

News Release

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Review copies (ebook and paperback) available

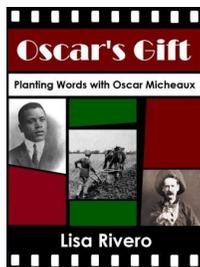
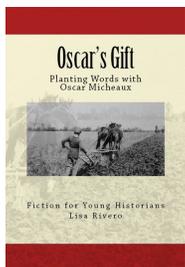


Oscar Micheaux wrote seven novels, several of which drew upon his homesteading experiences and included thinly disguised names of people and places he knew.

Micheaux founded the Micheaux Book and Film Company and produced over forty films, half of which were silent films.

Micheaux's cinematic response to *The Birth of a Nation*, his 1919 film *Within Our Gates*, is available at the Internet Archive:

<http://www.archive.org/details/WithinOurGates>



Paperback: \$6.95 • ISBN: 9781466215597

Ebook: \$0.99 • ISBN: 9780692014981

The Filmmaker Was First a Farmer: Novel Introduces Oscar Micheaux to Young Readers

Milwaukee, WI —While many people are aware of the pioneering filmmaking career of Oscar Micheaux, fewer know about his years as a South Dakota homesteader on the Rosebud Indian Reservation or his subsequent novels chronicling his farming experiences. In a new work of children's historical fiction, *Oscar's Gift: Planting Words with Oscar Micheaux*, author Lisa Rivero introduces readers ages eight and older to the early adult years of historical figure Oscar Micheaux, as seen through the eyes of the fictional eleven-year-old protagonist, Tomas, the son of immigrants.

Micheaux claimed his first homestead through the 1904 land lottery, an event which with the novel begins. He continued to farm until the drought of 1911 and later wrote about his farming experiences in novels such as *The Conquest: The Story of a Negro Pioneer*, and *The Homesteader*, which he also made into movies.

Oscar's Gift: Planting Words with Oscar Micheaux is available in paperback and as an ebook from major online bookstores. Historical topics embedded in the story include homesteading, farming, Native American boarding schools, Pullman train porters, Lakota Sioux culture, and education.

SELECTED REVIEWS

- “*Oscar's Gift* is a fine and much recommended pick for community library youth fiction collections.” ~ *Midwest Book Review*
- “Lisa Rivero, a native of the Rosebud country, expertly weaves fact with fiction in *Oscar's Gift*.” ~ *South Dakota Magazine*
- “Lisa Rivero's book is a definite must-read and a great introduction to Oscar Micheaux.” ~ Jerry Wilske, *Director of the Oscar Micheaux Film and Book Festival*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lisa Rivero grew up on the same South Dakota reservation where Oscar Micheaux homesteaded. She is the award-winning author of four previously published books and currently writes and teaches in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Her online home is <http://lisarivero.com>.

INTERVIEW WITH LISA RIVERO, AUTHOR OF *OSCAR'S GIFT*
(Questions by Marcia Richards, published at <http://marcia-richards.com>)

Was there a book or an author that influenced your life growing up?

I went to a two-room country school, and the nearest library was 30 miles away, the nearest book store even farther, so most of my books came from Scholastic orders and a county-wide Bookmobile (books shelved in a small van) that came to the school every week. Perhaps because I had access to fewer books than children today, I treasured nearly all of them, from *Heidi* to *The Hardy Boys*. In particular, I remember reading the *Little House* series over and over and going through a brief phase of calling my dad "Pa" (he wasn't amused). I can definitely see the influence of Laura Ingalls Wilder in my most recent book.

Could you, please, give us a brief summary of *Oscar's Gift*?

Oscar's Gift takes place in 1904-1905 on the Rosebud Indian Reservation in South Dakota. The story follows eleven-year-old Tomas, the son of Swedish immigrants, through a year of difficult changes, a new family, and a new home. Through it all, he gains new perspectives on luck and on the value of inner and outer diversity.

What was the inspiration for this book?

The form the book eventually took—that of a work of fiction for young (and young at heart) readers—was inspired by the many children and teenagers I've known whose sensitivity and curiosity can make them feel at odds with the world, and whose intensity and sense of justice can so easily be dismissed or squelched. I remember in particular a young boy in a writing and literature group I led who gave an impassioned reading of Langston Hughes's poem *I, Too, Sing America*. I wanted to write a story that captured that wonderful, youthful idealism and that encouraged young readers to stay true to themselves.

Your character, Oscar Micheaux, was an actual person. Can you tell us how much of the story is fact and how much is fiction?

Many of the details of Oscar's life in the book are from biographies written about him and his own semi-autobiographical novels. Some examples are his participation in the land lottery and subsequent purchase of a relinquished claim, his admiration for Booker T.

Washington, and his avid reading. Everything having to do with Tomas and his family is fictional, but sometimes a historical detail served as the basis for a fictional scene. For example, Micheaux biographer Patrick McGilligan wrote, "Micheaux seemed cursed with fiendish mules, once getting spiked in the temple so hard that he was out cold for hours." In my version of the story, I imagined Tomas's finding Oscar lying in the field after the accident.

What's the most surprising thing you learned during the process of research and writing *Oscar's Gift*?

This question is a tough one, because there were so many wonderful surprises along the way! The most interesting personal discovery was just how prominent Oscar Micheaux was in the area where I was raised, yet somehow I had never heard of him until just a few years ago. After I wrote the book, my dad said that my grandmother had talked about Oscar. I wish I'd discovered him earlier so that I could have asked her about him.

If you could travel back in time, when and where would you choose to land and why?

I hope this isn't a cop-out answer, but any time or place would be fine. History has always fascinated me. If I had to choose, though, I would love to have known my grandmother when she was a little girl. She was born in 1902, so maybe I subconsciously settled on the turn of the 20th century to tell Oscar's story for that reason.

What project do you have coming up next?

One project I'm looking forward to is the next book in the Fiction for Young Historians series, which takes place during the Great Depression.

If you could leave your readers with one bit of wisdom, what would it be?

This wisdom certainly isn't original, but it's important: If you have a gift or talent in a certain area, don't be afraid to own it, and to remember that practice and patience are far more important than luck in making that talent into an activity that can bring you joy.

