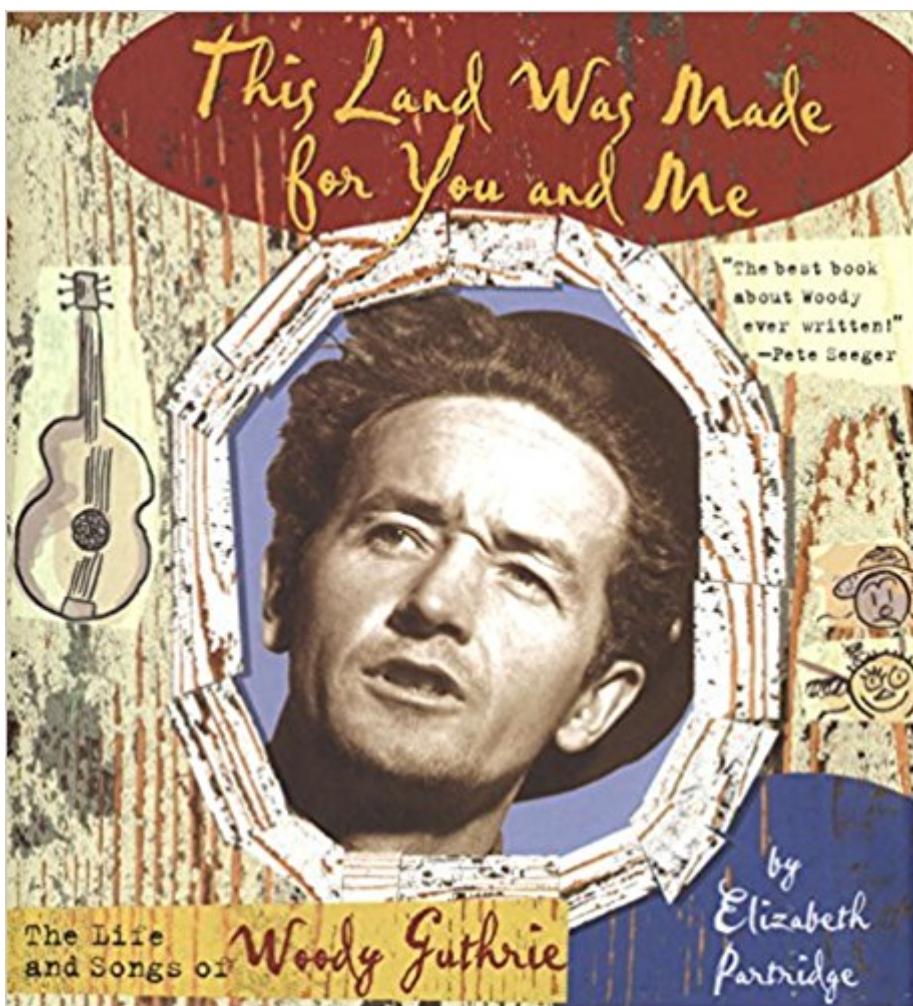


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# This Land Was Made For You And Me: The Life And Songs Of Woody Guthrie (Golden Kite Awards)



## **Synopsis**

Before Springsteen and before Dylan, there was Woody Guthrie. With "This Machine Kills Fascists," scrawled across his guitar in big black letters, Woody Guthrie brilliantly captured in song the experience of twentieth-century America. Whether he sang about union organizers, migrant workers, or war, Woody took his inspiration from the plight of the people around him as well as from his own tragic childhood. From the late 1920s to the 1950s, Guthrie wrote the words to more than three thousand songs, including "This Land Is Your Land," a song many call America's unofficial national anthem. With a remarkable ability to turn any experience into a song almost instantaneously, Woody Guthrie spoke out for people of all colors and races, setting an example for generations of musicians to come. But Woody didn't have the chance to find everything he was looking for. He was ravaged by Huntington's disease, just like his mother, and died in a mental institution at the age of fifty-five. Award-winning author, Elizabeth Partridge has taken the life of this songwriting genius and woven in his lyrics, and other rich materials to create a touching and highly entertaining portrait of a true talent.

