



Classroom Guide for
IN HER HANDS: THE STORY OF
SCULPTOR AUGUSTA SAVAGE
Written by **Alan Schroeder**
Illustrated by **JaeMe Bereal**

Reading Level

*Reading Level: Grade 3–4

Interest Level: Grades 1–5

Guided Reading Level: R

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points: 4.6/1.0

Lexile™ Measure: 630L

*Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula

Themes

Art (Sculpture), Personal Convictions, Overcoming Obstacles and Hardships, African American History, Women's History, Biography

Synopsis

As a young girl in Florida in the 1890s, Augusta enjoyed nothing more than playing with clay. She would happily sculpt it into little figures: cows, chickens, ducks. Augusta's mother didn't mind but her father, a stern preacher, felt the girl was wasting her time on idle nonsense.

With her mother's support, Augusta's sculpting talent blossomed as she grew into a young woman. Eventually, Augusta found herself at a crossroad. She wanted to pursue a career as an artist, but to do so she would have to leave behind all that she knew. With only her passion to guide her, Augusta headed to New York City to follow her dream, wherever it might take her. Despite having little money and no mentorship in New York City, Augusta earned admittance to Cooper Union School to start formal art training.

Award-winning author Alan Schroeder deftly weaves together historical details to create a compelling portrait of this unique Harlem Renaissance sculptor. Warm, inviting paintings by fine artist JaeMe Bereal capture both Augusta Savage's struggles and resilience as she skillfully carved out her own special place in art history.

BACKGROUND

From the author: American sculptor Augusta Savage (1892–1962) was born and raised in Green Cove Springs, Florida. She was by nature a private person, and little is known

about her life. In fact, she has been called one of the most enigmatic figures in American art. In this book, I have tried to present the facts of her early life accurately. I hope I have captured some of Augusta's spirit as well. As both an artist and a teacher, Augusta Savage was a central figure of the Harlem Renaissance; and though only a small fraction of her work survives, she deserves to be better known.

From the Afterword: Augusta Savage began attending classes at Cooper Union in October 1921. She worked hard—so hard, in fact, that she managed to complete two years' worth of study in just six weeks! She had arrived in New York City with very little money and by February, she was broke. The administrators at Cooper Union voted to supply Augusta with the funds that she needed—a first for the school. Upon graduating from Cooper Union, Augusta Savage went on to become one of New York's most promising artists, winning important commissions. Her sculptures included portraits of W.E.B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey, and a famous piece called *Gamin*. In the early 1930s, Augusta Savage discovered that she had another talent—one for teaching—and she opened an arts and crafts studio in Harlem. From the start, her favorite students were children. Her success as a teacher was not overlooked. In 1937, she was appointed director of the Harlem Community Art Center, at that time the largest art center in the nation. In the late 1930s, she was asked to create a sculpture with a musical theme for the upcoming World's Fair in New York. She found her inspiration in James Weldon Johnson's "Lift Every Voice and Sing," a powerful composition considered the Negro national anthem. *The Harp* attracted many spectators when it was unveiled in 1939. Beginning in the early 1940s, her creative output dwindled sharply. Depression overcame her, and in a fit of frustration, she apparently destroyed much of her work. She died in 1962. Because she spent so many years in retirement, and because so little of her work survives, Augusta Savage is not well remembered today. But in the 1930s, she was a guiding light of the Harlem Renaissance.

Cooper Union: Peter Cooper opened the college in 1859 with the vision that school was critical to individual and societal success. [Peter Cooper](#) is described as an inventor, industrialist, philanthropist, and social progressive of his day.¹ The college is divided into three schools: architecture, art, and engineering. Cooper Union from the beginning was [unique](#) compared to other universities and colleges because tuition at Cooper Union was free for students, and all races and women were welcomed alongside the typical students of the day: upper class, privileged white men.² The college admits solely on merit. Starting in fall 2014, Cooper Union adjusted its tuition policy due to financial struggles and now offers at least fifty percent tuition scholarship to all enrolled students.³

BEFORE READING

Prereading Focus Questions

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 5 and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

Before introducing this book to students, you may wish to develop background knowledge and promote anticipation by posing questions such as the following:

1. Take a look at the front and back covers. Take a picture walk. Ask students to make a prediction. Do you think this book will be fiction or nonfiction? What makes you think so? What clues do the author and illustrator give to help you know whether this book will be fiction or nonfiction?

