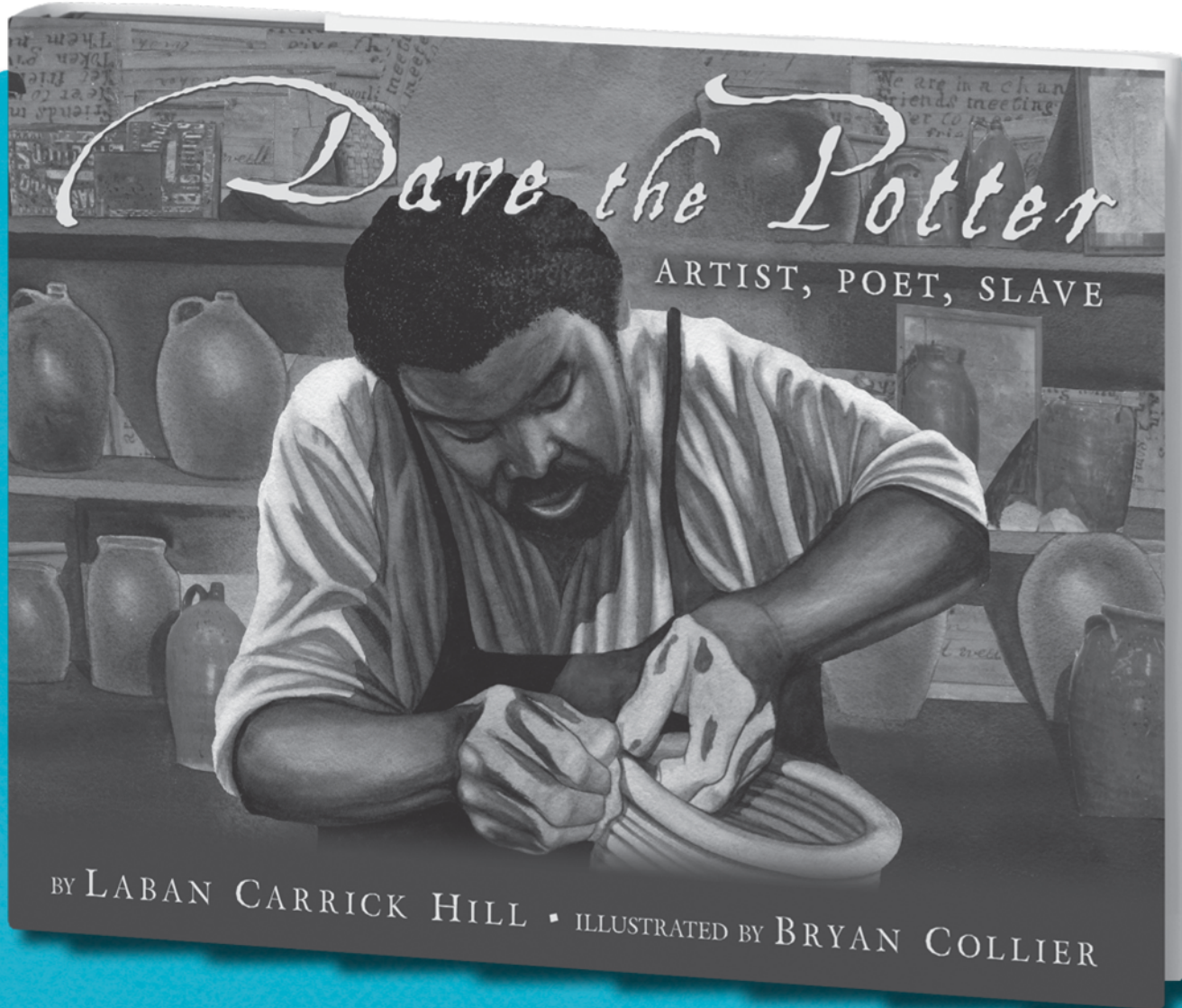


educator's guide

# Dave the Potter

ARTIST, POET, SLAVE



curriculum connections

❖ Art

❖ Poetry

❖ Slavery

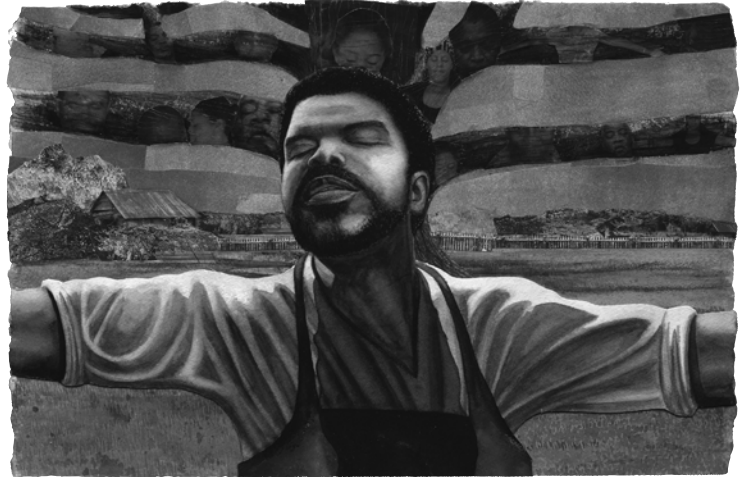
Ages: 3 – 10

WRITTEN BY  
LABAN CARRICK HILL

ILLUSTRATED BY  
BRYAN COLLIER

## Summary

Dave was an extraordinary artist, poet, and potter living in South Carolina in the 1800s. He combined his superb artistry with deeply observant poetry, carved onto his pots, transcending the limitations he faced as a slave. In this inspiring and lyrical portrayal, National Book Award-nominee Laban Carrick Hill's elegantly simple text and award-winning artist Bryan Collier's resplendent, earth-toned illustrations tell Dave's story, a story rich in history, hope, and long-lasting beauty.



## Pre-Reading Activities

Before beginning the book, ask students to share what they know about slavery in America. Ask them what they think a slave would have to do in a typical day. If your students do not have a strong understanding of slavery, Julius Lester's *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road* (Dial, 1998) offers an excellent introduction.

## Discussion Questions

1. What does Dave see in the dirt that others do not?
2. Whom do you think is the bearded old man Dave is looking at through the window?
3. How is our vision of the pot different from Dave's?
4. "Dave's hands, buried in the mounded mud, pulled out the shape of a jar." Where do you think Dave finds the vision for what he creates? Do you think he knows what he will create before he begins?
5. What do you think creating pottery means to Dave?
6. Why do you think it is important for Dave to write on his pottery? Why is it unusual that Dave is able to write at all?
7. Look at the illustration that accompanies the text: "The jar grew so large Dave could no longer wrap his strong arms around it." Whom or what do you think Dave is embracing? Who do you think the faces belong to on the tree branches behind Dave? What do you think is the connection between Dave and the tree?
8. How do you think Dave's life was different from most other slaves?
9. What do you think makes Dave's pottery important beyond its aesthetic value?
10. Dave took a practical skill and used it as a means of personal, creative expression. What is a skill you have that can be used in a similar way?

## Post-Reading Activities

1. Dave expressed himself with couplets, a simple poetic form. The author says Dave's poems "embody a simplicity and deep emotional complexity that rivals Japanese haiku." Share with your students examples of couplets, haiku, and other forms of poetry. Have students write poems of their own using these varieties of forms. Encourage students to write poems that celebrate Dave's life and work.
