

WE WERE HERE, TOO

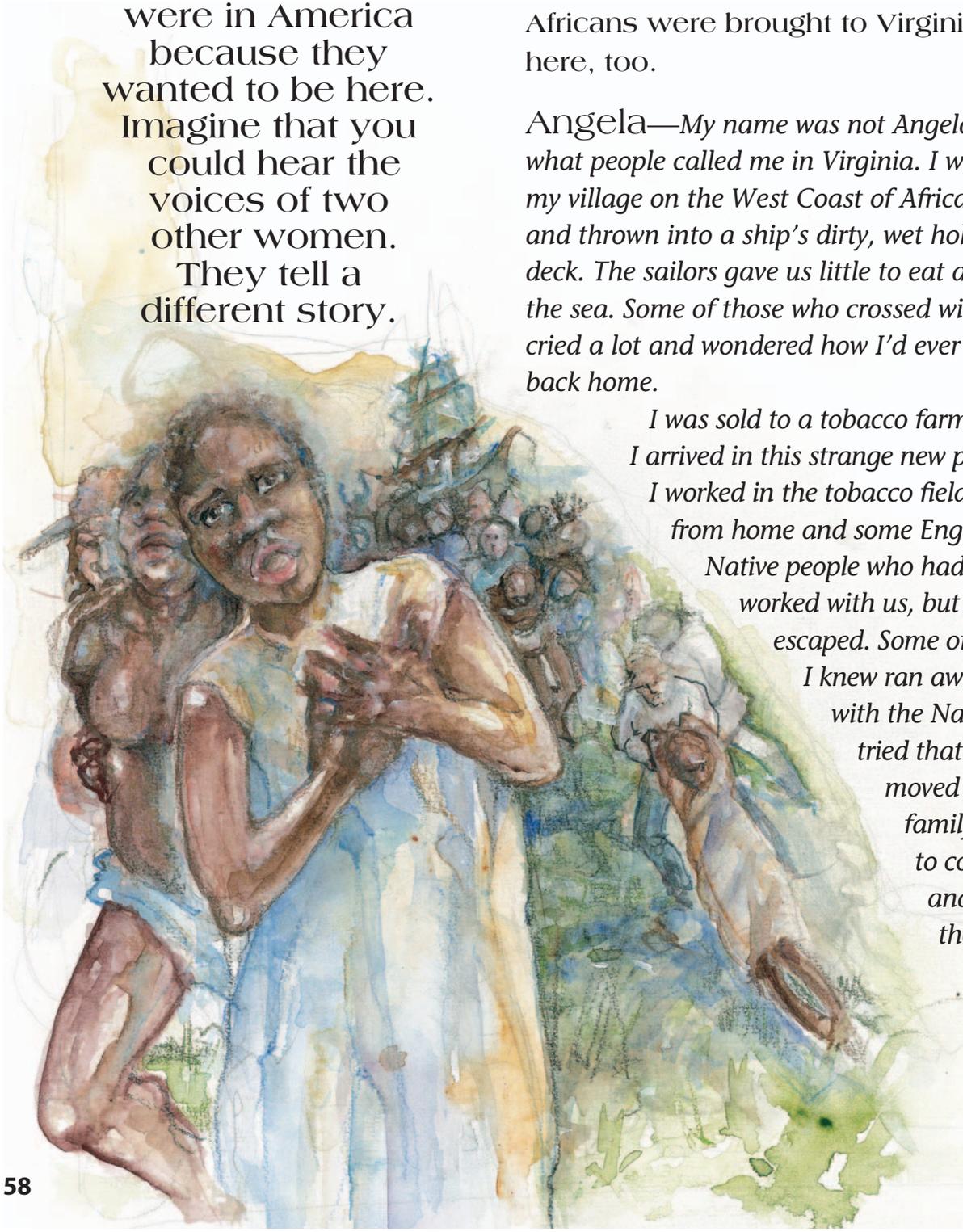
Not all of the “founding mothers” were in America because they wanted to be here. Imagine that you could hear the voices of two other women. They tell a different story.

