

Selected and annotated by Michelle Biwer
December 2014

All books are about women who led active lives despite the limits historically presented to their gender. Included are picture book biographies, middle grade biographies, and biographies most appropriate for high schoolers.

Adler, David A. *Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad*. Holiday House, 2013. 140p. Gr. 5-8.

In this comprehensive take on the life of Harriet Tubman, Adler includes Tubman's tireless efforts as a conductor of the Underground Railroad, as well as her lesser-known work as a Union Spy and as a nurse during the Civil War. Adler also documents the rest of Tubman's life after the war, which like many then-freed African-Americans was filled with hardships, and included working many less sensational jobs in order to feed herself and her family.

Beram, Nell. *Yoko Ono: Collector of Skies*; by Nell Beram and Carolyn Boriss-Krimsky. 178p. Gr. 7-12.

This biography of Yoko Ono begins with descriptions of Ono's childhood as the daughter of a powerful Japanese banker, and continues to chronologically discuss other significant life events—such as Ono's storied relationship with Beatle John Lennon—in the context of her passion for art and success as an adult musician and artist.

Burleigh, Robert. *Night Flight: Amelia Earhart Crosses the Atlantic*; illus. by Wendell Minor. Wiseman/Simon, 2011. 40p. Gr. 3-6.

This account of Amelia Earhart chronicles the challenges and highs of her solo flight from Newfoundland across the Atlantic to Northern Ireland in 1932. Sparse but expressive text and storytime-friendly illustrations make this picture book biography of Earhart an excellent introduction to the famous pilot.

Corey, Shana. *Mermaid Queen*; illus. by Edwin Fotheringham. Scholastic, 2009. 48p. 6-9 yrs. Annette Kellerman had trouble even walking as a child, but she soon discovered that swimming helped to strengthen her legs. Kellerman began to break swimming records, then attempted to swim the English Channel, and eventually created practical women's swimwear, all in a time when female athletes were not accepted by society.

Cummins, Julie. *Flying Solo: How Ruth Elder Soared in to America's Heart*; illus. by Malene R. Laugesen. Roaring Brook, 2013. 32p. Gr. 3-4.

After dreaming of becoming the first woman to fly across the Atlantic, Ruth Elder made the attempt, although her plane unfortunately crashed during the journey and she had to be rescued. She decided to compete again, this time in the first women's cross-country airplane race, in which she competed and placed fifth.

Farrell, Mary Cronk. *Pure Grit: How American World War II Nurses Survived Battle and Prison Camp in the Pacific*. Abrams, 2014. 160p. Gr. 6-10.

Before the disastrous events of Pearl Harbor, there were over a hundred US Army and Navy nurses stationed for routine peacetime work at various naval hospitals throughout the Philippines. Following Pearl Harbor and the Japanese invasion into the Philippines, these nurses had to quickly transition to treating wartime injuries, and eventually survive as captured Japanese prisoners of war.

Fleming, Candace. *Amelia Lost: The Life and Disappearance of Amelia Earhart*. Schwartz & Wade, 2011. 118p. Gr. 5-9.

Amelia Earhart is well known for her flying skills and record as the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic, but Fleming creates a more complete—but still sympathetic—picture of this fascinating character by including Earhart’s capabilities as a savvy businesswoman who carefully curated her public image. Fleming alternates between chapters which thoroughly investigate Amelia’s life, and those that investigate her mysterious disappearance in this biography best suited for middle schoolers.

Hartland, Jessie. *Bon Appétit!: The Delicious Life of Julia Child*. Schwartz & Wade, 2012. 48p. Gr. 6-9.

After a brief overview of Julia Child’s early life and marriage to Paul Child, Hartland focuses on how Julia became interested in cooking, the process of completing her cookbook, and her rise to fame on her cooking show, *The French Chef*. Hartland’s accessible text is complemented by her illustrations, which are laid out in panels, making this work easy to recommend to kids who love graphic novels.

Hopkins, H. Joseph. *The Tree Lady: The True Story of How One Tree-Loving Woman Changed a City Forever*; illus. by Jill McElmurry. Beach Lane/Simon, 2013. 32p. 5-8 yrs.

