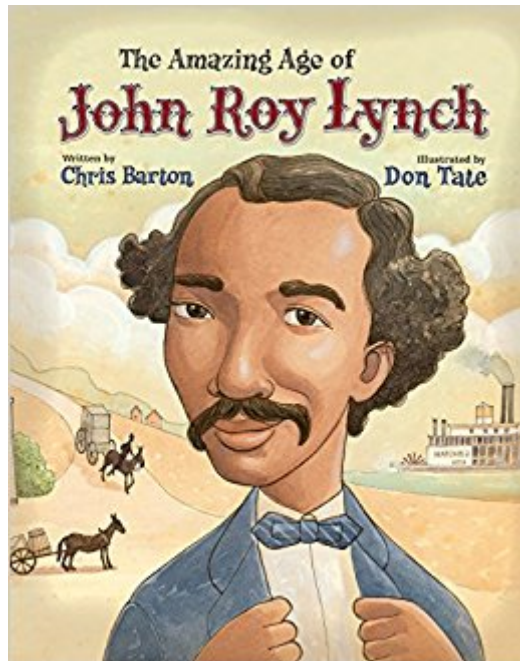


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# The Amazing Age Of John Roy Lynch



## Synopsis

A unique biography of a remarkable Reconstruction figure John Roy Lynch spent most of his childhood as a slave in Mississippi, but all of that changed with the Emancipation Proclamation. Suddenly people like John Roy could have paying jobs and attend school. While many people in the South were unhappy with the social change, John Roy thrived in the new era. He was appointed to serve as justice of the peace and was eventually elected into the United States Congress. This biography, with its informative backmatter and splendid illustrations, gives readers an in-depth look at the Reconstruction period through the life of one of the first African-American congressmen.

## Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars 6 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #125,054 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #29 in Books > Children's Books > Education & Reference > History > United States > Civil War Era #170 in Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Difficult Discussions > Prejudice & Racism #215 in Books > Children's Books > Biographies > Multicultural

Age Range: 7 - 10 years

Grade Level: 2 - 5

## Customer Reviews

Gr 2-5 "In this inspiring picture book biography, Barton recounts how John Roy Lynch went from teenage slave to state representative in just 10 years during Reconstruction. The author describes how Lynch was born to an Irish father and an enslaved mother, making him "half Irish and all slave." Lynch learned to read and write and developed into an eloquent speaker, eventually becoming a justice of the peace and being elected to the Mississippi House of Representatives. The vocabulary-rich text may be difficult for younger students, but Tate's illustrations, rendered in mixed media, ink, and gouache on watercolor paper, are extraordinary and carry the lengthy story well.

The excellent cartoon-style paintings soften potentially disturbing details, such as the Ku Klux Klan burning a church. The book concludes with a thorough historical note. VERDICT Teachers will find this remarkable story of hope and perseverance a valuable supplement to social studies lessons on the Civil War and Black History Month.â Jennifer Simmons, Anderson County Library, SC

CCBCâs Choices 2016 Publishers Weekly (STARRED review) "Barton offers an immersive, engaging, and unflinching portrait of the difficulties of the Reconstruction era, while Tate's cartoonlike artwork softens moments of cruelty and prejudice without diminishing them." Kirkus Reviews "Published while the United States has its first African-American president, this story of John Roy Lynch, the first African-American speaker of the Mississippi House of Representatives, lays bare the long and arduous path black Americans have walked to obtain equality. The title's first three wordsâ "The Amazing Age"â emphasize how many more freedoms African-Americans had during Reconstruction than for decades afterward. . . . A picture book worth reading about a historical figure worth remembering." Children's Literature â "This beautiful biography should be in every library frequented by young readers and introduced to them by parents and teachers who will also be amazed by the time and the man introduced to them in these pages." • Mississippi Library Commission â "A great introduction to some hard subjectsâ slavery and Reconstructionâ for upper elementary and middle school readers. . . . Highly recommended." • Reading While White (blog) â "I can't recall when I've seen a book for children that is so deliberate about calling out racism for what it is. And [Chris Barton] does it with such clear, simple language, making this complex period in history accessible to young readers, just as Don Tate's clear stylized illustrations do. Even though the illustrations use a cartoon style, there are no happy, smiling slaves here. What we see instead is the pain and suffering they endured and later, the look of pride and determination on the face of John Roy Lynch, a free man. . . . Chris Barton's book can serve as a model for White authors who choose to write about African American history for children." • Washington Parent â "Chris Barton has penned another fascinating picture-book biography. . . . With its timeline and engaging mixed-media illustrations by Don Tate, this book helps to fill the big gap for books about the Reconstruction Era." •

Just amazing. I love it as much as our daughters did.

