

The Septima Clark Women in Literature Awards, 2020

The Septima Clark Book Award honors exceptional nonfiction trade books depicting women's issues around the world. The award is named for Septima Poinsette Clark who challenged and helped change laws that discriminated against African American educators in early twentieth-century Charleston, South Carolina. She later campaigned for equal pay for black teachers and developed and taught workshops on citizenship and civil rights. In 1979, she was honored by President Jimmy Carter with a Living Legacy Award.

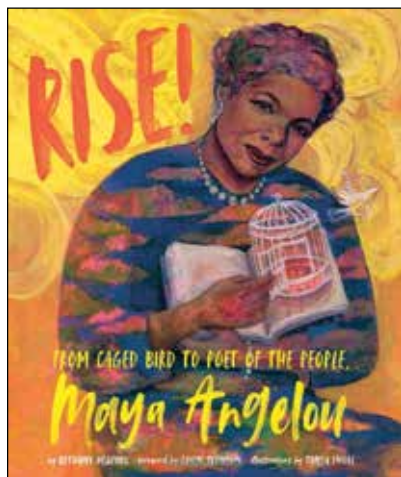
In 2019, the National Council for the Social Studies established this award to recognize books that educate readers about women's accomplishments. Books chosen for this honor accurately reflect women's issues, perspectives, and stories. They must be thoroughly researched, well written, and indicate originality. Books published either in the United States or internationally are eligible.

This year, the award committee selected one winner at the elementary level and one at the middle/secondary level as well as two honor books at each level for a total of six books. Collectively, these books tell the stories of girls and women who faced challenges and made their marks on the world. These individuals include writers, mathematicians, and athletes—all with stories to share that highlight how their lives were challenged and how they met those challenges. Our hope is that these stories will inspire, motivate, and empower the young people who read them.

—Ann Adkins, Chair, Septima Clark Book Awards Committee

Elementary Level Winner

Rise! From Caged Bird to Poet of the People, Maya Angelou, by Bethany Hegedus, foreword by Colin Johnson, illustrations by Tonya Engel. Lee & Low Books. Reviewed by Elizabeth Sturm, assistant professor, Department of Special Education, College of Education at Lewis University, Romeoville, Ill.



To capture the complex identity of Dr. Maya Angelou in a picture book is no easy feat, much less to tackle this in poetry. But the verse by Bethany Hegedus, brilliantly illustrated by Tonya Engel, does accomplish this phenomenal endeavor. *Rise!* presents Angelou's life story and the impact of the challenges, experiences, and people in her life on her development as a passionate artist and activist. The illustrations contain figurative elements that enhance the poetry, such as the image of her paternal grandmother, Momma Henderson, joined with the roots of a sycamore tree. The book includes additional

materials that support the narration, with a foreword from Dr. Angelou's grandson, Colin Johnson, along with a robust timeline and photographs from Angelou's life.

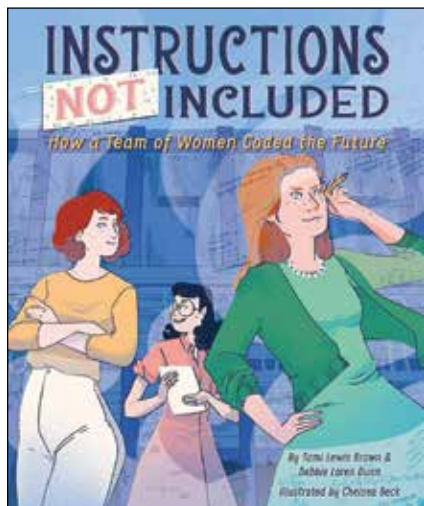
Social Studies Standards: ❶ CULTURE; ❷ TIME, CONTINUITY, AND CHANGE; ❸ INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT AND IDENTITY; ❹ CIVIC IDEALS AND PRACTICES.

Elementary Level Honoree

Instructions Not Included: How a Team of Women Coded the Future, by Tami Lewis Brown and Debbie Loren Dunn. Disney Hyperion. Reviewed by Sarah Segal, 6th grade Teacher, Hood River Middle School, Hood River, Ore.

