ForeWord Reviews

PICTURE BOOKS

My Best Friend, Abe Lincoln: A Tale of Two Boys From Indiana
Robert L. Bloch
Big Tent Books
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While Sam Harding is a fictional character and not all the passages in this book are true, *My Best Friend, Abe Lincoln* is based on historical details. In it, Robert L. Bloch depicts a boyhood friendship that entertains and educates young children about one of our most famous and beloved presidents, Abraham Lincoln. Abe was born in Kentucky on February 12, 1809. His imagined friendship with Sam, a young farm boy, helps to illustrate his early life, when he and his family move to a farm close to Sam Harding's family in Southwestern Indiana.

The boys have a love of learning in common. They attend a "blab school," where a dozen children aged six to twelve repeat their lessons aloud until they have memorized them by heart—a practice that makes for a noisy classroom. Sam is fond of Abe, who is tall and skinny and grows so fast that his pants always seem to be too short. He admires his friend's amazing memory for new words and thoughts, saying he was "…just about as smart as our teacher."

The young friends play with Kickapoo Indian children from an old tribe that lives on a nearby hill, go fishing, and explore caves where bats chase them out. Sam remarks that Abe listens to the preacher's Sunday sermon, and then uses his own folksy humor to entertain anyone who hears him speak. When Sam's family invites Abe to make a trip to Owensboro, Kentucky, with them. all are angered and upset when they see a horrible slave market auction.

The author tells how the gangly, barefoot, shaggy-haired Abe Lincoln evolves through mostly a love of books and self-education to become a first-class debater and, eventually, President of the United States. The adventurous tales make young readers aware of a life-style long gone, and also alerts them to the importance of education and friendship, which do live on. Bloch has a connection to Abe Lincoln in that his great-great-grandfather co-signed a request for the important orator to give his first campaign speech in Leavenworth, Kansas, in 1859.

Illustrator John Ewing brings the book's scenes alive with subtly colored drawings of the characters, the countryside, and farm scenes. He has worked with Walt Disney Studios helping to craft several feature films, and launched Freelance Animators Ltd. in New Zealand. His drawings with overlays of Lincoln leading the Civil War, ending slavery, and beginning the

nation’s healing are detailed and striking. This book will enhance young children’s perceptions of our nation’s history. For ages five to eight.

Mary Popham