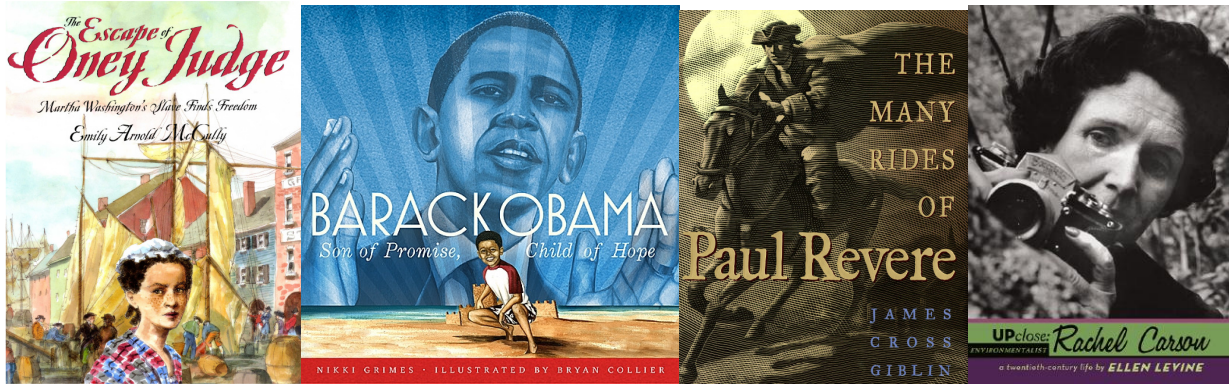


Biographies in American History

Recommended Biographies

with publication dates from 2007 to 2009



An Annotated Bibliography for Elementary and Middle Grades

Editors

Sasha Lauterbach
Librarian, Cambridge Friends School

Marion Reynolds
Instructor in Children's Literature, Tufts University

The books listed in this bibliography have content related to the following eras in United States History according to the National History Standards:

Era 3: Revolution and the New Nation (1754 – 1820s); **Era 4:** Expansion and Reform (1801 – 1861); **Era 5:** Civil War and Reconstruction (1850 – 1877); **Era 6:** The Development of the Industrial United States (1870 – 1900); **Era 7:** The Emergence of Modern America (1890 – 1930); **Era 8:** The Great Depression and World War II (1929 – 1945); **Era 9:** Postwar United States (1945 to early 1970s); **Era 10:** Contemporary United States (1968 to the present)

This bibliography was funded through *History Makers*, a professional development program presented by the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum Education Department in partnership with Boston Public Schools, Boston, MA, supported by a U.S. Department of Education Teaching American History Grant.

Introduction

This bibliography was created for teachers and school librarians as a resource for selecting high quality biographies of notable Americans. The books included were published between 2007-2009 as an addendum to bibliographies created prior to these years. (They are posted on the JFK Presidential Library and Museum website.)

In selecting titles for the bibliography, we looked for books that would engage and inspire children, that would provide opportunities for them to identify with people and events in history, and help them to imagine becoming history makers themselves. We sought books that were well-researched, with attractive formats, exciting and compelling texts, vivid illustrations, as well as interesting perspectives and insights.

Many picture books were included because students of all ages enjoy them, and they are excellent for reading aloud. These books serve as accessible introductions to the subject matter, and they invite further exploration.

The biographies are grouped under the following headings:

- Artists, Musicians and Writers
- Athletes
- Educators
- Explorers and Adventurers
- Scientists and Environmentalists
- Presidents and Their Families
- Americans Engaged in Conflicts
- Political and Social Justice Activists

Note: Some of the annotations in this bibliography were adapted from the brief summary of the book that the publisher submitted for cataloging by the Library of Congress and from other review sources.

Artists, Musicians and Writers

Artists

Bryan, Ashley. Words to My Life's Song

Photographs by Bill McGuinness.

Atheneum Books, 2009; 32 pages.

Grades 3 – 6. Ashley Bryan is the three-time winner of the Coretta Scott King Award and the winner of the 2009 Laura Ingalls Wilder Medal. Illustrated with many photographs and full-color reproductions of his paintings, this autobiography is an introduction to the children's book author, illustrator, and artist.

Nobleman, Marc Tyler. Boys of Steel: The Creators of Superman

Illustrated by Ross MacDonald.

Alfred A. Knopf Books for Young Readers, 2008; 32 pages.

Grades 3 – 6. During the Depression, two teenagers in Cleveland escaped into the worlds of science fiction and pulp magazine adventure tales and created one of the most well-known comic-book heroes of all time. The illustrations capture the look of 1930s comics.