Women's historic contributions to STEM-related endeavors have consistently gone unrecognized. During World War II, at a secret University of Pennsylvania lab, hundreds of women, called "computers," used pen, paper, and adding machines to make military calculations that would help win the war. Authors Lewis Brown and Debbie Loren Dunn celebrate three dynamic and inspiring thinkers who worked at this same location on a secret operation: the creation of an automatic machine, ENIAC, that calculated in a fraction of the time required by a human. Betty Snyder, Jean Jennings, and Kay McNulty were part of a group of mathematicians tasked with telling the machine what to perform and then ensuring that the answers were always correct. Through collaboration, dedication, and numerous

trials, the ingenious mathematicians ultimately presented the perfectly programmed ENIAC to high-ranking stakeholders. Despite receiving no congratulations, the women celebrated the accomplishment, and then immediately returned to their work of advancing technology.



The book's authors highlight each mathematician's contributions. Betty Snyder invented Sort-Merge data processing. Jean Jennings designed Stored Programs for computers to hold instructions. Kay McNulty advanced smaller and faster computers that Reduce and Reuse memory.

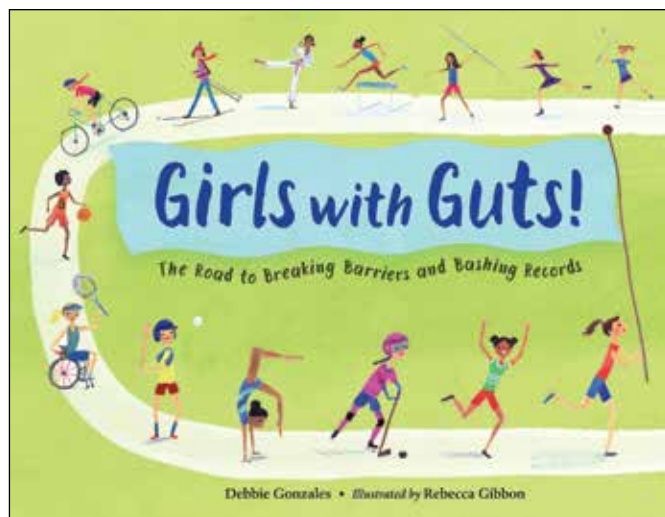
The concluding Authors' Note provides primary source materials including historical photos, ENIAC schematics, and a 1944 newspaper classified advertisement seeking mathematicians. Additional endnotes explain ENIAC, and give details on the lives of Betty Snyder, Jean Jennings, and Kay McNulty, along with recognizing numerous "forgotten" women instrumental in developing modern computers and technology.

Social Studies Standards: ⌚ TIME, CONTINUITY, AND CHANGE; 👤 INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS, AND INSTITUTIONS; 🌐 SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND SOCIETY; 🌍 GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

Elementary Level Honoree

Girls with Guts!: The Road to Breaking Barriers and Bashing Records, by Debbie Gonzales and Rebecca Gibbon, Charlesbridge. Reviewed by Kristy A. Brugar, associate professor, Huddleston Presidential Professor of Education, and department chair, Instructional Leadership and Academic Curriculum at the University of Oklahoma, Norman, Okla.

Each year, the presence and prominence of female athletes is growing—from Serena Williams and Simone Biles to Megan Rapinoe. In *Girls with Guts!*, Gonzales explains the historical restrictions on women's participation in athletics, from the ancient Greek Olympics and the female athletes who challenged these restrictions. Chronologically, Gonzales presents an athlete from a variety of sports over the twentieth century (beginning, however, in the nineteenth century with the 1896 Olympic Marathon) including polo, baseball, swimming, and tennis. The narrative then shifts to the work of politicians and activists like Congresswomen Edith Green and Shirley Chisholm who advocated for the passage of Title IX. Gonzales's



text is complemented by Gibbon's thoughtful and informative illustrations. Back matter includes a multiple-page timeline and an extensive bibliography. There is an important Author's Note in which Gonzales unpacks what it means to "play like a girl."

Social Studies Standards: ⌚ TIME, CONTINUITY, AND CHANGE; 👤 INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT AND IDENTITY

Middle/Secondary Winner

Reaching for the Moon: The Autobiography of NASA Mathematician Katherine Johnson, by Katherine Johnson. Simon & Schuster. Reviewed by Stephanie Long-Carsrud, Social Studies Methods Instructor, Great Basin College, Nev.



