



Bad News for Outlaws: The Remarkable Life of Bass Reeves, Deputy U. S. Marshal

Vaunda Micheaux Nelson , R. Gregory Christie (Illustrator)

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Sitting tall in the saddle, with a wide-brimmed black hat and twin Colt pistols on his belt, Bass Reeves seemed bigger than life. Outlaws feared him.

As a deputy U.S. Marshal and former slave who escaped to freedom in the Indian Territories, Bass was cunning and fearless. When a lawbreaker heard Bass Reeves had his warrant, he knew it was the end of the trail, because Bass always got his man, dead or alive. He achieved all this in spite of whites who didn't like the notion of a black lawman.

For three decades, Bass was the most feared and respected lawman in the territories. He made more than 3,000 arrests, and though he was a crack shot and a quick draw, he only killed fourteen men in the line of duty. *Bad News for Outlaws* reveals the story of a remarkable African American hero of the Old West.

Bad News for Outlaws: The Remarkable Life of Bass Reeves, Deputy U. S. Marshal Details

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From Reader Review Bad News for Outlaws: The Remarkable Life of Bass Reeves, Deputy U. S. Marshal for online ebook

Jill says

This book tells the story of Bass Reeves, who was born into slavery in 1838 in Crawford County, Arkansas. Like most slaves, he was given the surname of his owner, George Reeves. During the Civil War, Reeves fled north to what is now Oklahoma, and lived with Native Americans.

In 1875, a U.S. Marshal in the so-called Indian Territory hired 200 deputies and, hearing about Reeves' skill with Indian languages as well as with a gun, he took on Reeves as well.

Reeves worked for thirty-two years as a deputy, and was reputed to be "one of the bravest men this country has ever known." He died at age 72 in 1910 of a kidney disease. Hundreds of people – blacks, whites, and Indians, attended his funeral.

The story of Reeves is a natural for kids. It is a real-life action-packed look at the Wild West that doesn't read like non-fiction at all. It features a fantastic hero who overcame the worst sort of adversity with his exceptional mind and extraordinary gumption. For example, as a slave, Bass was never allowed to learn to read, but when he became a deputy, he managed to capture outlaws by his ingenuity and courage. He would have arrest warrants read to him by someone else, and in the process he would memorize the shapes of the letters for each name, along with the charges against that person. Then he'd go out hunting. As the author writes:

"Even when he got thirty warrants at one time, Bass always brought in the right outlaws."

He not only *arrested* the criminals (he once brought in seventeen prisoners at once!) but at night, he'd talk to them about the Bible and about repentance.

His bravery was legendary; he actually stopped a lynching *in action* once, as the angry mob "just watched in awe as he rode off."

And his integrity was unquestioned as well. He even arrested his own son for murder, after none of his colleagues would do it out of respect for Bass.

In Bass's career as a deputy, he arrested more than three thousand men and women, and only killed fourteen in the line of duty. After Oklahoma became a state and the Indian Territory ceased to exist, he was hired on with the police force in Muskogee, Oklahoma. Nobody would mess with him given with his reputation:

"During his two years on the force, *not a single crime* occurred in his patrol area."

Evaluation: This is a wonderful story, and R. Gregory Christie's illustrations meet his usual high standards. (Christie is a three-time winner of the Coretta Scott King Illustrator Honor Award.) In this book, Christie styles some of his paintings to look like Old West wanted posters. Although most of the pictures use earthy tones, they are bold and vibrant and set against bright blue skies.

It took me a while to get used to Mr. Christie. As he has said in an interview:

The disproportionate compositions and elongated figures [of my art] are meant to be a directional device for the viewer, my own natural inclination, and a challenge for the viewer to break away from the established fundamental belief that all children's books must be realistic or cute."

Once you get used to the idea that children's books are a good medium for introducing different visual styles as well as conveying stories, you can't help but fall in love with Christie.

Supplementary material at the back of the book includes a glossary of western words, a timeline, a guide to further reading and websites, and more.

Rating: 4.5/5

Note: This book was the 2010 author award winner of the Coretta Scott King Book Award.

Pamela says

This juvenile non-fiction book commemorating the life of Deputy U.S. Marshall, Bass Reeves was as delightfully illustrated as it was informative. Bud Ledbetter, a fellow lawman called Bass "one of the bravest men this country has ever known." In his 32 years of service, Bass Reeves "arrested more than three-thousand men and women . . . He [himself] was never wounded . . . Remarkably, he killed only fourteen men in the line of duty."

Bass Reeves, an unsung hero. Vaunda Micheaux Nelson did a wonderful job researching and presenting his story; aided by the beautifully conveying artwork of R. Gregory Christie.

Cheryl says

Great introduction to a historical figure I had never heard about.