This was a gift to be signed by the author

I just full-on love to read books with my daughter about people triumphing over great odds. It is hard to find more triumph than the life of John Roy Lynch. He was born into slavery. After emancipation, at only age 16, set off on his own. He found a job as a waiter and kept working his way into higher paying jobs. Then, he essentially taught himself to read and write! What a truly brilliant man! He goes on to become a justice of the peace, a Mississippi state representative, the Mississippi Speaker of the House, and finally a representative in the U.S. House. Like I said, this was a truly amazing and inspiring man. My only small complaint is that this book, although heavy on Lynch's personal accomplishments, really fails to drive home his lasting accomplishments in a concrete manner accessible to young readers. What impact did he have that we still feel today? The book really did not focus on that question in a way my 7-year-old could easily internalize. Other than that though, this is a great book.

It's the story of a guy who in ten years went from teenage field slave to U.S. Congressman. Come again? That's the pitch author Chris Barton pulled out when he wanted to describe this story to others. You know, children's book biographies can be very easy as long as you cover the same fifteen to twenty people over and over again. And you could forgive a child for never imagining that there were remarkable people out there beyond Einstein, Tubman, Jefferson, and Sacajawea. People with stories that aren't just unknown to kids but to whole swaths of adults as well. So I always get kind of excited when I see someone new out there. And I get extra especially excited when the author involved is Chris Barton. Here's a guy who performed original research to write a picture book biography of the guys who invented Day-Glo colors (The Day-Glo Brothers) so you know you're in safe hands. The inclusion of illustrator Don Tate was not something I would have thought up myself, but by gum it turns out that he's the best possible artist for this story! Tackling what turns out to be a near impossible task (explaining Reconstruction to kids without plunging them into the depths of despair), this keen duo present a book that reads so well you're left wondering not just how they managed to pull it off, but if anyone else can learn something from their technique. From birth until the age of sixteen John Roy Lynch was a slave. The son of an overseer who died before he could free his family, John Roy began life as a house slave but was sent to the fields when his high-strung mistress made him the brunt of her wrath. Not long after, The Civil War broke out and John Roy bought himself a ride to Natchez and got a job. He started out as a waiter then moved on to pantryman, photographer, and in time orator and even Justice of the Peace. Then, at twenty-four years of age, John Roy Lynch was elected to the Mississippi House of Representatives where he

served as Speaker of the House. The year was 1869, and these changes did not pass without incident. Soon an angry white South took its fury out on its African American population and the strides that had been made were rescinded violently. John Roy Lynch would serve out two terms before leaving office. He lived to a ripe old age, dying at last in 1939. A Historical Note, Timeline, Author's Note, Illustrator's Note, Bibliography of books "For Further Reading", and map of John's journey and the Reconstructed United States circa 1870 appear at the end. How do you write a book for children about a time when things were starting to look good and then plummeted into bad for a very very long time? I think kids have this perception (oh heck, a bunch of adults too) that we live in the best of all possible worlds. For example, there's a children's book series called *Infinity Ring* where the basic premise is that bad guys have gone and changed history and now it's up to our heroes to put everything back because, obviously, this world we live in right now is the best. Simple, right? Their first adventure is to make sure Columbus discovers America so . . . yup. Too often books for kids reinforce the belief that everything that has happened has to have happened that way. So when we consider how few books really discuss Reconstruction, it's not exactly surprising. Children's books are distinguished, in part, by their capacity to inspire hope. What is there about Reconstruction to cause hope at all? And how do you teach that to kids? Barton's solution is clever because rather than write a book about Reconstruction specifically, he's found a historical figure that guides the child reader effortlessly through the time period. Lynch's life is perfect for every step of this process. From slavery to a freedom that felt like slavery. Then slow independence, an education, public speaking, new responsibilities, political success, two Congressional terms, and then an entirely different life after that (serving in the Spanish-American War as a major, moving to Chicago, dying). Barton shows his rise and then follows his election with a two-page spread of KKK mayhem, explaining that the strides made were taken back. In a way, the Civil War wasn't really over. The battling had not stopped. And after quoting a speech where Lynch proclaims that America will never be free until every man, woman, and child can feel and know that his, her, and their rights are fully protected by the strong arm of a generous and grateful Republic, Barton follows it up with, "If John Roy Lynch had lived a hundred years (and he nearly did), he would not have seen that come to pass." Barton guides young readers to the brink of the good and then explains the bad, giving context to just how long the worst of it continued. He also leaves it up to them to determine if Lynch's dream has come to fruition or not (classroom debate time!). And he plays fair. These days I read nonfiction picture books with my teeth clenched. Why? Because I've started holding them to high standards (doggone it).

