Voices of Democracy- Raising our Voices as Readers to Engage Young Readers in Realizing their Voices as Citizens-

Literacy Selections to impart awareness of voices empowered by our democracy and to inspire young listeners own voices as citizens and as communicators.

Intro:

This year’s Law Day theme, may initially evoke, ideas of reading aloud books about our founding fathers lives or revisiting the experiences of famous speakers and communicators whose “words” do “voice” our democratic values. However, the spectrum of “Voices of Democracies” parallels the infinite range of our evolving population who include immigrants, artists, designers, community members, cultural affirmers, entrepreneurs, creators, team players, and advocates for themselves as well as others. As we gather in our homes and classrooms and beyond to read aloud these “Voices of Democracy,” let use celebrate how our 21st perspective lens on portals for individual citizen “voice and choice” has redefined and expanded the platforms for these voices. May this initial collection of Read Aloud works inspire all of us and young reader to read “into” these powerful “Voices of Democracy”. May our young readers “build out” and into this galaxy of voices through their own proactive citizen now initiatives and choices.

Dr. Rose Cherie Reissman

1.

The Arabic Quilt –An Immigrant Story (2020)-Aya Khalil

Illustrated by Anait Semirdzhan

Maine: Tillbury Publishers.

What better artistic depiction than a literal quilt of the diverse Voices of Democracy Law Day theme?

Grades 2-4

Topics: What it means to be American, Student Voice, Building Community.

Genres: Picture book, Culturally Responsive and Inclusive Literature.

This lovely story resonates with any child from any culture who treasures a family heirloom or object that speaks to family life. It also places through its narrative front and center the issues of cultures and bi-lingual or multi-lingual capacity and the implications of that for such a student in a classroom not filled with large minority of multi-lingual students from different backgrounds. The tone and skill of Khalil’s narrative with very genuine and honest peer classmate’s initial feelings that speaking languages beyond English are not desirable nor needed. The story includes an easily implemented class project that can validate the key lesson of the books which is we are united by speaking different languages and our multi-language backgrounds enhance our self and cultural pride. Another key aspect of this story is a lesson in the multi-lingual derivation of various “American” words from other cultures, such as the Arabic origin of algebra, coffee, lemon and sugar in the English language.

Read Aloud Talking Points:

Before reading:

Make certain that the students have a chance to think about and to react to these questions among themselves. Do not add any adult comments to their discussion.

Is there any object at home, which you treasure because it reminds you of family or of special events in your life or that of your family? If so, describe it. Tell why it is important to you. Explain when you use it or if it is just in your room or living room to inspire or light your life.

Think about this question. There is no single correct answer and many adults have different answers for it.

Is it useful in the United States to be able to use more than one language other than English? How would you answer this question? What do you feel about this as someone who does or does not speak another language?

During the reading:

1. How does Kanzi feel when her mother speaks to her in Arabic and gives her a lunch that comprised of Arabic foods?
2. What does Mrs. Haugen say about being bilingual? Do the students in the class agree with Mrs. Haugen or do they feel differently? What details in the story provide the answer?
3. Why does the project Kanzi’s mother does with the class, help the students to understand why language can unite them?
4. After the beautiful quilt of names in Arabic is completed and put on a bulletin board, what positive changes does this bring about in Kanzi’s class and in the school beyond her class? Share at least two from the story.

Take Action- Project

1. Identify at least one language other than English that is spoken in at least one student’s home, if not by the student himself or herself. Ask that a family member form that home write out all the class’s first names in that language and have the class as a whole research words from that language which are part of the English language as Kanzi learnt that many words from Arabic are part of the English language. Use same size shiny cardstock squares or same size fabric squares to have students glue their names and insert designs or words in English or other languages about themselves. Post the quilt on school site and on school website with there being an opportunity for viewers, whether peer students or adults to comment on the quilt, with post-its or a write on roll on site or online. Also, post the quote: “Learning other languages besides the one we grow up with helps make the world a friendlier place. We can speak non-English languages and still be American.” Ask the viewers explain why they agree or disagree with that quote.

