**Fortune's Bones**

**Book Excerpt**

**What's the Connection?**

The poem “Not My Bones” was inspired by the real life of Fortune, an enslaved person. Now learn more about this man and about what happened to his bones after he died.

**Skill Focus: Identify Treatment**

Three writers know they have to write about the first day of middle school. One writer writes a funny newspaper column about an embarrassing moment she had when she started sixth grade. Another writer describes the first day of sixth grade in a letter to his grandmother. A third writer creates an e-mail that gives students tips on how to find their way around the new middle school. How can such a variety of writings come from the same topic? It’s because writers can handle the same subject matter in very different ways.

The way a topic is handled is called its **treatment**. The writer’s purpose, or reason for writing, helps determine a work’s treatment. So does the form the writing takes and the tone, or attitude the writer expresses about the topic. In order to identify a writer’s treatment, ask yourself the following questions:

- **What form does the writing take?** For example, is it a newspaper column, a personal letter, or a business memo?

- **For what purpose(s) is the selection written?** Is it written to entertain, to express ideas and feelings, to inform, or to persuade? If there is more than one purpose, which is primary?

- **What is the writer’s tone, or attitude toward the subject?** For example, the tone of a selection might be described as mocking, optimistic, or respectful.

In the following selection, the topic is Fortune's life and legacy. As you read, identify the author’s treatment of this topic by completing a chart such as the one begun here.

<table>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Fortune's Bones</strong></th>
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<td><strong>What form does the writing take?</strong></td>
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<td><strong>For what purpose(s) is the selection written?</strong></td>
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<td><strong>What is the writer's primary purpose?</strong></td>
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<td><strong>What is the writer's tone?</strong></td>
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Before Fortune was bones in a Connecticut museum, he was a husband, a father, a baptized Christian, and a slave.

His wife’s name was Dinah. His sons were Africa and Jacob. His daughters were Mira and Roxa. He was baptized in an Episcopal church, which did not make him free. His master was Dr. Preserved Porter, a physician who specialized in setting broken bones.

They lived in Waterbury, Connecticut, in the late 1700s. Dr. Porter had a 75-acre farm, which Fortune probably ran. He planted and harvested corn, rye, potatoes, onions, apples, buckwheat, oats, and hay. He cared for the cattle and hogs.

Unlike many slaves, who owned little or nothing and were often separated from their families, Fortune owned a small house near Dr. Porter’s home. He and Dinah and their children lived together.

When Dr. Porter died in 1803, he left an estate that was worth about $7,000—a lot of money for the time. The estate included Fortune’s widow, Dinah, and their son Jacob. Fortune had died in 1798.

According to Connecticut’s Act of Gradual Emancipation, children born to enslaved parents after March 1, 1784, were to be freed when they reached age 21. Jacob was 18. By law, he could be enslaved for another three years.

In Dr. Porter’s will, he left Dinah to his wife, Lydia. He gave Jacob to his daughter Hannah.

No one knows what happened to Africa, Mira, and Roxa.

A sculptor used information about Fortune’s bones to create this reconstruction of Fortune’s face.

**FOCUS ON FORM**

You’re about to read the notes that accompany “Not My Bones” and Marilyn Nelson’s other poems about Fortune. These notes provide facts and additional information about Fortune’s life and his bones.

**TREATMENT**

Based on the number of facts you have learned already, what would you infer is the author’s purpose for writing these notes?

**NOTES**

What facts about slavery in the northern United States do you learn from these notes?
Most slaves who died in Waterbury in the 1700s were buried in one of the town’s cemeteries. When Fortune died, he wasn’t buried. Instead, Dr. Porter preserved Fortune’s skeleton to further the study of human anatomy.

Dr. Porter had been a bonesetter for many years, but he’d never had a skeleton to study. He had two sons who were also doctors. They could learn from the skeleton, too.

Fortune was about 60 at the time of his death and, in spite of his injuries, in relatively good health. His skeleton was sturdy and complete.

Four more generations of Porters became physicians, and the skeleton stayed in the family. Porter children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren used it to learn the names of the bones. This was their earliest medical training.

Sally Porter Law McGlannan, the last Porter doctor, remembered playing with the skeleton as a young girl. Another family member, Leander Law, once brought part of Fortune’s skeleton to a college physiology class.

At some point—no one knows exactly when—“Larry” was written on the skull. Fortune’s name was forgotten for nearly a century.

Over the years, the skeleton was lost and found. It was boarded up in an attic, then discovered by a crew of workers hired to renovate an old building.

In 1933, Sally Porter Law McGlannan gave the bones to the Mattatuck Museum. The museum sent the bones to Europe to be assembled for display. The skeleton hung in a glass case in the museum for decades, fascinating adults and frightening children.

Many stories were invented about the skeleton. Some said that “Larry” was a Revolutionary War hero—maybe even George Washington. Some said he fell to his death. Some said he drowned. Some said he was killed trying to escape. Some thought he had been hanged.

One Waterbury resident remembers, “Larry was the thing to see when you go to the museum. I don’t think anybody ever envisioned that this was truly a human being.”

In 1970, the skeleton, still called “Larry,” was taken out of its case and put into storage. Times had changed. The museum now believed that displaying the skeleton was disrespectful. It wasn’t just a bunch of bones. It was the remains of someone’s son, maybe someone’s father.

The skeleton rested for more than 25 years. Then, in the 1990s, historians searched local records and found a slave named Fortune. Archaeologists and anthropologists studied the bones, which started giving up their secrets. The bones told how Fortune labored, suffered, and died: A quick, sudden injury, like whiplash, may have snapped a vertebra in his neck. He did not drown or fall from a cliff. He was not hanged.

But he was free.
Comprehension

1. Recall Where did Fortune live?
2. Recall Who gave Fortune’s skeleton to the museum? What was her relationship to Fortune?
3. Clarify How did the museum learn how Fortune died?

Critical Analysis

4. Identify Treatment Review the chart you completed as you read. In your own words, describe the author’s treatment of Fortune’s life and legacy.
5. Evaluate Notes Reread “Not My Bones” on pages 648–649. Compare the understanding of Fortune that you get from this poem with the understanding of him that you get from the accompanying notes. What might be the strengths of a book that combines poems with historical notes?

Read for Information: Compare Treatments

Writing Prompt

In a paragraph, compare and contrast the treatment of Fortune’s life and legacy on pages 653–654 with Marilyn Nelson’s treatment of the same subject in her poem “Not My Bones.”

Remember that when you compare and contrast, you identify the ways in which two or more things are alike and different. To get started,

1. Reread the poem, noting its form, purpose(s), and speaker’s tone. You might also note its overall message or its impact on you as a reader.
2. Identify the similarities and differences between the treatment of Fortune in the notes and the poem.
3. In a sentence, make a general statement about these similarities and differences. Support your statement with specific details. Then draw a conclusion about the differences you have noticed.