Ray, Deborah Kogan. Wanda Gág: The Girl Who Lived to Draw

Viking, 2008; 40 pages.

Grades 2 – 5. The life of Wanda Gág, writer and illustrator of the famous picture storybook, Millions of Cats, unfolds through quotes from her diary that are expanded by the author. The slightly fictionalized, well-researched text is accompanied by richly colored illustrations by Deborah Kogan Ray. An author's note and information about Gág's career extend the story.

Rubin, Susan Goldman. Whaam! The Art and Life of Roy Lichtenstein

Abrams Books for Young Readers, 2008; 48 pages.

Grades 4 – 8. From an ordinary childhood to his career as a Pop artist, the development of Lichtenstein's iconic art images and his eventual success in the art world, unfolds in the narrative accompanied by direct quotes and illustrated with some of his famous art pieces, photographs, and the work of fellow artists whose work inspired his own. The author emphasizes Lichtenstein's playful sense of humor.

Shulevitz, Uri. How I Learned Geography

Farrar Straus Giroux, 2008; 32 pages.

Grades 2 – 4. Children's book author and illustrator Uri Shulevitz chronicles the events in his boyhood when he and his family escaped war-torn Poland to settle in Turkistan. A large world map, hung by his father in the family's plain home, sparked Shulevitz's imagination. The author's note reveals additional biographical information about this period in his life. Illustrated by the author with pen and ink, collage and watercolor.

Whitehead, Kathy. Art from Her Heart: Folk Artist Clementine Hunter

Illustrated by Shane W. Evans.

G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2008; 32 pages.

Grades 1 – 4. This picture book tells the story of the determined, talented folk artist Clementine Hunter, who was completely self-taught. The paintings that she first hung from her clothesline, later were hung in museums. Because she was black, she was not allowed into a gallery that was exhibiting her paintings - a friend had to sneak her in after hours. With striking illustrations and small reproductions of Hunter's work.

Musicians

Hopkinson, Deborah. Home on the Range: John A. Lomax and His Cowboy Songs

Illustrated by S.D. Schindler.

Putnam Publishing Group, 2009; 40 pages.

Grades 2 – 5. The fictionalized dialogue and use of vernacular capture his early years in Texan farm and cattle ranch country with a romanticized tone. John Lomax collected cowboy verses and song refrains in a life-long project on American folk songs. Pen and ink with watercolor illustrations in appropriate prairie colors enhance every page. Both the text and the illustrations are full of humor throughout.

Parker, Robert A. Piano Starts Here: The Young Art Tatum

Schwartz & Wade Books, 2008; 32 pages.

Grades 2 – 5. The author's love for jazz inspired this story of the great jazz pianist Art Tatum, who was legally blind and played by ear. Pen and ink with watercolor illustrations capture the range of venues in which Tatum played. An artist's note and extended bibliography are provided.

Writers

Bryant, Jennifer. A River of Words: The Story of William Carlos Williams

Illustrated by Melissa Sweet.

Eerdmans Books for Young Readers, 2008; 32 pages.

Grades 3 – 5. Each double spread of this picture book biography juxtaposes Williams's life, from childhood through his medical career, with the poems often published in anthologies for children. The everyday objects about which he wrote appear with the poems in collage illustrations. The author's note, the artist's note, and a timeline of Williams's life in the context of his times round out this portrait.

Clinton, Catherine. Phillis's Big Test

Illustrated by Sean Qualls.

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008; 32 pages.

Grades 1 – 5. In picture book format, this biography explores the life of Phillis Wheatley, a slave in Boston who was a published poet. The book focuses on the events in 1772 when the leading men of the community gathered to question the seventeen-year-old Phillis to determine if the poems were indeed her own.

Fleischman, Sid. The Trouble Begins at 8: A Life of Mark Twain in the Wild, Wild West

HarperCollins, 2008; 224 pages.

Grades 5 – 8. This biography focuses on the years during which Samuel Clemens lived and worked at a variety of occupations, essentially collecting material for the stories he wrote under his pen name, Mark Twain. Fleischman pays homage to Twain's contributions to American literature with his humorous, lively story telling in short chapters set with generous spacing. Many full-page illustrations – period drawings, photographs, and primary documents – alternate with pages of text, adding to the accessibility. Lightly fictionalized in some passages. With a time line and Twain's story, "The Celebrated Jumping Frog."

Krull, Kathleen. The Road to Oz: Twists, Turns, Bumps, and Triumphs in the Life of L. Frank Baum

Illustrated by Kevin Hawkes.

