

# Septima P. Clark Book Award, 2023

In 2019, the National Council for the Social Studies established the Septima P. Clark Book Award. Books chosen for this honor must be nonfiction trade books and accurately reflect women's issues, perspectives, and stories. They must be thoroughly researched, well written, and indicate originality.

Septima Clark, the educator and civil rights activist for whom this award is named, is credited with writing, "I believe unconditionally in the ability of people to respond when they are told the truth. We need to be taught to study rather than to believe, to inquire rather than to affirm." Many of today's most celebrated children's and young adult authors provide subsistence for Clark's call by both telling young people the truth and inspiring them to inquire further into social issues. This year's Septima P. Clark book awardees are no exception. The authors of each winning title or honoree book highlight the experiences of those who, like Clark, were impacted by their historical and geographic context while also being agents of change.



Importantly, this year's awardees include *Pauli Murray: The Life of a Pioneering Feminist & Civil Rights Activist*, a text that reminds readers and our social studies community that gender binaries stifle our understanding of history and the social world. Murray, who like Clark was both an educator and an activist, challenged gender and racial binaries and hierarchies at every turn. The biography of Murray has compelled our book award committee to propose more expansive views of gender identity and expression in consideration of the Septima P. Clark nominations and eligibility criteria. Only in this light can the award truly elevate the power of those who speak their truth and are unafraid to question and dismantle systems of injustice.

For more information about Pauli Murray, gender, and pronouns: Please visit: [www.paulimurraycenter.com/pronouns-pauli-murray](http://www.paulimurraycenter.com/pronouns-pauli-murray).

—Jennifer L. Gallagher  
Septima P. Clark  
Book Awards Committee

## Elementary Winner

*Bessie the Motorcycle Queen*, by Charles R. Smith, Jr., illustrated by Charlot Kristensen. Orchard Books. Reviewed by Sydney G. Beauchamp, Teaching Professor, Indiana University South Bend, Indiana.



Tossing a penny on a map, Bessie Stringfield climbed on her motorcycle and sped into her next adventure across the

United States. Born circa 1911, Stringfield rode her motorcycle across the 48 contiguous states, participating in racing competitions as she traveled. In the 1920s and 30s, Bessie Stringfield stood out not only because she was a woman traveling the country on her own, but because she was the first known African American woman to do so. This beautiful book, written by Charles R. Smith, Jr., and illustrated by Charlot Kristensen, conveys Stringfield's experience of making her own choices and moving about the country in freedom. Yet it also conveys the brutal reality of the racism she confronted as she rode through the Jim Crow American South.

During most of Bessie Stringfield's travels, people she met greeted her with questions about her

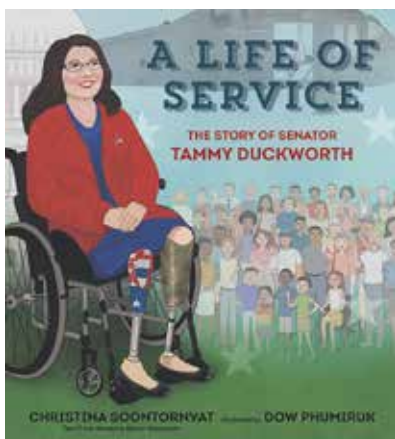
life and were intrigued by her stories. But when she tossed her penny and rode through Georgia, she was chased by men in a truck screaming at her. Stringfield outraced the men and escaped, but she had to sleep outdoors on her motorcycle because there was no motel for African Americans to roll up to for the night. She tossed her penny again and headed west.

In the book's backmatter, readers will learn about Bessie Stringfield riding her motorcycle and serving in World War II as a civilian dispatcher. In her later years, Stringfield founded the Iron Horse Motorcycle Club, and was inducted posthumously into the Motorcycle Hall of Fame in 2002. Bessie Stringfield rode her motorcycle until her death at the age of about 81 (the exact year of her birth is not known). Her story is about a woman who broke racial and gender barriers in a dangerous time in history.

**Social Studies Themes:** ① CULTURE; ⑥ POWER, AUTHORITY AND GOVERNANCE; ⑩ CIVIC IDEALS AND PRACTICES.

### Elementary Honoree

*A Life of Service: The Story of Senator Tammy Duckworth*, by Christina Soontornvat, illustrated by Dow Phumiruk. Candlewick Press. Reviewed by Ann Adkins, Fifth Grade Teacher, St. Pius X/St. Leo School, Omaha, Nebraska.



Elementary students often have opportunities to learn the stories of great people in history who have chosen to serve our country. There are fewer opportunities to read books about contemporary heroes

whose ongoing service continues to have an impact on our country. *A Life of Service: The Story of Senator Tammy Duckworth* provides children with the opportunity to learn about such a person.