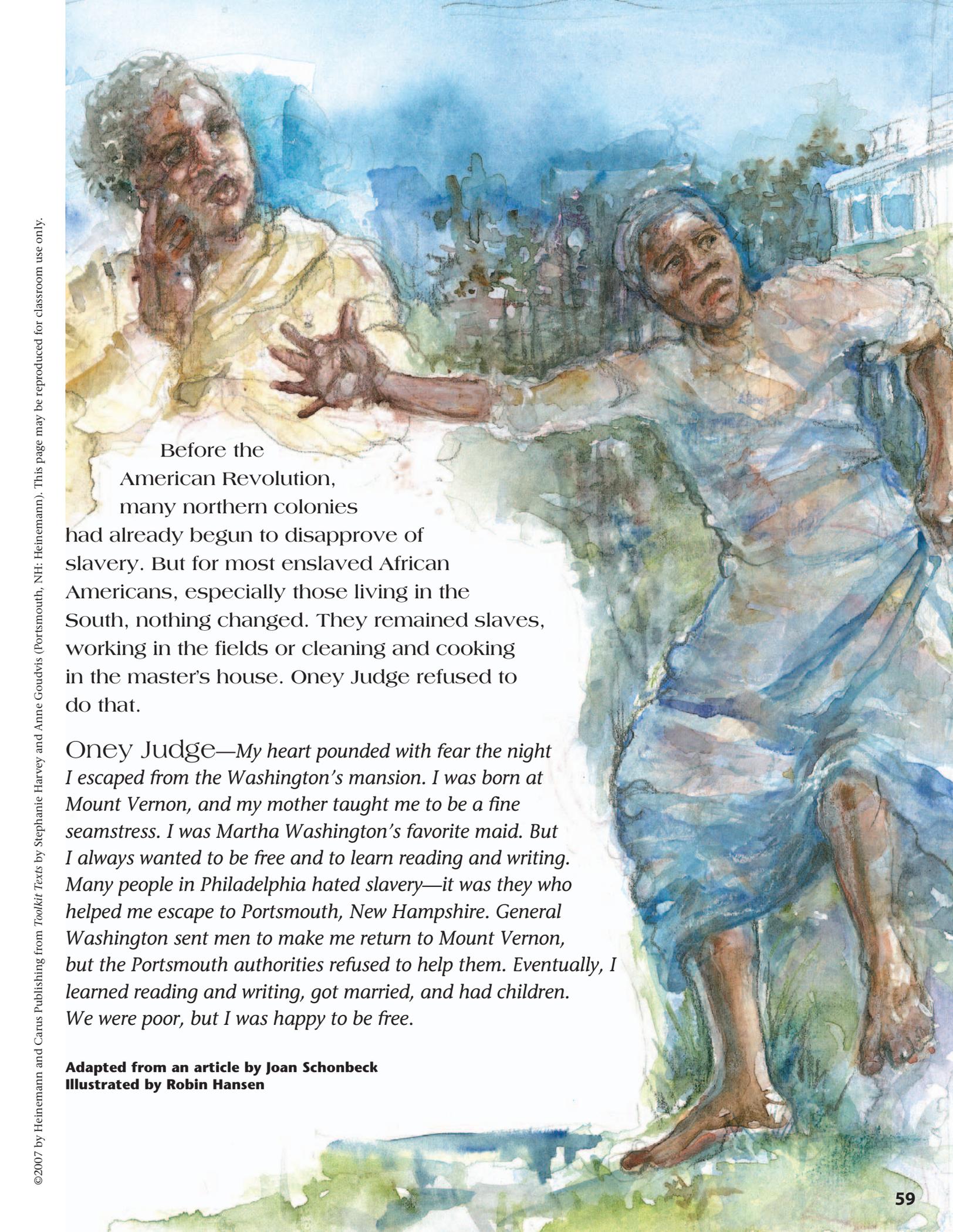
Our voices whisper across centuries. We were brought to America from Africa against our will as slaves, though at first they called us “servants” instead. The names you know us by aren’t our real names but rather names our captors gave us. We cleared and planted their fields, raised their children, got sick from disease, went hungry when the crops failed, and helped America become free from England. Right from 1619, when Africans were brought to Virginia, we were here, too.

Angela—My name was not Angela, but that’s what people called me in Virginia. I was captured in my village on the West Coast of Africa, carried away, and thrown into a ship’s dirty, wet hold below the deck. The sailors gave us little to eat as we crossed the sea. Some of those who crossed with me died. I cried a lot and wondered how I’d ever find my way back home.

I was sold to a tobacco farmer as soon as I arrived in this strange new place. At first, I worked in the tobacco fields with others from home and some English servants.

Native people who had been enslaved worked with us, but they often escaped. Some of the Africans I knew ran away to the forests with the Natives. I never tried that. Later, I was moved into the family’s house to cook, clean, and care for the children.



A watercolor illustration depicting a scene in a rural setting. On the left, a man with a beard and curly hair, wearing a yellowish-brown tunic, is shown in profile, looking towards the right. He has a thoughtful or distressed expression. On the right, a woman with her hair wrapped in a blue cloth, wearing a blue dress, is shown from the waist up, looking towards the man. Her right arm is extended towards him, with her hand open as if in conversation or pleading. The background features a landscape with trees, a building, and a blue sky, rendered in soft, blended watercolor washes.

Before the American Revolution, many northern colonies had already begun to disapprove of slavery. But for most enslaved African Americans, especially those living in the South, nothing changed. They remained slaves, working in the fields or cleaning and cooking in the master's house. Oney Judge refused to do that.

Oney Judge—My heart pounded with fear the night I escaped from the Washington's mansion. I was born at Mount Vernon, and my mother taught me to be a fine seamstress. I was Martha Washington's favorite maid. But I always wanted to be free and to learn reading and writing. Many people in Philadelphia hated slavery—it was they who helped me escape to Portsmouth, New Hampshire. General Washington sent men to make me return to Mount Vernon, but the Portsmouth authorities refused to help them. Eventually, I learned reading and writing, got married, and had children. We were poor, but I was happy to be free.

**Adapted from an article by Joan Schonbeck
Illustrated by Robin Hansen**