

Book Review

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Grover Cleveland, Again!

Ken Burns

Illustrated by Gerald Kelley

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You probably know Ken Burns from all the spectacular documentary films he has made. But did you know that he has written a book for children about all the American presidents? And did you know that Gerald Kelley illustrated it? These two men are American literary heroes because they keep us in touch with our history!

“Grover Cleveland, Again!” is a children’s picture book that is so exquisite in its illustrations and in its style of writing that adults should read it aloud so that they, too, become educated. After all, most of us do not know about all our presidents. So we double educate—our children and ourselves. Simultaneously!

Being an historian, Ken Burns tells us how he would recite the names of the presidents to put his four daughters to sleep when they were little. He would recite a president’s first name, and they would follow with the president’s last name. But when he would recite Grover Cleveland’s name twice because Cleveland’s terms were not consecutive, Ken Burns’ children would say, “Grover Cleveland AGAIN!” And thus the title wrote itself.

Each president has two pages. There is a vertical strip that has basic facts with the president’s picture at the top. At the bottom of the two pages are horizontal strips with questions leading the facts. And throughout all the intriguing information on both pages are beautiful historical illustrations. This is a picture book, a history book, and an art book!

Ken Burns has a questioning style that pulls you into his message. Here are some delightful examples:

A “LIE” ABOUT A “LIE”! There’s a famous story that Washington chopped down his father’s cherry tree and, in admitting it, said, “I cannot tell a lie.” Actually, that story was a “lie”... something a writer made up about him. But he had a good reason. He wanted to give an example of how honest George was.

Many presidents are known for the wars America fought while they were in office. John Adams is known for the war we didn't fight.

Ever wonder what you'll be when you grow up? How about a writer, inventor, architect, scientist, botanist, philosopher, musician, historian, and president of the United States? THOMAS JEFFERSON was all those things. And more!

Madison's most important achievement was to suggest that Americans agree to a "Bill of Rights," which became part of the Constitution. It lists the ten freedoms to speak any opinion, practice any religion, and be treated fairly if accused of a crime.

The best form of government is that which is most likely to prevent the greatest sum of evil.

James Monroe helped people compromise...a trait still difficult or even missing in modern times.

John Quincy Adams was the first son of a president to become president...John Quincy Adams also believed that it was important for the government to do things that helped all the people in the United States...But many people thought the government should only do what it had to do...This disagreement still prevails and probably will forever and ever.

These are only examples of our beginnings. Each and every president follows with succinct and clever remarks with those beautiful illustrations. Our Constitution and Bill of Rights see us through "the worst and the best of times." So many presidents were not great, but that may enlarge the fact that our foundation sees us through those good and bad times.

What a gift Ken Burns and Gerald Kelley have given us!

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