And there are so many moments in this book that could have been done incorrectly. Heck, the first image you see when you open it up is of Joy Roy Lynch's family, his white overseer father holding his black wife tenderly as their kids stand by. I saw it and immediately wondered how we could believe that Lynch's parents ever cared for one another. Yet a turn of the page and Barton not only puts Patrick Lynch's profession into context (while he may have loved these slaves, he most likely took the whip to others) but provides information on how he attempted to buy his wife and children. Later there is some dialogue in the book, as when Lynch's owner at one point joshes with him at the table and John Roy makes the mistake of offering an honest answer. Yet the dialogue is clearly taken from a text somewhere, not made up to fit the context of the book. I loathe faux dialogue, mostly because it's entirely unnecessary. Barton shows clearly that one need never rely upon it to make a book exemplary. Finally, you just have to stand in awe of Barton's storytelling. Not making up dialogue is one thing. Drawing a natural link between a life and the world in which that life lived is another entirely. Take that moment when John Roy answers his master honestly. He's banished to hard labor on a plantation after his master's wife gets angry. Then Barton writes, "She was not alone in rage and spite and hurt and lashing out. The leaders of the South reacted the same way to the election of a president " Abraham Lincoln " who was opposed to slavery." See how he did that? He managed to bring the greater context of the times in line with John Roy's personal story. Many is the clunky picture book biography that shoehorns in the era or, worse, fails to mention it at all. I much preferred Barton's methods. There's an elegance to them. I've been aware of Don Tate for a number of years. No slouch, the guy's illustrated numerous children's books, and even wrote (but didn't illustrate) one that earned him an Ezra Jack Keats New Writer Honor Award (It Just Happened: When Bill Traylor Started to Draw). His is a seemingly simple style. I wouldn't exactly call it cartoony, but it is kid friendly. Clear lines. Open faces. His watercolors go for honesty and clarity and do not come across as particularly evocative. But I hadn't ever seen the man do nonfiction, I'll admit. And while it probably took me a page or two to understand, once I realized why Don Tate was the perfect artist for "John Roy Lynch" it all clicked into place. You see, books about slavery for kids usually follow a prescribed pattern. Some of them go for hyperrealism. Books with art by James Ransome, Eric Velasquez, Floyd Cooper, or E.B Lewis all adhere closely to this style. Then there are the books that are a little more abstract. Books with art by R. Gregory Christie, for example, traipse closely to art worthy of Jacob Lawrence. And Shane W. Evans has a style that's significantly artistic. A more cartoony style is often considered

too simplistic for the heavy subject matter or, worse, disrespectful. But what are we really talking about here? If the book is going to speak honestly about what slavery really was, the subjugation of whole generations of people, then art that hews closely to the truth is going to be too horrific for kids. You need someone who can cushion the blow, to a certain extent. It isn't that Tate is shying away from the horrors. But when he draws it it loses some of its worst terrors. There is one two-page spread in this book that depicts angry whites whipping and lynching their black neighbors. It's not shown as an exact moment in time, but rather a composite of events that would have happened then. And there's something about Tate's style that makes it manageable. The whip has not yet fallen and the noose has not yet been placed around a neck, but the angry mobs are there and you know that the worst is imminent. Most interesting to me too is that far in the background a white woman and her two children just stand there, neither approving nor condemning the action. I think you could get a very good conversation out of kids about this family. What are they feeling? Whose side are they on? Why don't they do something? And Tate has adapted his style, you can see. Compare the heads and faces in this book to those in one of his earlier books like, *Ron's Big Mission* by Rose Blue, in this one he modifies the heads, making them a bit smaller, in proportion with the rest of the body. I was particularly interested in how he did faces as well. If you watch Lynch's face as a child and teen it's significant how he keeps his features blank in the presence of white people. Not expressionless, but devoid of telltale thoughts. As a character, the first time he smiles is when he finally has a job he can be paid for. With its silhouetted moments, good design sense, tapered but not muted color palette, and attention to detail, Mr. Tate puts his all into what is by far his most sophisticated work to date. This year rage erupted over the fact that the Confederate flag continues to fly over the South Carolina statehouse grounds. To imagine that the story Barton relates here does not have immediate applications to contemporary news is facile. As he mentions in his Author's Note, "I think it's a shame how little we question why the civil rights movement in this country occurred a full century following the emancipation of the slaves rather than immediately afterward." So as an author he found an inspiring, if too little known, story of a man who did something absolutely astounding. A story that every schoolchild should know. If there's any justice in the universe, after reading this book they will. Reconstruction done right. Nonfiction done well. For ages 5-8.

This beautifully illustrated picture book includes historical notes, a timeline and notes from the author and illustrator at the end of the book. The story of John Roy Lynch, son of an Irish father and

enslaved mother, who went from being a teenage field slave to a US Congressman in ten years - from 1862 to 1872, is told in a way that children can understand and relate to and the illustrations help to tell the story. The story tells about the life of John Roy Lynch and about the Civil War and Reconstruction period that followed it and how he fought for civil rights during that time. The story is informative and touching and I love the illustrations.

Words and artwork beautifully combine to tell the story of John Roy Lynch, a fascinating "half Irish and all slave" man who spent much of his life enslaved, and eventually, amazingly, became a member of the House of Representatives. Lynch's story will inspire young readers, and teach about Reconstruction, a little-understood period of history. Excellent back matter for further learning, including both author and illustrator describing why they were drawn to the story.

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