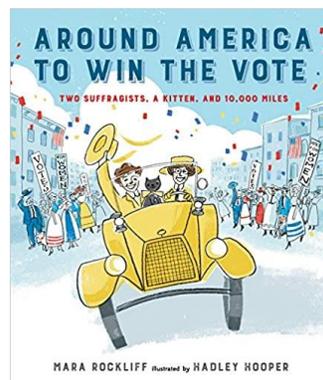


Second Reaction: Facing Obstacles with Resilience in *Around America to Win the Vote*

Rockliff, Mara. *Around America to Win the Vote*. Illustrated by Hadley Hooper. Somerville, MA: Candlewick, 2016. Print.

Leslie Rowland-Yeh



As a teacher at an all-girls' school older than the 19th Amendment and founded by a suffragist, I was excited to review *Around America to Win the Vote* and to consider how I could use it in my middle school classroom. This children's book tells the story of Nell Richardson and Alice Burke, two women who drove around the country in 1916 to gain national attention and to persuade people that women deserve the right to vote because they were, in fact, capable of making important decisions. Driving 10,000 miles, they believed, "would prove that WOMEN could do ANYTHING" (Rockliff unpagged).

The charming, brightly-colored illustrations will draw in young readers, and they can play "spot the kitten" on each page. The illustrations will inspire "why" questions, as well. In my head, I could hear my five-year-old niece asking, "Why is everyone wearing yellow?" or "Why did the horse not want to move?" or "Why did they go through the desert?" The word choice is clear, engaging, and full of adjectives and adverbs that make the book an upbeat, fun read-aloud--in person or via Zoom.

For older students such as mine, before reading the book, context would enable them to understand the impact of Richardson's and Burke's journey. At that time, few women owned cars or could even drive. Roads were often treacherous, cars regularly broke down and gas stations were rare. The women had to know how to repair their car and not depend on anyone else. As such, Richardson

and Burke were a spectacle and drew attention wherever they went. The women, though, used that attention to their advantage by giving speeches to crowds at every stop. You could even invite students to write the speeches they imagine Richardson and Burke gave. At my school, we could delve into our archives to see what was written by students and faculty about suffrage in 1916.

The themes of this book are resilience and determination. The women faced many obstacles along their journey; yet, they never give up. Older students would benefit from a discussion or related text on the arguments against suffrage or the vehemence and violence some suffragists experienced. In this book, only physical challenges of the journey are described: the women faced a blizzard, getting stuck in the mud, crossing the desert, dodging border skirmishes and getting lost. A physically-active lesson in class would be to re-enact the story as someone reads it aloud. In light of today's distancing needs, though, scenes could be divided among students, and each student could create a shoebox theater or puppet show to tell their part of the story. The entire production could be recorded on Google Meet or Zoom and then shared with students in younger grades. Additionally, students could write personal narratives or create one-pagers about difficult journeys via car or bus.

It would be remiss not to mention that Richardson and Burke are white, and the few images of people of color are only in large background scenes. Educators need to ensure that students know that women of all races and backgrounds were important actors in the suffrage movement. If using this book in class, I would assign students to research a woman of color who was active in the suffrage movement in their city or state. For example, the Rollin sisters were among the first women suffragists in South Carolina ("Columbia City"). Students could work together to create a children's book or skit sharing the story of the Rollin sisters' efforts. Additionally, the informational end matter mentions that Richardson and Burke had to use a "Blue Book" that gave important information about roads and towns. A natural connection would be for students to research the Green Book and discuss how two Black suffragists' experience on a cross-country road trip in 1916 may have been different—and why.

Another way to engage older students with this book, or to introduce the topic of suffrage, is to collect multiple children's books on the topic. Divide students into small groups and then ask each group to read one book and discuss it. This may be done digitally through read-alouds or videos and breakout rooms. Then ask groups to read a second book or discuss what they learned or noticed in the book with another group to share and compare findings.

The historical nature of the book lends itself to a wide audience, so teachers of all grades could consider it for their classroom library. Children's books can often provide an entry into difficult

conversations around issues such as racism, sexism, and politics, and *Around American to Win the Vote* provides material for each.

Works Cited

"Columbia City of Women Honoree: The Rollin Sisters." Columbia: City of Women, Columbia City of Women, 2020, www.columbiacityofwomen.com/honorees/rollin-sisters. Accessed 2 Aug. 2020.

About the Author

Leslie Rowland-Yeh holds a Master's in Literacy, Culture, and Language Education. She teaches English at an independent school, focusing on arts-in-education strategies and critical literacy.