¹ <http://www.cooper.edu/about/history/peter-cooper>

² <http://www.cooper.edu/about/history>

³ <http://cooper.edu/admissions/tuition-fees>

2. What do you know about texts that are biographies? What are the typical text features of biographies? What are some things that will not happen in biographies? Why do authors write biographies? How do you think their reasons different from authors who write fiction?
3. What does an artist do? What are some different types of art with which you are familiar? Why do people like to create art? What are some types of art you have made in school? Share a memory of a favorite piece of art you have made.
4. What do you know about clay? For what do we use clay? What do you know about sculpture and pottery?
5. Have you ever been judged in a competition? On what kind of task were you judged? How does it feel to have your work or ideas evaluated? What advice would you give someone who is shy or nervous about being in a competition?
6. What is *persistence*? Share a time you demonstrated persistence and worked hard to achieve a goal. What was your goal? Who helped you achieve your goal? What challenges did you face? What advice would you give someone who has a goal he or she wants to achieve?
7. Why do you think I chose this book for us to read today?

Exploring the Book

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1, Craft & Structure, Strand 5, and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

Talk about the title of the book. Ask students what they think the title means. Then ask them what they think this book will most likely be about and who the book might be about. What do they think might happen? What information do they think they might learn? What makes them think that?

Take students on a book walk and draw attention to the following parts of the book: front and back covers, illustrated endpapers, title page, dedications, author's note, illustrations, and afterword.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

Have students read to find out:

- who Augusta Savage is
- how she becomes a famous, professional artist
- how she demonstrates persistence and passion
- to what the book title *In Her Hands* refers

Encourage students to consider why the author, Alan Schroeder, would want to share this story with young people.

VOCABULARY

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

The story contains several content-specific and academic words and phrases that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary below. Encourage a variety of strategies to support students' vocabulary acquisition: look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, create a specific action for each word, list synonyms and antonyms, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

CONTENT SPECIFIC

sculptor sour look sermon clay figure pottery potter's wheel

sculpted	sculptures	county fair	Harlem	pulpit	congregation
critical eye	bust	minister	hopscotch	sulphur springs	
letter of introduction		Cooper Union School			

ACADEMIC

disapproved	cultivating	stubbornly	grubby	profane	public
halt	battered	factory	sinful	impressed	talent
contest	art/artist	original	exhibit	startled	tuition
taken aback	officially				

AFTER READING**Discussion Questions**

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop appreciation for the content. Encourage students to refer to passages and/or illustrations in the book to support their responses. **To build skills in close reading of a text, students should cite evidence with their answers.**

Literal Comprehension

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1 and 3)

1. How does Augusta feel about working with clay?
2. What characteristics of clay make Augusta excited about sculpture and art?
3. What obstacles does Augusta face at home?
4. What does Augusta's mother think about Augusta's love of clay and sculpture? How does Augusta's mother encourage her?
5. How does Augusta's father discourage her? What reasons does he give for not wanting her to play with clay?
6. How does Augusta help her family in Florida?
7. What convinces Augusta's mother that her daughter should become an artist?
8. What evidence in the book demonstrates Augusta's persistence and passion?
9. How much money does Augusta win from the county fair? Explain why this was an important accomplishment for Augusta?
10. How does Augusta's mother show she is proud of Augusta?
11. How is the famous sculptor, Solon Borglum, helpful to Augusta? How is he unhelpful to her?
12. What kind of school is Cooper Union?
13. How does Augusta find out about Cooper Union School?
14. Where does Augusta Savage's inspiration come from?

