

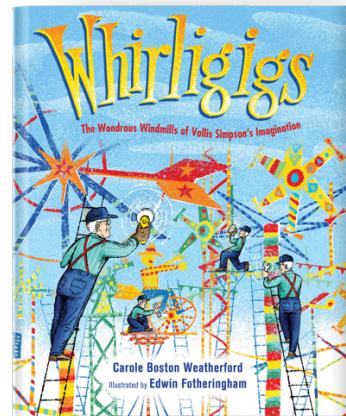
# DISCUSSION GUIDE

## *WHIRLIGIGS The Wondrous Windmills of Vollis Simpson's Imagination*

**Written by Carole Boston Weatherford**  
**Illustrated by Edwin Fotheringham**

**\$18.99 US / \$24.99 CAN**  
**ISBN 9781662680410 HC**

**Grades: 2-5**  
**Ages: 7-10**



### ABOUT THE BOOK

#### 2025 Best STEM Book Winner

Take a journey through the creative process that led folk artist Vollis Simpson to create his wonderful and whimsical wind-powered whirligigs and more in this STEAM/STEM picture book.

Vollis Simpson was a man with a curious mind—always eager to know how things worked and how to fix them. Growing up on a farm in North Carolina, he loved to tinker with machines. And when he served in the Army Air Corps during WWII, Vollis kept right on tinkering. His ingenuity allowed him to build things no one would have thought to create from scraps—a washing machine out of airplane parts and a motorcycle out of a bike.

After the war, his passion for metal creations picked up speed—turning into a whirlwind of windmills as far as the eye could see. Luckily, Vollis's fanciful and colorful windmills have been preserved at a park in Wilson, NC, where visitors can behold his magnificent and towering creations forever whizzing in the air.

### PRAISE FOR *WHIRLIGIGS*

“Weatherford conveys the joyful obsession and dedication that fueled Simpson’s creative endeavors. Fotheringham’s cheerful, cartoonish illustrations capture the energy of Simpson’s work... This illuminating biography of a mechanic-turned-folk-artist brings his whirligigs to clanking, stirring life.”—*Kirkus Reviews*

“A wonderful addition to any library collection.” —*School Library Journal*

 **ASTRA BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS**

  
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### **Discussion Questions**

- Before reading the book, test your students' knowledge about whirligigs and windmills. What is a whirligig? How does a whirligig differ from a windmill?
- In the book, Vollis Simpson says: "If you don't try something, you don't learn anything." How did Simpson's desire to know how things work influence his future?
- While serving in the Army Air Corps during World War II, what did Simpson use to create a wind-powered washing machine? How did his resourcefulness serve him well throughout his life?
- After the war, Simpson returned home to North Carolina and made his first windmill. What did his wife and neighbors think about his new hobby?
- Why is it important that Simpson built his whirligigs using recycled materials? What does this tell us about his inventiveness and view on art?
- How did Simpson's whirligigs become a part of the local community in Lucama, NC? How did people in his town and beyond respond to his art? Who were the most frequent visitors to the Windmill Farm?
- What happened to Vollis Simpson – and to the windmills – when he got older? What did Simpson never want to call himself? How do his whirligigs represent his creativity and imagination?
- Read Carole Boston Weatherford's author's note at the conclusion of the book. What did you learn about Vollis Simpson from reading the author's note that you didn't find out in the story?
- Illustrator Edwin Fotheringham's artwork in the book is bright and colorful. As a class, talk about the colors Fotheringham chose for his illustrations. How does this bold artwork add to this story? Would the book have the same appeal if the colors were more subdued?
- Fotheringham's artwork is also full of motion and sound. Identify the pages in the book you think use sound most effectively. Then, read those pages aloud!
- How did Simpson's self-taught background influence his work? What kind of art would you call a whirligig?
- In what ways does this book show that *anyone* can be an artist?

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### Projects + Further Research

- **School/community art project:** Vollis Simpson's whirligigs became a hit in his hometown of Lucama, NC! Using Simpson as an inspiration, ask your students to work with one another and those in their community to create a collaborative art piece, preferably using recycled or repurposed materials. How does it feel to make art from what others might throw away?
- **Local inventors and artists:** Ask your students to find and identify artists and inventors in your town. How do these creators contribute to their communities through their work?
- **Go on a field trip!** Identify and visit a place that features whirligigs or other kinetic art. If you can't visit Vollis Simpson's whirligig park in Wilson, NC, research other public installations of kinetic art and explore how different artists express similar themes.
- **Do further research into Vollis Simpson's whirligigs:** Simpson's whirligigs exist beyond rural North Carolina. Name some notable spots where his windmills were installed.
- **What is folk art?** According to the author's note in the book, Simpson's whirligigs have been named North Carolina's official folk art. Did your students know much about folk art before reading this book? Ask them to define folk art. How does it differ from other types of art?
- **Draw and create your own whirligig!** What kind of whirligig would you construct? Sketch a design for your own personal whirligig.
- **Host a sing-along!** Sing the song "Vollis Simpson's Windmill Farm" to the tune of "Old MacDonald Had a Farm". The lyrics are at the conclusion of the book!