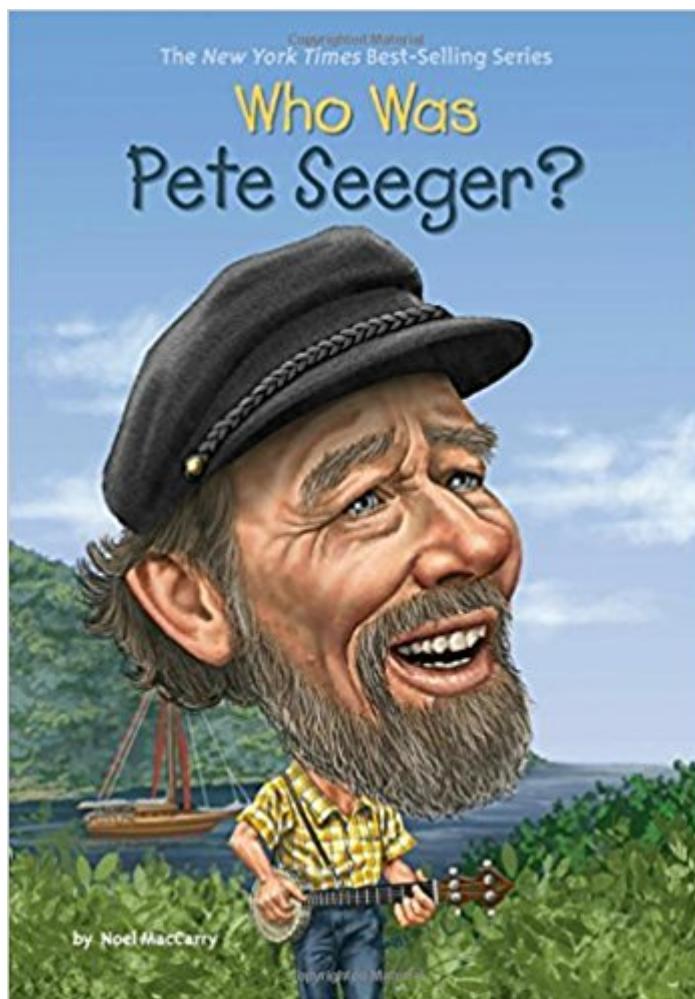


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Who Was Pete Seeger?



Synopsis

Pete Seeger was an American folk musician and social activist whose outspoken songs about freedom and justice got him blacklisted from radio and TV for years. Pete Seeger was still singing and playing the banjo for tens of thousands of fans even when he was at the age of ninety-four. Born in New York City on May 3, 1919, Pete came from a family of musicians. Despite writing and singing folk songs that all of America knows, not many kids know his name. Why? Because his ties to the Communist Party got him banned from radio and television for many years! Well-known for his civil rights activism with Martin Luther King Jr., Seeger also spearheaded efforts that cleaned up the Hudson River and made it beautiful again. His best-known songs include "Where Have All the Flowers Gone?", "If I Had a Hammer" and "Turn, Turn, Turn." In this easy-to-read biography from the New York Times best-selling series, Pete Seeger is revealed as not just a performer but as a champion for a better world and the eighty illustrations contained in the book help bring his story to life.

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Customer Reviews

Noel MacCarry worked as an elementary school librarian in North Salem, New York, for

twenty-seven years. This is his first published book. He lives in Danbury, Connecticut.

Who Was Pete Seeger? Madison Square Garden was packed with more than fifteen thousand fans. It was May 3, 2009. Everyone had come to honor a very tall, very thin, plainly dressed musician. His name was Pete Seeger and it was his ninetieth birthday. Pete who? Is that what you are asking yourself? Although he wrote and performed songs that all of America knows and loves, many young people today don't recognize his name. That's because for many years, his voice was banned from radio, and he was never seen on television. That night, however, fans were thanking him for both his music and his courage to stand up for his beliefs. His belief that all people are equal, no matter the color of their skin. His belief that we must protect nature. His belief that peace on earth is possible. At Madison Square Garden, rock and folk music legends performed in Pete's honor. They included Bruce Springsteen, Dave Matthews, and Joan Baez. Near the end, all the stars and the audience joined hands while singing "We Shall Overcome." Pete helped make that song a rallying cry during the 1960s when African Americans struggled so hard for equal rights. Singing songs for freedom was the story of Pete Seeger's long life.