2. The Oldest Student- How Mary Walker Learned To Read- (2020)

Rita Lorraine Hubbard & Oge Mora-

Penguin Random House.

Mary Walker’s story compellingly demonstrates the interconnection between literacy and citizenship, actively being part of the chorus of Voices for Democracy.

Grades 3-5

Topics: Building Community, Constitutional Rights, Citizen Responsibilities, Women Slaves, What it means to be an American.

Genres: Biography. Historical nonfiction, literacy acquisition nonfiction.

The Oldest Student, a biographical account of a woman born to slavery who finally became a reader at the age of 116, is evocatively told, through Mora’s striking acrylic paint, marker, colored pencil, and paper clippings illustrations. This is a true, backed by secondary and by primary sources story of a resilient woman born into slavery, who from her childhood years had a desire to learn to read, which was forbidden to her as a slave. The story of Mary Walker’s life which spans and parallels American history from 1848 to 1969 is a story of resilience, forgiveness, and literacy acquisition during the last five years of a long life. The Chattanooga Area Literacy Movement proclaimed her the nation’s oldest student at that time. This is a story to motivate, inform, and energize young students, as well as every citizen. Reading is aloud is being part of the chorus of Voices of Democracy.

Before the Read Aloud:

Ask students the following questions:

If they were forbidden to learn how to read or how to write, would they want to learn it, anyway? Ask them to explain, why yes or why not.

Tell them that there is no single correct answer and there are actually many countries, where they would not be required to go to school at all to learn how to read and to write.

Can an elderly person over 70 and beyond- a grandparent or great-grandparent learn new academic, art or other skills or are they too old to learn new skills? For this answer, students can of course reference their family members or neighbors.

During the Read Aloud:

1. As a young slave, what things did Mary wish for that were impossible for her to attain at that time because she was a slave?
2. Did the official end of slavery when Mary became an adult, allow her to attain the things she had wished for as a child? How did she react as a person to still not being able to attain what she had wanted to have when she was a slave?
3. Since she never as a young adult mother had learned to read or write, what was Mary not able to do for her children, although she loved them dearly? How did her not knowing how to read and write affect Mary as an adult woman besides as a mother?
4. Based on this story, as Mary aged into a grandmother and great grandmother, did she give up on her dream of learning how to read or not? Provide details from the story and point to illustrations that demonstrate whether Mary gave up on her dream or no, even though she was already over a hundred years old.

Take Action Project

1. Not everyone knows about Mary Walker’s achievement in becoming one of the oldest students to learn how to read after she was over 100 years old. Create a set of at least 2-3 posters celebrating her learning to read and the powers of reading to be used by citizens. Among the slogans from the book to use might be: “Your civil rights are in these pages,” “You’re never too old to learn.” Display the posters with actual downloaded images of Mary or photocopy them from the clippings in the inset page. Create a digital slide show as well of the posters and share it with a local senior center.

If possible, invite or zoom with a librarian or senior center specialist or ESL specialist who can share with the students the materials, methods and strategies that are currently being used in adult literacy classes. Students can react to these strategies and perhaps do recruitment posters for these adult literacy classes.

This book implicitly and explicitly highlights the right to read that is inherent for us in this constitutional democracy, which is too often, not even realized by so many adults and students.

3. More Than Peach-Changing the World . . . One crayon at a time! (2022)

Bellen Woodward-

Sometimes a Voice of Democracy is not just a speaker, a writer or an advocate, it can also be an entrepreneur who through a new product or new way of seeing standard products voices an unheard American democratic perspective. Such a voice emerged when Bellen Woodward wrote this children’s book about her work.