Extension/Higher Level Thinking

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 2 and 3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4 and 5)

1. How does Augusta's father's attitude toward her and her passion prepare her for challenges she may face as a woman artist and an African American artist?
2. Why does Augusta's mother let Augusta keep clay at the farm and continue playing with clay despite her father's disapproval?
3. Why does Augusta's mother let her daughter move to New York City even though she will miss her?
4. What effect does Augusta being a girl have on her father's attitude about playing with clay?
5. Augusta's father calls her figures "profane" and "sinful." Why would he say this? What does he mean? How do you know?
6. How do the illustrations in the book capture the mood of the story? What about the style and color of the images help reflect the mood?

7. Why does the dollar Augusta earns every day from teaching cause Augusta's father to change his mind about his daughter's talent and interest in clay and sculpture? What does this tell you about Augusta's family?
8. Solon Borglum tells Augusta that Cooper Union does not charge any tuition. What does this mean? Why is it significant for Augusta? How would her life be different if Cooper Union did charge tuition?
9. Think about Augusta's favorite song from church. What clues does this give you about why the author, Alan Schroeder, title the book *In Her Hands*?
10. Why does Augusta like to make figures of ducks and chickens when she is a young girl? What does this tell you about her life and experiences? What does this tell you about what she knows? After moving to New York City, what objects might Augusta want to make figures of?
11. How might Augusta's life been different if her father had been supportive of her talent and interests?
12. The main text and the afterword both give facts about Augusta's life and career. How are these sections different from each other? How are they similar? How are both texts examples of nonfiction?
13. How does this story teach about persistence and confidence?
14. What is the theme/author's message of the story? What does the author want you to understand by learning about Augusta Savage's life? Is Augusta a good role model or not?
15. Why do you think the author chose to include the quotation from Augusta Savage on the back cover of the book? How does the quotation relate to the central idea of the book?

Reader's Response

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 2 and 3 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strand 4)

Use the following questions and writing activities to help students practice active reading and personalize their responses to the book. Suggest that students respond in reader's response journals, essays, or oral discussion. You may also want to set aside time for students to share and discuss their written work.

1. In this story, art, particularly sculpture, has the powerful effect of helping Augusta feel content. Describe a time you felt content and what made you feel that way. Did you listen to or play music, write a poem or story, draw a picture, talk to someone, or do something else? How has enjoying art or expressing yourself in art helped you think about your feelings?
2. Augusta is quite persistent, or determined, to achieve her dream of working with clay and becoming an artist. Share a time you demonstrated persistence and worked hard to achieve a goal. What was your goal? Who helped you achieve your goal? What challenges did you face? What advice would you give someone who wants to achieve a goal, but might feel discouraged or scared?
3. Imagine you are the famous sculptor Solon Borglum and Augusta Savage has come to you for help. Write her a letter of introduction to Cooper Union School of Art to help persuade Miss Reynolds to accept Augusta as a student.
4. Augusta's mother is quite supportive and proud of Augusta's talent and passion. Describe a time when someone special in your life was proud of you. How did they demonstrate their pride? How did their support make you feel? Do you think everyone needs someone who believes in them? Why?

ELL Teaching Activities

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 4–6)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English Language Learners.

1. Assign ELL students to partner-read the story with strong English readers/speakers. Students can alternate reading between pages, repeat passages after one another, or listen to the more fluent reader.
2. Have each student write three questions about the story. Then let students pair up and discuss the answers to the questions.
3. Depending on students' level of English proficiency, after the first reading:
 - Review the illustrations in order and have students summarize what is happening on each page, first orally, then in writing.
 - Have students work in pairs to retell either the plot of the story or key details. Then ask students to write a short summary, synopsis, or opinion about what they have read.
4. Have students give a short talk about what they admire about Augusta, her mother, or Miss Reynolds in the story.
5. The book contains several content-specific and academic words that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary. Expose English Language Learners to multiple vocabulary strategies. Have students make predictions about word meanings, look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, list synonyms and antonyms, create an action for each word, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

(Introduction to the Standards, page 7: Student who are college and career ready must be able to build strong content knowledge, value evidence, and use technology and digital media strategically and capably)

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas. These can also be used for extension activities, for advanced readers, and for building a home-school connection.

