

# Introducing the NCSS Septima P. Clark Women in Literature Book Award

**I**N 1974, NCSS established the Carter G. Woodson (CGW) Book Award to counter the absence of books that offered authentic portrayals of the experiences of American racial and ethnic minorities. As the diversity in book publications increased over the years, the book award committee has wrestled with the question of gender and how it played into the award decision process. While books about women that address issues of race or ethnicity have always been considered for the Carter G. Woodson award, the committee found that the award eligibility guidelines limited the ability to consider many female-centered children’s and young adult literature.

Carolina, from 1916-1919. Returning to Charleston in 1919 to teach at Avery Normal Institute, Septima Clark joined the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). That year, she led her students around Charleston, collecting over 10,000 signatures in one day for a petition to allow black principals at the private, all-black, Avery.

Clark received a bachelor’s degree from Benedict College in 1942 and a master’s degree from Hampton (Virginia) Institute in 1945. She also collaborated with Thurgood Marshall to campaign for equal pay for black teachers in Columbia, South Carolina.

In 1956, Clark became the vice president of the Charleston chapter of the NAACP. That same year, South Carolina passed a law banning city and state employees from participating in civil rights organizations, but Clark refused to leave the NAACP. As a result, she was fired, losing her pension after 40 years of employment. She later fought for and regained her pension.

Clark then moved to Tennessee to lead workshops at the Highlander Folk School, an institution supporting integration in the labor movement. Clark taught classes focused on developing leaders from within their communities. Four months before Rosa Parks refused to give up a seat on a bus, Parks attended one of Clark’s workshops at Highlander.

Additionally, while at Highlander, Clark and her colleagues designed Citizen Schools curriculum for teaching



Septima Clark (left) and Rosa Parks at Highlander Folk School, Monteagle, Tennessee, 1955.

In answer to this dilemma, this year, the book award committee is pleased to announce the first annual Septima Clark Women in Literature Book Award.

As a teacher and civil rights activist, Septima Poinsette Clark, born May 3, 1898, empowered countless people through education and activism. She played an important role in the civil

rights movement by developing adult literacy programs and creating Citizenship Schools, which promoted voting and civil rights for African Americans. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., referred to her as the “mother of the civil rights movement.”

Becoming a teacher at the age of 18, Clark taught children during the day and adults at night on Johns Island, South

adults reading, writing, and math skills within real-work context of citizenship rights. Classes included how to pay taxes, complete the driver's license exam, voter registration, mail-order forms, and how to sign checks. Created in response to legislation requiring reading and interpretation of state constitutions in order to be allowed to register to vote, these schools gave individuals the knowledge and confidence to participate in improving their communities.

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) recognized the Citizen Schools' potential for increasing voter registration. In 1961, Clark joined the SCLC, and by her retirement in 1970, the Citizen Education Program had trained over 10,000 teachers, teaching more than 25,000 people, and enabling about 700,000 African Americans to become registered voters.

Continuing her activism in retirement, Clark served two terms on the Charleston County School Board, organized daycare centers for low-income mothers, and spoke out on women's rights. She was honored with a Living Legacy Award from President Jimmy Carter in 1979. In 1987, Clark's second book, *Ready from Within: Septima Clark and the Civil Rights Movement* (1986), won the American Book Award.

Septima Clark died on December 15, 1987, on Johns Island. During a lifetime

dedicated to laying the foundation for advancing social justice through education, Clark's grace and dignity empowered individuals, especially women, to take leadership roles within their communities.

### The Award

Although instrumental in empowering African American voters, as a woman, Clark was still questioned by top civil rights leaders regarding her role on the SCLC executive board of directors. Clark noted on several occasions that the unequal treatment of women was "one of the greatest weaknesses of the civil rights movement."

Creation of the *Septima Clark Women in Literature NCSS Annual Book Award* encourages authors at the secondary, middle, and elementary levels to compose authentic, notable works about women.