Grades 2-6

Topics: Student Voices, What it means to be an American citizen, student leadership, cultural responsiveness, entrepreneurship

Genres: Student Advocacy, Picture Book, Memoir, Student Leadership Guide

This non-fiction book authored by a 12-year-old student cultural change advocate, who started her leadership work, is one that teachers can authentically use with students on so many levels. For younger grades, it is a beautifully rendered accessible to the maximum story of a child who at the age of eight started her initiative using crayon activist to “draw” her voice of democracy expression. Bellen’s recognition that there had to be more color shades other than “peach” for drawing skin tones (easily comprehended in the early elementary grades), of course has deeper meaning as an entrepreneurial student owned initiative focused on inclusivity, cultural responsiveness and student capacity to effect change themselves right away. The memoir written in an intimate, conversational tone immediately communicates the urgency and immediacy of Bellen’s idea about transforming the range of crayons. It also provides fabulous back material to enable students to do their own “take action” projects that are applicable to their communities and their grassroots capacities after hearing Bellen’s story. Most important given the target audience for the book is that within the framework of these student change leader guidelines, the students are explicitly guided to seek our librarian, teacher, parent organization and family guidance for help.

Talking Points:

Before reading the story:

1. Challenge the students to think about how they could change their classroom community- the kids in their room or school – themselves and make it better or happier. Let them come up with a list of their own including changes they would like to see happen. Make no comments about the changes the students propose, but ask them to check those they think could happen quickly if everyone agreed.

Ask children what color crayon they use when they want to color a character’s or a friend’s face. List the exact words they use to name that color.

During the reading of the story:

1. What makes Bellen feel confused when her friend asks her to pass the “skin colored” crayon? Why does passing the “peach” colored crayon for a flesh drawing confuse Bellen and make her feel wrong? How does Bellen resolve this dilemma or problem?
2. In what way does Bellen change her friend’s way of thinking about colors, by a single question? (Answer: “Which one? Skin can be any number of beautiful colors.”
3. How can Bellen see how her question and change of language affects/changes her classroom conversation? (Answer: She hears teacher using the same idea of a “number of beautiful colors “for color of skin tone).

Take Action Project:

1. Decide on a do-able in your class change you can make as a class or as teams of 2 to 3- Talk about it- Name the change you can see happening- Bellen called hers- More Than a Peach Project. Then Follow Bellen’s Guidelines at the back of the book. Student Voices can tell about the Change as posters, as a flip grid recorded audio on a school website, as a PBA in the morning or as a class to class visit. Ways to realize it might be: host a fundraising drive with your PTA, create flyers, or promote at lunchtime or with the student leadership group. Start small and make change your advocate in your space.

4. I Affirm Me-The ABCs of Inspiration for Black Kids (2021).

Written by Nyasha Williams –Illustrated by Sof’ya Glushko

Hachette Books-

While articulating their voices through actions, advocacy, words or art comes naturally to some, others adults included, despite our democracy do not know how to raise their voices. Affirmations are a right and a responsibility of our American democracy. This ABC if affirmations provides a format for a diverse spectrum of persons across an infinite cultural range to find their voices by affirming their identities and values aloud. This is truly an interactive authenticator of the May 2024 Law Day Voices of America Theme.

Grades 2-4 and beyond.

Topics: Student Voices, What it is to be an American, Building Community-Social and Emotional Learning/Competencies.

Genres- Picture Book, Affirmations, ABC picture book, Cultural Responsiveness Primer,

While the title of this book would suggest that it is limited or intended to be for black children alone, it is in reality a rich beautifully written and artistically allusion full, text of positive affirmations for every child, no matter what race or cultural background. The format of this seeming picture book alone is highly accessible to both visual and text learners as it is half text and half full-page illustrations. The book utilizes the alphabet genre format as the catapult for drawing the reader into coming up with multiple aspects of cultural identity, personal strengths, and family backgrounds that “affirmed” fuel pride, perseverance and productivity. The fluidity of the affirmations and the vividness of the illustrations can be used as the springboard for all young students and even older ones to connect to individual cultures, talents, strengths and beliefs so the affirmations become their own.

