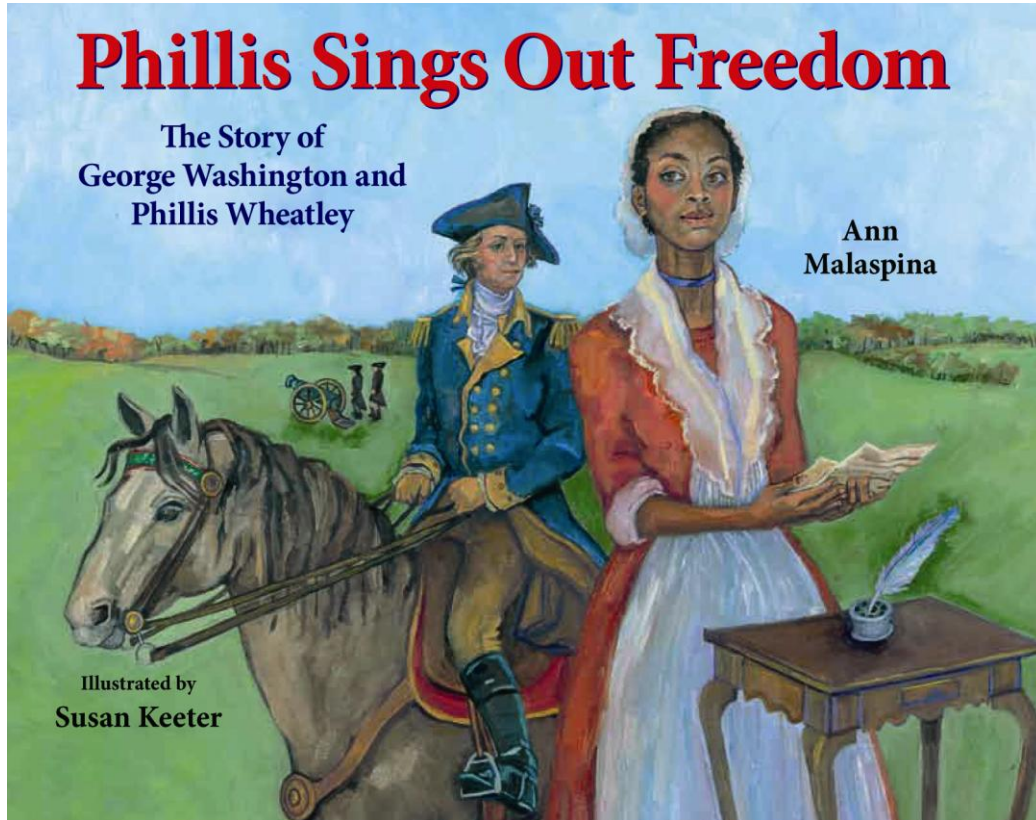


A Teacher's Guide to
Phillis Sings Out Freedom
The Story of George Washington and Phillis Wheatley
Written by Ann Malaspina Illustrated By Susan Keeter



PHILLIS SINGS OUT FREEDOM © 2010 by Ann Malaspina; Art by Susan Keeter
Albert Whitman & Company ISBN 978-0807565452

Praise for Phillis Sings Out Freedom

"Keeter's rich oil paintings are full of period details that help to clarify both the war scenes and Wheatley's life...the story should help young readers to see the bigger picture of both the war and colonial life." ~*Booklist*

"The fact that the colonists were at once fighting for their freedom from England and depriving Africans of theirs is one of the great hypocrisies of American history. The text addresses it, but the emphasis is placed on Washington's and Wheatley's twin triumphs, he in liberating Boston and she in publishing her poems....Keeter's illustrations depict the depth of character of the individuals and the hardships and challenges of their environments." ~*Kirkus Reviews*

Story Summary

From Albert Whitman & Co.:

In the fall of 1775, General George Washington was struggling to find a way to fight the British so that the colonies could be free from England. Phillis Wheatley, an African American poet who herself had struggled to gain freedom, decided to write Washington a poem of encouragement. Ann Malaspina's inspiring story shows the life and times of these two brave people who did so much to lay the foundation of our country.