2. Bryan Collier is an award-winning illustrator renowned for his stunning collage and watercolor style. On his website ([www.bryancollier.com](http://www.bryancollier.com)), Collier says: "Collage is more than just an art style. Collage is all about bringing different elements together. Once you form a sensibility about connection, how different elements



relate to each other, you deepen your understanding of yourself and others.” Create your own collage work that imagines a day in the life of Dave, the potter.

3. One of Dave’s couplets is: “Dave belongs to Mr. Miles/ where the oven bakes and the pot biles.” Lewis Miles is his owner at the time. It is believed that Dave had five owners in his lifetime. Write a letter to Mr. Miles in which you argue why he should free Dave from slavery. Remember that in this time in United States history, slavery was constitutionally legal.
4. The type of pottery Dave created is called alkaline-glazed stoneware. Invite a local artist from your community who works with the same medium to visit your class, show examples of his/her work, and explain the process of creating it.
5. If possible, visit a gallery or museum that has a significant collection of pottery. Ask students to select the piece they like most and compose a short verse they can imagine being inscribed on it.
6. In the appendix, the author cites a website with an excellent educator’s guide focusing on learning about Dave’s pottery making and antebellum regional pottery traditions. Speak to your art teacher about collaborating on the lessons and activities.
7. Speak to your art teacher about the possibility of students creating stoneware pottery in Dave’s style. Have students compose a couplet that can be inscribed upon the finished piece.



8. Using online and print resources, have students work in pairs or small groups researching significant events relating to events in African-American history that occur in the years cited for Dave’s couplets. Ask students to share their findings with the rest of the class. Here is a basic timeline.

**1834:** Slavery is abolished throughout the British colonies.

Harry Blair receives a patent for his corn planting machine, the second African American to receive a patent.

**1836:** *The Philanthropist*, an abolitionist newspaper, is launched by James Birney, a former slave owner.

Alexander Lucius Twilight, the first U.S. Black college graduate, is elected to the Vermont legislature.