Reaching for the Moon introduces readers to a young African American girl from the South who fell in love with math and who would one day become one of our nation's greatest assets. Katherine Johnson overcomes racial and gender inequities with the belief, instilled by her father, that "You are no better than anyone else, and nobody else is better than you." This became a guiding principle for Johnson as she

makes her way to the top of NASA as a research mathematician.

In this autobiography, Johnson provides a first-hand account of the barriers faced by African Americans and women in the early part of the twentieth century. Johnson takes us on her journey from small town White Sulphur, Virginia, to the landing of Apollo 11.

This is a beautiful story that is sure to inspire all and would be an excellent addition to middle school and high school classrooms and libraries. A great resource to build knowledge and historical perspective around civil rights, racial discrimination, Jim Crow laws, gender roles and the space race.

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Middle/Secondary Level Honoree

Soaring Earth: A Companion Memoir to Enchanted Air, by Margarita Engle. Atheneum Books for Young Readers. Reviewed by Sarah Segal, 6th grade Teacher, Hood River Middle School, Hood River, Ore.



In *Soaring Earth*, Cuban American Margarita Engle continues the exploration of identity begun in *Enchanted Air*, in which she yearned to return to the summers of her youth in Cuba. In this companion memoir, an intimate coming-of-age verse novel, Engle chronicles her journey through adolescence. The novel spans the late 1960s and early 1970s, when Engle grappled with personal

identity in Los Angeles among dynamic cultural, societal, and political shifts of the era.

Initially a curious high school student, Engle desires world travel, adheres to pacifism, negotiates friendships, and excels in writing. At the same time the country around her is contending with the Vietnam War and the Cold War, the controversial Free-speech Movement and the rise of Women's rights. In college, in 1968, Engle is introduced to purposeful activism at the University of California, Berkeley. She participates in Cesar Chavez's nonviolent farm workers movement and attends enlightened ethnic studies courses, yet violent campus protests and the daily disturbances of counterculture life spur Engle to become a freshman dropout.

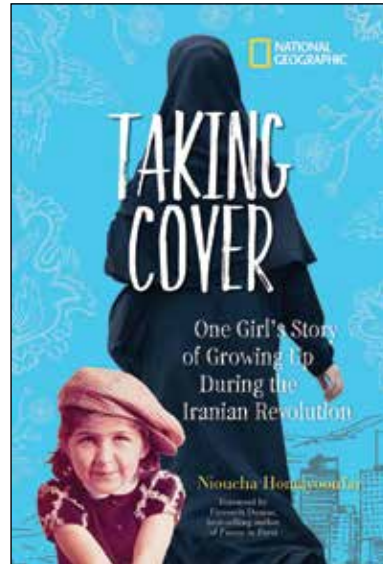
Engle drifts from a San Francisco commune to the uncertainty of New York City. Eventually returning to Los Angeles, she rediscovers her passion for writing poetry. International travel, family, activism, love, eventual college and graduate school degrees, along with her Abuelita immigrating from Cuba to the

United States, sets Engle on her life's direction.

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Middle/Secondary Level Honoree

Taking Cover: One Girl's Story of Growing Up During the Iranian Revolution, by Nioucha Homayoonfar. National Geographic. Reviewed by Heidi J. Torres, assistant professor, Elementary Education, Jeannine Rainbolt College of Education, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Okla.



Homayoonfar's memoir paints a vivid picture of life in Iran after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. It presents a microcosm of the political and societal shifts that led to greater repression, particularly for Iranian women.

The story follows Homayoonfar beginning with her birth in the United States to her relocation to Iran as a young girl, through the Revolution and its oppressive aftermath,

and her eventual departure from Iran as a teenager. The narrative is filled with tense and difficult moments such as Homayoonfar's abduction by the Morality Police, Tehran's bombing during the Iran-Iraq war, the execution of friends' parents, and her own cousin's torture and imprisonment after a failed attempt to leave Iran. Juxtaposed against these stories of oppression and fear are moments depicting beauty and resilience: holidays with family, clandestine dancing to illegal show tunes, and loving friendships with classmates and cousins. The contrast of events illustrates the tensions many exiles and refugees feel in their love for abandoned homelands with untenable political situations. Homayoonfar's French, Iranian, and American identities illustrate the complexity of navigating multiple spaces as a progressive woman living in a repressively theocratic nation-state, and as an immigrant to and from both of her homelands. Her story serves as an example of the strength and resourcefulness of women living in oppressive contexts.

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