Her story begins as an American citizen born in Thailand. As a child, she experienced both joy and troubling times witnessing her father's work for the United Nations. Her story continues with a move to Hawaii and tough economic times for her family. Hard work and determination in school opened up a number of career paths for her. Tammy Duckworth chose to join the military. She served in Iraq, where she was seriously injured and lost both her legs. This was, however, not the end of her service to her country.

In 2012, Duckworth was elected to Congress, where she continues to work as a senator from Illinois. As Christina Soontornvat recounts Duckworth's story, she provides numerous opportunities for children to connect their own experiences to those of Tammy Duckworth's. Some children may see themselves reflected in the poverty Duckworth experienced; others may connect with aspects of Duckworth's medical crises; some students might connect because they are members of a military family; and others might recognize the experience of being a young person facing prejudice.

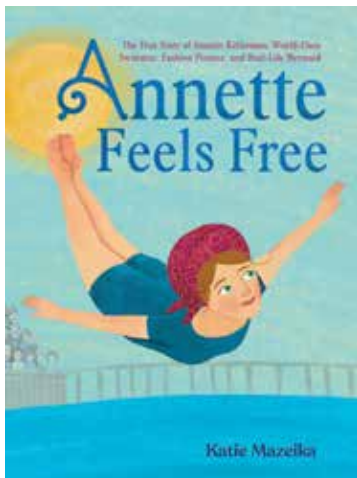
The illustrator, Dow Phumiruk, was born in Thailand and shares that commonality with the senator. Phumiruk's illustrations support the story while inviting the reader to explore more details of Duckworth's story. Soontornvat has written a book that introduces students to a contemporary hero, who continues to pursue solutions to the problems facing our country.

**Social Studies Themes:** ① CULTURE; ② INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT AND IDENTITY; ⑤ INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS, AND INSTITUTIONS; ⑩ CIVIC IDEALS AND PRACTICES.

### Elementary Honoree

*Annette Feels Free*, written and illustrated by Katie Mazeika. Beach Lane Books. Reviewed by Jennifer L. Gallagher, Assistant Professor, College of Education, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina

Have you ever jumped into a swimming pool with all of your clothes on and tried to swim? That must have been how Annette Kellerman felt in the early twentieth century when she participated in swim races, water dances, and diving competitions



while wearing the then-accepted swim skirt and “pantaloon.” She even tried to swim the English Channel in the burdensome costume, while men were allowed to swim naked. Swimming was the vehicle Annette had used to strengthen her

legs in order to break free from leg braces earlier in her life. As an adult, she wanted to expand that freedom and swim with her legs completely unencumbered. The first time Annette revealed herself publicly in a one-piece swimsuit she had sewed herself, she was arrested for not wearing enough clothing. But Annette persevered, and she led the way for women around the world to swim in whatever they felt free and comfortable in. Annette’s history reminds us that all people deserve the right to “redress” gender norms.

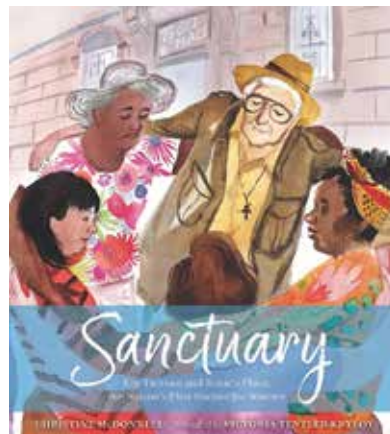
The book’s back matter includes an informational page on Annette Kellerman, an author’s note and a source list.

**Social Studies Themes:** ② TIME, CONTINUITY AND CHANGE; ⑤ INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS AND INSTITUTIONS; ⑩ CIVIC IDEALS AND PRACTICES

### Middle/Intermediate Winner

*Sanctuary: Kip Tiernan and Rosie’s Place, the Nation’s First Shelter for Women*, by Christine McDonnell, illustrated by Victoria Tentler-Krylov. Candlewick Press. Reviewed by Sarah Segal, 6th Grade Teacher, Hood River Middle School, Hood River, Oregon.

Kip Tiernan created the first women’s shelter in the United States—a safe space for women, without judgment. *Sanctuary*, written by current Rosie’s Place educator Christine McDonnell, and illustrated by Victoria Tentler-Krylov, chronicles Tiernan’s life and legacy. Inspired by observing her grandmother’s generosity during the Great Depression, combined with seeing



housing-insecure women disguise themselves as men in order to receive services at male-only shelters, Tiernan decided to commit her life to individuals and communities that have historically gone

unsupported. She believed in connection and listening to people.

Through determination and tenacity, in 1974 Tieran convinced the City of Boston to rent an empty supermarket to her organization for one dollar a year. Rosie’s Place was created with an inviting and cheerful atmosphere, where women and their families felt welcome—a shelter without judgment, questions, or chores, where women found a safe place, a good meal, and warm beds. Today, Rosie’s Place is still a sanctuary for the people of Boston. Tiernan helped found numerous additional nonprofits including the Boston Food Bank and Community Works.

