



## Author Spotlight Suzanne Slade

An interview with Suzanne Slade, author of *The House That George Built* and *Friends for Freedom: The Story of Susan B. Anthony & Frederick Douglass*

- ◆ **You received your undergraduate degree in Mechanical Engineering. How did you decide to transition from Mechanical Engineering to writing children's books and what was that process like?**

I was interested in writing children's stories when I was a teenager, yet math and science were much easier for me than English and literature classes in high school, so my mom suggested I study engineering in college. Years later after I became a mom, I left the engineering world to stay home with my children and began reading them stacks of picture books every day. That's when I started to think about writing again.

Like many authors, my path to publication was rather long. As an engineer who hadn't taken any writing classes in college, I had a great deal to learn about writing, editing, submitting, and children's stories in general. So I took several writing classes, joined critique groups, attended SCBWI (Society of Children's Writers and Illustrators) conferences, and kept writing and writing. After eight years of writing full-time (and over 80 rejection letters), I finally got my first book contract. My writing journey included many highs and lows, but I love writing books for children more than anything I've ever done!

- ◆ ***Friends for Freedom: The Story of Susan B. Anthony & Frederick Douglass* is about the friendship the two shared in a tumultuous time when men and women weren't typically friends. What drew you to this subject?**

Susan B. Anthony and Frederick Douglass have always fascinated me. Both of these individuals were incredibly brave, and boldly spoke out for equality and freedom despite the harsh opposition they faced. In 2006 I began writing individual biographies about Susan and Frederick, and during my research discovered a fascinating fact I'd never heard before—these two freedom fighters were good friends. In fact, their friendship lasted over 45 years! I was surprised I'd never read about this incredible friendship before and decided I had to share the story of how they fought for equality together and supported one other.



◆ ***Friends for Freedom* took you over three years to research. What were some of the most memorable people, places, or facts you encountered while conducting this research?**

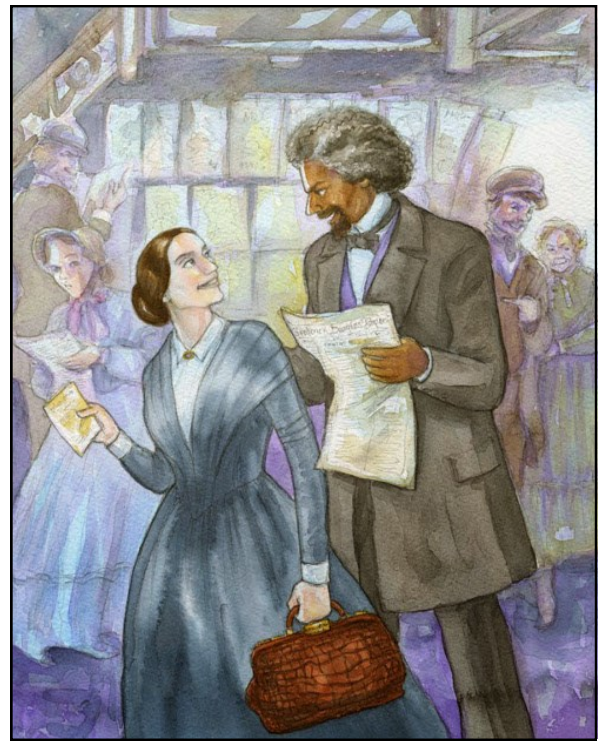
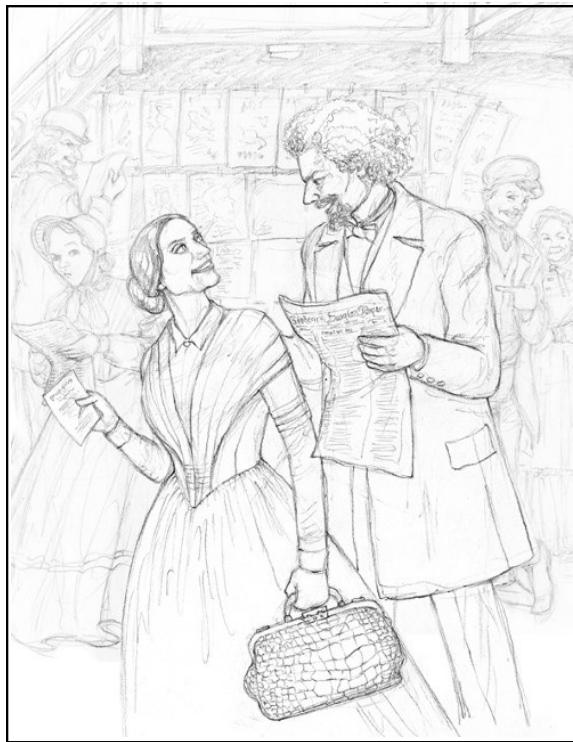
Wow, there's a lot I could share about the research for this book, so I'll mention a few of the highlights. First, I am extremely grateful for the enthusiasm of several experts who generously helped out with this project. Dr. C. James Trotman, the Founding Director of the Frederick Douglass Institute and author of *Frederick Douglass: A Biography*, kindly answered many questions and reviewed the manuscript and sketches at different stages along the way. Historians at the National Susan B. Anthony Museum & House also provided their expertise on the manuscript and invaluable research tips which helped uncover some elusive facts.