View the book trailer at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=633AjEIG2A8>



About the Author

Born in Brooklyn, New York, author Ann Malaspina started her career as a newspaper reporter. Working as a journalist taught her to stick to the facts and write a good lede – the opening lines of a story that catch the reader's eye. Ann has written many nonfiction books on topics from jaguars and koalas to the Underground Railroad and Mahatma Gandhi. Her picture books include *Finding Lincoln* (Albert Whitman & Co., 2009) and *Yasmin's Hammer* (Lee & Low, 2010). Ann lives with her family in New Jersey in a house full of books, musical instruments, and piles of new story ideas. Learn more at: www.annmalaspina.com.

About the Illustrator

Susan Keeter is a portrait painter and holds an MFA from Syracuse University. *Phillis Sings Out Freedom* is her twelfth illustrated book. Other books include *Waiting for Benjamin: An Autism Story* (Best Children's Book of the Year from Bank St. College), *Honey Baby*, *Sugar Child* (a 2005 NAACP Image Award nominee), *The Piano* (Society of School Librarians International Best Picture Book Award) and *An Apple for Harriet Tubman*. She is co-author of the book *Three Nineteenth Century Women Doctors*, reviewed by the *Journal of American Medicine*. Keeter lives in Syracuse with her husband, daughters, one dog, and two cats.



Pre-Reading

Background Knowledge

Have students brainstorm a list of what they already know about George Washington. Show the front cover and title of the book. Who might Phillis Wheatley have been? Turn to the pages that show Phillis Wheatley. Without reading the text, what information can students glean from picture clues?

Use a graphic organizer like the one shown below to organize students' answers. As the book is read, students can verify their answers.

What We Know about George Washington	True/Not True	What We Think We Know about Phillis Wheatley	True/Not True

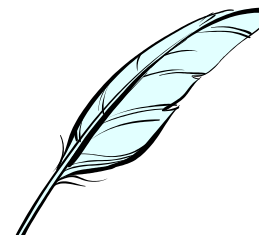
- Ask and answer questions in order to gather additional information or deepen understanding of a topic or issue.
- Use information gained from the illustrations in a print text to demonstrate understanding of its characters.

Vocabulary

Your students may be unfamiliar with the following words. Encourage them to identify and use clues from the text, illustrations, or both to infer meanings.

From the text

revolution	forts	wavered
liberty	tyranny	enslaved
taxes	wharf	auction
trifle	soaring	underwritten
assure	flattered	gales
fleet	hatched	barges
barricades	astonished	British Empire



From the Illustrations

powder bags	powder bags	mansion
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Neither Text Nor Illustrations

casks of rum

From Text and Illustrations

ragged	muskets	quill pen	frail
fond	spectacles	retreated	Continental Army

- Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text.

Discussion Questions

1. How did Phillis get her name? (*knowledge*)
2. Why was George Washington worried that the Continental Army might lose the war? (*comprehension*)
3. How did Phillis encourage George Washington? Tell about a time when someone encouraged you. How did you feel? Think of ways you could encourage a friend who is going through a challenging time. (*application*)
4. Reread the excerpt from the poem Phillis Wheatley wrote for George Washington. What does it mean? (Teacher's note: The goddess to whom Wheatley refers is Columbia. The Americans often referred to the colonies as "Columbia" to distinguish themselves from "Britannia." Wheatley was the first poet to personify the new nation as the goddess Columbia.) (*analysis*)
5. After analyzing Wheatley's words, rewrite the poem using modern language. (*synthesis*)
6. Read the author's note to find out how Phillis's life ended. Was her life tragic or triumphant? Why? (*evaluation*)

Student Activities

Poet's Wall

In the story, we learn that "Phillis loved words—loud words, like 'mighty' and 'thundering,' and bright words, like 'sparkling' and 'radiant.'"