The book’s back matter shares more about Tiernan’s legacy and includes memorable quotes. Most notable, an impressive educational tool for educators, is the author’s age-appropriate list and explanation of the “Causes of Homelessness,” including Urban Renewal, Gentrification, Deinstitutionalization, Veterans’ Trauma, and Drug and Alcohol Addiction. With illustrations that evoke a strong sense of time and place, along with literary celebration of non-stereotypical female contributions, *Sanctuary* is an excellent middle-level teaching resource.

**Social Studies Themes:** ② TIME, CONTINUITY AND CHANGE; ③ PEOPLE, PLACES AND ENVIRONMENTS; ⑤ INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS AND INSTITUTIONS; ⑥ POWER, AUTHORITY, AND GOVERNANCE; ⑩ CIVIC IDEALS AND PRACTICES.

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## SEPTIMA P. CLARK BOOK AWARD *from page 170*

### Middle/Intermediate Honoree

*Call Me Miss Hamilton: One Women's Case For Equality and Respect*, by Carole Boston Weatherford, illustrated by Jeffery Boston Weatherford. Millbrook Press. Reviewed by Valencia Abbott, History/Social Studies Teacher, Rockingham Early College High School, Rockingham County Schools, North Carolina.

I hadn't heard about Miss Mary Lucille Hamilton before reading this book. But after reading that she demanded to be addressed as "Miss Hamilton," I knew I wanted to know her better. Miss Hamilton would become the plaintiff in the U.S. Supreme Court case *Hamilton v. Alabama* (1964), which upheld that a Black woman was entitled to the same courtesy forms of address customarily reserved for whites in the Southern United States. This book addresses the fact that calling a Black person by their first name was a form of racial discrimination and utter disrespect. By demanding that a Black person was owed the same courtesy greeting, Miss Hamilton positioned Black people as societal equals. While this may seem an inconsequential move to some, it was on par with any civil rights movement strategy, from sit-ins and protests to the March on Washington.

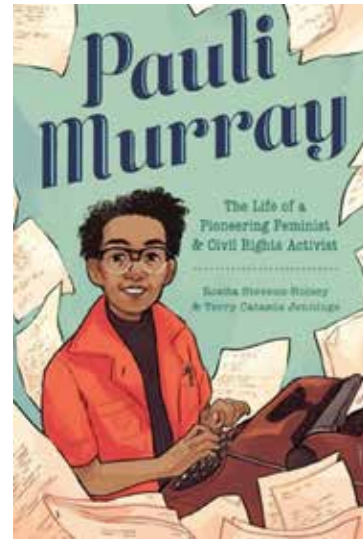
This book should be shared in every classroom from elementary to high school, because it addresses a point of history that is undertold or unknown and showcases the story of an everyday person fighting for equal respect and equal rights. The illustrations propel this book into more of a historical research project with a montage of primary source images intermingled with scratchboard art that adds another layer of depth to the narrative.

**Social Studies Themes:** ① CULTURE; ③ PEOPLE, PLACES, AND ENVIRONMENTS; ④ INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT AND IDENTITY; ⑤ INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS, AND INSTITUTIONS; ⑥ POWER, AUTHORITY, AND GOVERNANCE.

### Secondary Winner

*Pauli Murray: The Life of a Pioneering Feminist & Civil Rights Activist*, by Rosita Stevens-Holsey

and Terry Catasús Jennings. Yellow Jacket. Reviewed by Elizabeth Sturm, Associate Professor, Department of Education, Lewis University, Romeoville, Illinois.



This is a detailed and nuanced poetic biography of Pauli Murray's life and work as a lawyer, scholar, women's and civil rights activist, priest, and poet. "My whole history has been a struggle in a society dominated by the ideas that Blacks were inferior to Whites and

women were inferior to men," Murray once stated. Pauli Murray worked to change society for women and minoritized people in many ways, including framing the argument used in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* and working on the *Commission on the Status of Women Report* for President John F. Kennedy's administration.

Author Rosita Stevens-Holsey, one of Murray's nieces, incorporates her personal insight into Murray's complex identity. Murray was born female in 1910 to parents who identified as Black within a larger interracial extended family. From an early age, Murray's gender expression and identity were non-conforming. The authors describe Murray as, "a woman who felt herself a man trapped in a woman's body," and as "A woman who fell in love with other women." The intersectional position Murray occupied provides a lens into multiple perspectives and issues within civil rights movements. Murray's work consistently challenged the status quo and compels us to continue to challenge norms today.

Photographs from Murray's life are interspersed throughout the book. Back matter includes authors' notes, timeline, and a bibliography.

**Social Studies Themes:** ① CULTURE; ② TIME, CONTINUITY, AND CHANGE; ④ INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT AND IDENTITY; ⑤ INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS, AND INSTITUTIONS; ⑥ POWER, AUTHORITY, AND GOVERNANCE; ⑩ CIVIC IDEALS AND PRACTICES. 📌