Alfred A. Knopf Books for Young Readers, 2008; 32 pages.

Grades 2 – 5. This biography traces the life of L. Frank Baum from his privileged childhood in mid-19th-century upstate New York through the many winding roads that led him to the Land of Oz. He finally became successful doing exactly what he had always loved to do: sharing stories with children. With full-color paintings and drawings.

Scieszka, Jon. *Knucklehead: Tall Tales & Mostly True Stories about Growing Up Scieszka.*

Viking, 2008; 106 pages.

Grades 2 – 5. This memoir of Scieszka's boyhood is laugh-out-loud funny. Photographs from the family album and images from the 1950s and 1960s enhance each short chapter. Recommended for fans of Scieszka, students who might be reluctant to read biography, or those seeking a good laugh.

Athletes

Crowe, Ellie. *Surfer of the Century: The Life of Duke Kahanamoku*

Illustrated by Richard Waldrep.

Lee & Low Books, 2007; 32 pages.

Grades 3 – 6. This is the biography of Duke Kahanamoku, six-time Olympic swimming champion from Hawaii, who popularized surfing around the world. His encounters with racial discrimination are depicted with sensitivity, underscoring the courage and character he developed to face these setbacks. With full-color illustrations.

Nelson, Kadir. *We Are the Ship: The Story of Negro League Baseball*

Illustrated by the author.

Jump at the Sun, 2008; 88 pages.

Grades 3 - 8. The story of baseball's unsung African-American heroes with powerful full-color illustrations. Adopting the perspective and voice of an elderly ballplayer, the text has the sound of oral history. Nine chapters offer an overview of the founding and history of the Negro League, the players, style of play, and the Negro League's eventual end after Jackie Robinson broke major league baseball's color barrier in 1947.

Smith, Charles R. Jr. *Twelve Rounds to Glory: The Story of Muhammad Ali*

Illustrated by Bryan Collier.

Candlewick Press, 2007; 80 pages.

Grades 5 - 8. Rap-inspired verse tells the story of the boxing champion who changed his name from Cassius Clay to Muhammad Ali, from his childhood to the years after he retired from the ring. The author includes many aspects of Ali's life, including his Muslim faith and his conflicts with the U.S. government during the Vietnam War. Each chapter, or "round," represents a specific period featuring quotes from Ali. With vivid, full-color, collage illustrations.

Sullivan, George. *Knockout! A Photobiography of Boxer Joe Louis*

National Geographic Society, 2008; 63 pages.

Grades 4 – 8. This is the story of the hardworking man who overcame poverty and prejudice to become a world champion. Louis's series of fights against Max Schmeling of Nazi Germany became the defining acts of his career. Illustrated with evocative period photography.

Winter, Jonah. *You Never Heard of Sandy Koufax?!*

Illustrated by Andre Carrillo.

Schwartz & Wade Books, 2009; 40 pages.

Grades 3 – 5. Narrated in a folksy voice, this biography tells the story of the Dodgers' pitcher – a private, somewhat mysterious, and principled man who had a remarkable career and faced discrimination as one of the few Jewish baseball players of his time. The illustrations are innovative and striking, done in a caricature-like style with a few vivid colors, and the text is accompanied by sidebars that provide baseball statistics. The cover has a 3-D hologram image that actually shows Koufax throwing a pitch.

Wise, Bill. Louis Sockalexis: Native American Baseball Pioneer

Illustrated by Bill Farnsworth.

Lee & Low Books, 2007; 32 pages.

Grades 2 – 5. A biography of Louis Sockalexis, a Penobscot Indian, who pursued his childhood love of baseball and eventually joined the Major Leagues, where he faced racism and discrimination with courage as the first American Indian to play professional baseball. With full-color illustrations.

Educators

Alexander, Sally Hobart and Robert Alexander. She Touched the World: Laura Bridgman, Deaf-Blind Pioneer

Clarion, 2008; 100 pages.

Grades 5 – 8. Famous in her day, Bridgman, both blind and deaf from an early childhood illness, learned about the world through touch, then through written language. Laura was enrolled in the New England Institution for the Education of the Blind (the Perkins School) at the behest of the director, Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe. Laura spoke widely, demonstrating that people with disabilities could be educated. Illustrated with photographs and drawings. The engaging narrative is illustrated with photographs and drawings.

Delano, Marfe Ferguson. Helen's Eyes: A Photobiography of Annie Sullivan, Helen Keller's Teacher

National Geographic Society, 2008; 63 pages.