Create a classroom resource for student poets by categorizing descriptive words. Possible word categories include:

Quiet Words

Happy Words

Sad Words

Scared Words

Excited Words

Soft Words

Silly Words

Shy Words

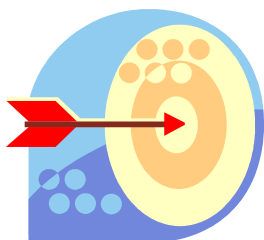
- Identify words and phrases in stories or poems that suggest feelings or appeal to the senses.
- Choose words and phrases for effect.
- Choose words and phrases to convey ideas precisely.

Words of Encouragement

Phillis' poem encouraged George Washington to persevere even when it seemed unlikely that the colonists would win the Revolutionary War.

Have each student write a goal on a strip of paper like the one below:

<p>My goal is to _____</p> <p>To achieve my goal, I will _____</p> <p>Signed: _____</p>



Goals might be in-school challenges (memorizing all basic multiplication facts) or out-of-school challenges (shooting soccer goals for 20 minutes per day) but they should be specific and measurable goals.

Have students place their strips of paper in a “Goal Jar.” Allow each student to draw a strip of paper from the jar and write a poem of encouragement for a classmate.

- *Select a personal goal and explain why setting a goal is important.*

Timeline Titles

Using the author's note at the end, construct a timeline of important events in Wheatley's and Washington's lives. Calculate Wheatley's year of birth and include it in the timeline. Other events may be added after reading some of the books in the “Further Reading” section.



What are some events that Phillis did not live to see? How might she have reacted to those events? If she had written poems about each event, what might the titles have been? Brainstorm titles and add them to the time line above each event. (Note: Phillis' poem about the end of the Revolutionary War is called *Liberty and Peace*. Compare this with the title that students come up with for the end of the war.)

- *Describe characters in a story (e.g., their traits, motivations, or feelings) and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events.*

Taking Sides

Phillis' thoughts on the war "wavered" like a candle flame. She had reasons to support both the British and the colonists. Reread the page that shows Phillis sitting at a desk with her quill pen. Use a graphic organizer like the one below to list her reasons for supporting each side.

Why should Phillis support the British?	Why should Phillis support the Colonists?

Next, give students roles to play. Cut up the cards on the following page and let students choose one each. For a whole class, make extra copies of the loyalist and patriot cards, or let students work in groups.

Phillis Wheatley	George Washington	King George III
Member of Parliament: Helps decide which taxes the colonists should pay.	British publisher who published Phillis' poems	Patriot with no slaves (colonist who wants independence from Britain)
Patriot who owns slaves (colonist who wants independence from Britain)	Loyalist (colonist who supports the British crown)	Phillis' mother in Africa

Let each person take a turn trying to convince Phillis to support his or her side of the war. In the end, the student playing Phillis can announce her decision to support the colonists over the British. Why did she choose this side? What was the deciding factor?

- *Examine the roles and perspectives of African Americans and women during the American Revolution.*
- *Acknowledge differences in the points of view of characters, including by speaking in a different voice for each character when reading dialogue aloud.*
- *Describe how a narrator's or speaker's point of view influences how events are described.*

Epitaph for Phillis

View the site of George Washington's family tomb here:

<http://www.mountvernon.org/visit/plan/index.cfm/pid/535/> Phillis and her infant were buried in an unmarked grave. Compare the two. Why were the burial sites so different?

What might Phillis have wanted her gravestone to say about her life? Have students brainstorm ideas and come up with an epitaph for Phillis to commemorate her life and contributions to American literature.

- *Provide reasons that are supported by facts and details.*
- *Compare and contrast two characters in a story, drawing on specific details in the text.*

Show to Tell

Author Ann Malspina uses words to show, rather than tell, what happened in the story. Help students to draw conclusions from examples of “showing” in the text.

I think _____,	...because _____.
...the Continental Army was not as strong as the British Army...	...the Continental Army soldiers’ coats were tattered, their powder bags were empty, some were too old to be soldiers, and some were too young.
...Phillis was nervous when she spoke in front of the governor and 17 other men...	...her heart was beating hard.

- *Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.*
- *Describe the civic leadership qualities and historical contributions of George Washington.*

Verb Power



On the following page, strong, descriptive verbs from the sentences have been replaced with weak, generic verbs. Have students suggest stronger verbs for each sentence, then find the sentences in the story.

