out there, and it makes me wonder whether editors don't really know or talk about what makes a quality picturebook.

Gerry says

The Price of Freedom is an inspiring story; but I'm sorry to say that the writing is not at all inspired. The artwork was beautiful and moody, and I appreciate that the text tells about an obscure but important part of our American history. However, while the Price of Freedom attempts to serve up many features that educators will seek out in support of common core standards (narrative nonfiction, different perspectives, cause & effect, primary sources, author's notes, subject matter that will foster thoughtful discussion), it falls short and reads more like a preliminary draft. Different perspectives aren't developed sufficiently. In the middle of the story, the "narrative" is a series of one-sentence statements giving the names of people who came to Price's rescue. I would have preferred fewer names and more details. If the story is about a whole town that stood up to bounty hunters, could more research have turned up at least a little more information about a few residents? The rescue scene itself seemed hard to follow as the author jumped back and forth between the rescuers, Price, and his captors. I was glad for the lone photograph, but it almost seemed out of place without any other photographs.

I would have given this work just two stars, but I don't want to discourage anyone from reading it for the sake of the story and the discussion it will promote. We want students to think about what they're reading, and this is where The Price of Freedom meets the grade. Without any prompting, my third-graders were bothered that escaped slaves would settle in a town that was famous for welcoming runaways. Because they understood the Fugitive Slave Act, they felt that bounty hunters would flock to a place that was home to a high percentage of escaped slaves. So, the story has merit. It's just disappointing that the author and/or publisher didn't pursue the opportunity to make this unique story so much more.

Alex (not a dude) Baugh says

In 1856, freedom was just across the river in Ohio for Kentucky slaves Dinah, John and Frank. One frigid cold night, the three took horses from their master's barn and rode across the frozen river. On the other side, they met an elderly Quaker who sheltered the frozen runaways. After two weeks. Dinah went her own way and John and Frank headed north together.

The two men had to keep going, hoping to reach Canada before they were caught because Congress had just passed the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which meant that a slave owner could capture a runaway slave anywhere in the US and made aiding a runaway slave was a federal crime.

Along their route, Frank and John had help from the various Underground Railroad "station" they came to. They had almost reached Canada when they decided to spend the rest of the winter in Oberlin, Ohio. There they took odd jobs and they liked Oberlin so much, they decided to stay longer.

Until 1858, when several slave hunters showed up looking for the two runaways. Frank and John were worth \$500 each to their leader, Kentuckian Anderson Jennings. But the town of Oberlin wasn't going to let this happen without a showdown...

In the end, neither John nor Frank or even Dinah were returned to Kentucky. But 37 townsmen were charged with violating the Fugitive Slave Act and sentenced to three months in prison...three months that only strengthened their resolve to aid runaway slaves in whatever way they could.

The Price of Freedom is a true story and another of those picture books for older readers that bring aspects of American history to life in such an effective way. The text is simple, straightforward and factual but without being patronizing and coupled with realistic illustrations that compliment and extend the text even further. Artist Eric Velasquez has expertly rendered the illustrations using mixed-media and oil paint, in dark hues that reflect the dramatic times depicted in the text.

There is an old photograph of the 37 men who went to prison at the end of the book giving absolute credibility to the story of what happened in the town of Oberlin, Ohio. In the back matter, Fradin and Fradin have also included brief description of the Underground Railroad as well as a Bibliography, suggestions for further reading and websites where curious readers can find more information.

All this makes The Price of Freedom a welcomed addition to any classroom or home-school or for introducing any reluctant young readers to non-fiction through narrative. But whatever the reason, this is a book well worth reading.