Talking Points:

1. Before reading the book, challenge students to share “voice” using the alphabet platform, parts of their personalities, appearances or strengths which they feel are wonderful.

Start by doing at least three letters on your own:

“A” is for “all in.” I work on every project with a team with all my ability and effort- I am “ALL IN.”

B is for Beauty. I try to make every place I work in, every room I enter and every writing or art I design “beautiful” looking. I also want to put out “beauty” of spirit and of good in all I do.

C is for Challenge- I love to always challenge myself to do well and to be a teacher who challenges students to think, to invent and to solve problems.

Challenge the students to share with you individually their “A, B, C”s of how wonderful they already are.

Tell them that when we talk positively and share all the good contributing to the world aspects of ourselves, we are “affirming” ourselves. We are going to read a story about how one class of students “affirm” their positives.

During the read-aloud:

1. Choose selected letters as a focus such as the A and challenge the students to react to the following two questions: Is this true for you personally? (in this narrative- the author is affirming the Afro hairstyle- do the students like their own hair style, texture and length currently) –Of course, there is no single correct answer-) and How would you change the Glushko illustration to show how you feel about your hair? What affirmation would you create or not create for your hairstyle or cut?
2. The alphabetical affirmations in the story can also be paused to include use of the text as a discussion and illustration prompt to enhance themes such as classroom/community belonging- “B is for Belong. I have value.”- “Y is for Youth” – I have the power to create change. “Q is for Question- I will ask questions seeking answers.” Any of these affirmations or others can generate a very customized to the students in the room visual and statement display that will serve as a mirror the students’ emotional, cognitive and social perception of themselves as individuals and as a class.
3. Another fun and “picture/visual” document approach for this book would be to show the readers only the illustrations and challenge them to identify and word the letter and the affirmation. What the students suggest as text should be recorded on an experiential chart. Then the chart can be compared and contrasted with the actual book text. No right or wrong since student ideas reflect the students in the room.

Take Action Project:

1. Use the Jigsaw approach and divide students into groups of four each or more depending on class size. Divide the letters among these teams with some overlap if necessary. Challenge the groups to work together to develop affirmations and illustrations for the letters they have been given.

This activity will need at least another period, but will result in an affirmations text and illustrations that truly represents the class perspective. It can be published as an e book or printed out and posted on the school website.

5. Growing an Artist (2020) - The Story of a Landscaper and His Son- John Parra – Author and Illustrator-

Simon and Schuster

This book is a key selection for the Law Day Voices of Democracy theme, because it emphasizes immigrant voices and underscores that artists work including a range of arts media/platforms also are part of the landscape of Voices of Democracy. A voice is not only a heard one uttering words or being read, but is also part of Democracy’s portal for artistic, design and other concrete or under the feet creative expressions.

Grades 2-4-

Topics: What it means to be an American- Rights and Responsibilities, Building Community, Student Voices, The World of Work-Immigrants, fathers and sons, Mexican Americans, community roles and student voices.

Genres: Family stories, memoirs, snapshots of workdays, father and son stories, autobiographical fiction, landscape gardening fiction,

This is a beautifully accessible loving tribute from an adult Mexican American author and illustrator to his father a landscaper, who took him to work as a child. This very accessible story tells about the experience from the perspective of the son Juanito who gets to help his father and use his sketchbook to document the experience. Beyond the bond of accompanying his father to his work, Juanito gains insight into the daily routines of the landscape business and its clients (customers). As a young artist, he sketches his surroundings plus learns how sketching an integral part of landscaping is. Most importantly, the closeness during the workday gives the father a chance to impart his values to his son. A story that will inspire parents and children to bond through a shared adult community experience.