Grades 4 – 8. This is the story of the pioneering teacher who overcame both poverty and her own disability to become one of the most famous educators of all time. Because of her inspired breakthroughs and accomplishments with Helen Keller, Sullivan became known as the "Miracle Worker." Illustrated with period photographs.

McCully, Emily Arnold. My Heart Glow: Alice Cogswell, Thomas Gallaudet, and the Birth of American Sign Language

Illustrated by the author.

Hyperion Books for Children, 2008; 32 pages.

Grades 2 – 5. In childhood, Alice Cogswell lost her hearing due to a fever, and she inspired the establishment of deaf education in the United States. At her father's request, Thomas Gallaudet traveled to Europe to research methods of teaching deaf children. He founded the first permanent school for the deaf in the United States in 1817. In picture book format with full-color illustrations.

Sullivan, George. Helen Keller: Her Life in Pictures

Scholastic, 2007; 80 pages.

Grades 3 – 6. Keller's story is told through images from the American Foundation for the Blind and The Perkins School for the Blind. The images trace Keller's life from birth, to her education with teacher Annie Sullivan, to college, and on to her many

years as a dedicated social activist and spokesperson. Simbraille (a print representation of braille characters) is used alongside each page number and caption heading.

Explorers and Adventurers

Kirkpatrick, Katherine. Snow Baby: The Arctic Childhood of Admiral Robert E. Peary's Daring Daughter

Holiday House, 2007; 50 pages.

Grades 4 – 8. Born north of the Arctic Circle in 1893, Marie Ahnighito Peary had an unusual childhood. This book is based on her own story. Kirkpatrick's text captures the girl's adventurous spirit and the opportunities that her father's life as an explorer presented, as well as her love of the Arctic and her Inuit friends. Many black-and-white photos show Marie growing up and Peary's explorations.

McCully, Emily Arnold. Manjiro: The Boy Who Risked His Life for Two Countries

Illustrated by the author.

Farrar Straus Giroux, 2008; 32 pages.

Grades 3 – 6. This is the true story of a young man whose knowledge and experience of two cultures led him to play an important role in the opening of Japan to Western trade and ideas in the 19th century. McCully's watercolor illustrations show the contrast between traditional Japanese and 19th-century New Englanders as well as the dangers of the sea-going experience.

Tanaka, Shelly. Amelia Earhart: The Legend of the Lost Aviator

Illustrated by David Craig.

Abrams Books for Young Readers, 2008; 48 pages.

Grades 3 – 5. The focus of this biography is on Earhart's early interest in airplanes, her subsequent accomplishments as a pilot and her disappearance. Photographs and paintings extend the narrative. Direct quotes incorporated in the text and as sidebars.

Weatherford, Carole. I, Matthew Henson: Polar Explorer

Illustrated by Eric Velasquez.

New York: Walker & Co., 2008; 40 pages

Grades 3 – 6. A fully-illustrated picture book account of this African-American explorer's life and accomplishments. Henson accompanied Robert Peary on seven trips to the Arctic between the years 1891 and 1909.

Scientists and Environmentalists

Bolden, Tonya. George Washington Carver

Abrams Books for Young People, 2008; 40 pages.

Grades 3 – 6. This beautifully designed and well-written biography of Carver features photographs from the period, primary documents, botanical drawings and many quotes by Carver.

Harness, Cheryl. The Groundbreaking, Chance-Taking Life of George Washington Carver and Science & Invention in America

National Geographic, 2008; 144 pages.

Grades 3 - 6. This accessible biography situates Carver's life and accomplishments in the context of the times in which he lived, with a timeline running along the lower margins and with sub-titled passages, often several pages in length providing interesting and relevant information. Pen and ink drawings complement the sometimes informal tone. Includes direct quotes by Carver throughout the narrative.

Levine, Ellen. Rachel Carson: A Twentieth-Century Life

Viking Children's Books, 2007; 224 pages.

Grades 6 - 8. This biography explores Carson's love of science and writing, her education and early career, and her award-winning and controversial book, Silent Spring. Her book exposed the dangers of pesticide use and the resulting long-term harm to the environment, leading to the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency. Primary sources are used to document Carson's life.

**Presidents and their Families:
The Washingtons, Lincolns, Roosevelts and Obamas**

The Washingtons

Freedman, Russell. Washington at Valley Forge

Holiday House, 2008; 100 pages.