CHAPTER 1: Young Peter

Peter Seeger was born in New York City on May 3, 1919. (He wasn't known as "Pete" until much later.) His parents, Charles and Constance, were musicians. Charles wrote classical music and taught in universities. Constance was a talented violinist. Peter had two older brothers. Charles Jr. was seven years older. He grew up to become a famous astronomer. John, five years older, became a well-known teacher. Peter was eighteen months old when Charles and Constance took the family on an unusual adventure. They packed a piano and their belongings in a homemade trailer. It looked like a covered wagon. Charles hitched the trailer to his Model T Ford and headed to the South. The Seegers hoped to bring classical music—the music of composers like Mozart and Beethoven—to country folks. The trailer had a stage that pulled out for performances. Life on the road was difficult. Dirt roads turned to mud when it rained. Peter's mother had to boil water over a campfire to wash his diapers. After Peter almost stumbled into the fire, his mother said, "Charlie, this is not going to work." Charles agreed. The family had made it as far as North Carolina. Audiences listened with curiosity to the classical concerts. But country people had their own music. They played fiddles, banjos, and guitars. When Charles Seeger heard them, he became more interested in their folk music than they were in his music. The Seegers packed up and returned to New York. Unfortunately, Charles no longer had a teaching job, and things became tense

between Peter's parents. Peter's mother and father decided to live apart and in time they got a divorce. As for the boys, they spent summer vacations with their father in Patterson, New York, at their grandparents' house. Each night, Peter and his brothers slept with their father in the barn that was next to the main house. the woods nearby. For him, it was heaven. On visits to his mother, Peter found musical instruments all around the house. Pretty soon Peter taught himself songs on the organ, accordion, marimba, and more. Peter liked learning music by ear rather than by reading notes. His mother tried to teach him piano. Peter didn't like sitting still, and the lessons bored him. Besides music, Peter loved reading. His favorite books were by Ernest Thompson Seton, who founded the Boy Scouts. Seton wrote outdoor adventures. His characters knew how to hunt, track wildlife, and survive in the woods. Peter wanted to be like them. At his grandparents' home, Peter would dress up like a Native American Indian. He even built his own sixteen- foot-high tepee. At thirteen, Peter was sent to a boys' boarding school in Avon, Connecticut. Peter was a bright student and a good writer. His love of nature grew deeper at Avon, where he worked helping to blaze trails in the thousands of wooded acres owned by the school. At Avon, a music teacher let him try out a four-string banjo. Right away, Peter fell in love with the instrument. His music teacher said he could buy the banjo for ten dollars. Peter wrote to his mother pleading for the money. At first she ignored his request. But when another letter from Peter came weeks later, still asking, "Please, Mother, can I have that banjo?" she gave in. Soon Peter was playing his banjo in the school jazz band. He liked the popular music of the time, including Dixieland jazz with its strong beat. He also liked the music of the great Gershwin brothers, George and Ira. Peter's father married again. Charles and his new wife, Ruth, became big fans of American folk music. So after Peter's high school graduation in 1936, his father took him south on another musical road trip. The trip opened Peter's ears and changed his life forever. In the Appalachian Mountains of North Carolina, Peter heard people play the five-string banjo. It was foot-stomping music! Nothing like it was played on the radio stations Peter listened to. Back then, America was listening to big jazz bands led by musicians like Benny Goodman and Tommy Dorsey. Bing Crosby was a top singer in those days. For Pete Seeger, however, folk music—and the banjo—would become his life's calling.

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