

**DON'T HOLD ME BACK: MY LIFE AND ART
BY WINFRED REMBERT**

**Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Award Nominee 2006
Grades 6-8**

Submitted by Brenda Eames, Teen/Young Adult Services Librarian
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Title: Don't Hold Me Back: My Life and Art

Author: Winfred Rembert

Publisher: Cricket Books, 2003

Pages: 40

Summary

Don't Hold Me Back: My Life and Art is an autobiographical story of Mr. Rembert's life from shortly after his real birth in Cuthbert, Georgia in 1945 to his birth as an artist in 1996. An introductory poem by Nikki Giovanni provides the title of this book and the underlying theme of Mr. Rembert's life. Episodes of his life depicted in his leather artwork include his childhood as a poor black child in the rural south, his first hand accounts of racism, his civil rights activism, and his time spent in prison.

This first book by Winfred Rembert vividly tells his life story through words and original artwork. The story begins with Winfred's mother giving him to his great aunt whom he called "Mama." Mama pulled him on her cotton sack as she worked in the fields picking cotton. Winfred was observant and noticed the details of life around him from the people and shops of "Colored People's Corner" to the way that whites treated blacks. When he was about nineteen, he went to a demonstration in Americus, Georgia. When shots were fired and the demonstrators ran, Winfred found a car with a key in it and he left. The police arrested him and he was put in jail. Later, he served time in the same penitentiary where Martin Luther King, Jr. had served time. While in prison, an artist named TJ taught him how to make designs on leather.

"Entirely, self-taught, Winfred was unaware of the strong affinities of form, subject matter, and narrative that he shared with Hale Woodruff and other towering figures of African American art such as Horace Pippin, Jacob Lawrence, and Romare Bearden.... Here, in the first book on Winfred Rembert and his art, is a fine selection of his leather paintings accompanied by text based on Winfred's descriptions, all of which reflect a life lived fully and irrepressibly with a most generous human spirit." [from *Don't Hold Me Back's* "A Note on the Art" by Jack Reynolds, The Henry J. Heinz II Director of the Yale University Art Gallery.]

Related Titles

Art Against the Odds: From Slave Quilts to Prison Paintings by Susan Goldman Rubin. This book combines photographs of outsider art with stories about the artists and their artwork.

Activities for Creating Pictures and Poetry by Janis Bunchman and Stephanie Bissell Briggs. This book focuses on creating both artwork and poetry. It combines poets and artists by themes and encourages both art and poetry using various mediums and styles.

Gorgeous Leather Crafts: 30 Projects to Stamp, Stencil, Weave and Tool by Kari Lee. This beautifully illustrated how-to book includes a variety of leather craft projects.

Words with Wings: A Treasury of African-American Poetry, and Art by Belinda Rochelle.

See the "Further Reading" section of *Don't Hold Me Back* for more titles.

Classroom Connections

- Have students use artwork to illustrate a place or event that had importance in their life. (Use art to tell a story.)
- Compare and contrast Winfred Rembert's art with other African American folk artists.
- *Don't Hold Me Back* could complement and enrich classroom discussions on African Americans' Civil Rights Struggle.

Web Sites

Cobblestone Publishing

<http://www.cobblestonepub.com/pages/TGBOOKSRembert.html>

This teacher's guide accompanies *Don't Hold Me Back* and includes discussion questions and class activities.

Footsteps Magazine

<http://www.footstepsmagazine.com/issues/2003/05/2003-05-more.html>

Site features a biography of Winfred Rembert, a summary of his book, and two excerpts.

The Indelible Images of Winfred Rembert

<http://www.folkart.org/mag/rembert/rembert.html>

The article includes background information from the author on his life and work.

Official Website for Nikki Giovanni

<http://nikki-giovanni.com/>

Includes biographical information, multimedia (of Ms. Giovanni reciting some of her poetry), bibliography, and web resources.