Grades 5 - 8. This book focuses in particular on the winter Washington spent in Valley Forge with his troops in harsh conditions and without adequate supplies. It is the story of the development of Washington's considerable capacity to lead. With period drawings, maps, primary documents, paintings, and photographs.

McCully, Emily Arnold. The Escape of Oney Judge: Martha Washington's Slave Finds Freedom

Illustrated by the author.

Farrar Straus Giroux, 2007; 32 pages.

Grades 3 - 5. This picture book is a fictionalized account of Martha Washington's female slave, who successfully escaped from Washington's granddaughter and family. Attractively illustrated in pen and ink and watercolor.

Rockwell, Anne. Big George: How a Shy Boy Became President Washington

Illustrated by Matt Phelan.

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009; 48 pages.

Grades 4 - 8. The role of George Washington's personal traits of shyness, a hot temper and persistence, frame this telling of his boyhood, military career, and acceptance of the presidency. The full color illustrations effectively capture the moods of Washington and others. The author's note provides additional information for more experienced readers.

Thomas, Peggy. Farmer George Plants a Nation

Illustrated by Layne Johnson.

Calkins Creek Books, 2008; 40 pages.

Grades 5 - 8. Quotes from George Washington's diary reveal his scientific approach to farming. His interest in farming becomes a metaphor for growing a new nation. The text deals straightforwardly with the subject of Washington's ownership of slaves. Fully-illustrated in a rich palette. With a timeline and additional information on Washington's attitude towards slavery.

The Lincolns

Denenberg, Barry. Lincoln Shot: A President's Life Remembered

Illustrated by Christopher Bing.

Feiwel & Friends, 2008; 40 pages.

Grades 4 and up. This oversized book is a facsimile of an anniversary newspaper edition of Lincoln's assassination. Pen and ink drawings are combined with

photographs in articles examining Lincoln's life, starting with his boyhood, moving through his early years in Illinois, family life with Mary Todd Lincoln, his early political career and rise to the presidency, and, finally, the Civil War, ending with the North's victory and Lincoln's assassination.

Fleming, Candace. The Lincolns: A Scrapbook Look at Abraham and Mary

Schwartz & Wade Books, 2008; 177 pages.

Grades 5 - 8. This is a dual biography of Lincoln and his wife in scrapbook format that uses photographs, letters, engravings and cartoons. Included are the full lives of Abraham and Mary, from their childhoods, courtship, young married life, through the tragedy of the Civil War, the loss of three of their sons, and their own deaths.

Rappaport, Doreen. Abe's Honest Words: The Life of Abraham Lincoln

Illustrated by Kadir Nelson.

Hyperion Books for Children, 2008; 32 pages.

Grades 2 - 6. This is a portrait of Lincoln told in free verse accompanied by quotes of his own inspiring words. The book provides an overview of Lincoln's life, from his humble beginnings and his early political career through his struggles to preserve the Union and to abolish slavery. In picture book format with powerful, striking, and generously sized illustrations.

Sandler, Martin W. Lincoln Through the Lens: How Photography Revealed and Shaped an Extraordinary Life

Walker & Company, 2008; 97 pages.

Grades 5 - 8. This biography contains more than one hundred images of Lincoln, providing a complete portrait of this president and the events that defined him. Part history of early photography, part Lincoln biography, and part documentation of the period, the book also provides an overview of Lincoln's life and the role that photography played in his career.

St. George, Judith. Stand Tall, Abe Lincoln

Illustrated by Matt Faulkner.

Philomel Books, 2008; 32 pages.

Grades 2 - 5. This biography focuses on Lincoln's childhood and the people and events that influenced him. The text includes incidents from Lincoln's life that explain the person and leader that he became. The role of family members, who helped Lincoln to achieve his potential, is also emphasized. With vivid and humorous full-color illustrations.

The Roosevelts

Kerley, Barbara. What to Do about Alice? How Alice Roosevelt broke the rules, charmed the world, and drove her father Teddy crazy!

Illustrated by Edwin Fotheringham.

Scholastic Press, 2008; 44 pages.

Grades 3 - 5. The author's and illustrator's appreciation for their spirited, independent subject informs their lively storytelling through text and illustration. Slightly fictionalized with imagined dialogue. The subtitle captures the tone of this picture book biography.

Rappaport, Doreen. Eleanor, Quiet No More

Illustrated by Gary Kelley.

Hyperion Books, 2009; 40 pages.

Grades 2 - 5. This beautifully conceived and stunningly illustrated biography is

framed by direct quotes that chronicle Eleanor Roosevelt's early and growing awareness of the lives of others, and her activism on behalf of human rights. The artist's use of media and color evoke the Depression-era WPA murals.