Current studies find there is an imbalance of gender portrayal in children's and young adult literature—with the ratio of male to female characters at 2:1.<sup>1</sup> Other studies have examined the gender imbalance in children's informational books with Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math themes. Within these subjects, there was an even larger gap, in both text and images.<sup>2</sup>

Girls and young women deserve to have books that serve as windows, mir-

rors, and sliding glass doors<sup>3</sup> and this award will serve to boost the publication of more nonfiction texts that present non-stereotypical female roles and experiences. Submitted books will be analyzed from a social studies perspective, which means selections will be engaging and provide authentic cultural or historical material.

### Criteria

Nominated books will be evaluated for four key traits:

- Respect for the worth and importance of individual(s)/group(s) presented.
- Focus on individuals and issues that provide insight into experiences and historical events.
- Presentation of positive, balanced with negative.
- Avoid patronizing, distorting, and stereotyping in text and illustrations.

Septima Clark Women in Literature NCSS Annual Book Award:

- The books should accurately reflect the experiences, perspectives, cultures and values of women.
- The books should be nonfiction or informational text.
- They should be primarily trade or supplementary books rather than textbooks, fact books, or encyclopedias.

### Carter G. Woodson Book Award Committee (2018) and Creators of the Septima Clark Women in Literature NCSS Annual Book Award:

Sarah M. Segal, M.Ed., 2018 Woodson Committee Chair, Hood River Middle School, Hood River, OR.

Kristy Brugar, Ph.D., 2017 Woodson Committee Chair, 2019 NCSS Awards Chair, University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK.

Ann Adkins, Ed.D., Clarke University, Dubuque, IA.

Sydney G. Beauchamp, M.S., Indiana University South Bend, School of Education, South Bend, IN.

Janae J. Oveson, M.S., McKay School of Education, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

Elizabeth Sturm, Ed.D., Lewis University, College of Education, Romeoville, IL.

Heidi J Torres, Ph.D., Jeannine Rainbolt College of Education, University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK.

Jessica Wilkerson, M.Ed, King George High School, King George, VA.

Lara Willox, PhD., University of West Georgia, Carrollton, GA.

- The books should be written for children or young people. (Children and young people are standard terms with specific meanings used by librarians and the American Library Association.)
- The books should be well written and reflect originality in presentation and theme. The setting of the books may take place anywhere across the globe.
- The books must have been published in the year preceding the year in which the award is given.
- They should also have been published in the United States, but the authors of the books need not necessarily be United States citizens.
- It is possible for more than one book to receive the award if the selection subcommittee determines that more than one book satisfies the criteria for the award.
- Although only one book in each category will normally receive the award each year, outstanding runner-up books may be designated as Outstanding Honor books. 🌍

#### Notes

1. T. Crisp, S.M. Knezek, M. Quinn, G.E. Bingham, K. Girardeau, and F. Starks, "What's on Our Bookshelves? The Diversity of Children's Literature in Early Childhood Classroom Libraries," *Journal of Children's Literature* 42 no. 2 (2016): 29–42.
2. E.F. Caldwell and S.J. Wilbraham, "Hairdressing in Space: Depiction of Gender in Science Books for Kids," *Journal of Science & Popular Culture* 1,

no. 2 (2017): 101–118. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1386/jspc.1.2.101\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/jspc.1.2.101_1); C.G. Anderson, Girls, STEM, and Children's Books: A Review of the Literature Concerning Girls' Interest, Motivation and Ability in STEM, Complemented by a Mixed Methods Content Analysis of Award Winning Informational Children's Books (Master's Thesis: University of Washington, 2013), [https://digital.lib.washington.edu/research\\_works/bitstream/handle/1773/22833/Anderson\\_washington\\_02500\\_11388.pdf;sequence=1](https://digital.lib.washington.edu/research_works/bitstream/handle/1773/22833/Anderson_washington_02500_11388.pdf;sequence=1)