Talking Points:

Before the Read-Aloud:

1. Have you ever gone to work with your parent or adult grandparent, aunt, uncle, or older sibling? What job or role were they doing? How did you help or assist them? What did you enjoy the most about it? What did you like the least about it? Would you want to do the job or play the role that your parent does when you grow up? Explain your answer.

During the Reading:

1. What does Papi share about his work and why he likes it? Do you feel that it is important to do something that you love or is it important to do something that pays well whether you like it or not? There is no single correct answer, explain yours.
2. What is Juanito’s reaction to going to the city dump? What public benefits will come from the branches and trimmings that are dumped? (Elicit and record “mulch for planting.” Why does Juanito have fun at the dump?
3. What excites Junanito about the challenge of Mr. and Mrs. Carroll’s garden? How does designing the layout of this garden space help to connect Juanito with his father?

Take Action Project:

In school: Get a member of the custodial staff, the family workers, the cafeteria staff or school office staff (all of these perform essential services in the school- but few students know what they actually do in the school since it is not classroom related to allow a small group of students to shadow them before school or during lunch or recess. These individuals can share some of the tasks they do and how they impact the school. The students can then write or illustrate these key school roles as Inside writers.

OR

Students can over a holiday break either go to work with one of their adult family members or neighbors or interview local business owners to learn about their routines and work ethics. The results can be a similar fiction or newspaper story providing insights into a job, career or business. This is of course PARCC starting at the elementary level.

6. Yes We Will

Asian Americans Who Shaped This Country-

Kelly Yang

Illustrated by Nabi H. Ali, Fahmida Azim, Marcos Chin and others.

2022- Penguin Readers, Dial Books

This set of concise autobiographic descriptions of successful Asian Americans contributes to the Voices of Democracy theme not only by these actual examples of empowered voices, but also through the positivism of the statements included here. These positive statements about opportunities, goal setting and capacity to achieve are part of the intrinsic connective fabric that makes the threaded Voices of Democracy come together as one.

Grades 1-4

Topics: Asian American Culture, American History, Building Community, Government, Immigration, Rights and Responsibility.

Genres: Picture Book Non-fiction collected biography, affirmations text-nonfiction, Asian American nonfiction picture book.

This is a highly accessible, beautifully work chock of full of facts and illustrations of Asian Americans who have contributed tremendously to our society. The strength off this evocative work is that that the illustrations and poetic text at the top inform, teach and celebrate a slew of Asian Americans who have so distinctively contributed to American life. Beyond that for older elementary readers, in smaller fonts additional detailed information is provided. In the back of the book, Kelly Yang provides further biographical details for all the individuals cited in the book plus the bonus of quotes that deftly summarize their perspectives of their Asian American identity. The poetic main text of the narrative that connects the very different Asian Americans chosen for this collected biographical text is: “Yes We Will. . . For we can be anything. All we have to do is to dream it.” This positivism drives the text and is lofted through the illustrations during any individual reading or read aloud.

Talking Points:

Before the Read-Aloud-

1. What things do all of you think you can do and will do on your own? Encourage the students to discuss them and to share them in a sentence or to come up to illustrate them on an experiential chart or the Smartboard. Make sure to date the chart, so the students can revisit it at the end and see to what extent the read aloud shifted their mindsets. Show the students the full title of the book-Yes We Will” and ask them how many Asian Americans they can name by using the cover design or from their own knowledge. Note down the names.

During the Read Aloud:

1. As the story is being read, challenge students to add to a “New Fact/Idea” chart and an “I heard that phrase or idea before chart.” At the end of each set of pages or so, have them share items for either chart. Among the items which might be shared: Heard before chart: glorious meals that bring us all together, sing our hearts together, fight for civil rights, and soar to high heights.

New Fact/idea chart: 20,000 Chinese American immigrants built the Transcontinental Railroad. Franklin Chang-Diaz is a Costa Rican Chinese American astronaut who has gone on seven space shuttle missions.

Peter Tsai invented the N95 mask.