The Obamas

Abramsom, Jill and Bill Keller. Obama: The Historic Journey. Young Reader's Edition

With the staff of *The New York Times*
New York Times, 2009; 96 pages.

Grades 5 – 8. This high-interest biography, focused primarily on the presidential campaign, traces Obama's life from birth through the inauguration. Includes quotes, primary documents, a family tree, the electoral map, and many photographs and sidebars.

Edwards, Roberta. Michelle Obama: Mom-in-Chief

Illustrated by Ken Call.

Grossett & Dunlap, 2009; 48 pages.

Grades 2 - 4. Michelle Obama's life from early childhood through the inauguration, illustrated with many photographs. This paperback biography is very accessible with large font and straightforward writing.

Grimes, Nikki. Barack Obama: Son of Promise, Child of Hope

Illustrated by Bryan Collier.

Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2008; 42 pages.

Grades 3 – 5. This story of President Obama's childhood, education, work as a community organizer, early political career, and presidential campaign, focuses on his search for identity and his inspiration to seek change. The narrative is through the conversation of a mother and son, enhanced by Collier's signature collage and paint illustrations. With an author's note, an artist's note, and a timeline of important dates.

Winter, Jonah. Barack

Illustrated by A.G. Ford.

HarperCollins, 2008; 32 pages.

Grades 3 – 5. The School Library Journal review suggests that this handsome picture book biography is more an adulation than a presentation of the facts. The narrative is based on the premise that young Barack Obama often wondered: "Who am I? Where do I belong?"

Of additional interest: a "biography" of the White House

National Children's Book and Literacy Alliance. The White House: Looking In, Looking Out

Edited by Mary Brigid Barrett.

Candlewick, 2008; 242 pages.

Grades 3 - 8. This book is a compilation of short stories, poems, nonfiction pieces and illustrations about the history of the White House and its famous and infamous occupants. More than 100 well-known children's authors and illustrators contributed to this project.

Americans Engaged in Conflicts

Anderson, Laurie Halse. Independent Dames: What You Never Knew about the Women and Girls of the American Revolution

Illustrated by Matt Faulkner.

Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2008; 37 pages.

Grades 3 – 6 With humor and energy, this collective biography presents important, and often overlooked, historical facts about the women who were crucial to the founding of America. Included are profiles of 22 women, some well-known and many not. With exuberant and detailed illustrations.

Fradin, Dennis. Duel! Burr and Hamilton's Deadly War of Words

Illustrated by Larry Day.

Walker & Company. 2008; 32 pages.

Grades 2- 4. Brief biographical information about the early lives and political careers of Burr and Hamilton preface this stirring account of the infamous – and illegal – duel which resulted in Hamilton's death and Burr's disgrace. Slightly fictionalized with imagined dialogue. The pen and ink and watercolor illustrations effectively capture this dramatic story.

Giblin, James Cross. The Many Rides of Paul Revere

Scholastic Press, 2007; 86 pages.

Grades 5 – 8. Period drawings, art, photographs and primary documents accompany this biography of Revere, with particular emphasis on his role in the American Revolutionary War. The contrast between Longfellow's famous poem and the actual events at the outset of combat complete this handsomely designed and well-written biography.

Kennedy, Robert F. Robert Smalls: The Boat Thief

Illustrated by Patrick Faricy.

Hyperion Books for Children, 2008; 40 pages.

Grades 3 –6. At the age of 24, African-American Robert Smalls led a group of nine slaves in the capture of the Confederate gunship, the Planter. He was a brilliant military strategist who was promoted to the rank of captain in the Federal Navy. Smalls went on to convince President Lincoln to enlist 5000 former slaves into the Union armed forces, thus breaking the color barrier. He was a spokesman for abolition, and served six terms in Congress. Vivid paintings enhance the clearly written narrative.

Silvey, Anita. I'll Pass for Your Comrade: Women Soldiers in the Civil War

Clarion Books, 2008; 115 pages.

Grades 5 – 8. This book explores the secret world of women soldiers: who they were, why they went to war, and how they managed their disguises. Primary sources include memoirs, diaries and letters, as well as newspaper stories and the writings of male soldiers who knew about the women fighting alongside them. Illustrated with archival photographs and reproductions.

Turner, Ann Warren. Sitting Bull Remembers

Illustrated by Wendell Minor.

HarperCollins Publishers, 2007; 32 pages.