This book is recommended for readers age 6+
This book was borrowed from the NYPL

The review was originally posted at Randomly Reading

Jenn says

Judith and Dennis Fradin's short, illustrated book tells the story of a group of Ohio residents who thwart the capture of a runaway slave. Kentucky slaves John Price, his cousin Dinah and their friend Frank followed the underground railroad into Ohio in January of 1856. They intended to go to Canada where their freedom would be guaranteed, but they decided to stay in the welcoming town of Oberlin. In October of that year, several slave hunters arrived in Oberlin to find the men. With the help of one of the few local families in support of the Fugitive Slave Law, they are able to grab John Price and take him to Wellington, Ohio. Believing in a "higher law," hundreds of Oberlinians go to Wellington a free John before the slave hunters are able to force him aboard a train back to Kentucky. This event became known as the Oberlin-Wellington Rescue

With powerful illustrations, the Fradlins show one of the little known, yet important events that would lead to the Civil War. *Price of Freedom* is an excellent classroom novel for studying the Underground Railroad. It can be read aloud in about 10 minutes and would easily fuel discussion and further research.

4 out of 5 stars

Grades 4 and up

Melissa Dwyer says

Originally rated G+ by Annette Sirio

Although picture book format, highly appropriate story for middle school as well. Excellent illustrations convey true story that warrants repeating.

SLJ:

The picture-book format is highly effective in conveying the power of the story. In Velasquez's dramatic mixed-media and oil paintings, determination shows in the stance of the figures and the set of their facial features. The book design is masterful. The front cover highlights John Price, surrounded by some of his champions. The back cover foreshadows a betrayal, with a hand dropping a gold coin into another hand, accompanied by the sentence, "How much is one man's life worth?" On the endpapers, a dark, quiet view of the river sets the stage for the conflict to come. Full-page images and spreads draw readers directly into the action. The final image is an 1859 large-scale photo of the Rescuers taken in the courtyard of the jail. This book could be used as a nonfiction partner to Christopher Paul Curtis's *Elijah of Buxton* (Scholastic, 2007) and as a resource in units about slavery, the Underground Railroad, or the Civil War.

Booklist:

The Oberlin-Wellington rescue—a little-known story from the annals of the American civil rights movement—finds cinematic exposition in this fast-paced, informative outing. Oberlin, Ohio, a sympathetic town resisting the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, became the home of many escaped slaves, including John Price, who arrived on the Underground Railroad from Kentucky, headed towards Canada, and settled down. When Price is kidnapped by a Kentucky slave hunter, the town rises up en masse to rescue him. Twenty men were tried, convicted, and jailed, and the conflict contributed to the unrest that led to the Civil War. The Fradins begin the story with Price's escape and passage, moving quickly to the central event that plays out across a single day, with time stamps marking the episodic scenes. Velasquez storyboards the drama with his detailed paintings, occasionally framed with wooden panels, posing his characters to highlight the action.

Back matter includes a bibliography and sources for further research, and illustrations on the front and back endpapers offer meaningful context.

Morgan Efland says

The Price of Freedom written by Judith Fradin and Dennis Fradin is a historical fiction book about slaves escaping through the Underground Railroad and finding a way to avoid the Fugitive Slave Act. This would be a great book to use in a third or fourth grade classroom as a read aloud when talking about slavery or the Civil War. This book sparks conversation about slavery, the Underground Railroad, the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, the views of the North and South on slavery, and the beginnings of the Civil War. This book also allows students to follow the story of a slave that escaped and how different laws, events, and places impacted his life.

I would also use this book as an opener to talking about the Civil War. At the end of this book it mentioned that Oberlin-Wellington Rescue was one of many events that sparked the beginning of the war between the North and the South.

This was a WOW book for me because I learned about slavery from a different perspective and I got to hear about an event that is not discussed in history classes since it was small compared to the big picture. I also enjoyed the illustrations since they correlated well with the storyline. I would definitely use this book in my future classroom!