This may be done in a Language Arts center, or individual sentences may be assigned to small groups.

How do the students’ verb choices compare with the author’s? (Note: The sentences on the following page are in the order in which they appear in the text).

In another lesson, have students replace weak verbs with stronger ones in their own writing.

- *Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.*

Directions: Replace the underlined words with stronger, more descriptive verbs. How do your verb choices compare with the author's?

1. Every day, the well-trained soldiers walked down the streets in bright red uniforms and shiny black boots.
2. Then the slave ship took her away across the wide ocean.
3. After Phillis served the tea to visitors, Susanna let her stay and listen—and Phillis heard every word.
4. She put her pen in the black ink and wrote the date, October 26, 1775.
5. Phillis's rhymes made the poem sound nice.
6. The wind went through the soldier's coats, and snow fell on their huts and tents at night.
7. When Christmas arrived, hundreds of George Washington's men left.
8. An officer named Henry Knox had thought of a daring plan.
9. General Washington's men took the cannons up the hills above Boston and pointed them at the city below.
10. Days later, the British army left and sailed north, leaving Boston to the American colonists.
11. And with her poems, Phillis Wheatley wrote about freedom—for herself and a new nation.

Answers: 1. marched 2. snatched 3. drank up 4. dipped 5. sang 6. tore, piled 7. vanished
8. hatched 9. dragged, aimed 10. retreated 11. sang out

Cause and Effect

History is replete with authentic examples of cause and effect. To introduce the idea of cause and effect, show the illustration of the colonial family watching British soldiers march down the street. How does the family feel? How do you know? What is causing them to feel this way?

Make a chart with two columns labeled “Cause” and “Effect.” Show students the card on the following page that reads: *British soldiers march through Boston*. Place the card on the chart under “Cause.” Now show the card that reads: *Some colonists were afraid*. Place that card under “Effect.”

To get students started, give them the cards on the following pages and have them match the causes with the effects on their own chart (see following page).

Note that some cards are repeated when an effect later becomes the cause of something else. The last effect has three causes.

To scaffold the activity for students who need extra support, try the following:

▶ Leave the colored borders intact when cutting out the cards to allow students to easily discriminate the “Cause” cards (with black borders) from the “Effect” cards (with red borders).

For a challenge, you might:

▶ Leave off the borders when cutting out the cards and let students decide which are causes and which are effects.

▶ Give only the cause cards and hand out blank cards for students to record the effects (or vice versa).

▶ Hand out some cause cards, some effect cards, and blank cards. Have students complete the activity.

- Describe characters in a story (e.g., their traits, motivations, or feelings) and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events.
- Describe the overall structure (e.g., cause/effect) of events in a text.
- Explain how specific aspects of a text’s illustrations contribute to a story.
- Analyze the problems of financing the American Revolutionary War.
- Understand how our interpretations of past events inform our understanding of cause and effect.

British soldiers march through Boston.

Some colonists were afraid.

The Continental Army was low on supplies and had no money.

Washington feared he might not win the revolution.

One day, Phillis began writing English letters on the wall.

Mary taught Phillis to read.

Mary taught Phillis to read.

Phillis began writing poetry.

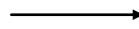
Not everyone thought a slave girl could write poetry.

Phillis had to prove that she had written her poems.

Phillis wanted to help free the colonists.

Phillis wrote a poem of encouragement to General Washington.

Phillis wrote a poem of encouragement to General Washington.



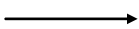
George Washington was flattered and encouraged.

Washington blocked ships bringing supplies to the British.



The redcoats tore down houses and chopped trees for fuel.

Washington's soldiers were tired of being cold and hungry.

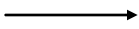


Hundreds of Washington's men went home at Christmas time.

Henry Knox brought cannons to George Washington.



More men arrived to join Washington's troops.



The British left Boston. The Continental Army had won its first victory!

Washington's men made fake cannons and barricades.



An Interview with Author Ann Malaspina



How did you get the idea for PHILLIS SINGS OUT FREEDOM?

