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REVIEWS

The Woman Issue

CELEBRATING
BOOKS
BY AND ABOUT
WOMEN



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INTERVIEWS & PROFILES

NANCY B. KENNEDY

A MIDDLE-GRADE BOOK OFFERS COMPLEX BIOGRAPHIES OF THE ACTIVISTS WHO FOUGHT FOR WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE IN THE 20TH CENTURY

By Deesha Philyaw



Y.E.C. Creations Photography

NANCY B. KENNEDY, a journalist and author of seven previous books, makes her middle-grade debut with *Women Win the Vote!: 19 for the 19th Amendment* (Penguin Random House Canada, Feb. 11), an illustrated collection of 19 brief biographies of individuals who fought for women's suffrage in the 20th century. Published in honor of the centennial of the 19th Amendment, *Women Win the Vote!* features well-known suffragists, including Sojourner Truth and Susan B. Anthony, alongside lesser-known trailblazers like Mary Ann Shadd Cary and Adelina Otero-Warren.

Where did the inspiration for *Women Win the Vote!* come from?

In late 2017, a colleague mentioned the upcoming centennial in 2020 [of the ratification of the 19th Amendment]. I'm a hard news person, with a newspaper background. I

wanted to write a nonfiction book, and the centennial seemed like a really gripping topic. I grew up in Rochester, New York, the home of Susan B. Anthony, and I knew nothing about her. I was taught nothing. My family didn't go to the Susan B. Anthony Museum House....But because of this connection [to my hometown] and because of my interest in hard news, I wanted to learn as much as I could. And I think in terms of headlines, so immediately I thought: *19th Amendment, 1919 [the year the amendment was passed by Congress], 19 heroes.*

Women Win the Vote! is inclusive in that four of the 19 women profiled are black, and the final chapter is comprised of shorter bios of other notable suffragists, including Frederick Douglass. But you go even further by being really honest about racism within the suffrage movement. At first I thought, "Oh, I want these to be inspiring stories. And aren't these ladies wonderful?" But then the more you read about it, the more you see the racism. Not at the beginning when the anti-slavery movement was also going on. That was more inclusive. They wanted to go forward together and get the vote at the same time, African Americans and white women. But then, after the 15th Amendment enfranchised African American men, and white women were still not enfranchised, things got pretty ugly.

Then I thought, "We're just looking back on them from a different time. We can't expect them to be as enlightened as we are." But the more I read, the more I went from that thought to, "Well, they were just being pragmatic. They knew they couldn't get the vote [for everyone] because the Southern legislators would never agree to it. So they were just being pragmatic and playing to people's racial beliefs." And then I went from that to, "Oh, my gosh, that's out and out racism." [The suffragists] said terrible things. It wasn't pragmatic; I think it was ideological. They believed some terrible things.

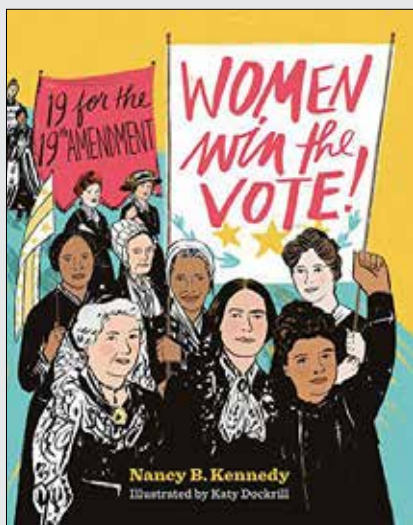
I went to the National Archives a couple of months ago, and they have a suffrage exhibit with a letter from Carrie Chapman Catt, who was the head of the National American Woman Suffrage Association. She wrote to a Southern senator, saying, *OK, there are more white women than Black women in the South, so we can maintain white supremacy.* She used the words *white supremacy*. She said that voting for the federal amendment would uphold white supremacy “constitutionally, honorably.”

Besides these kinds of complexities, what else do you hope young readers will take away from this book?

One approach that I didn’t see anywhere else was to start with each of the suffragists as children. Not fully formed, in activist mode. So I read a lot of memoirs, letters, journals, and articles to get the women’s individual voices; they wrote prodigiously back then. I started each story with the suffragist at as young an age as I could find information and then filled in their backstory. What kind of home life did she have? Where was she seeing discrimination? How did she come to the suffrage cause?

When I worked at the *Wall Street Journal*, one thing I learned was that it doesn’t matter how complex a story is. If you tell it through the people, you’ll engage the reader. And in this day, when we have young activists focused on [issues like] gun violence and violence against women, I wanted to show readers, by example, that 100, 150 years ago, there were young girls just like them who felt strongly about their causes. [I wanted to] give them a sense of possibility for their own lives.

Deesha Philyaw is the co-author of Co-Parenting 101: Helping Your Kids Thrive in Two Households After Divorce. Women Win the Vote! was reviewed in the Dec. 1, 2019, issue.



EVERY MISSING PIECE

Conklin, Melanie
 Disney-Hyperion/LBYR (288 pp.)
 \$16.99 | May 19, 2020
 978-1-368-04895-8

While trying to solve the mystery of a missing boy, Maddy finds a new family.

Ever since her father died, Maddy Gaines has been anxious, performing weekly safety checks on her small-town North Carolina home and garnering the sheriff’s ire for calling in too many false alarms. When the 11-year-old not only becomes obsessed with the news reports about the abducted Billy Holcomb, but thinks she has spotted him in her own neighborhood, she knows she must uncover proof before reporting it this time. Maddy’s heartfelt first-person narration reveals how her recon missions to find out more about a new classmate named Eric leave her with increasing certainty that he’s actually Billy, as well as funny feelings for a boy for the first time. Adding to the light mystery are more areas of concern for the preteen: Her mother has recently remarried, and she and quirky Stan now want a new baby; her best friend, Cress, seems to be growing up faster than Maddy is ready to; and she’s afraid of losing the memories of her father. Conklin’s fine Southern storytelling, complete with Cheerwine, homemade pies, and pig pickin’s, blends these nuanced realities with care. A nail-biting ending brings hopeful resolutions, including a growing family that still honors Maddy’s dad. Maddy, her family, Billy, and Eric are white while Cress is black.

Maddy’s spunky resilience will appeal to girls adjusting to their own changes. (*Fiction. 8-12*)



FOOTSTEPS IN BAY DE VERDE

Cotter, Charis
 Illus. by Dwyer, Jenny
 Running the Goat (36 pp.)
 \$19.95 | May 15, 2020
 978-1-927917-28-2

An illustrated ghost story set in Bay de Verde, Newfoundland.

Inspired by a story told to the author by a longtime Bay de Verde resident about an event his mother experienced when she was a child of 6, this spooky tale skillfully layers atmosphere and pacing. On a windy November evening in 1922, siblings Theresa, 4, Bridie, 6, and John, 8, huddle on a daybed in their Newfoundland kitchen, which is lit by a single kerosene lantern. It is an hour past their bedtime, and they are half-hiding in the shadows because they want to hear the ghost stories the adults tell after their everyday news is finished. The tales begin, and the children shiver deliciously. Then unexpected—but familiar—footsteps are heard, and ghosts become more than just stories. Cotter’s tale harks back to an age when visiting was the activity and stories were the entertainment, so despite its skillful suspense, it manages to also convey a restful interlude. Dwyer’s shadowy double-page spreads evoke the mysterious