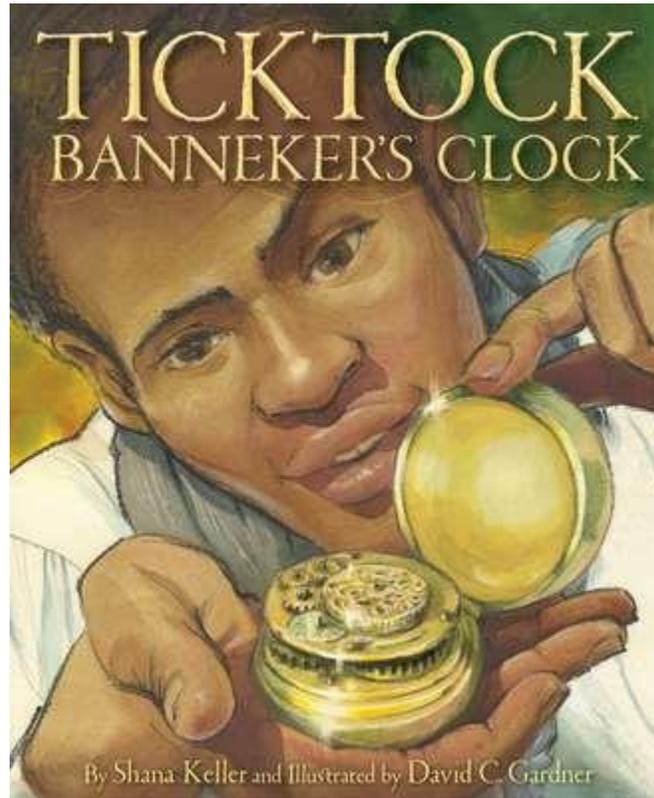


#firstpicturebook q&a

[ticktock banneker's clock](#)

November 7, 2016

Tags: [TICKTOCK BANNEKER'S CLOCK](#), [Shana Keller](#), [David C. Gardner](#), [Sleeping Bear Press](#), [2016](#)



[TICKTOCK BANNEKER'S CLOCK](#) By Shana Keller and illustrated by David C. Gardner (Sleeping Bear Press, 2016)

Shana Keller is a busy writer, mom, wife, and traveler but today she takes some time to talk about her first picture book, [TICKTOCK BANNEKER'S CLOCK](#)—"a lovely book about time, patience and genius in its purest form" (Black History Channel).

Q. Was TICKTOCK BANNEKER'S CLOCK the first picture book manuscript you ever wrote? If not, what was the first picture book you wrote and what happened to it?

A. No, Banneker was not my first picture book. I've written several. The first one was about storms and it is currently unpublished.

Q. What inspired TICKTOCK BANNEKER'S CLOCK?

A. The fact that I had never heard of him until my 1st grader came home with an article about his overall achievements. Intrigued, I began to research him.

Q. How did you pick the title of your book?

A. Through trial and error. I knew that I wanted his name in the title, and luckily my editor supported that.

Q. What resources did you use while researching TICKTOCK BANNEKER'S CLOCK?

A. I started off with the library of course and read everything I could get my hands on, which wasn't much compared to say, Frederick Douglass or Harriet Tubman. A lot of previous books published about him were no longer circulating. I ended up finding several books online and frequenting used bookstores both at home (Pennsylvania) and one state over (Ohio)! After initial reading, I contacted the Benjamin Banneker Historical Park & Museum. That visit led to meeting one of Banneker's collateral descendants, which led to meeting others, and then the opportunity to interview them. I also went to the Maryland Historical Society and was able to find some of those hard-to-find books and see original documents that mentioned Banneker.

Q. How did you decide where to start and end this nonfiction story?

A. **The more I researched him, the more it felt right to focus his story on the achievement that everyone supported during a divisive time in our history, and one he did of his own volition. It's noted that people came from near and far to see his clock.**

Q. What is your favorite part of the book? And was that part in the first draft?

A. My favorite part is when he realizes he can cure wood. That's problem solving and perseverance at its best! Yes, that part made it in the book.

Q. Did TICKTOCK BANNEKER'S CLOCK receive any rejection letters? If so, how many (ballpark)?

A. Yes. Seven (I believe), and one request for a myth, rather than a historical biography, which was still a rejection but encouraging nonetheless.

Q. Describe your reaction when you received an offer on TICKTOCK BANNEKER'S CLOCK.

A. Pure shock and joy. I read the email about thirty times. Then read it out loud to my husband. I know I scared him at first. He thought something really bad happened because of my total shock!

Q. What kind of input did you have in choosing an illustrator for the book?

A. I didn't have any initial input, but fortunately they paired me with an amazing illustrator. My input came afterwards when the sketches were made.

Q. What jumped out at you when you saw the first sketches and jacket cover?

A. It was kind of like reading the offer letter again. Pure joy and excitement.

Q. How long did TICKTOCK BANNEKER'S CLOCK take to be published—from the time you received an offer until it was printed?

A. We were fast-tracked, which I know is unusual. **It only took one year.**

Q. Is there anything you would change in the book today if you could reprint it? (Was there a part that you really loved but had to edit out? Or did you think of something later that you wanted to add?)

A. Not a thing! I love it.

Q. Can you share any memorable parts of letters from kids about TICKTOCK BANNEKER'S CLOCK?

A. We gave my daughter's teacher a book for their classroom library. They made a thank you card with a picture of the pocket watch on the front. It is the sweetest card ever.

Q. When you do readings of TICKTOCK BANNEKER'S CLOCK, which part of the book gets the best reaction?

A. When Banneker sets his clock on the mantel, that sense of pride pervades.

Q. What is your #1 tip to those who want to write picture books?

A. Find a topic you love or a person you love and go with it.

Q. Do you have a favorite writing exercise that you can share?

A. Journaling, but not for me, it's for my characters!

Q. What are you working on now?

I have several on-going projects. I'm working on two other picture books, both historical, and literally as of Saturday, a new middle-grade story has sunk itself into my mind! I'm obsessed with it.

To learn more about Shana Keller and her projects, visit her www.shanakeller.com