Social Studies

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7 and 9)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strand 2, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

1. Have students investigate the role of women in American sculpture. Who are some famous American women sculptors? How have women sculptors been treated in the art community, including at universities and museums? What challenges have women sculptors faced due to their gender and/or the color of their skin? How has sculpture, or art in general, opened opportunities for these women and others? What contributions have they made to American art?
2. Ask students to research Florida in the 1890s. What was going on socially and politically at that time in history? What challenges did African Americans who lived in Florida face? What did towns look like? Discuss how this information helps students understand Augusta Savage's childhood and experiences.
3. Have students research the history and mission of The Cooper Union (for the Advancement of Science and Art). How is the school unique from other colleges? How was Cooper Union able to offer free education to students at the time Augusta Savage attended? Is the school still able to offer students a college education tuition-free? Who are some famous alumni of the school?

4. Ask students to research sculptor Solon Borglum. What type of art did Borglum create? What challenges did he face? Create a timeline of major events in his life and career. Using a Venn diagram, compare and contrast his life and career and with Augusta Savage's.

Art/Music

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7 and 9)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strand 2, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3)

1. Have students research and compare sculpture, ceramics, and pottery. Where/when did these art/craft forms originate? What do they have in common? What makes them different? What materials are used in each? Who are some famous artists in each form?
2. Invite your local art school, local community college, or nearest university art department to bring some examples of pottery and sculptures to the classroom. Also supply some clay. Ask the visitor to model some small pieces and allow students to touch each piece, if permitted. Have a discussion about clay and its uses as an art material. What are the properties of clay? What makes it a valuable material to work with for pottery and sculpture? What makes clay unique from other materials used for sculptures?
3. When Augusta Savage was a child, she created many figures of ducks and chickens. Ask students to draw a favorite or important object from their daily lives. If possible, allow students to then use modeling clay or Play-Doh to create a “sculpture” of the object. As Solon Borglum says, “What matters most to you? When you think about your life, what comes to mind?”
4. Play a recording of the song, “He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands.” If you wish, teach students the lyrics and have them sing along with the recording. Ask students why this song was Augusta Savage’s favorite and how it relates to themes in the book.

English Language Arts/Writing

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3 and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 9)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 2 and 3 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)

1. Have students read [Baby Flo](https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2767),⁴ [Little Melba and Her Big Trombone](https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2854),⁵ and/or [Catching the Moon](https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2372),⁶ which are all biographies of women who faced obstacles because of their race and gender. As students reflect on each story, ask them to compare how a clear goal helped these women conquer hardship along the way. What is the central idea of each book? How do these stories tell the impact African American women can have on the world around them? What does each story demonstrate about persistence and passion? What does each story reveal about the value of art?
2. Have students read [It Jes' Happened: When Bill Traylor Started to Draw](https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2764).⁷ Both Bill Traylor and Augusta Savage share their experiences and memories through their art. What kind of images and figures did each artist choose to create? Why? What experiences and memories inspired their art?
3. The story ends with Augusta planning to write a letter to her family about her acceptance into Cooper Union. Imagine you are Augusta and write a letter to your parents. Explain why you are staying in Harlem, in New York City, instead of coming

⁴ <https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2767>

⁵ <https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2854>

⁶ <https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2372>

⁷ <https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2764>

- home. What do you hope to learn at Cooper Union? What are the benefits of studying at Cooper Union? What do you hope to do with your art after you graduate?
4. What is the theme/author's message of the story? What does the author, Alan Schroeder, want you to understand after reading Augusta Savage's story? Explain in a paragraph why you do or don't think Augusta Savage is a good role model.
 5. Read the afterword at the end of the book with students. What were some of the challenges Augusta Savage faced as an adult trying to make a career as an artist? How did people treat her? Why are Augusta Savage's accomplishments and artwork remarkable?
 6. Choose a period from Augusta Savage's life. Write a journal entry from her point of view. Take into account the time period; historically what was happening? Use your imagination to describe what she is experiencing, thinking, and/or feeling.

