

SCHOMBURG

THE MAN WHO BUILT A LIBRARY

Carole Boston Weatherford

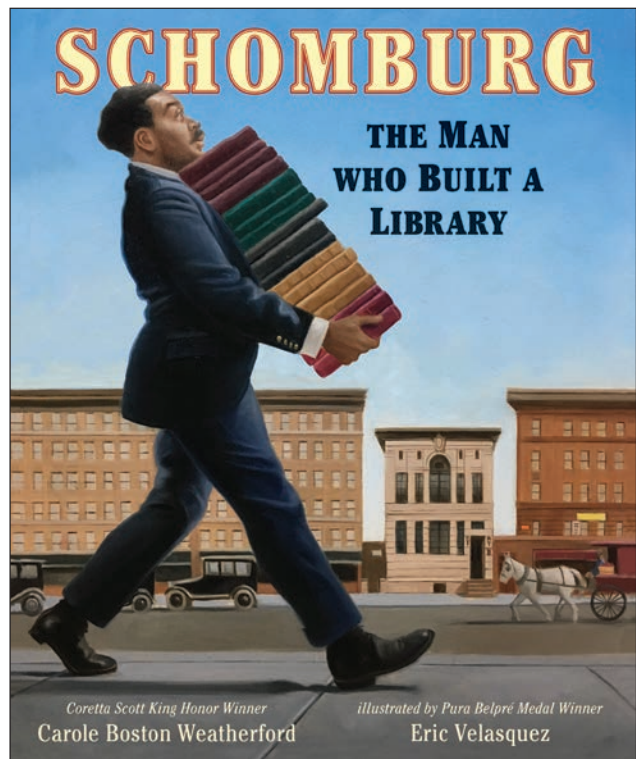
illustrated by
Eric Velasquez



ABOUT THE BOOK

Where is our historian to give us our side?
Arturo asked.

Amid the scholars, poets, authors, and artists of the Harlem Renaissance stood an Afro–Puerto Rican man named Arturo Schomburg. The law clerk’s life’s passion was to collect books, letters, music, and art from Africa and the African diaspora in order to bring to light the achievements of people of African descent. When Schomburg’s collection became so large that it threatened to overflow his house (and his wife threatened to mutiny), he turned to the New York Public Library, where he created and curated a collection that was the cornerstone of a new Division of Negro History, Literature and Prints. A century later, his groundbreaking collection, known as the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, has become a beacon to scholars all over the world.



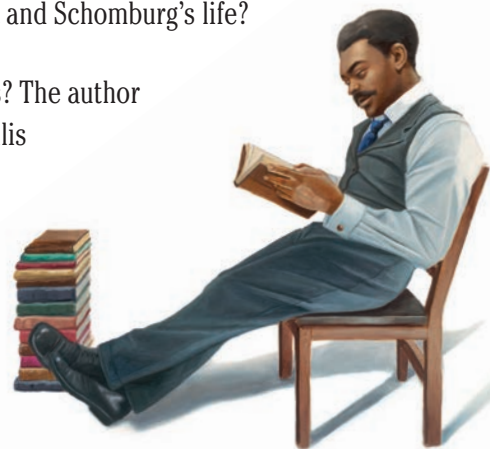
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Common Core Connections

This biographical picture book provides students with a deep understanding of adversity, determination, cultural pride, and the power of research. The focuses on Schomburg’s inquisitive nature and relentless pursuit of the truth make the text an excellent choice for a close read, group discussion, or an independent research project. Based on the thorough historical connections and rich illustrations, teachers can integrate the text into related content areas such as science and social studies. Throughout this guide, teachers will find suggestions that are aligned with the Common Core State Standards for Reading: Informational Text, Speaking and Listening, and Writing. As students explore the book through the questions in this guide, teachers should encourage them to support their answers with textual evidence and extend the discussion with additional text-dependent questions. For more information on specific standards for each grade level, visit the Common Core website at www.corestandards.org.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The book begins with the following Arturo Schomburg quote: “The American Negro must remake his past in order to make his future. . . . History must restore what slavery took away.” Analyze the quote. What message does Schomburg convey? What do you think we will learn in this text based on the meaning of the quote? In your opinion, why is this quote important?
2. How did Schomburg’s interaction with his fifth-grade teacher shape his lifelong curiosity about African heritage? What did she think about African history? How did Schomburg respond to that opinion? Do you agree with him or his teacher? Why? Support your response with evidence from the text.
 - 2a. Consider how the story in the poem “Fifth Grade” contributed to the development of Schomburg’s character. How does this poem align with the theme of inquiry, which is highlighted throughout the text?
3. What is the role of a historian? What types of things do we learn from historians? Why would they discuss some cultures and ignore others?
 - 3a. Schomburg was fascinated when he learned about the accomplishments of Benjamin Banneker. How was Schomburg’s study of Banneker aligned with the actions of a historian? What important things did he learn about Banneker?
4. When Schomburg arrived in New York, he was not fluent in English and had no record of his formal schooling. Why were these details potential barriers to his success? How did he overcome them, support himself, and positively contribute to the New York community? What does his response to these obstacles tell us about his character? Describe his character traits using details from the text.
5. As you read the book, look for terms that are written in both English and Spanish, such as in the poem “El inmigrante/The Immigrant.” Why do you think the author chose to include words written in both languages? Using examples from the text, explain what message is conveyed through the Spanish and English terms. How do the Spanish terms add to the reader’s understanding of the text and Schomburg’s life?
6. In “The Book Hunting Bug,” what fueled Schomburg’s love of books? The author goes on to reference several famous historical figures, such as Phillis Wheatley, Frederick Douglass, Toussaint Louverture, David Walker, Denmark Vesey, and Nat Turner. According to the text, why is it important for people to learn about these individuals? What did they contribute to society? Why did Schomburg have to search for information about them instead of learning about them in school?