Grades 3 – 5. In this fictionalized memoir, the imprisoned Sitting Bull looks back over his life – from his growing into manhood through the incursions into Sioux territory by white settlers and the U.S. army. The full-color illustrations and text capture Sitting Bull's spirituality, as well as his leadership of his people. The historical note provides additional information for more experienced readers.

Political and Social Justice Activists

Bardham-Quallen, Sudipta. Ballots for Belva: The True Story of a Woman's Race for the Presidency

Illustrated by Courtney Martin.

Abrams Books for Young Readers, 2008; 32 pages.

Grades 2 – 4. This book introduces Belva Lockwood, who was "smart, spirited, and willing to work hard" at breaking down barriers to women's participation in the law, the vote, and the presidency. She ran for president herself as a third-party candidate in 1884 and received several thousand votes. Illustrated in a rich palette. A timeline of the path to women's suffrage in the U.S., and an author's note provides additional biographical information.

Bolden, Tonya. M.L.K.: Journey of a King

Abrams Books for Young Readers, 2007.

Grades 5 -8). Winner of the 2008 Orbis Pictus Award, this moving account of "M.L." reveals dimensions of his life and personality not often explored in biographies for younger readers. Includes many photographs with excellent captions and sidebars, quotes, a timeline, an author's note, and detailed notes.

Bolden, Tonya. W.E.B. Du Bois

Viking Children's Books, 2009; 222 pages.

Series: Up Close

Grades 6 – 8. Du Bois' life spanned 95 years, from Reconstruction to the modern Civil Rights Movement. This biography includes his many contributions as a teacher, speaker, Civil Rights activist, sociologist, writer and co-founder of several organizations, including the NAACP, as well as his personal and professional setbacks.

Brimner, Larry Dane. We Are One: The Story of Bayard Rustin

Calkins Creek Books, 2007; 48 pages.

Grades 5 – 8. Rustin was called the "intellectual engineer" of the modern Civil Rights Movement. The book begins and ends with the March on Washington in 1963, which Rustin organized; he was a lifelong adviser to Martin Luther King, Jr. His story is told through Bayard's own words and archival photographs, and through the spirituals and protest songs that Bayard often sang.

Capaldi, Gina. A Boy Named Beckoning: The True Story of Dr. Carlos Montezuma, Native American Hero

Illustrated by the author.

Carolrhoda Books, 2008; 32 pages.

Grades 3 – 5. Based on an autobiographical letter, historical documents, and photographs taken by his adoptive father, this fully-illustrated story tells of the Yavapai boy who was kidnapped and sold, eventually to become educated. Beckoning, now named Carlos Montoya, became a medical doctor and activist for the rights of American Indian people.

Clinton, Catherine. When Harriet Met Sojourner

Illustrated by Shane W. Evans.

Amistad Press, 2007; 32 pages.

Grades 3 – 5. The stories of Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth alternate throughout this picture book, culminating with their undocumented meeting in

Boston. The skillfully written text and expansive illustrations complement one another particularly well, highlighting the courage and persistence of both women in their struggle to escape from and to end slavery. The epilogue contains additional biographical information and photographs.

Dray, Phillip. Yours for Justice, Ida B. Wells: The Daring Life of a Crusading Journalist

Illustrated by Stephen Acorn.
Peachtree Publishers, 2008: 48 pages.

Grades 4 – 6. This biography relates the life and work of crusading journalist Ida B. Wells, who was born in slavery. The focus is on her efforts to end lynching. The title refers to Wells’s signature, used in her social justice work. The elongated lines in the illustrations echo the Art Deco style current during the Jim Crow era. With direct quotes from Wells’s speeches and articles, a timeline, photographs of Wells and her family, and a discussion of lynching.

Farris, Christine King. March On! The Day My Brother Martin Changed the World

Illustrated by London Ladd.
Scholastic Press, 2008; 32 pages.

Grades 3 – 5. Martin Luther King’s sister tells the story of her brother’s decision to become a 3rd generation preacher and to get involved in the Civil Rights Movement. The focus is on the historic speech he delivered at the National Mall on August 28, 1963, and the resulting family pride. Illustrated with vivid paintings.

Michelson, Richard. As Good as Anybody: Martin Luther King, Jr. and Abraham Joshua Heschel’s Amazing March Toward Freedom

Illustrated by Raúl Colón.
Alfred A. Knopf, 2008; 40 pages.

Grades 2 – 4. Lightly fictionalized story of Rabbi Abraham Heschel joining Martin Luther King, Jr. in Selma. The discrimination each faced as children and young adults informed their work for social justice. Colón, as illustrator, used a different palette for each juxtaposed story, and then blended the palettes to depict the two leaders coming together at Selma.

