As a young man, John James Audubon, the renowned American woodsman and artist, had to make a choice between following his father's dreams for him and discovering his own special destiny. In this beautifully conceived book, Robert Burleigh imagines a conversation in which Audubon tells his father why he has chosen to forgo the ordinary life of a shop-keeper and instead live out in nature to develop his art and his relationship with the world. Illustrated not only with sumptuous images by Wendell Minor, but with actual drawings by Audubon himself, this book will appeal to his fans of all ages.

My Personal Review:
This beautiful picture book is a real treat for any admirer, young or old, of nature and the work of John James Audubon. From first page to last, it is a tribute to an extraordinary man who had a passion for America's wilderness, as well as to the wilderness itself. Robert Burleigh tells the story of the pioneering environmentalist through an imaginary rhyming letter to his father, with accompanying excerpts from Audubon's journals. Wendell Minor, a renowned jacket artist and distinguished picture book illustrator, enlivens the text with some of his finest work, which is complemented by a few of Audubon's original paintings. Mr. Minor portrays the curious woodsman as he rambles through sun-dappled forests, investigates a cormorant's nest on the side of a rocky cliff, and admires the untamed spirit of a temporarily captive hawk. Later on, the story's tone changes from carefree revelry to a heartfelt plea for wilderness preservation, as Audubon mourns the loss of the woodlands and the birds he holds so dear. While holding a dying pigeon in his hands he remarks: "And as I watched it die I knew/The world I love is passing too. And I must paint it all because/We need this memory of what was. . ." These inspiring
words are accompanied by some poignant pictures of a flock of now-extinct passenger pigeons--once the most populous bird in the world--streaming across the sky, and a once-mighty forest reduced to stumps. There is a hopeful note in the story, as well: "But listen, now, from every tree/I hear them calling out to me: The crow's ka-kow, the lark's ti-ti/The warbler and the chickadee." In order to preserve nature, we must first appreciate even the smallest aspects of it, from the mighty bald eagle to the tiny chickadee. The book leaves one with a sense of hope about the conservation movement and a refreshed passion for the outdoors, especially birds, which are so plentiful and so striking in this country. With his paintings Mr. Minor has skillfully captured the personality of the man and the beauty of the birds he loved, and Mr. Burleigh has brought poetic words to help us remember Audubon not just as the vanguard in the American conservation movement, a mere icon of history books, but as a true woodsman who loved this country and its wilderness with his whole heart. INTO THE WOODS makes a lovely gift for any aspiring naturalist of age 8 to a lifelong birder of age 80. Pick up a copy for the child in your life and one for yourself. Also be sure to check out another new picture book, RACHEL: THE STORY OF RACHEL CARSON, which, like INTO THE WOODS, tells the story of a pioneering American environmentalist and is wonderfully illustrated by Wendell Minor.