I would've rated it 5 stars, but I wasn't the biggest fan of the artwork.

Kym Winchester says

Audience: I feel this book is appropriate for older elementary school-aged children, perhaps grades 3-6. This is due to more mature subject matter, including talk of slavery and murder.

Appeal: I think children interested in history, especially about the "Wild West" type of outlaw stories would love this book. Also children interested in learning about African American's part in helping settle our country.

Application: I would use this book in teaching about American history. It could also be tied into Black

History Month-but I personally feel we should be teaching multiculturally all year round! I would perhaps do an activity discussing what children know about the parts of African Americans in the early history of the USA. I think this book would really be interesting to contrast some of the limited points of view children have been taught, i.e., only about slavery in the early history of the USA.

Awards: This book won the Coretta Scott King Award in 2010. It also won the American Library Association Notable Books for Children in 2010.

Book review from Booksinprint.com

Publishers Weekly

(November 02, 2009; 9780822567646)

With lively language and anecdotes, Nelson (Juneteenth) chronicles the life of African-American lawman Bass Reeves in a biography that elevates him to folk hero. The story opens with an action-packed sequence leading to Reeves killing criminal Jim Webb. The second spread has readers staring down the barrel of Reeves's rifle, in an attention-grabbing, somewhat unsettling closeup. As Webb lay dying, he "gave Bass his revolver out of respect. Bass buried Webb's body and turned in the outlaw's boots and gun belt as proof he'd gotten his man." Christie's (Yesterday I Had the Blues) dynamic full-page oil paintings portray a somber, statuesque Reeves, his big eyes shining from under the brim of his deputy's hat. The folksy language is heavy with simile ("Bass took to guns like a bear to honey") and jargon (vittles, slack-jawed cowpoke), inviting a drawly reading. It's an arresting portrait of a man who rose from escaped slave in Indian Territory (now Oklahoma) to become a federal marshal who made thousands of arrests, including his own son, but killed only 14 men. A glossary, bibliography, time line and other source material are included. Ages 8-12. (Oct.) (c) Copyright PWxyz, LLC. All rights reserved

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I agree with this review; the paintings are subdued but vivid, and I found that the folksy language almost took me back in time to when these events actually happened. I agree with the unsettling close up account of some of the events-this is why I feel the book would be too much for younger readers.

Krista the Krazy Kataloguer says

Outstanding book about a black man who, for some 30 years, was a deputy U.S. Marshall in the Indian Territory, which later became the state of Oklahoma. He escaped slavery as a child to live with the Indians before becoming Marshall. These are the sorts of people who bring history to life. I'm sure I would never have heard of this man if Nelson hadn't written this book. Best of all, at the end she provides a photo of the real Bass Reeves, plus a glossary, timeline, and lots of web sites and books for further reading. Highly recommended, and well deserving of the 2010 Coretta Scott King Medal for best author/text.

Catherine says

The book, "Bad News for Outlaws", describes the life of Deputy Marshall Bass Reeves. Reeves dedicated

his life to serving the public by deceiving thieves and arresting outlaws. During his youth, Reeves was a slave in Texas where he sang of pistols, rifles, thieves, and killers. At one point, his mom thought he was going to become a criminal! One night, Reeves, who was a surly tall man, hit his owner and fled towards Indian Territory. For a short time, he lived within tribes and started to make life for himself as Deputy Marshall. In order to catch outlaws, Reeves wore a variety of disguises and went to extreme lengths to track down outlaws in the area. He became admired among his community, as well as in the outlaw circuit. With a warrant out for her arrest, Bandit Queen Belle, a notorious outlaw, even turned herself in out of respect for Reeves. The illustrations in the book utilize solely primary colors, which I believe show the simplicity of the time. The illustrations are made with big brush strokes across the page. One image displayed the barrel of Reeve's gun right before he killed an outlaw, which may evoke fear and unrest in an intended reader. I would utilize this book in a classroom grades 3 and up as an example of a high quality text for a biography unit. By modeling a high quality text in the classroom, I hope to encourage positive book choices to my students. "Bad News for Outlaws" was awarded the Correta Scott King Award and is highly acclaimed.

Gretchen says

It was really interesting and better then I thought I would be.

Becky says

Biography – Juvenile Fiction

Summary: Maintaining an infallible integrity and sense of character, Bass Reeves, U.S. Marshal in the Indian Territories from 1875 to 1907, (eventually to become Oklahoma) arrests over 3000 men and women in creative ways to establish peace in extremely unlawful areas. He kills only fourteen men in all that time and is never wounded. Vaunda Micheaux Nelson renews the interest in this forgotten African American hero of the American West with the true stories of a man born a slave becoming a larger than life legend in his time.