Mathematics

(Mathematics Standards, Grade 2, Measurement & Data, Strand 8)

(Mathematics Standards, Grade 2, Operations & Algebraic Thinking, Strand 1)

(Mathematics Standards, Grade 3, Operations & Algebraic Thinking, Strands 3 and 8)

1. This book has several money references because Augusta earned money from her teaching and from competitions she entered. Use some of the scenes in the book to review the values of currency. For example, for younger students: What is a dollar? How much is it worth? How many pennies do you need to equal the value of a dollar? How many nickels do you need to equal the value of a dollar? How many quarters do you need to equal the value of a dollar?
2. For teaching students, Augusta earned a dollar every day from the principal of her school. How many different ways can you make \$1.00 using combinations of quarters, dimes, nickels, and pennies?
3. *In Her Hands* also lends itself to word problems. For example: Augusta earned a dollar every day for teaching students. If she taught five days a week from January 1 to March 1, how much money did she earn all together?

Home-School Connection

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strand 2, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strand 4, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strand 7)

1. Encourage students to interview a parent, a guardian, or an adult mentor about their experiences with art. What does this person know about art? What artists were popular when this person was growing up? What memories does this person have about art in popular culture? Why does this person think people like to create art? Look at art? What pieces of art or which artists would this person recommend?
2. Augusta Savage was passionate about sculpture and stops at nothing to make a life around it. Have students interview a parent, a guardian, or an adult mentor about what the person is passionate about either currently or when growing up. How is this passion enjoyable, meaningful, or important to the person? Does the person want to pursue a career in this field or just enjoy it as a hobby? What advice does the person offer for turning a passion into a career?
3. Encourage students to ask a parent, a guardian, or an adult mentor to describe a time he or she experienced the support of someone who believed in them (someone such as a parent, a teacher, a coach, or another adult mentor). How did the experience make the person feel? How did the person demonstrate his or her pride and confidence? Does the person think everyone needs someone who believes in them? Why or why not?
4. Invite students to research an artist (past or present) from their community, city, or state. What type of art does the artist create? What challenges did the artist face?

Create a timeline of major events in the artist's life and career. Using a Venn diagram, compare and contrast the artist's life and career with Augusta Savage's.

5. As a child, Augusta often made figures outdoors. Sit outside and create a drawing on paper. What is happening around your home? Your neighborhood? How would your picture change based on changes in the time of day? The time of year?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alan Schroeder is the author of several award-winning picture books that recreate the early lives of famous African Americans. His works—which include *Ragtime Tumpie*, *Minty: A Story of Young Harriet Tubman*, *Carolina Shout!*, and *Satchmo's Blues*—have earned numerous honors such as ALA Notables, Parents' Choice Awards, the Coretta Scott King Award for Illustration, and *American Bookseller's* Pick of the Lists. Schroeder lives in Alameda, California.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

JaeMe Bereal is a fine artist and sculptor who, like Augusta Savage, discovered her passion at a young age. But unlike Savage, Bereal comes from a long line of supportive artists, including both of her parents. When she isn't painting or sculpting, Bereal enjoys yoga and dance. She lives in Berkeley, California, and can be found on the Web at jaembereal.com.⁸ This is her first picture book.

Book Information

\$19.95, HARDCOVER

978-1-60060-332-7

48 pages, 8-1/4 x 10-7/8

*Reading Level: Grades 3–4

*Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula

Interest Level: Grades 1–5

Guided Reading Level: R

Accelerated Reader[®] Level/Points: 4.6/1.0

Lexile[™] Measure: 630L

Themes: Art (Sculpture), Personal Convictions, Overcoming Obstacles and Hardships, African American History, Women's History, Biography

RESOURCES ON THE WEB

Learn more about *In Her Hands* at: <https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2712>

Order Information

On the Web:

<https://www.leeandlow.com/contact/ordering> (general order information)

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2712> (secure online ordering)

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⁸ <http://jaembereal.com/>