

Barb's BookSpot: Episode 11
Heroes and Leaders in Picture Books
October, 2016

HOW TO BE A HERO. Text © 2016 Florence Parry Heide. Illustrations © 2016 by Chuck Groenink. Reproduced by permission of the publisher, Chronicle Books.

Gideon is a young boy who would like to be a hero, so he studies some of his favorite fairy tales, to learn just what makes a hero: they rescue damsels in distress, they fight dragons or giants, they even sometimes kiss others (yuck!) After all of his research, he comes to the conclusion that all it really takes is to be in the right place at the right time, so he determines he will be patient and on the look-out for his opportunity. About half-way through the book, several wordless pages depict Gideon as totally unaware of the action taking place behind him in the supermarket. He leaves the store thinking he has become a hero when in fact, something truly heroic has taken place without him. He missed the point and the opportunity. The unreliable narrator speaks in a conversational, tongue-in-cheek, style, telling the story from Gideon's point of view, and readers are left to enjoy the parallel (real story) with a laugh. This book will work for young readers who can identify with Gideon, and enjoy the story; teachers can use it with sophisticated readers to begin a discussion about what truly makes a hero.

AROUND AMERICA TO WIN THE VOTE: TWO SUFFRAGISTS, A KITTEN AND 10,000 MILES. Text © 2016 by Mara Rockliff. Illustrations © 2016 by Hadley Hooper. Reproduced by permission of the publisher, Candlewick Press, Somerville, MA.

In 1916, Nell Richardson and Alice Burke set off on a 5 month journey by automobile around the country to promote voting rights for women. These brave, creative suffragists took along a "teeny-tiny typewriter" and an "itsy-bitsy sewing machine" so they could demonstrate how capable women could be. They did whatever they needed to reach their audience. When men seemed more interested in their car, they impressed with their ability to 'talk cars'. The tone is light, engaging, and reflects the spunky personality of the characters. They left New York City, travelled south, then west to California, then made their return trip across the northern states back to New York. At a time when road travel was anything but easy, they made it through mud, storms, blizzards and breakdowns. They attended parades, parties, and high class social events to promote the cause. Students might like to trace the journey and find the cities on a map for themselves, but a map of the journey is provided in the text as well. This book will be a great addition to elementary social studies units and discussion about leadership, determination, voting rights and equality for women. Back matter includes a detailed account of the historical event and suggestions for more sources and reading.

I DISSENT: RUTH BADER GINSBURG MAKES HER MARK. Text © 2016 by Debbie Levy. Illustrations © 2016 by Elizabeth Baddeley. Reproduced by permission of the publisher, Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers.

Ruth was born in 1933, and grew up in a Brooklyn neighborhood "vibrant with immigrants." The traditional attitude that girls should aspire to being wives and mothers prevailed, but Ruth's mother did not agree. From the start, she taught Ruth that girls could do anything that men could do. Ruth and her family knew prejudice, as they were Jewish, and she never forgot how it felt to be excluded or denied access. Ruth went to college when few women did, and after marriage, on to law school. In her class there were only 9 women, but 500 men. Eventually, she was granted teaching positions at Rutgers, and later at Columbia. Ruth spent her life persisting, resisting, and fighting for equality, and she championed rights for women all the way to the Supreme Court. The text of the book emphasizes Ruth's fiery personality with large colorful fonts, superimposed over illustrations with an old-fashioned feel. Personalizing details include her husband's love of cooking, and her close friendship with Justice Antonin Scalia. The rich back-matter includes biographical information, notes on Supreme Court Cases, and a selected bibliography. Include this book in units for upper elementary and even secondary students to begin a discussion about the current political situation in the United States, and the upcoming selection of a new Supreme Court Justice.