3. R. Sims Bishop, "Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors," *Perspectives* 1, no. 3 (1990): ix–x.

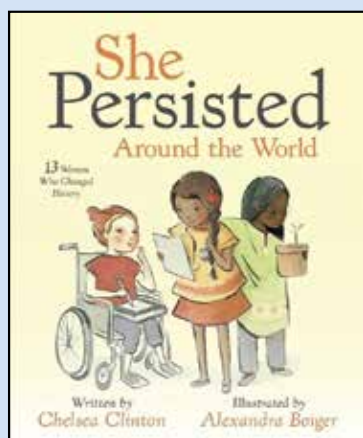
#### References

- McCabe, J., E. Fairchild, L. Graurholz, B. Pescosolido, and D. Tope, "Gender in Twentieth-century Children's Books: Patterns of Disparity in Titles and Central Characters," *Gender and Society* 25, no. 2, (2011): 197–226, [www.jstor.org/stable/23044136](http://www.jstor.org/stable/23044136)
- Colabucci, L., and M. Napoli, "Beyond Compassion? An Analysis of the Jane Addams Children's Book Award," *Journal of Children's Literature* 43, no. 1 (2017): 28–36.

### Elementary Winner

*She Persisted Around the World*, by Chelsea Clinton, illustrated by Alexandra Boiger. Philomel Books. Reviewed by Lara Willox, associate professor and department chair, Department of Educational Technology and Foundations, College of Education at the University of West Georgia, Carrollton, Georgia.

In this companion book to *She Persisted*, which highlighted the achievements of 13 American women, Chelsea Clinton spotlights 13 remarkable women from around the world.

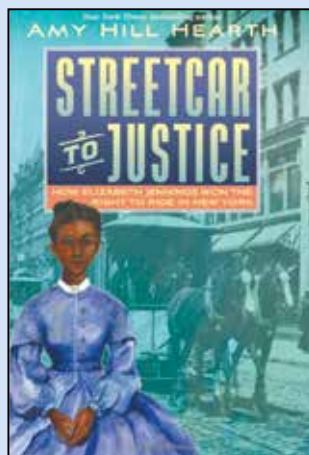


Each chapter features a short but comprehensive biography, a quotation, and a few illustrations. The illustrator, Alexandra Boiger, makes use of a double page layout to create images that encompass the work and scope of each woman's achievements. The book features: Marie Curie, Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, Viola Desmond, Sissi Lima do Amor, Leymah Gbowee, Caroline Herschel, Wangari Maathai, Aisha Rateb, J.K. Rowling, Kate Sheppard, Yuan Yuan Tan, Mary Verghese and Malala Yousafzai. Young readers from diverse backgrounds will find connections and inspiration from the spotlighted women, who represent a cross section of the world's countries and cultures.

*Social Studies Themes:* ❶ CULTURE; ❷ TIME, CONTINUITY, AND CHANGE; ❸ PEOPLE, PLACES, AND ENVIRONMENTS; ❹ INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT AND IDENTITY; ❺ POWER, AUTHORITY, AND GOVERNANCE; ❻ CIVIC IDEALS AND PRACTICES

### Middle Level Winner

*Streetcar to Justice: How Elizabeth Jennings Won the Right to Ride in New York*, by Amy Hill Hearth. Greenwillow Books. Reviewed by Lara Willox, associate professor and department chair, Department of Educational Technology and Foundations, College of Education at the University of West Georgia, Carrollton, Georgia.



Elizabeth Jennings is rarely talked about with regard to America's struggle for racial equality, but she played a prominent role in 1854 in the desegregation of New York City's privately-run streetcars. A school teacher and church organist who was running late for church, Jennings refused to dismount a segregated streetcar. She was the catalyst for legal action, in *Jennings v. Third Ave. Railroad*, 100 years before Rosa Park's famous act of civil disobedience. The court ruled in her favor, and the Third Avenue Railroad Company desegregated (though it would be another decade before all of New York's public transit was desegregated).