In 1881, Katherine Olivia Sessions became the first woman to graduate with a science degree from the University of California, and she used this degree to transform the San Diego landscape by personally selecting and planting trees and greenery best suited for the city’s climate. Today, despite its location in the dry desert of Southern California, San Diego is full of plentiful foliage and shade and includes the world-class outdoor cultural center now known as Balboa Park, thanks to Sessions’ lasting work.

Hoose, Phillip. *Claudette Colvin: Twice Toward Justice*. Kroupa/Farrar, 2009. 133p. Gr. 5-10.

A predecessor to Rosa Parks, fifteen-year-old Claudette Colvin refused to give up her seat on a Montgomery, Alabama bus to a white woman during the reign of Jim Crow Laws. Hoose’s interviews with Colvin illustrate why her act of civil disobedience was received negatively by her community and was later lost to history.

Lambert, Joseph. *Annie Sullivan and the Trials of Helen Keller*. Disney Hyperion, 2012. 92p. Gr. 4-8.

This graphic novel biography covers the childhood of Helen Keller, including her difficult experiences learning how to communicate and socialize as a visually impaired and deaf young girl. Lambert’s take is unique, however, because he also includes flashbacks to the childhood and related hardships of Annie Sullivan, Keller’s teacher and friend who was also visually impaired.

Macy, Sue. *Basketball Belles: How Two Teams and One Scrappy Player Put Women's Hoops on the Map*; illus. by Matt Collins. Holiday House, 2011. 32p. 6-9 yrs.

Five years after the invention of basketball in 1896, the first women's college basketball game was played between Stanford and Berkeley. Macy's account of the game is told from the point of view of Agnes Morley, a woman who played guard for Stanford on that historic day.

Macy, Sue. *Bylines: A Photobiography of Nellie Bly*. National Geographic, 2009. 64p. Gr. 5-9. A daring journalist, Nellie Bly defied the conventional expectations of her time in order to lend the power of her journalistic voice to the less fortunate. Her investigative and often undercover work included becoming committed to a women's insane asylum in order to expose its miserable conditions and the discriminatory manner in which women were placed there. In true *National Geographic* fashion, this photobiography is complete with fascinating pictures which bring context to her life and the era during which she lived.

Malaspina, Ann. *Heart on Fire: Susan B. Anthony Votes for President*. illus. by Steve James. Whitman, 2012. 32p. Gr. 3-4.

On November 1st, 1872, Susan B. Anthony registered to vote, and shortly after on Election Day she succeeded in voting for the first time. A few weeks later, Anthony was arrested for voting because she was a woman. This picture book biography then covers the ensuing court case and its provocative "guilty" verdict.

Malaspina, Ann. *Touch the Sky: Alice Coachman, Olympic High Jumper*; illus. by Eric Velasquez. Whitman, 2012. 32p. 6-9 yrs.

At the 1948 Summer Olympics in London, Alice Coachman became the first black woman to win an Olympic gold medal. Malaspina details Coachman's early childhood and ceaseless energy with Coachman practicing the high jump in her backyard through to the triumphant day she brought home much-deserved gold medal.

McDonough, Yona Zeldis. *Louisa: The Life of Louisa May Alcott*; illus. by Bethanne Andersen. Ottaviano/Holt, 2009. 48p. Gr. 3-5.

This picture book chronicles the life of the author Louisa May Alcott, known today as the author of the classic novel *Little Women*. From her unconventional childhood as the daughter of teacher and philosopher Bronson Alcott, through her various jobs as teacher, seamstress, travel companion, and Civil War nurse, it was clear that her real passion and talent lie in her writing. Older readers who are familiar with *Little Women* will have fun pointing out the parallels between Alcott's own life and those of her most beloved characters.

Moss, Marissa. *Nurse, Soldier, Spy: The Story of Sarah Edmonds, a Civil War Hero*; illus. by John Hendrix. Abrams, 2011. 48p. 6-10 years.

Soon after the Civil War began, Sarah Edmonds enlisted with the Union army as a man and fought as a soldier under the name Frank Thompson. Moss focuses on Edmonds' life and duties as a soldier as well as her special recruitment to spy on the Confederates.