Hopkinson, Deborah. Sweet Land of Liberty

Illustrated by Leonard Jenkins.
Peachtree Publishers, 2007, 32 pages.

Grades 3 – 6. This is the story of Oscar Chapman, who was largely responsible for Marian Anderson’s concert at the Lincoln Memorial on Easter Sunday 1939. When Chapman, Assistant Secretary of the Interior under President Franklin Roosevelt, learned that Marian Anderson was not allowed to sing at Constitution Hall because she was African-American, he found another site for the concert. An author’s note provides additional historical context. The illustrations are powerful, vivid, mixed-media collages.

Hoose, Phillip M. Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice

Farrar Straus Giroux, 2009; 144 pages.

Grades 5 - 8. Rosa Parks was not the first Montgomery bus rider to refuse to give up her seat. This is the story of a fifteen-year-old high school student who was arrested in March of 1955 for refusing to “move back with the rest of the colored.” Colvin was interviewed extensively for this book, giving it the sound of a first-person narrative. The text is supplemented with black-and-white photos, reproductions of period newspapers and documents, and sidebars.

Levine, Ellen. Henry's Freedom Box: A True Story from the Underground Railroad

Illustrated by Kadir Nelson.

Scholastic Press, 2007, 32 pages.

Grades 3 – 5. In this compelling story, Levine weaves together the extraordinary events in the life of Henry "Box" Brown, who hid in a wooden crate in a remarkable escape from slavery using the Underground Railroad. Kadir Nelson's illustrations add to the power of this picture book biography.

Myers, Walter Dean. Ida B. Wells: Let the Truth Be Told

Illustrated by Bonnie Christensen.

Amistad Press, 2008; 38 pages.

Grades 3 – 5. Myers' well-shaped narrative, supported by pen and ink and watercolor illustrations, with quotes by Wells, depict the major events in her life as a teacher, journalist and crusader for justice. Includes a timeline.

Pinkney, Andrea Davis. Boycott Blues: How Rosa Parks Inspired a Nation

Illustrated by Brian Pinkney.

Amistad Press, 2008; 32 pages.

Grades 2 – 5. This book focuses on the Montgomery Bus Boycott that followed the 1955 arrest of Rosa Parks. The guitar-strumming hound-dog narrator uses rhyme and the rhythm of the blues to tell the story of hardship and determination. The illustrations are vivid in electric blues and greens.

Shange, Ntozake. Coretta Scott

Illustrated by Kadir Nelson.

Amistad Press, 2009; 32 pages.

Grades 2 – 4. This very brief biography touches on Scott's childhood experiences, marriage to MLK, and civil rights activism. The poetic text is complemented by Nelson's full color, somewhat sculptural paintings. The narrative and the illustrations convey the immense dignity and commitment to social justice on the part of Scott and her colleagues. With additional biographical information for experienced readers in the back matter.

Slade, Suzanne. Cesar Chavez: Champion and Voice of Farmworkers

Illustrated by Jeffrey Thompson.

Picture Window Books, 2007; 24 pages.

Grades 2 – 4. An accessible, straightforward account summarizing the familiar events in Chavez's life as an advocate for farm workers. Notable primarily for the full-page woodcuts in warm saturated colors. A time line and glossary further situate the story of migrant farm workers in the context of the times.

Stone, Tanya Lee. Elizabeth Leads the Way: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the Right to Vote

Illustrated by Rebecca Gibbon.

Henry Holt & Company, 2008; 32 pages.

Grades 2 – 5. "But Elizabeth wasn't interested in easy" captures the tone of this picture book biography of human rights activist and suffragette, Elizabeth Cady Stanton. She believed that women should have the right to vote, and worked tirelessly towards that end. The illustrations are somewhat plain and folksy. This book would serve well as a read-aloud because of the lively, immediate narrative voice.

Tafolla, Carmen and Teneyuca, Sharyll. That's Not Fair!/No Es Justo!: Emma Tenayuca's Struggle for Justice/La Lucha de Emma Tenayuca Por La Justicia

Illustrated by Terry Ybanez.
Wings Press, 2008; 38 pages.

Grades 3 – 6. A vivid depiction of injustices suffered by Mexican-Americans in San Antonio, Texas in the 1920s, this book tells the story of Emma Tenayuca. She later led 12,000 workers in the first significant historical action in the Mexican-American struggle for justice and equal rights. With bold, mural-like illustrations. In Spanish and English, with some invented dialogue.