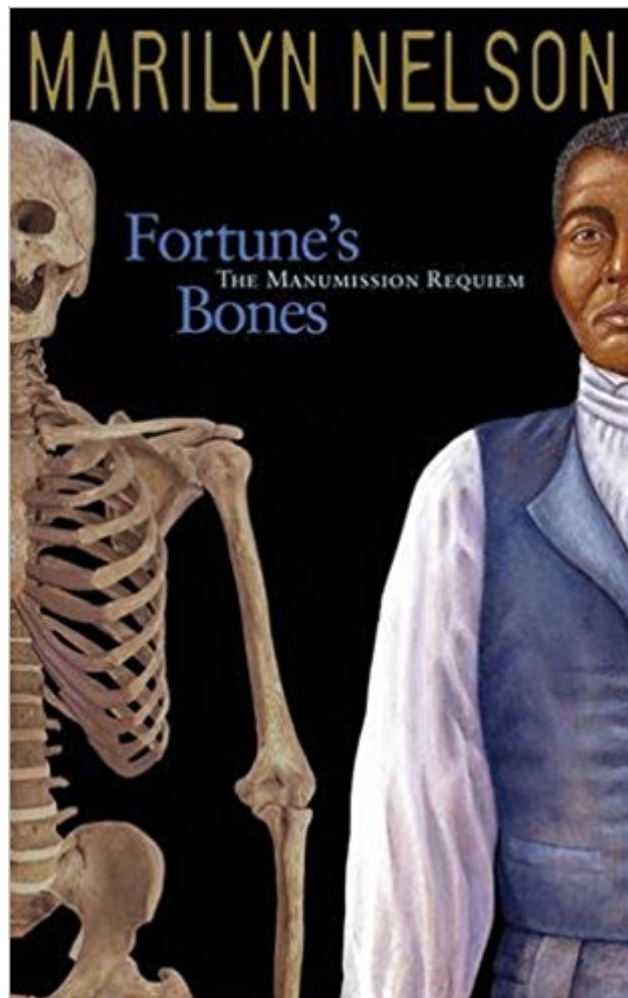




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# **Fortune's Bones: The Manumission Requiem (Coretta Scott King Author Honor Books)**



## Synopsis

There is a skeleton in the Mattatuck Museum in Connecticut. It has been in the town for over 200 years. In 1996, community members decided to find out what they could about it. Historians discovered that the bones were those of a slave name Fortune, who was owned by a local doctor. After Fortune's death, the doctor rendered the bones. Further research revealed that Fortune had married, had fathered four children, and had been baptized later in life. His bones suggest that after a life of arduous labor, he died in 1798 at about the age of 60. Marilyn Nelson wrote *The Manumission Requiem* to commemorate Fortune's life. Detailed notes and archival photographs enhance the reader's appreciation of the poem.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Grade 6 Up—This requiem honors a slave who died in Connecticut in 1798. His owner, a doctor, dissected his body, boiling down his bones to preserve them for anatomy studies. The skeleton was lost and rediscovered, then hung in a local museum until 1970, when it was removed from display. The museum began a project in the 1990s that uncovered the skeleton's provenance, created a new exhibit, and led to the commissioning of these six poems. The selections, which incorporate elements of a traditional requiem as well a New Orleans jazz funeral, arc from grief to triumph. A preface lays out the facts of Fortune's life, followed by "Dinah's Lament," in which his wife mourns the husband whose bones she is ordered to dust. Other pieces are in the voices of Fortune's owner, his descendants, workers, and museum visitors. The penultimate "Not

"My Bones," sung by Fortune, states, "What's essential about you/is what can't be owned." Each page of verse faces a green page containing text and full-color archival graphics that lay out the facts of Fortune's story. This volume sets history and poetry side by side and, combined with the author's personal note on inspirations, creates a unique amalgam that can be confusing at first. Subsequently, however, the facts inform the verse and open up a full appreciation of its rich imagery and rhythmic, lyrical language. The book brings the past to life and could make for a terrific choral reading.

—â œNancy Palmer, The Little School, Bellevue, WA Copyright Å Å© Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Gr. 7-12. Fortune was a slave in eighteenth-century Connecticut, and when he died, his owner, a physician, rendered the bones to teach anatomy. In 1933 the physician's family donated the skeleton to the local Mattatuck Museum. Recently, the museum researched Fortune's story, and Connecticut Poet Laureate Marilyn Nelson, author of the award-winning *Carver: A Life in Poems* (2001), has written a series of six stirring poems to honor Fortune's life. Part funeral mass, part freedom celebration, her spare words are clear about the harshness of his servitude and what his remains tell about his backbreaking labor. In the climactic poem, "Not My Bones," Fortune himself speaks: "You can own someone's body, / the soul runs free." Nelson's small poems are framed by a wealth of facts as well as archival photos and images from the museum exhibit. Should Fortune's skeleton be kept on display, or should it be buried in consecrated ground? Moved by the poetry and the history, readers will want to join the debate. Hazel Rochman

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The remarkable true story set as Requiem is at once intriguing as a piece of literature, as informative in its historical and civic background. A great piece for high school classroom discussion, and an excellent opportunity to investigate English language writing forms and styles. Also a great common core sample. Enjoy the mystery!

I can't wait to share this true story with my middle school students and plan to incorporate music (What's a requiem?), history (Revolutionary America and slavery), and science (body systems) when we read it together in class.

Excellent book. The author definitely knows what she's talking about and put words perfectly in great poetry.

Way overdue! This is an important piece of American history and a must read for everyone.

As I said above this is an absolutely amazing poem. I had heard it along with the music and really wanted a copy I could keep. I wish someone had recorded it with the music.

This is a beautiful book and a wonderful poem. I'd highly recommend it. I have purchased several, for myself and as gifts.

The book was everything I expected; I enjoyed it so much I shared it with my friends! They like it as much as I did.

I expected a book telling more about the life circumstances of Fortune and how his skeleton came to be on display. Apart from the Author's Note and the Afterword, this book was poetic and lovely, but the blurbs did not provide enough information for my science-minded maniac. For science-minded kids, try something like: *Breaking Ground, Breaking Silence: The Story of New York's African Burial Ground* (Coretta Scott King Author Honor Books) or *(WRITTEN IN BONE) Buried Lives of Jamestown and Colonial Maryland* by Walker, Sally M. (Author) Hardcover on 01-Feb-2009 Both books detail the forensic study of bones. I do find it heartbreaking that a man who spent his life enslaved was denied burial and instead, his flesh was dissected and dissolved so his master could learn from his bones. This level of "ownership" is foreign to 21st century American kids. Shudder. Humanity can be horrifying.

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