Kellee says

Full review at: <http://www.unleashingreaders.com/?p=620>

In 1856, John Price, his cousin, and a friend risked their lives to cross the Ohio River in hopes of finding freedom on the other side. As slaves, leaving Kentucky and making their way into Ohio was the only way to even hope for freedom. However, the real goal was to get to Canada since the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 stated that slaves could still be returned to their owners if caught in a free state. On his way to trying to get to Canada, John was lucky enough to come across the town of Oberlin, Ohio. A town that did not believe in slavery and even embraced runaway slaves as one of their own. But what would happen when slave hunters came to town looking for John? What is the town willing to do to save their own?

I love how this book was put together. The best way to teach nonfiction, in my opinion, is to make it into a narrative that catches readers' attention and makes them want to learn more. The narrative in Price of Freedom was put together very well- a perfect plot arc- yet leaves you wanting more. It starts out with just enough prior knowledge (not too teachy yet makes sure that it teaches enough that the reader will understand) and takes us through what happens to John Price as a story and finally the end is a bit of a cliffhanger that makes you want to research more. My favorite type of nonfiction. And to add to this the watercolor illustrations bring the story to life and are so very well done adding even more depth to the picture book. This book puts the reader straight into a tense situation and invites them to take part of a historical situation that does not appear in history textbooks. While I'd been taught about the Fugitive Slave Act and realized that there were oppositions to the act, but I had never read a narrative like this one.

In the classroom, I think this nonfiction picture book is important to start conversations about the two sides of the civil war. It would also be a great jumping off point to start talking about people who stood up against laws, the Underground Railroad, and the transition into the civil rights movement: Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Harriet Tubman, etc. The authors even gave websites that are perfect to use as an extension.

Why do you think that the people of Oberlin and other Underground Railroad risked their lives to help escaped slaves?

What do you think happened to John Price? Do some research and see if your hypothesis was correct.

"Oberlin student William Lincoln was in his room when some classmates pounded on his door. He was the man to rescue John Price, they told him, offering him a gun. Lincoln hated slavery, but he also hated violence. Unsure what to do, he knelt on the floor with his Bible and asking himself: "if it were your own brother, what would you do?"

His answer? "Rescue him or die!" Lincoln grabbed the gun and raced to Wellington." p. 23

Lexie Hoffmann says

My rationale for selecting The Price of Freedom: How One Town Stood Up to Slavery for my primary twin text is it gives a true account of a slave's journey from escaping the South to the North.

What makes this text particularly unique is the story itself is not just about a slaver, rather it is about the town that assisted him in staying free when the slave captures came to get him. The story is told in a way that illustrates the growing tension between the North and South and how that tension resulted in the Civil War.

The primary text structures for The Price of Freedom: How One Town Stood Up to Slavery are Sequence of Events and Problem and Solution. First, the book gives a sequence of what the slave had to go through to reach the town that assisted him in staying free. The book highlights on multiple historical events during that time such as the underground railroad and the fugitive slave law.

It also presents the "problem" of slavery and how escaped slaves could be forced back into slavery if caught in the United States and a "solution" to the problem came about as the town assisting in helping keep slaves free which ultimately aided in the Civil War. . This is an informational texts with addition information in the back on the underground railroad, where to locate other books on this topic, and educational websites. There is an actual photograph at the end of the story of all the people who helped keep the slave from being taken back to the South.

The strategy application I would use that will engage students in critical thinking by making connections between the texts (The Price of Freedom and All Different Now) is to have students read them All Different Now and discuss what slavery looks like in the book and to ask them what had to happen for this Juneteenth to occur? After I will read them The Price of Freedom, to show them what the tension was like between the North and South and how the Civil War came to be. This will lead nicely into our unit on the Civil War, where students will learn about what it was like for people in the North and South.

Johnson, A., & Lewis, E. B. (2014). All different now: Juneteenth, the first day of freedom. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers.