Critique: (a.) One of the most intriguing aspects of this book is the presentation of Bass Reeves' life as a man of color during the early 1800's and the extensive research and portrayal of not just events in his life, but how his strong character was maintained personally and respected by everyone from the criminal to all colors of men. (b.) Nelson does an extraordinary job of sharing the creativity and character of Reeves as he successfully pursues wanted men and women. "Bass took many a bad man by surprise through the use of disguises. One day he'd pose as a cowboy. Another he'd be a tramp, a gunslinger, or an outlaw." (p.21) The author's research reveals the notorious outlaw, Jim Webb, giving his revolver to Bass Reeves while dying in a salute of honor to the man who had finally ended his crime career. The notorious "Bandit Queen," Belle Starr, surrenders to him for the first time in her crime career when she receives word that he is looking for her. (c.) She describes his character using "cowboy" words to absorb us into the time period: "But the biggest thing about Bass Reeves was his character. He had a dedication to duty few men could match. He didn't have a speck of fear in him. And he was as honest as the day is long." (p.11) and "But Bass was as right as rain from the boot heels up. He couldn't be bribed. And he shot only as a last resort..." (p.20) The combination of her revealing research and use of cowboy language engages the reader to be captured into a brave man's tale.

Curriculum Connection: This is an excellent book for teaching elementary through high school African American history as well as the Wild West and the settling of the Indian territories. It teaches about a great African American man of character who couldn't read and who came from a background of slavery yet was

incredibly smart, creative, brave, and respected. It also describes how some men hated him merely based on the color of his skin. In a culture where the Wild West is mostly depicted as white cowboys fighting brown Indians, this story is an incredible display of a black man of faith keeping the law in dangerous times and territories.

Jazzmon Cobb says

Bad News for Outlaws is an amazing book that follows the life of a historical legend, Bass Reeves. A runaway slave during the Civil War, Reeves escaped to the Indian territories; he was welcomed and respected within the Native community. In addition, Reeves was a very large and strong man who had a near perfect shooting range. His skill, reputation, and good heart qualified him to become the territory protector, and in 1875 became an official U.S. Marshall. He excelled at his title, being the only lawman to successfully arrest every assigned warrant—dead or alive. He arrested over 3,000 criminals in his lifetime! Bass was respected by many, feared by outlaws, and led an influential life as peacemaker in Indian territories. Most importantly, he always sided with justice—even when it came to his own family members. This book is a great historical book for reluctant readers! It is filled with wonderful artwork and short, action-packed paragraphs that are engaging enough for even the shortest attention span. In addition, there is a wonderful index of “western words” that not only help readers understand western lingo, but also adds to the book’s thematic western aesthetic. A wonderful read for all, especially African American youth who want to learn more about the positive contributions blacks have made in American history!

Phil Jensen says

This is a well-written, well-illustrated story of an African American wild west hero. As far as I can tell, it's accurate, but the bibliography at the end is pretty slim. Recommended for anyone who likes stories about cowboys and gunfights.

Porter Broyles says

Via Recorded Books.

I'm glad I listened to this to the end otherwise it might have earned a 1 or 2 star rating.

I picked the book because I wanted to learn something about Bass Reeves--the suspected inspiration for the Lone Ranger---and wanted something a little less serious than some other books I've tackled.

Listening to the book, I felt like I was listening to somebody read a Wikipedia article. There wasn't much meat to it. It covered the key events---all of which are in Wikipedia---and ended abruptly after only 20 minutes!

Then there was an afternote from the author. That is where I discovered that this was written as a childrens book. I felt kind of silly, but as such I thought it was an excellent story for younger kids---they may not know who the Lone Ranger is, but I do.

June says

Got this at work and picked it up because of the Coretta Scott King Award. Remarkable story of a runaway slave who was hired by Judge Parker as a U. S. Deputy Marshal. His use of disguises and unflappability are a great read. I love the story of the skunk. Belle Starr turned herself in when she heard Bass had her warrant. His reputation was so big he was able to cut a man down that a mob was lynching and ride off with him. He also had to arrest his own son, since no one else wanted to. After Oklahoma became a state he hired on with the Muskogee police force. Even though he was nearly 70 and walked with a cane not a single crime occurred in his patrol area during his 2 years on the force. The author's note concludes: "Bass's story is so incredible it comes close to sounding like a tall tale. But it isn't. It's true. And I've done my best to tell it true."

Definitely going to highlight and use it during Black History Month! 5/5/11

Read to a 3rd grade class and even though it is maybe a little long it kept their interest. 2/11/13

Used again for a 3rd grade class studying people. Maybe not as popular as Lebron James: I Love Challenges!, but they were good listeners.