**1840:** Blacks in Wilmington, Delaware, are permitted to attend school with whites.

**1857:** *Dred Scott Case* decided by the Supreme Court.

New Hampshire grants full citizenship to Blacks.

The *Golconda* sails from Charleston, South Carolina’ to Liberia.

**1858:** Fugitive John Prince is rescued from slave catchers in Ohio by Oberlin College professors and students. The incident becomes known as the Oberlin-Wellington Rescue.

The seventh and final Lincoln-Douglas debate takes place in Galesburg, Illinois.

**1862:** Susie King [Taylor] joins the First South Carolina Volunteers, an all-black regiment.

Jefferson Davis is elected President of the Confederate States of America.

Robert Smalls, a Blackman pressed into Confederate service, sails a gunboat out of Charleston and turns it over to Union forces.

Congress authorizes Blacks to serve in the Union army.

## praise for *Dave, the Potter*

**"This book is a testament to heart, soul, and art."**

— Jerry Pinkney,  
2010 Caldecott Medalist

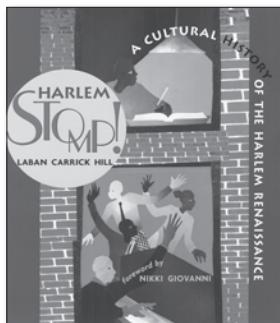
## also by Laban Carrick Hill



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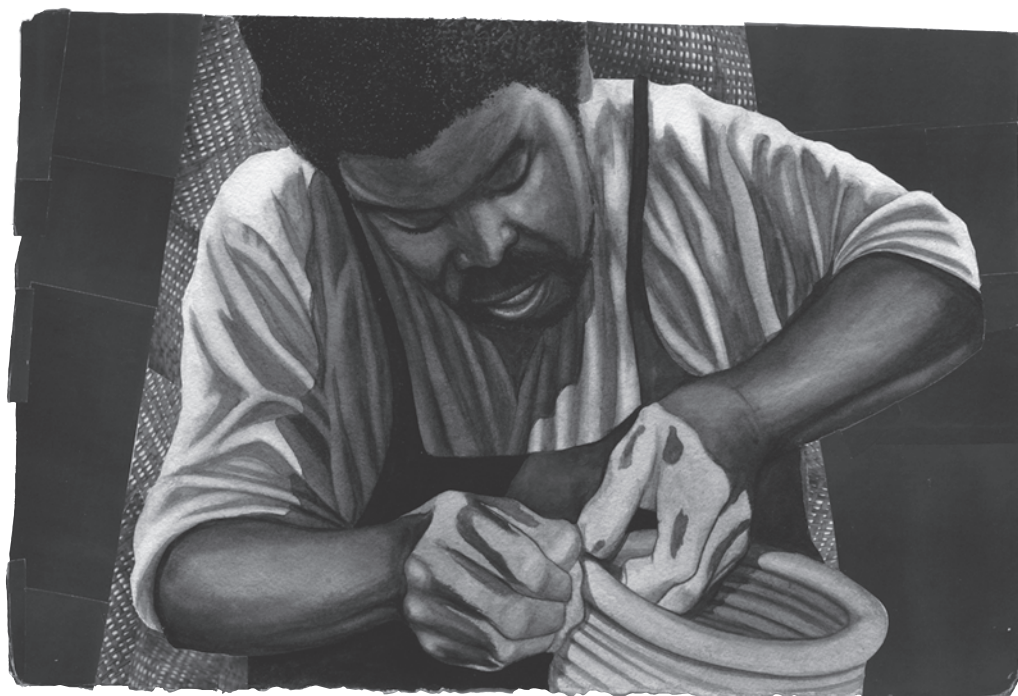
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## about the author

Laban Carrick Hill is the author of the National Book Award Finalist *Harlem Stomp!* He has taught Literature and Writing at Columbia University, Fordham University, and currently teaches at St. Michael's College in Vermont. He has published his poetry and articles in a number of periodicals including *American Letters & Commentary*, *Denver Quarterly*, and *Onion River Review*, and has written over 20 middle grade novels.



## about the illustrator

Bryan Collier began painting at the age of 15 and earned a B.F.A. with honors from the Pratt Institute in New York. He is the illustrator of over 10 picture books, including *Martin's Big Words* and *Rosa* (both Caldecott Honor and Coretta Scott King Award winners) and *Barack Obama: Son of Promise, Child of Hope*, a *New York Times* bestseller. Mr. Collier lives in Harlem, where he directs mural programs throughout the city for any child who wants to paint.



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*This guide was created by Edward T. Sullivan, a librarian and author who has written many articles about and reviews of children's and young adult books. Visit his website at [www.sully-writer.com](http://www.sully-writer.com)*