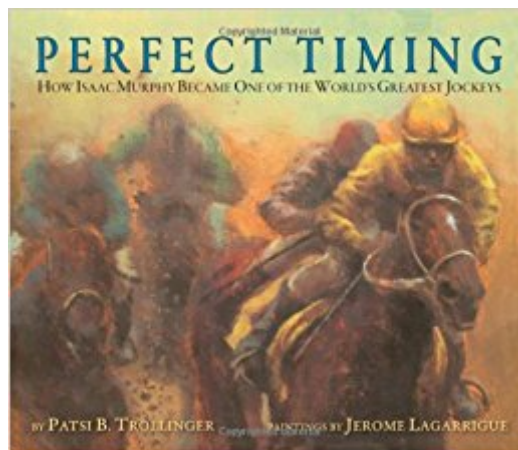




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Perfect Timing: How Isaac Murphy Became One Of The World's Greatest Jockeys



Synopsis

This picture-book biography, Trollinger's debut title, celebrates a legendary African American jockey. Using the jockey's "perfect timing" as a framework, Trollinger begins with a serendipitous moment, when Murphy was 12, that started his career. Off-track scenes, such as Murphy's marriage, appear, but Trollinger focuses on Murphy's rigorous training and the thrilling races, described in moment-by-moment detail. The straightforward text will read aloud well, and the subject will interest boys and girls alike. Lagarrigue's elegant paintings wonderfully enhance the story. As in his illustrations for Deborah Wiles' *Freedom Summer* (2000), for which he received the Coretta Scott King/John Steptoe Award, the images reinforce the story's sense of looking back through time with blurred, abstract acrylics, which, like memories or historical stories, only capture part of the picture. Kids will be drawn particularly to scenes on the track, spiked with the color of bright silk uniforms, which evoke the speed and the excitement of both horse and rider. A note adds more historical context about African Americans in horse racing.

Book Information

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Age Range: 2 and up

Grade Level: 2 - 5

Customer Reviews

Grade 2-5—This picture-book biography describes how 12-year-old Murphy, the grandson of slaves, accepted a chance offer to ride a racehorse in 1873 in Lexington, KY, changing his life forever. He became one of the most successful jockeys in history, holding records that remain

unbroken to this day. The exciting depiction of a match race in 1890, an event for just two horses and riders, concisely captures the action and drama of the sport. Trollinger's prose style is clear but not oversimplified, and she does not sidestep the issue of the eating disorder that led to Murphy's death at 35. An author's note explains that Murphy's perfect timing pertained not only to a horse race but also to his career. If he had raced 20 years earlier it would have been as a slave, and 20 years later, racial discrimination had forced most black jockeys out of racing. Lagarrigue's russet-hued oil paintings are vibrant and full of movement. This interesting biography is unique in its historical perspective on race relations and sports.

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This picture-book biography, Trollinger's debut title, celebrates a legendary African American jockey. Using the jockey's "perfect timing" as a framework, Trollinger begins with a serendipitous moment, when Murphy was 12, that started his career. Off-track scenes, such as Murphy's marriage, appear, but Trollinger focuses on Murphy's rigorous training and the thrilling races, described in moment-by-moment detail. The straightforward text will read aloud well, and the subject will interest boys and girls alike. Lagarrigue's elegant paintings wonderfully enhance the story. As in his illustrations for Deborah Wiles' *Freedom Summer* (2000), for which he received the Coretta Scott King/John Steptoe Award, the images reinforce the story's sense of looking back through time with blurred, abstract acrylics, which, like memories or historical stories, only capture part of the picture. Kids will be drawn particularly to scenes on the track, spiked with the color of bright silk uniforms, which evoke the speed and the excitement of both horse and rider. A note adds more historical context about African Americans in horse racing.

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This is a beautifully illustrated and wonderfully told story. It has a timeless feeling, and wonderful educational value.

A very well written book. Please tell the author to keep writing good books! Ms. Trollinger has a way of making the words sing!

The story of Isaac Murphy is inspirational for all children but especially for children of African

American heritage. This young man was a former slave who became a great jockey. His name continues to be in the record books even today! Children love the action involved with horse racing and are mesmerized by the lovely artwork. This is a must read historically and for pure enjoyment!

I was not expecting a children's book. It was informative, but I was searching for a thick book of history on Isaac Murphy.

This is one of my favorite biography picture books because it teaches the idea of doing your best, even when it's tough. We read biographies in our homeschool, and this book is a wonderful way to introduce even young children to the story of a noble life.

Derby Day seems like the perfect day to share this book. Isaac Murphy was a three time Kentucky Derby winner and is the only jockey buried on the grounds of the famous Kentucky Horse Park. Author, Patsi Trollinger makes the point that Isaac Burns Murphy's timing was perfect in life as well as on the track. The son of a slave, he lived at a time when black jockeys could enjoy a successful career in racing, before they were forced out of the sport early in the 20th century. Trollinger describes his career beginning with his early training in Lexington where he learned the importance of pace and concentration. Murphy went on to become one of the most sought after jockeys of his time. The exciting match race between Salvatore and Tenny is told in such detail that the reader feels like they are standing at the rail watching the race. Jerome Lagarrigue's soft focus paintings convey the speed and power of the horses. The colors are dark and muddled which imparts the yesteryear feel of the story. The reader's eyes do need to linger on the pictures to fully appreciate and discern the images. Isaac Burns Murphy had a reputation for honesty and fair play. "He had rules for himself that were firm: no cheating, no fighting, no swearing. And he rode every race, large or small, as if it was the most important one of his life." This is a lovely tribute to a man of character and who might otherwise be unknown to this generation.

In PERFECT TIMING, Patsi Trollinger has succeeded in encapsulating the fascinating life of Isaac Murphy, the grandson of slaves--and one of the all-time winningest jockeys in the world. From his first ride on Volcano, which earned Isaac his place in jockey school, through his wins at racetracks around the United States, his marriage, an all-important match between Isaac (and a horse named Salvator) and a horse named Tenny, his struggles in his later years, and his death at the young age of thirty-five in 1896, PERFECT TIMING delivers. Paintings by Jerome Lagarrigue compliment the

lively story--an all-around beautiful book! I recommend this picture book biography wholeheartedly!

Patsi B. Trollinger, *Perfect Timing: How Isaac Murphy Became One of the World's Greatest Jockeys* (Viking, 2006) Isaac Murphy. Even now, over a century after his death, the very mention of his name inspires reverence among most racing fans. Patsi Trollinger gives a good intro to Murphy's life and career in *Perfect Timing*, a book aimed at, roughly, the preschool set. Her clear prose is well-complemented by Jerome LaGarrigue's impressionist illustrations. A worthy addition to the bookshelf of any horse racing fan, or any horse racing fan's child. ****

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