My editor, Abby, asked me if I'd like to write a book about George Washington. So many books had already been written about him. I wondered if I could find a new story to tell. While I was writing another book on slavery and the Underground Railroad, I had come across the famous slave poet Phillis Wheatley and the poem she wrote for Washington. I knew that, like many colonial leaders, Washington was a wealthy slave owner. So I started to look into Wheatley's poem—and I read the admiring letter that Washington wrote back to her. They were from such different worlds. Washington was born to a wealthy land-owning family in Virginia—and Wheatley was brought to Boston on a slave ship from Africa. Yet they had two things in common—a desire for freedom and a respect for each other. Now I knew that I had a story to tell!

Once the idea came to you, what happened next?

Since *Phillis Sings Out Freedom* is a true story, I had to do a lot of research before I could begin to write. There was so much for me to learn! I began by researching the lives of Washington and Wheatley. I spoke with historians in Boston about the slave trade and the wealthy family that bought Phillis, as well as experts on Wheatley and her poetry. I also had to learn about the early days of the Revolutionary War, and what it was like for Washington's soldiers that first winter in Cambridge, when they had barely enough food or warm clothes.

What was the most challenging part of writing this book?

The most challenging part of writing this book was balancing the stories of two very different people. My editor was a big help in figuring out how to move back and forth between their stories. The key was to focus on their common goal of freedom. Once I figured that out, I was able to weave their stories together. I tried to capture their characters—and what I discovered was that they were both incredibly brave. Through her poetry, Wheatley overcame her slavery—and Washington overcame huge obstacles to lead the Continental Army to victory.

How is writing non-fiction different from writing fiction?

Surprisingly, I've found that I use the same craft and tools for writing both kinds of stories. For *Phillis Sings Out Freedom*, I had to develop the characters, build suspense, and create an exciting climax, just like I would for a fictional story. The real-life history and people had plenty of built-in drama. I didn't need to make up a plot or create new characters, but I still had to figure out a beginning, middle, and end. I also had to paint the scenes—and find the best words to use in every sentence.

How did the illustrations come about?

My editor asked Susan Keeter to illustrate the book. Susan had done the art for other books for Abby, so she knew Susan was a great artist. I had never met Susan. I was thrilled to work with her, because she was really interested in Phillis Wheatley. We emailed each other several times with ideas as the book developed. It's important for both the writer and illustrator to be passionate about the book's subject—and Susan and I shared a strong feeling that we wanted to tell Wheatley's story.

What's the best piece of writing advice you've ever received?

That's a very hard question! My fourth grade teacher, Mrs. Redkey, told me to write every day. One of my editors told me to always have a good transition between paragraphs. Another editor reminded me to check my facts not once or twice but three times! But I think the best advice came from my Uncle Robert, who was an engineer and a boat-builder. He told me that writers should always know more than they put in the story. For this book, I needed to learn a lot more about George Washington, Phillis Wheatley, the slave trade, and the Revolutionary War, than what's actually in my book. Right now, I'm looking at a tall pile of books about Wheatley. I read all of them before I wrote the story.

What advice do you have for young writers?

I think writers need to be fearless. By that, I mean that they have to write what's in their hearts—and sometimes that takes a lot of courage. Most writers want to get published. So they do have to worry about what other people think. But the best writers find ways to stay true to what they believe. Phillis Wheatley had to be careful what she wrote. Many people didn't think that slaves could write poetry—or that they *should* write anything! Often, Wheatley wrote poems to please other people and win their support. Still, she was able to choose her words—and express her feelings about many things, such as war and freedom. When she criticized slavery, she did so in a way that some readers might think she wasn't criticizing it at all!

Do you have a writing routine?

I try to write every day, usually in the morning. I think that every writer needs a special place to write where they feel comfortable and can think! My writing place is up in my third-floor attic. I have my computer on a desk next to a few bookcases. Above my desk is a skylight, through which I can see the top branches of a giant oak tree, birds flying by, and the sky. The first thing I do in the morning is open the skylight, unless it's raining! Breathing fresh air always helps me start writing.

When you aren't writing, what are some of your favorite things to do?

