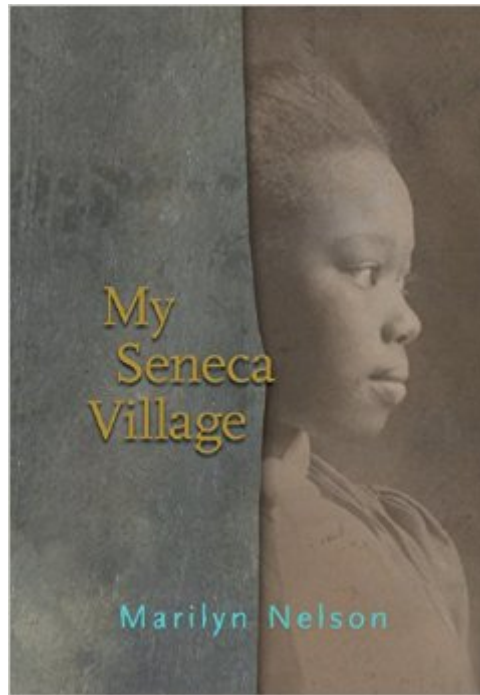


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# My Seneca Village



## Synopsis

Poetry illustrated in the poet's own words - with brief prose descriptions of what she sees inside her work -- this exquisite collection takes readers back in time and deep into the mind's eye of Marilyn Nelson. A girl ponders being free-but-not-free. Orphaned brothers get gold fever. A conjurer sees past his time and into ours. The voices of a multi-ethnic, multi-racial 19th century Manhattan neighborhood are rising again. One of America's most honored writers - a Newbery Honor medalist, Coretta Scott King Medalist and National Book Award nominee - draws upon history, and her astonishing imagination, to revive the long lost community of Seneca Village.

## Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (8 customer reviews)

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## Customer Reviews

Marilyn Nelson has done it again! My Seneca Village brings the community that was leveled to make way for Central Park back to life. I ordered this book so I could design lessons for my school's fifth graders. They are very much enjoying poems such as Land Owner, 15 cent Futures, and Conductor. These persona poems, which are deftly constructed using meter and rhyme, have captured the interest of my students and taught them what life was like for African Americans in the village. All of her poetry books that deal with African American history are superb and, in this age of endless standardized testing, have helped me to make lessons culturally relevant. Mrs. Nelson is such a gem of American Letters and we are so lucky to have her.

Marilyn Nelson, former CT Poet Laureate and winner of the Frost Medal for lifetime achievement in American poetry, has proven once again that she is able to enter another place, another era, and

take us along. Seneca Village was a real place located in New York City in the 1800s. The immigrants who lived there—African American, Irish, German—were forced to move to make way for what is now Central Park. Nelson imagines their lives, dreams, successes, and setbacks. She employs a number of poetic forms in the telling of their stories. The "About the Poems" section in the back of the book is an informative look into her creative process and will interest not only those who write and study poetry, but poetry lovers in general. As for the poems, each reader will have his or her favorites. One of mine was "Counting Blessings" about those who left Ireland during the Potato Famine in search of a new home where they could feed their children. At four lines, it's one of the shortest in the book, but it spoke to my heart as did the story behind it. "The Deaf Boy" is a testimony to music's transformative powers; it gave me chills. And "Make-Believe" rearranged something in my brain, causing me to think about racism in a new way. "Uncle Epiphany" was the perfect way to end the book. The last stanza—and in particular, the last three lines—left me with a feeling of quiet contentment. History is often less than glorious (as witnessed in many of these poems), but sometimes, sometimes, we human beings get something right at last.

In Seneca Village exist a living group of daguerreotypes (or at least that is the way I first visualized them as each character was introduced). They populate a historic and predominately African American community which existed in New York City from 1855 - 1857. Their actual geography was razed to help form Central Park. Nelson's introduction frames the setting and history in a brief but thorough explanation of her historical research, which helps to structure in time the reader's experience of this uniquely voiced set of poems. Every poem is written with an accompanying visual description to help the reader glimpse the character who thinks/speaks each poem. This glimpse is not necessary to recognize the power of the poems. They stand quite well on their own; it's just interesting to me to be led toward the image of the community's life as a whole. Very imaginative for both author and reader. Nelson does a sensitive job of combining daily life with emotional life. She touches the issues of partial freedom and the American Dream as a misleading with a masterful hand. Her closing notes are very helpful to those who are not particularly well versed in poetry's many forms, and to those who are, she provides interesting specific information regarding her use of form. I have been on a quest to read the works of each poet who is leading in a summer workshop I came across when shopping for something enlightening to do this summer. All the poets I have read thus far have been beautifully diverse in content and style, so I highly recommend the following slender volumes to you below: *The Night Guard at the Wilberforce Hotel* by Daniel Anderson *Straits and Narrows* by Sidney Wade *The Common Man* by Maurice Manning *The Arrival of the Future* by B

H Fairchild

Summary: From 1825 to 1857, Seneca Village in Manhattan was populated by newly-freed African American slaves and immigrants from Ireland and Germany. The people were poor and life was hard, but there was also celebration, hard work, and hope for the future. This collection of poems tells the story of those years through the people who lived there. Each facing page introduces the poem and creates a picture of the person at the moment it is spoken. Characters are referenced in others' poems, or come back with their own several years later. The second to last poem, "The Law of Eminent Domain" quotes the law that ordered the eviction of Seneca Village residents so their land could be used to create Central Park. The author's introduction gives the history of Seneca Village; she uses the last few pages to describe the different poetic forms she used. 87 pages; grades 5 and up. Pros: These moving, beautifully crafted poems introduce a little-known chapter in American history. Footnotes give additional historical context. The final lines of the last poem bring the inhabitants of Seneca Village into the present: "I am one who knows that time and we are mist/hiding Light's ever-changing panorama,/where the future holds a President Obama." Cons: The drab colors of the cover could make this less appealing for young readers to pick up and try.

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