At times, my research took me to out-of-state libraries which had old, rare books that couldn't be checked out, so I took a few trips to see what nuggets of information they might contain. Interestingly, one of my biggest challenges in writing this story was figuring out when and where Susan and Frederick first met. I read several children's books which claimed different locations for that historic first meeting, such as the Anthonys' farmhouse near Rochester. But Ida Husted Harper's book, *The Life and Work of Susan B. Anthony* (which is considered a primary source because it was written under Susan's guidance) explained Susan first met Frederick when she and her father went to his home in the fall of 1849. So I used Susan's account of this meeting in *Friends for Freedom*.

It's important to note I wasn't the only one who did research for this book. The illustrator, Nicole Tadgell, did extensive research of her own to ensure all the illustration details—from the Rochester background scenery to Susan's famous alligator handbag—were accurate. Nicole made the long drive to North Adams, MA, to see the Susan B. Anthony Birthplace Museum, and visited the Susan B. Anthony Museum & House in Rochester, NY. She also worked with a costume expert who answered questions about clothing during the mid-1800s. Nicole discovered new facts, she carefully revised her sketches. I was very fortunate that Nicole decided to work with me on this project, as her digging and diligence resulted in lovely, accurate illustrations for the book. (And she also created some awesome [coloring pages](#) for *Friends for Freedom*!)



**Nicole visiting the Susan B. Anthony Birthplace Museum**



**Nicole's pencil sketch and final art of a scene with Susan (and her iconic alligator bag) and Frederick walking together**

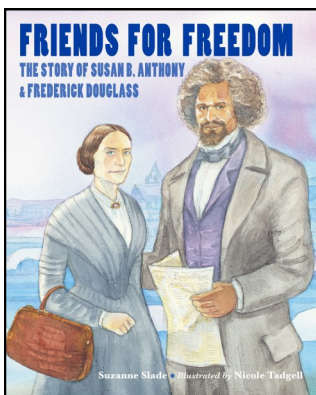


◆ **In addition to historical figures, what other subjects do you enjoy writing about?**

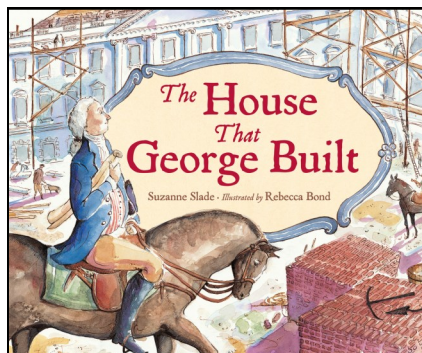
Yes, I enjoy writing about historical figures—especially when I discover a little-known fact about a famous person that surprises me. I also like to revisit my nerdy engineering side, and find myself drawn to science topics as well. I have a new book releasing this year which combines my fascination with historical figures and interest in engineering titled, *The Inventor's Secret*. This picture book was a blast to research and write, as it shares the true story of two famous inventors, Thomas Edison and Henry Ford, and one surprising secret!

While working on this book I got to investigate Edison's most famous inventions, such as the electric pen, phonograph, and light bulb, and study the patents for each. And I learned amazing things about Ford's first car designs, too. I hope readers have as much fun discovering cool information about these inventors and their inventions (and that surprising secret) as I did!

## Books by Suzanne Slade

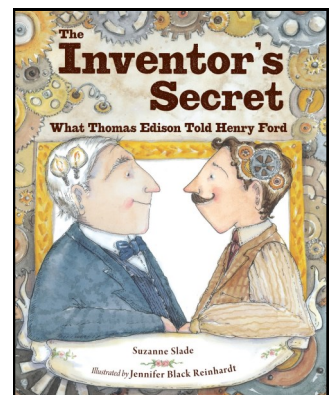


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