I recently got my first new bicycle in many years. I'm still figuring out the gears, but I like to take it down to the bike path by a nearby river, where I can ride for several miles. I also like to travel when I can—and visit volcanoes. I've hiked on volcanoes in Costa Rica, Italy, Greece, and other countries. My last trip was to Hawaii, where one of my brothers lives. He took us to Kīlauea, the active volcano on the Big Island, where we got to see the lava flows at night. Since I can't get away very often, I like to discover places nearby that might give me story ideas. Recently I found an Arabic neighborhood in Paterson, NJ, right near my town, which inspired me to write a story about an Islamic girl.

What was your favorite subject in school?

My absolute favorite subject was English, because I always liked to discover new books and authors. In college, I took mostly writing and literature classes—and I loved every minute of them. Looking back, I wish that I had taken more science classes. I've written several books on endangered species and the environment, and I could have used more knowledge of biology and chemistry! My teenage son is taking an anatomy class this year, and every day, I ask him to tell me what he learned.

An Interview with Illustrator Susan Keeter



When did you begin to think of yourself as an artist?

I have liked to draw since I was very young and sold a sculpture of a woman made out a glass Coca Cola bottle when I was 5 years old. I stood out in art class beginning in 6th grade but in high school, I played second fiddle to a guy who could make very detailed drawings of movie stars.

My mother and step-father were artists, so I had a lot of guidance and encouragement, and they supported themselves as artists (teachers, advertising artist, portraitist, restorer) so I didn't have to defend my desire to study art in college! However, it was a long time before I felt I was good enough to be an artist. I'm always aware of how incredibly talented other people are and how fallible I am.

Still, art was the only thing I was really good at growing up. While I still have many hours of doubting my abilities, I am reminded—deep down inside—that there will never be another me, and no one else, in the entire history of the earth, will do my work.

The arts—writing, drawing, etc.—are the best way to connect with yourself, and to create things that are true expressions of you as a person. For me, it is an anchor that helps me understand who I am.

Painting and drawing have also been a path to knowledge for me. For example, I was bored by social studies as a youth, yet love history today. Through looking at old paintings and painting historical scenes, I learned about the people, the clothes they wore, the homes they lived in, and the struggles they had, all of which led me to become more interested in the world they lived in, which leads to an interest in larger events and societal issues, effects of geography, etc.

How did you break into the illustrating profession?

I studied painting and illustration at Syracuse University. I had an aunt who was an illustrators' representative in NYC. She broke into the business by working, initially, as a graphic artist for another illustrators' representative. Her acceptance of me was a huge

advantage because I didn't need to spend all that time making contacts, and she was very much a teacher to me.

It is hard to explain how much an artist needs to learn and adapt to develop the skills of an illustrator. Good drawing and painting skills are the most important, but learning to tell a story through a series of pieces of art is challenging—it's much like creating a mini-movie. You are constantly faced with learning about things so that you can draw them accurately, and beautifully. (In "Phillis," I had to learn about cannons, muskets and military clothing!)

What type of media do you like working with the most, and why?

I like to paint in oils and draw with oil pastel. Oil paint is relatively uncommon for illustration, because it dries slowly and its opacity can be challenging for the printing process—the illustrations sometimes reproduce darker than the originals. On the plus side, oil paint blends beautifully, and it allows me to paint beautiful faces. I love it.

I use oil pastels when I do demonstrations at schools, because it handles much like paint and allows me to quickly show a group how I approach drawing and painting.

How long did it take to illustrate PHILLIS SINGS OUT FREEDOM?

The illustrator is given approximately six months from the time he/she receives the manuscript until the final illustrations are due. But, the actual time for drawing and painting is closer to four months because there are many things that need to be worked out on the publisher's side—the size of the book, revisions to the manuscript, etc., all of which affect the actual illustrations.

Also, research and preliminary sketches are a large part of the job. Once the book size, and pacing of the manuscript have been decided (what words go on what pages), the illustrator does the preliminary pencil sketches and sends them to the publisher for review. Once the preliminary sketches are approved, it's time to paint the final illustrations. This, by far, is the most time-consuming, and I always wish I had more time!