1. Challenge the students to provide the soundtrack for the illustrations and what happened during the scenes before the moment the illustration captures plus what came next after the illustration capture. This is otherwise known as prequel and sequel training for reading and writing teaching, but is as fun with single powerful illustrations as shown her. For example on the two page, spread of Jenny Han- Students can infuse the sounds of book pages turning and student readers sharing comments about the book. They can mimic the sounds of those cheering Amanda Nguyen at a rally and suggest music that could be played or songs to be sung at that rally.
2. Let us Talk as the read aloud progresses through the story, challenge the students to suggest which of the persons highlighted might connect as friends and as supporters of others. This will help them as readers classify or categorize the subjects as: activists, arts persons, inventors, adventurists, political figures and celebrities.

Take Action Project:

1. Refer the students back to the list they originally had of Asian Americans they were familiar with and recognized without the reading. Have them now add names to the list based on the reading. Divide the students into groups of 2-3 and tell them they are now going to help Kelly Yang publicize some of these worthy, but unknown to general public Asian Americans. Have them download an image or photo of the person they choose and a quote-they can start from the back material provided by Kelly Yang that has quotes for each. A poster saluting this person and promoting books or a site of the individual’s work can be made and displayed on a bulletin board or better yet on a slide show on the school website. If there is time to expand the research, students can create a picture book or graphic novel short bio or article on their selected key person. This could be presented to peer or younger peer classes.

7. My Powerful Hair- (2023)

Carole Lindstrom and Illustrated by Steph Littlebird

Abrams Books for Young Readers-

New York.

Voices of Democracy –the Law Day 2024- theme evokes- a sense of written and spoken statements affirming or demonstrating American democratic values. However, “Voices” can manifest themselves in many formats. They can emerge as visual art, sculptures, take action marches or . . . . “Hair” expressions. Yes, hair, fashion, and style “statements” that also are part of the galaxy of “voices of democracy.” There is no doubt of that because in many countries, various hairstyles and fashion statements are not only illegal, but also punishable. Often hair or other fashion styles are affirmations of and “utterances” of culture.

Topics: Indigenous Tribes, History of Indian Boarding Schools, family values, Student Voices, Building Community, Government treatment of the Indian nations, Hair as a cultural expression.

Genres: Autobiographical fiction, Indigenous person picture book, Cultural values picture book, Hair Story/Cultural significance genre.

Grades three-and beyond.

This beautifully illustrated and told autobiographical fiction picture book is authentic to its indigenous culture and theme celebrations since Carole Lindstrom who is an enrolled citizen of the Turtle Mountain Band of Ojibwe writes it. The illustrator Steph Littlebird is an indigenous member of Oregon’s Confederated Tribes off Grand Ronde. This authenticity adds to the immediacy and passion of the narrative that details the indigenous belief that the hair contains and embeds special powers and energies and maintains cultural stories and traditions. Family values as conveyed through the eyes and words of the narrator, a young girl at the beginning with short hair who is told by her grandparents, that hair “is our memories . . . our source of strength.” The concept of the memories and stories of our families’ past woven into young persons’ hair is a visually beautiful one, but also one that young students can relate to through a consideration of their own hair cutting, braiding, and styling experiences. The author provides back material that includes: Ojibwe Glossary, Native American culture notes and an autobiographical reflection on the impact of Indian Boarding schools. This work is useful and accessible on many levels including just a “hair story” or as part of Indigenous persons in American history study.

Talking Points:

Before reading the story:

1. Ask the students how they feel about the quality, texture, length and style of their hair. Do they like their hair as it is on the day the question is asked? If they were in total charge of their hair without any parental input, how would they have their hair styled? Does hair hold any special powers or meaning for them? These questions should evoke at least several minutes of heated sharing.