COMMON CORE CONNECTIONS:

These questions correlate to Common Core ELA Reading Standards for Informational Text: Key Ideas and Details RI.4–7.1, 4–7.3; Craft and Structure RI.4–7.4; and Integration of Knowledge and Ideas RI.4–7.7, 4–7.8.

7. The author uses figurative language to convey understanding and build reader interest in the story. In “The Book Hunting Bug,” the text states, “If only Arturo could have been a gull swooping and crooning above the waves as Phillis crossed the Atlantic a second time, bound for London to promote her book —*Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*— in 1773.” What does this tell us about Schomburg’s hunt for literature? As you read, search for additional figurative language and interpret the meaning.
8. In “Whitewash,” several sources of evidence are provided to support reader understanding of the term *whitewash*. What does it mean to whitewash something? Which famous individuals does the author highlight to help the reader understand the meaning and impact of whitewashing? Based on the evidence provided, what was Schomburg’s opinion of whitewashing? Do you agree?
9. How was Schomburg connected to the Harlem Renaissance? Describe his interactions with the “Who’s Who” of the movement, as discussed in “Bloodhound.” Compare and contrast his role as a historian to those of famous artists, writers, and poets of the Harlem Renaissance. How did his interactions result in a positive community impact? Why was Schomburg considered an influential member of society?
10. Why is Schomburg’s contribution to the New York Public Library referred to as “the cornerstone of the Division of Negro History, Literature and Prints” in the poem “Sold”? Describe noteworthy items included in his collection. What can others learn from them? Do you believe it was easy or challenging for Schomburg to sell his collection? Why? Incorporate evidence from the text in your response.
11. Explain how Schomburg’s actions positively impacted Fisk University. How did his decisions influence both professors and students? Why was the Lincoln Bible a relevant item worthy to be the centerpiece of the library’s holdings according to the poem “Fisk University”?
12. In “Doctor,” why did the library staff call Arturo “Doctor Schomburg”? How had he earned that honor? Summarize Schomburg’s journey, lessons, and development from the beginning to the end of the story.
13. Think about the sequence of events outlined in the book. How did Schomburg’s mission evolve as his collection grew? Why did he begin collecting art? How can art and literature convey a similar message?
14. Eric Velasquez provides many vivid illustrations throughout the text. Select your favorite image and explain why it is important and how it helps the reader better understand the corresponding text.
15. In the story, we learn that Schomburg changed his name from Arturo to Arthur. Why do you think he made that decision? Which of Schomburg’s actions show that he has pride in his *afroborinqueño* heritage? Why is it important for him to explore his own culture? Create a hypothesis that explains why he focused on studying other cultures earlier in his life. Use evidence from the story to support your conclusion.
16. In “Epitaph: 1938,” the author shares the following proverb: “A book is like a garden carried in a pocket.” How does this proverb relate to Arturo Schomburg’s life’s work? Can you think of another proverb that might be appropriate for Schomburg’s lifetime mission? How does the proverb relate to the central theme of the text? Provide an analysis using details from the text.

VOCABULARY

Defining and Using Words

Instruct students to write a definition for each of the words below as they read the text. Remind students that using strategies like isolating the word parts, analyzing context clues in and around the sentence, and generating synonyms can help them figure out the definition of the words.

afroborinqueño	heritage	priceless
agitate	ignorance	revolution
collector	immigrated	transcend
endeavor	insatiable	uprising
exhibitions	opponent	vast
haste	peculiar	

COMMON CORE CONNECTIONS

These questions correlate to the Common Core ELA Reading Standards for Informational Text: Craft and Structure RI.4–7.4.

SOCIAL STUDIES

School Curriculum Debate

Schomburg’s experience in school shows that perspectives about curriculum vary. As a class, brainstorm a list of historical topics and/or individuals highlighted in your school curriculum. After reviewing the list, as a class generate at least three topics and/or individuals who should be added. Once the list is complete, have each student share their ideas by providing a rationale for each suggestion, a personal point of view, and potential counterarguments.