Orgill, Roxane. *Skit-Scat Raggedy Cat: Ella Fitzgerald*; illus. by Sean Qualls. Candlewick, 2010. 44p. Gr. 3-6.

This jazzy picture book focuses on Ella Fitzgerald's early years, including her happy early

childhood, when she often ran off to Harlem to dance at the Savoy and listen to the jazz bands play. After her mother's sudden death, she became homeless and jobless, like many of Harlem's occupants during the Great Depression. Fitzgerald's career as a singer really began at this time when she began singing at amateur nights and gaining popularity within Harlem, and this book closes with Fitzgerald finally finding success at the young age of twenty-one, when she had her first number one single.

Powell, Patirica Hruby. *Josephine: The Dazzling Life of Josephine Baker*; illus. by Christian Robinson. Chronicle, 2014. 100p. Gr. 5-8.

From her childhood in the slums of segregated St. Louis, Missouri up until her death as a superstar in Paris, Josephine Baker loved to dance. This poetic and award-winning take on Baker's trailblazing, chaotic, and often heartbreaking life is accompanied by appropriately jazzy illustrations that capture the spirit of the first black performer in the Ziegfield Follies.

Rappaport, Doreen. *Eleanor: Quiet No More*; illus. by Gary Kelley. Disney Hyperion, 2009. 48p. Gr. 3-5.

Eleanor Roosevelt led a privileged but unhappy childhood full of overbearing relatives who showed little affection towards her. She realized that she had a passion for speaking up for the less privileged, and Rappaport's biography shows Roosevelt doing just that throughout her marriage, her time as First Lady, and as a member of the United Nations Human Rights Commission after her husband's death.

Ray, Deborah Kogan. *Paiute Princess: The Story of Sarah Winnemucca*. Foster/Farrar, 2012. 48p. Gr. 3-5.

A member of the Paiute tribe, activist Sarah Winnemucca dedicated her life to protecting the way of life of the Paiute people by attempting to negotiate in any way possible with the white communities of Nevada in the late nineteenth century. Winnemucca's legacy and a brief history of the Paiute tribe are included in an author's note.

Reef, Catherine. *The Brontë Sisters: The Brief Lives of Charlotte, Emily, and Anne*. Clarion, 2012. 231p. Gr. 6-9.

Most accessible to the middle grade set, this biography of the lives of the Brontë sisters includes the impact of the death of their mother and two of their siblings during their childhoods. Reef then follows them into adulthood and notes their attempts at teaching and working as governesses, as well as their mutual passion for writing and the response their published works received from critics, and then finally, their tragic and early deaths.

Rosenstock, Barb. *Fearless: The Story of Racing Legend Louise Smith*; illus. by Scott Dawson. Dutton, 2010. 32p. 5-8 yrs.

Louise Smith always loved driving, but mostly she loved driving fast. During the mid- twentieth century, she managed to make racing a career and eventually became the first woman elected to the International Motorsports Hall of Fame.

Taylor, Sarah Stewart. *Amelia Earhart: This Broad Ocean*; written and illus. by Sarah Stewart Taylor and Ben Towle. Center for Cartoon Studies/Disney/Hyperion, 2010. 79p. Gr. 5-9.

Grace, who dreams of being a reporter, is a young and avid admirer of female pilot Amelia

Earhart. Taylor and Towle tell the story of Earhart's successful 1928 transatlantic flight through Grace's eyes in this thoughtful graphic novel.

Van Allsburg, Chris. *Queen of the Falls*. Houghton, 2011. 40p. Gr. 3-6.

Widowed and without savings, Annie Edson Taylor was hoping to avoid being sent to a poorhouse when she came up with the daredevil task she just knew would bring her fame and enough money to happily live out the rest of her life. Taylor decided she would go over Niagara Falls in a barrel, and in 1901 she set the record of being the first person ever to accomplish the feat, despite her age, thus inspiring generations of future risk-takers.

Wadsworth, Ginger. *First Girl Scout: Juliette Gordon Low*. Clarion, 2011. 210p. Gr. 5-8.

Juliette Gordon Low is most famous for founding Girl Scouts of the USA in 1912. Wadsworth's biography thoroughly describes how the Girl Scouts came to be, but also discusses the over five decade span in which Low lived and worked before the formation of the celebrated organization.