

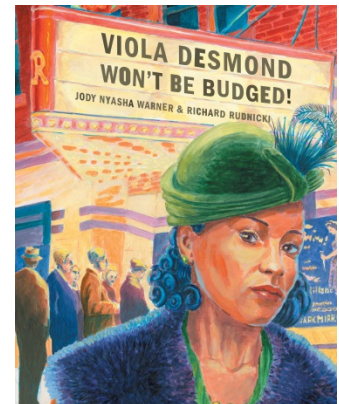
Viola Desmond Won't Be Budged

Jody Nyasha Warner

2010

Groundwood Books, Toronto, Berkeley

There is sometimes a tendency on the part of us Canadians to be perhaps a little smug when reflecting on our national attitude of acceptance and tolerance with regards to race relations, particularly with African Canadians. After all, we did provide the Northern Terminus for the Underground Railroad, providing a place of freedom for escaped African American slaves. What is easy to forget is that British Canada abolished slavery only thirty years before the United States, and racial tensions did not vanish with the stroke of a pen.



Viola Desmond Won't Be Budged, written for children, illustrates that segregation was alive and well in Nova Scotia in the years just following World War II. Jody Nyasha Warner frames the story around the bravery of a successful Black businesswoman at the time who simply refused to be moved by the accepted prejudice of the day.

The story suggests to us that Viola Desmond had achieved some status in her own community, being the proprietor of her own beauty salon which employed two others, and owning her own car. It was troubles with this car that caused Viola to come face to face with discrimination in a nearby community.

Faced with the prospect of killing time while awaiting car repairs, Viola decided to do what many of us would do; she opted to see a movie. Assuming no issues of segregation, Viola took a seat on the main floor of the theatre. She was soon corrected. Using the short, repetitive sentences effective in writing for children, Warren illustrates the unyielding position of the theatre workers and police who were called in when Viola refused to move. Although there were no segregation laws on the books in Canada at the time, Viola ended up spending the night in jail.

Back home, Viola's story caused many in her community to become angry and they began to speak out against segregation in the province. An attempt to appeal Viola's cleverly constructed charge did not meet with success, but her experience started a movement which eventually led to anti-segregation laws.

Jody Nyasha Warner has written this story in a conversational way, posing questions of the reader to recall the focus of the book. An appendix of African Canadian History, written for a more adult audience, provides very helpful context and concludes, "Today many African Canadians still experience racism on a daily basis. Viola Desmond continues to be an inspiration for all who choose to struggle against racial discrimination."

By writing this book about the struggles of one brave woman in 1946 Nova Scotia, Jody Nyasha Warner has provided our children with honest insight into the world of African Canadians as they have struggled, and continue to struggle for acceptance and inclusion in Canada.

***Since writing this review, on December 8, 2016, the Bank of Canada announced that Viola Desmond will be honoured as the first Canadian woman to appear on a Canadian bank note. Viola was chosen from hundreds of worthy Canadian women submitted by people all across the country. She will appear on the ten dollar bill, beginning in 2018.



Mollie Wilson