

George Moses Horton

General Overview

George Moses Horton was a slave who composed poetry and sold his poems to university students. His initial book was the first one published in the South by an African American. The sample acrostic is one written for Sion Hart Rogers, UNC student in the 1840s for Miss Mary E. V. Powell.

Lesson Objectives

Students will be able to

- Examine the unique life and work of a slave.
- Use an original acrostic to discuss and practice this form of poetry

Preparation

Students should read the acrostic, as well as the short biographical sketch of Horton.

Activities

The following questions should provoke discussion.

- What was unique about George Moses Horton's life?
- Why was it unusual for a slave to write and sell poems?
- Why did the UNC students purchase so many of Horton's poems?
- What is an acrostic?
- What is the meaning of "buying time" from a master?

Activities at <http://www.history.ncdcr.gov/SHRAB/ar/exhibits/educationalresources/index.html>

Enrichment and Extension

- Students may create an acrostic with their own or someone else's name. Examples can be found at www.holycross.edu/departments/socant/dhummon/acrostics/acrostics.html.
- Students may investigate other slaves that did unusual jobs.

Sources

PC 1533 Simpson and Biddle Papers at the North Carolina State Archives

Jackson, Blyden "George Moses Horton, North Carolinian" *North Carolina Historical Review* 53(April 1976) 140-147.

Sherman, Joan R., ed. *The Black Bard of North Carolina: George Moses Horton and His Poetry* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 1997.

Walser, Richard *The Black Poet* New York: Philosophical Society, 1966.

"George Moses Horton" *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988.

Wilson, Steven "The Slave Poet of Chapel Hill" *Our State* (October 2004).

George Moses Horton

George Moses Horton was born around 1797 in Northampton County, North Carolina. He was born a slave, the property of William Horton. When he was a child the Hortons moved to Chatham County and he taught himself to read. Horton also began to compose poems. In 1814 he was given to James Horton, the son of William and in 1843 to Hall Horton, James' son.

Before he was 20 years old George Moses Horton began creating acrostics, reciting, and selling them to students at the University of North Carolina. The acrostics used the names of students' sweethearts. Horton sold the acrostics for \$.25- \$.75. He also sold fruit at the university and, with this money he bought his time from his master at \$.25 (later \$.50) per day. In 1829 Horton published a book entitled *The Hope of Liberty*. It was the first book published in the south by an African-American. He later published two more books.

Some time in the 1830s George Moses Horton married* a slave belonging to Franklin Snipes who was a neighbor of the Hortons. Although the marriage was not a happy one there were two children born to the union, a son, Free and a daughter, Rhody. Both children used their mother's surname, Snipes.

After the Civil War George Moses Horton allied himself with a Federal soldier and went north with him. He died in Philadelphia, where he lived the rest of his life, around 1883.

*Slaves were not legally allowed to marry at this time.

Books by George Moses Horton

The Hope of Liberty 1829

The Poetical Works of George M. Horton, The Colored Bard of North Carolina 1845

Naked Genius 1865

About George Moses Horton

Jackson, Blyden "George Moses Horton, North Carolinian" *North Carolina Historical Review* 53(April 1976) 140-147.

Sherman, Joan R., ed. *The Black Bard of North Carolina: George Moses Horton and His Poetry* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 1997.

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Acrostics

Mistress of green in flowers arrayed
Alluring all my heart away
Replete with glory not to fade
Yet flourish in eternal may—
Eternalized by distant fame—
Void of a shade in bloom divine—
Pleasures await thy sacred name
Or bid thee still proceed to shine
Who has surpassed thy heavenly mein
Expression will forbear to tell
Like thee not one I yet have seen
Let all adore thee lovely belle

So let our names together blend
In floods of union to the end
Or flow together soul in soul
Nor distance break the soft control—
How pleasing is the thought to me
A thought of such a nymph as thee
Reverts my language into song
That flows delightful soft along—
Return to me a soft reply
On which I must with joy rely
Give me thy hand and then thy heart
Entirely mingled not to part
Relume the tapor near expired
Seeking a friend so long desired—

Acrostics

Gifted poet
Enterprising man

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Courtesy of the State Archives of North Carolina