Jameisha says

I thought this was a very informative book about the life of Bass Reeves, a United States Deputy Marshall for 3 reasons. 1) I had never heard of this man, and when I finished reading the book I felt like I learned everything I needed to know. The book isn't over powering with information, but it recounts important moments in his life, and how he affected the world around him in a way that allows you to understand who he was, what he did and why he's important. 2) I loved the way it was written. It's like someone is telling a story about someone they knew, like they had witnessed the events. It also words things in a way that takes you to the time period when Bass was living. I also liked the way events or situations were described. Killing and murder are talked about but it's never glorified. Everything is said straight to the point but there is also a humorous feel to some of the events being told. 3) The illustrations. I liked how they took up the entire pages in the book and the painted medium used. They were very colorful and went well with the part of the story they were representing. I thought this was a very good bio and I learned something new by reading it. I'm sure children would be interested in learning more about Bass Reeves, as well as some of the other figures mentioned in the story.

Audra says

This is a children's book, but still very informative. Bass Reeves grew up a slave but later became one of the best deputy marshals in the Indian Territory (which later became Oklahoma) for 32 years. He was a man of integrity, very tall, and very well-respected. He was an excellent marksman and cunning. So cunning that

when he was given warrants for outlaws to capture them, those outlaws were considered as good as caught because Bass Reeves always got his man.

Once Indian territory became Oklahoma state, Reeves was out of a job, but not for long. He was then hired by the Muskogee, Oklahoma police force and even though he was almost 70 and walking with a cane by that time, he was still very much feared by lawbreakers.

Don't cheat yourself by not reading this because it's a children's book. It's a great book and has some wonderful references at the back for adult books that were used to gather research on the subject.

Eva Mitnick says

As the size of the book and his portrait suggest, Bass Reeves was larger than life. Born into slavery in 1838, he escaped from his owner during the Civil War and headed off for Indian Territory, where he lived with and was sheltered by Indians. After the war, he bought a farm, married, and "true to the song of his life, Bass had a big family" - 11 children. In 1875, Bass was hired by Judge Parker to track down outlaws as a deputy U.S. marshal - and because he was smart, honorable, a crack shot, and knew his territory like the back of his hand, he became one of the most valuable of the 200 marshals patrolling 74,000 square miles of what would later be Oklahoma.

The tales of his adventures and exploits read like tall tales, but apparently they are all true. To catch his quota of outlaws, he wore disguises, planned elaborate hoaxes, and in general used any trick possible to bring back in the bad guys - or bad ladies, as the case might be. Belle Starr, the bandit queen, turned herself in to Bass Reeves when she found out he had her warrant. After 32 years and more than 3000 arrests, Oklahoma became a state and Bass Reeves lost his job - so at the age of nearly 70, he became a police officer in Muskogee, OK and worked until he died several years later.

Both the text and the illustrations are captivating, creating a vivid portrait of a man who seems to rank right up there with Paul Bunyan and John Henry. The book opens with the capture of outlaw Jim Webb - "Jim Webb's luck was running muddy when Bass Reeves rode into town" - blasting us right into the action as Bass Reeves chases Webb down. This simple, colloquial language, glinting with just enough Western slang and lilt to make reading it aloud a joy, continues throughout the book. An example:

"Even horses played a part in his disguises. Like many U.S. marshals, Bass rode some of the finest. Most times, he forked a handsome sorrel. Bass rode proud in the saddle. There was no mistaking his silhouette. But prize horseflesh could be a dead giveaway that the rider was a lawman. Bass always kept some rough stock and rode lazy while undercover."

Don't know what "forked" means? Check out the glossary of Western words at the back, and while you're there, be sure to read the timeline (which includes Bass Reeves' induction into the Hall of Great Westerners of the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City in 1992), the list of further reading and websites, a bit of fascinating information about Judge Parker and the Indian Territory, and best of all, a fine bibliography of books, articles, and manuscripts about Bass Reeves.

I've been a big Christie fan for years - his art is always powerful, whether depicting young Bass feeding a

horse at dusk or an anguished but stern Bass turning in his own son after he had committed murder. Full-page spreads offer dramatic scenes, often outdoors, while smaller paintings show us smaller moments like that of Bass trying to talk sense into captured outlaws ("Getting through to them was like trying to find hair on a frog, butg Bass kept trying"). The text is often set on yellow-gold paper that looks creased and stained with brown, bringing to mind the travel-worn warrants that Bass must have kept in his saddlebags or folded into an inside pocket of his jacket. The endpapers depict Bass's United States Deputy Marshal star against this background.

This is altogether a marvelously entertaining and thought-provoking portrait of a little-known Western hero. The bold and action-packed illustrations will pull kids in and the rollicking text will grab hold and keep them hooked until the end. Don't let this sit on your shelves - display it and talk it up to kids, parents, and teachers.

Highly recommended for ages 8 and up.