Virtual Field Trip

It is important to consider the relevance of Arturo Schomburg’s work and the impact it continues to make today. Explore the website for the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Have small groups of students take a virtual field trip, with each group engaging in one of the online exhibitions. Then have each group present a detailed overview to the class of new information learned from the investigation.

COMMON CORE CONNECTIONS

These questions correlate to the Common Core ELA Speaking and Listening Standards: Comprehension and Collaboration SL.4–7.1 and ELA Writing Standards: Research to Build and Present Knowledge W.4–7.7, W.4–7.8.



Vocabulary Graphic Organizer



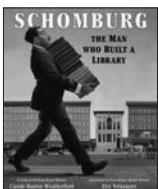
Use this graphic organizer to further examine challenging vocabulary words from the book.

Sentence from the Text		Synonyms or Examples
Definition in My Own Words	Word	Antonyms or Non-Examples

Sentence from the Text		Synonyms or Examples
Definition in My Own Words	Word	Antonyms or Non-Examples

Sentence from the Text		Synonyms or Examples
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Sentence from the Text		Synonyms or Examples
Definition in My Own Words	Word	Antonyms or Non-Examples



On the back of this sheet, draw a picture for each word to help you remember the meaning.

POETRY

The Power of Poetry

Arturo Schomburg was very interested in the work of Phillis Wheatley. Use online and print resources to locate one of Phillis Wheatley’s poems, and read it aloud to your class. Clearly convey the tone and meaning of the poem by incorporating all components of reading fluency (e.g., accuracy, prosody, and expression). Then explain the meaning, significance, and central message of the poem.

Artistic Expression

Arturo Schomburg lived during the Harlem Renaissance, a time that was filled with artistic expression. As discussed in the story, he was an avid collector of books and art. Have your students think about an important theme conveyed in the story. Then ask them to each create an illustration, poem, or song that depicts the theme. Have students share their representations with a small group or a partner.

COMMON CORE CONNECTIONS

These questions correlate to the Common Core ELA Reading Standards for Foundational Skills: Fluency RF.4–5.4; ELA Writing Standards: Text Types and Purposes W.4–7.3; and Research to Build and Present Knowledge W.4–7.7, W.4–7.8.

HISTORY

Time Line Analysis

Have your students use the time line provided in the back of the book to summarize the important events of Schomburg’s life. Students should explain how at least five events relate to and/or impact another experience on the time line. They should also consider how things happening in the United States during that period were connected to Schomburg’s decisions. To demonstrate understanding of the selected time line events, students should write a summary that includes a clear introduction, key details, factual examples, and a conclusion statement.

Become a Historian

Using online and text resources, have students research famous people (e.g., musicians, poets, authors) who thrived during the Harlem Renaissance. They should compare and contrast Schomburg’s contributions to those of one of these individuals. Students can then create a presentation that outlines the contributions of, important facts about, and quotes from Schomburg and the other person. Instruct students to highlight why both people are historically significant.

COMMON CORE CONNECTIONS

These questions correlate to the Common Core ELA Reading Standards for Informational Text: Craft and Structure RI.4–7.6; ELA Writing Standards: Text Types and Purposes W.4–7.2; and Research to Build and Present Knowledge W.4–7.7, W.4–7.8.

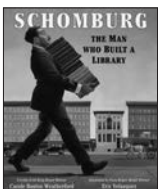


Famous People Graphic Organizer



Use this graphic organizer to keep track of the famous individuals referenced throughout the book.

FAMOUS INDIVIDUAL	HISTORICAL CONTRIBUTION



About the Author



Carole Boston Weatherford is a *New York Times* best-selling author and poet. Her numerous books for children include the Coretta Scott King Author Award Honor Book *Becoming Billie Holiday*, illustrated by Floyd Cooper, and the Caldecott Honor Books *Moses: When Harriet Tubman Led Her People to Freedom*, illustrated by Kadir Nelson; *Freedom in Congo Square*, illustrated by R. Gregory Christie; and *Voice of Freedom: Fannie Lou Hamer, Spirit of the Civil Rights Movement*, illustrated by Ekua Holmes. Carole Boston Weatherford teaches at Fayetteville State University and lives in Fayetteville, North Carolina.

About the Illustrator



Eric Velasquez is the illustrator of numerous books for children, including several previous collaborations with Carole Boston Weatherford. He won the Coretta Scott King/John Steptoe Award for New Talent for his work as the illustrator of *The Piano Man*, written by Debbi Chocolate, and is the author-illustrator of the Pura Belpré Illustrator Award–winning *Grandma’s Gift*. Born in Harlem, he lives and works in Hartsdale, New York.



This teachers' guide was written by Dawn Jacobs Martin, an assistant professor of special education who works to improve student academic outcomes through teacher development, instructional design, and research in the areas of response to intervention, social support, and parent involvement.