During the reading of the story:

1. How does the narrator who has short hair feel about her hair’s length? Why if her mother did not have long hair and does not have it, does the narrator want long hair?
2. “Our ancestors say: Our hair is our memories. Our source of strength. An extension of us.” This is part of the Indigenous person ideas or philosophies (a fancy way of saying their beliefs/thoughts). Do you based on your own thinking or that of your traditions agree or disagree with this idea? Think about parents or other family members who save cuttings from a baby’s first haircut or cut hair of children at specific ages, because of cultural traditions.
3. The narrator remembers moments in her family’s history based on her hair length at that time. Think back to your hairstyle at specific key points in your life so fair, can you remember times or special occasions (milestones or parties), when your hair was specially styled or changed for the event and who prepared your hair. Share these stories.

After the reading:

Take Action Project:

1. Ms. Lindstrom notes that Indigenous persons feel hair carries energies, powers and memories. Create a poem, an illustration, or a reflection about your hair and the energies, memories and power it is carrying.

Or

Share this idea with your parents at home or older siblings and interview them about the ways they associate various hairstyles with memories, occasions, opportunities or milestones.

Or

Have older students research Indian boarding schools to document why they cut student hair. They might weigh in on the damage done to these students’ indigenous cultures and the extent to which those who ran them were intentional in that damage or felt that they were doing the right thing.

8. I have a Super Power. (2022)

Stephen Curry, author and Geneva Bowers, illustrator.

Penguin Books, New York.

The Law Day May 2024 theme- Voices of Democracy- is one with intentionally plural “voices.” As a consequence of the freedom of individual democratic voice available to all of us in the United States, we often forget that Voices of Democracy can also be about working together toward a common community, neighborhood, group, and state, federal or global goal. This is only the shared Voices power that happens regularly in workplaces, schools, team playing fields, actors’ stages, film sets and orchestras. Stephen Curry is well aware of this super power that enables every member of a group to exponentially become a super power as part of a team working to “voice”/realize one goal.

Grades 1-3

Topics: Student Voices, Building Community, Team Playing, What it means to be an American, Self Concept, Personal Development.

Genres: Picture Book, Self Concept, Leadership Development- Self Affirmations Picture Book, Superhero genre.

Stephen Curry, famous for his on court NBA career and his off court work in family valued centered media, brings his presence and passion to this very readable and teaching ready picture book about Hughes. Hughes is a seemingly ordinary boy of eight who aspires to basketball fame someday. However, at eight he is not yet a tall famous player, yet he has a super power to share with the world. As the illustrations walk the reader through Hughes’s school day, his ordinary relatable qualities are emphasized as the superpower is hinted by his bubbled thoughts. Beyond the very easily cultivated superpower that is revealed in the story, the illustrations and text also convey lessons about choosing teams, playing on a team, and working with peers toward a common goal. The strength of this story as an emotional cheerleader lies in its protagonist’s work on himself and his game to achieve a spot in the team. A lesson that goes beyond the basketball court.

Talking Points:

Before reading the story:

1. Ask the students what they would like to achieve right now as students, players, artists, leaders, which although they want to do it, they feel is not possible for them at this point. Make certain that at least five or six students share the goal they want, but cannot achieve. Have them explain in their own words, why that goal is something that they still feel is beyond them. Check if any students in the class feel they can suggest some ways for their peers to achieve these goals. Do not weigh into the discussion yourself.

During the reading:

1. Are there any superpowers, which ordinary persons who are not superheroes by birth or by the use of tech devices or magic, can have as persons? If so, what might be a superpower, you, your family or others have. Explain your answer.
2. What might be a superpower a child has which a parent and a coach might notice? Although Hughes has this hidden superpower, what does he worry about? Have you ever, although you were pretty confident, still worried like Hughes about doing an activity, passing a test or playing a game? Share your story.
3. Besides his superpower, how else does Hughes make his goals come real and true? In what ways does relating to others help a superpower work well in this story?

Take Action Project:

After reading the story:

1. With heart- the superpower, plus practice and belief in himself, Hughes, although not at eight physically ready to be a star player, comes through for his team.