## **Book Information**

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 06 - 08

## **Customer Reviews**

The author of *Restless Spirit: The Life and Work of Dorothea Lange* shapes a lucid, affecting portrait of another indisputably restless spirit, the prolific songwriter and impassioned folksinger Woodrow Wilson Guthrie (1912-1967). Drawing from Guthrie's autobiographical writings and correspondence and from original interviews (with the singer's children Arlo and Nora, and Pete Seeger, among others), the author painstakingly charts his subject's itinerant, often troubled life. Tragedy often, eerily, in the form of devastating fire shadowed Guthrie from his childhood, when his mother, suffering from Huntington's Disease (which eventually ravaged the singer as well), was finally placed in a state hospital after setting her husband on fire. (Years later, Woody's four-year-old daughter died from severe burns.) In chronicling Guthrie's cross-country ramblings and his relationships with his three wives, children and fellow musicians, Partridge offers intriguing insight into the singer as well as the creation of his songs. Background on political and social conflicts gives young readers access to the issues that so frequently inspired Guthrie. Ample quotations, excerpts from his lyrics, reproductions of his sketches and photographs infuse these pages with Guthrie's spontaneous and charismatic if erratic personality. A memorable biography of this talented artist and understated proponent of social change. Ages 12-up. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

Grade 6 Up-This outstanding biography belongs in every library collection, large or small. With access to the extensive Woody Guthrie Archives and opportunities to interview two of his children and his longtime friend and fellow musician Pete Seeger, Partridge has written a fascinating portrait not only of the man, but also of the historical upheavals that shaped his life and were captured and reflected in his songs. Against a backdrop of the Depression, the Dust-Bowl migration, farm workers' camps in California, World War II, and the Cold War era, readers are introduced to the whirlwind of creative, nervous energy and often-erratic behavior that characterized Guthrie. Although he was hospitalized with Huntington's Disease by the time of the 1960s' folk-music boom, young singers including Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, Ramblin' Jack Elliott, and Odetta led a new generation to love his music. While deeply appreciative of his many talents, the author does not gloss over his irresponsible behavior and frightening outbursts of violence, which grew worse as his disease progressed, or the family tragedies he endured. Although Guthrie's active career lasted just over two decades, readers are left with an overwhelming sense of the remarkable creativity and productivity of those years and its enduring legacy for future generations. Numerous black-and-white photographs, reproductions of Guthrie's drawings and letters, and concert posters and flyers appear throughout the handsome volume. Partridge includes detailed source notes and a

page of resource information about the archives and the Huntington's Disease Society of America. Ginny Gustin, Sonoma County Library System, Santa Rosa, CA Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc.

This is by far my favorite of the Woody Guthrie biographies, and I have most of them. Never mind this being a book for middle childhood to teens, Ms. Partridge takes the time to paint the canvas of Guthrie's growing up, tragic losses, and resourcefulness, along with his calling for the working man. She doesn't sugarcoat unsavory details, but gives as much focus to the spirit of the man, not just the details of his life, as in the Klein work. I love keeping this one handy!

I have not read other books about Woody, but I don't feel I have to, to get an appreciation of who he was and where he came from. Until I read this book, I really had no idea what a great musician he was. I'm a fan of Arlo, but knew very little about Woody. Woody's parents didn't have it easy - his father, Charley didn't like to face the reality of what was happening to his wife, he would drink so he didn't have to face it. Woody explored just about every belief looking for answers, answers to life and how to live his life. He was mostly interested in the Communist Party and their beliefs. At times Woody was a counselor to those who were lost, sick, hungry, wanting work and he would give them "commonsense answers", the people would go away satisfied with what Woody had to say to them. Woody would quite frequently sing his songs to down and out families in migrant camps, always identifying with the workers. Woody began to suspect the same illness that haunted his mother was effecting him also, he knew that Huntington's disease could be passed along generation to generation. My heart breaks for all the people who loved Woody and for Woody himself. It's a tragic story, but one worth reading.

I thought this would be a better "read aloud" book for middle school age kids as it is in the 6-8 range of Common Core exemplars. It is pretty dark, which is ok for this age, but not my preference. Also, it doesn't seem as appealing in terms of themes (depression, alcoholism, etc.) for this age. Beautiful photos and a great story for music folks and history buffs, though.

Five stars, definitely. Thank you, Elizabeth Partridge, for giving the world this intimate portrait of America's beloved Woody Guthrie.

Although this book is geared for young adult readers, I couldn't put it down. I teach general music

and showed it to some of my kids. They loved the pictures and real life story of Woody Guthrie. The narrative is captivating and sprinkled with generous doses of letters and source material. Love love love.

Nice!

This story was so powerful and so well-told that I keep recommending the book to everybody who knows about Woody Guthrie. Nothing I had previously read about Guthrie compares to this telling. I especially appreciated the inclusion of some of the singer's personal notes, as well as scraps of paper containing some of his songs.

I just finished reading this book, for the 2nd year in a row, with my 7th grade Language Arts students, and, once again, they LOVED it! Woody's life is fascinating to them and the many photographs really help bring the story alive to them. When I first purchased the books to use in class, I was worried about them not being interested because of the "distant" past in which it's set. That wasn't a problem at all. In fact, it gave us a springboard for talking about some topics they had heard of, but had no real knowledge of, like the Great Depression, unionization, the Dust Bowl, etc. Many lively discussions were had. I highly recommend this book!

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