Jean Coughlin says

Twin Text: Unspoken by Henry Cole, @2012

Rationale: The book *Unspoken* is a wordless book. It is a story of a girl who, going about her chores, notices someone hidden in the family storage shed. Afraid at first, she realizes what is going on. As her family shows silence of knowledge, she too keeps silent, but nightly brings food to the person. Her whole family keeps silent as men looking for the fugitive question them. The last frame shows that the person is gone and has left a corn shuck doll for the little girl. I would use this book to evoke discussion and emotions from my students. We could talk about the perspective of each person – the girl or the hidden slave, or the groups of people – the family, the slave hunters. It is a powerful way to introduce the underground railroad without a lot of words to get into the way. One other comparison between the two books would be the choices children made in each book. In *Unspoken* the girl kept the secret and the slave safe. In *The Price of Freedom* a 13 year old boy was given money to tell where John Price was...and he did it.

Text Structure: *The Price of Freedom* is a descriptive structure giving a historical account of three slaves trying to find their way to freedom. It is told through a narrative story. The text is also a chronological sequence structure because they state dates and time periods of the lives of two of the slaves and one in particular – John Price. At the ladder portion of the book time is even broken down to time of day.

Strategy application: I would use the DL-TA strategy since this is a narrative. The book lends itself to making predictions, stopping in places to discuss and make more predictions.

Book review citation for nonfiction book: (2013, February 1). Booklist.
<http://titlewave.com/search?SID=29fe4...>

Barbara says

After escaping across the Ohio River to freedom with two other former slaves, John Price settles in Oberlin, Ohio. But two years later, in 1858, slave hunters kidnap him and plan to bring him back to Kentucky. His fellow citizens refuse to let that happen, and storm the hotel where he's being held and free him. Although his fate is unknown, what is known is that the United States government charged and imprisoned 37 men who aiding him. This incident, which became known as the Oberlin-Wellington Rescue, fanned the flames of dissension between the North and South. The inclusion of a photograph of some of the rescuers and the sumptuous mixed media and oil paint illustrations gives readers a feeling that they are right there in the midst of the conflict and living through the bravery of these townsfolk who refused to follow a law that they considered immoral. This is an inspiring story about a little-known incident in American history and should add depth to readers' understanding of the reasons behind the Civil War. Clearly, these men had found something for which they were willing to stand firm.

Bonnie says

I had high expectations for this book, especially after receiving several stellar non-fiction picture books from JLG recently. While it does tell the story of the Oberlin-Wellington Rescue, it doesn't really tell a story so much as relay the facts. The text reads as a sequence of events with little detail about the motivation or feelings of the characters and virtually no story arc. For a story that is described on the jacket as "one of the most dramatic slave rescues in American history," there is neither drama nor suspense introduced. The illustrations are expressive with depth, but the text doesn't live up to them.

Dan says

A very small story to read about the heroics of a small town in Ohio who helped 2 runaway slaves (John and Frank). This would be a great story to introduce in a classroom to explain (in detail) key events that happened towards the end of slavery and especially the Fugitive Slave Act and how it impacted the country.

After departing from their 3rd counterpart (Dinah), John and Frank voyaged north from Kentucky to escape slavery and gain their freedom. Just when they thought they were going to be safe, the two of them sat tight in Oberlin, Ohio to pick up jobs for the time being until they continued their voyage north.

With bounties on their head, the town stood behind the 2 and saved them from returning to slavery in Kentucky after being caught by the Runaway Hunters. Unfortunately, more than 30 townspeople would be charged for aiding and abetting a fugitive during this time.

A great way to show students the importance of community and standing up for your beliefs. I would definitely use this in a Middle School classroom to assist with students and working together.

Librariansteph says

I think this an uninteresting book about a very interesting and important story. It starts out telling the story in a way that makes you think the runaway slaves are the focus, but then shifts halfway through to a very dry retelling of the rescue timeline. The many rescuers are not well differentiated. Random facts are included about the rescuers in ways that slow the momentum of the story. It may have been more effective to tell the story from the point of view of one of the rescuers. Perhaps by focusing on one character's experience of the events, the drama could have built to the high stakes that are never quite achieved in this book.