What was the most challenging about this project? The most rewarding?

One stumbling block was figuring out George Washington's looks. Everyone is familiar with his looks, from the dollar bill and scores of paintings. But, we all picture him as a man much older than he was in this story. I found a painting of him at the correct age, but he didn't look like the man we think of as the Father of Our Country.

The primary challenge I had was learning about military equipment and clothing. For example, the soldiers on our (the Colonists' side) did not have matching uniforms. That was news to me.

The most rewarding part of the project was the entire book! I'd just finished reading a book about Phillis Wheatley, for pleasure, when I was offered the job, so it felt like a match made in heaven. I was ecstatic.

Specifically, painting the illustration of Phillis dreaming of her mother and her childhood home was very rewarding. The image of the illustration came to me in the blink of an eye, and I think the painting is beautiful, and evocative. And, the model's real-life mother modeled, so I felt that it was a gift to both of them.

Did you collaborate with the author as you did the illustrations?

I work with the editor and the book designer, both of whom work for the publisher. It is important to remember that the illustrator and author are providing a service to the publisher. The publisher knows the book they want, and it is our job to provide the work they are looking for!

The editor understands the workings of a book very well. For example, she identifies words in the story or images in an illustration that might detract from the story or confuse the reader. She is very important to the creation of a good book, no matter how talented the author. The editor's job is crucial, much like that of a good and trusted teacher.

So, generally, I have no contact with the author. In the case of Phillis, the editor connected me with the author so that she (the author) could direct me to some excellent reference material that helped me with the illustrations.

Are any of the characters or aspects of the setting modeled on real-life people and places?

Since I paint realistically, ALL of the characters in my illustrations are based on real people, frequently people who have modeled for me. For George Washington and Phillis Wheatley, I used artwork of them as reference. (Portrait paintings, drawings and prints, because photography did not exist in their lifetimes.) I hired a teenaged dancer to model for some of Phillis' poses. She looks a bit like Phillis and, as a dancer, carries herself with a grace and confidence that I associate with Phillis Wheatley. (Similar process for George Washington.) The girl who modeled as the young Phillis is my daughter's friend. Both of

my daughters appear as the young colonists shocked at the appearance of the Red coats, and my younger daughter, Emma, also stands in for the very young soldier in the first illustration (although she says, "No more modeling as a boy!")

Pablo Picasso once said, "All children are artists. The problem is how to remain an artist once he grows up." Do you agree?

Certainly, especially now that television and other electronics suck up so much of the time that people used to devote to other pastimes, like writing and drawing. Everybody has talents, and cultivating your talent is key.

Picasso was one of my favorite artists when I was a child. I was jolted by some of his more cerebral and inventive stuff—his bicycle seat and handle bars turned into a goat's head, and the little girl jumping rope that was cast from a basket. I was moved emotionally by many of his paintings. I remember a quiet blue portrait of his daughter, and a crying portrait of one of his wives. I loved looking at reproductions of his paintings and photographs of him and his family (See question 1 for more information).

What advice do you have for young aspiring artists?

Find a place in your home where you can draw, privately. Have a sketchbook and pencil box that no one else touches. Keep all the drawings in your sketchbook and don't worry that some of them aren't as good as others. Seek out your art teacher, language arts teacher and librarian, and other adults who do creative things. Let them know that you like art. Be careful of people who don't understand art. They can be good people, and good influences on you in other ways, but they will not help you develop as an artist! Most of all, make time to draw. Enjoy it. Know that you are unique!

What do you like to do in your spare time?

Besides illustration, I also have a 'day job' that pays most of the bills. So, I don't have a lot of free time. When I do have spare time, I like to make cloth dolls and paint silly things. My daughters and I painted a big cartoon of all of the pets we ever had and installed it on our garage window. I've painted duck decoys, snowflakes, and a life-size horse to raise money to "battle" racism and diseases.

I like to walk my dog, Bella, and spend time with my daughters, Sara and Emma, and my husband, Seth. I visit my Dad, who is old and sick, and see my Mom, who is old and healthy. I'm also very involved in my church.