Do you have the superpower of heart and the determination to practice and the belief in self to achieve your goal/your dream?

Revisit some of the dreams the students shared and ask each of them to make a plan for using the heart superpower and practice plus belief in self to achieve the goal. Have them draw or share in word narrative a realistic plan for starting on this goal right away.

They can also draw or use graphics to create their own superpower heart hero costume or logo.

9. Flying Free- How Bessie Coleman’s Dreams Took Flight (2020)

Grades 2-4

Voices of Democracy does not immediately conjure up an African American female aviator, nor does it suggest many who sought and do seek to break through ceilings or regulations that barred them from joining their “voices” to the power of various endeavors, careers. Opportunities or experiences. Bessie Coleman actually did “voice” her passion for aviation in flight shows with spectators watching her feats live, but her most powerful voice for American history came through her determination to become a licensed female black aviator in the 20th century. It was Bessie’s “voice” for democracy that crashed beyond that ceiling.

Karyn Parsons

Illustrated by R. Gregory Christie

New York: Little, Brown, and Company.

Topics: African American Female Aviation History, Women’s Roles and Rights, Student Voices, Rights and Responsibilities.

Genres: Picture Book Biography, Biography in Verse- Juvenile, Informational Picture Book.

This beautifully designed, biography of Bessie Coleman, is rendered melodically and emotionally accessible through the verse text. The factually based and extensively photo researched story spins an inspiring narrative of a real life female who defied 20th century boundaries of pilot licensure for a Black female. The narrative wisely chooses a visual and plot comparison between the black girl and the black bird. It also establishes the solid ceiling in the early 20th century for women and even more solid for black women, to transcend in the aviation field. The work name drops various key female figures from 20th century American Aviation history and includes as back material: a timeline for females in Aviation from the 20th through early 21st century, actual artifacts of Bessie Coleman, and touching very personal notes from both the author and the illustrator. The key in this long overdue picture book for young readers is immediately making the emotional connection between the young reader and the adventurous, young Texas girl going against the regulations and standards for female piloting of her time. Just as students have rediscovered the unpublicized but documented achievements of Mae Jemison and Josephine Baker, this picture book introduces the flying high bravery of Bessie Colman. Her example inspires all young readers to soar to attain their goals.

Talking Points:

Before reading:

1. Ask children if they feel that currently in the United States, there is any position, career or business, they cannot aspire to or hope to attain when they grow. Since many students are from diverse backgrounds, ask them if their family members in their native jobs had any careers, businesses or government positions they could not get, even if they worked hard to attain them.

Allow the students to share their ideas about themselves and their families at length. Do mention the requirement for a United States President of being born in the USA if that comes up. Make a list of student suggestions.

During the reading:

1. What dreams about her future does Bessie develop as a child? What experiences or persons inspire her to have these dreams?
2. How did Bessie as a young woman work toward making her dreams a reality? How did Bessie react to her brother’s reminding her that in America as a black female in 1920, she could not get a flying license? What did she do to achieve her goal when it was obvious she could not make that goal happen in the United States?
3. What was Bessie able to achieve even though at first as a black female, it was denied her in the United States? Once she had achieved it, how did the public and press react to her? How did she use her fame to fight racism?

After reading the book:

Take Action Project:

1. Have the students select up to three or four female pilots from the Trailblazing Women in Flight Timeline. For each of these females have them identify a key quote and key facts and compare these with Bessie’s accomplishments and quotes. Students might enjoy creating an imaginary conversation about the American Aviation field challenges for women among Bessie and other female aviators.

OR

Students can draw a character trait chart for Bessie based on the traits they identify from the story. Among these are: imagination, determination, strategic thinking, hardworking, perseverance, study, adventurous nature, risk taking, entrepreneurship. They can explain for each trait how that trait helped her achieve her dream and how they can be inspired by that trait to achieve their dreams and potential as well.