

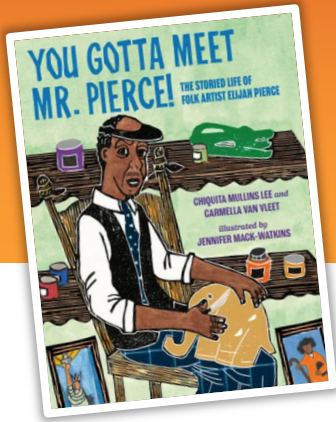
“You Gotta Meet Mr. Pierce!”

The Storied Life of Folk Artist Elijah Pierce

By Chiquita Mullins Lee and Carmella Van Vleet

Illustrated by Jennifer Mack-Watkins

Published by Kokila

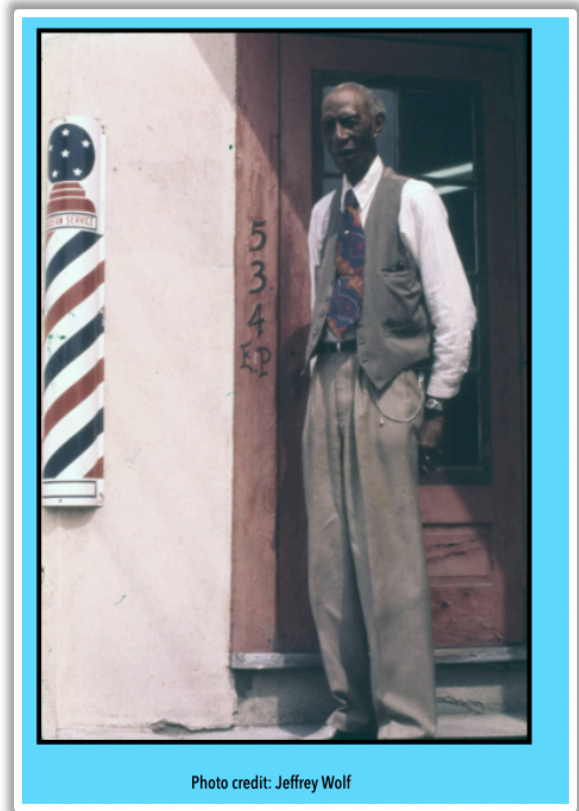


Activities guide

Conduct an interview

Elijah Pierce was well-known in his community but the art world didn't recognize him until much later in his life. Ask students if there is someone they think everyone should know or that we “gotta meet.” Invite them to interview that person and write a book about the person.

Going further: do a Biography Scavenger Hunt. Challenge students to find a biography of someone who's relatively unknown or who has an interesting story, and then share those books as a class.



Tell a story in multiple ways

Elijah said, “Everything I carve, I want it to tell some kind of a story.”

Wood carving was the way Elijah told his stories. But there are many ways to share a story. Working individually or in small groups, invite students to re-tell a story or fairy tale in a different way. For example: draw, sing, paint, sculpt, carve, make a diorama, write a poem, act out, re-tell in a different language, flip book.

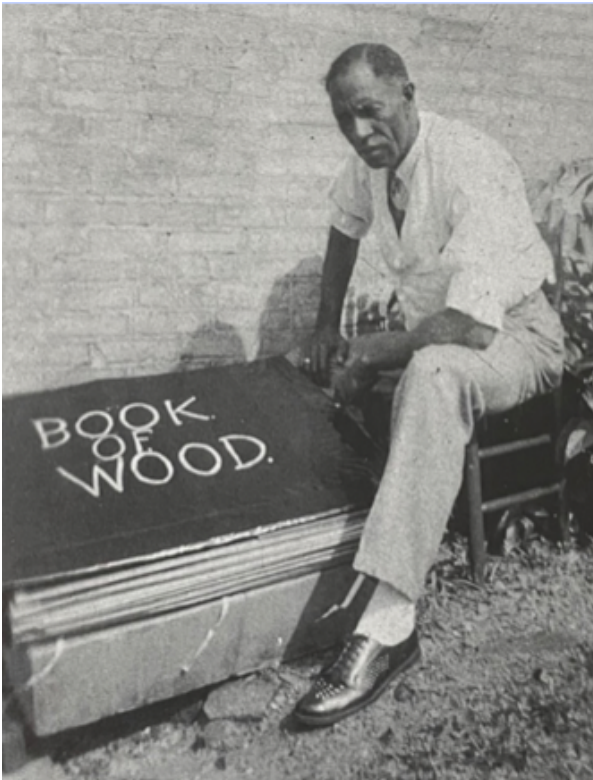


Writing activities

- In the book, Elijah explains it was his wife’s idea to create the Book of Wood. In an interview, Elijah said, “I thought it was about the dumbest thing I ever heard. But we glued them onto cardboard pages and now it’s the only book of its kind in the world.” Have students write about a time someone suggested that they do something and it how it turned out. For example, Mom suggested going on a roller coaster and you loved it/hated it.
- At the end of the story, the young artist says, “I think I know what I want to draw...”