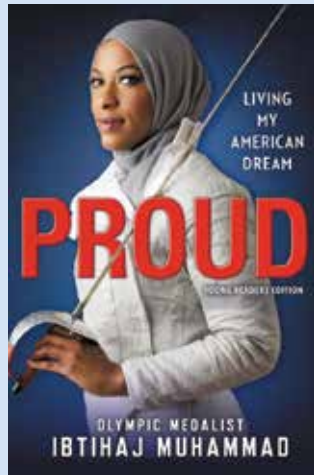
Amy Hill Hearth uses narrative and primary sources

(including newspaper articles, photographs, and maps) to tell the story of Elizabeth Jennings's fight for equality. This book not only details the events of Elizabeth Jennings's fight, but it also provides historical context about slavery in the North. The back matter includes extensive resources such as a six-page bibliography of websites, books, and newspapers as well as author notes, and a timeline.

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### Secondary Winner

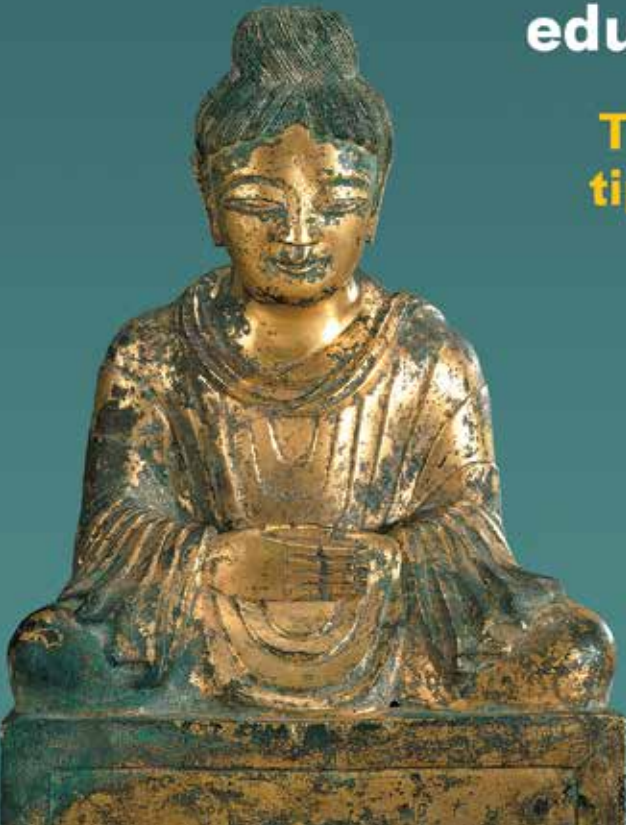
*Proud: Living My American Dream* (Young Readers Edition) by Ibtihaj Muhammad (Author), Lori Tharps (Contributor). Little, Brown Books for Young Readers. *Reviewed by Kristy Brugar, associate professor, Social Studies Education in the Instructional Leadership and Academic Curriculum Department at the University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK.*



This autobiography by Olympic fencer Ibtihaj Muhammad describes her humble beginnings as the only African American Muslim in her Maplewood, New Jersey, elementary school. Her father was a New Jersey police officer and her mother a special education school teacher. Muhammad writes that her parents “thought of sports as almost a way of life” (p. 21), and they searched for a sport in which she could retain her family’s religious beliefs and wear the hijab head covering. Muhammad tried other sports but discovered fencing as an adolescent. In spite of bigotry and other obstacles, she excelled

at it. She won state championships and competed for Duke University where she was a three-time All-American. In 2016, she joined Team USA in Rio and became the first American woman to compete in the Olympics in hijab and the first Muslim woman to win an Olympic medal (bronze) for the United States. *Proud* is an engaging coming-of-age story and is both informative and inspirational.

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