Ask students what they think he drew. Next, have them write a few sentences how they came up with their prediction. Are there any clues in the story that might help?

- “Your life is a book, and every day is a page” is a famous quote from Elijah. Have students write or draw about a particular day in their “life book.” It could be a special or memorable day or even an ordinary day.



Art ideas

- Have students draw what they think the boy in the story ends up drawing after his inspirational visit to Elijah’s barbershop.
- Invite students to investigate the carvings used in the book. (There is information about each in the back material.) Challenge them to create their own reproduction of the piece.

- The book’s illustrator used a special method called the mokuhanga printmaking technique. It involves carving into wood, inking the wood, and then laying paper on top and pressing down to create a print. A simple way to recreate this technique is to have students use a pencil to “carve” into foam board or a Styrofoam tray. (Grocery stores will often donate these to teachers.) Next, cover the board in paint, gently lay a piece of paper on top and press. Then, carefully pull the paper off the board.
- The illustrations in the book are also mixed media. Invite students to create their own mixed-media pieces of art or to add color and mixed media to their prints.
- Elijah used wood he found lying around or wood that people would bring him. Have students collect various pieces of wood from outside or around their homes to create their own piece of wood art.





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New York. 1974
from *Eliza Pierce's America*, edited by Nancy Ireson
and Zoe Whitley / The Barnes Foundation, 2020

Discussion questions

- The text uses action words like DRAPE, HONE, ROUGH, SAND, DUST. Why do you think the authors included these words? How do they convey the connection between barbering and carving?
- Why do you think the authors and illustrators included pictures of Hank Aaron, Abe Lincoln, and Martin Luther King, Jr.? What do these people tell us about the time Elijah Pierce lived?
- Why wasn't Elijah well-known until later in life?
- All of the quotes from Mr. Pierce are real things he said. Why do you think the authors choose to use them and write the story this way?
- What is a folk artist? Do you know any folk artists?

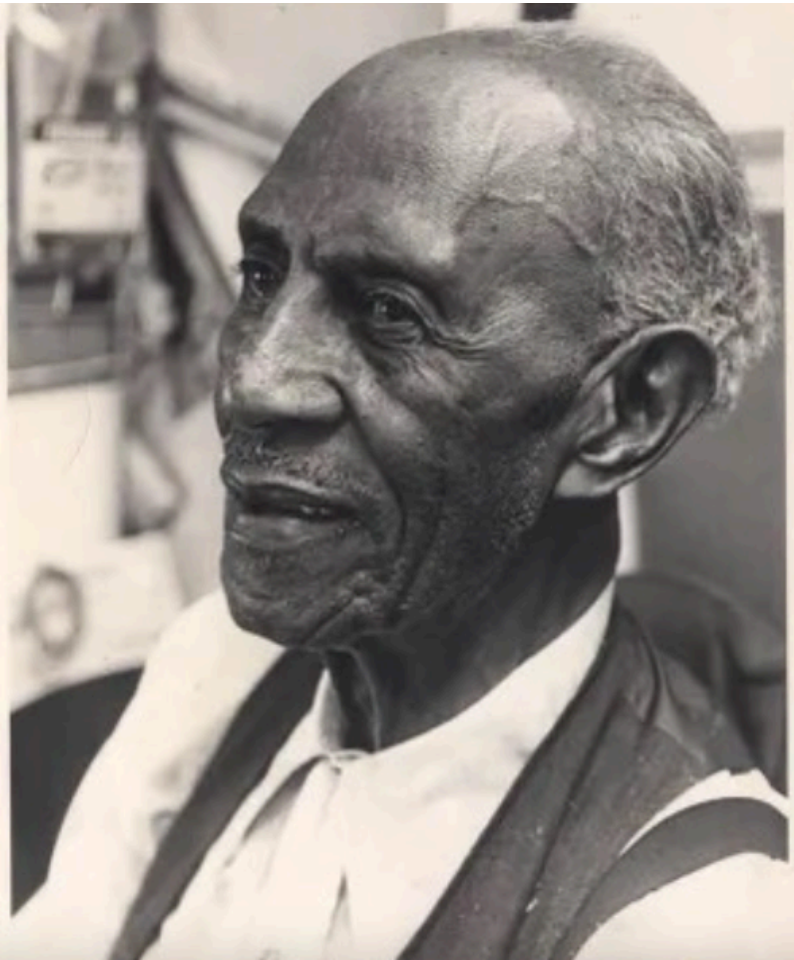


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