

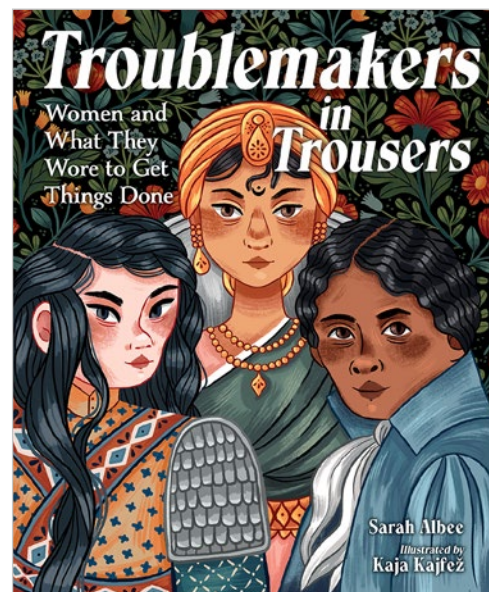
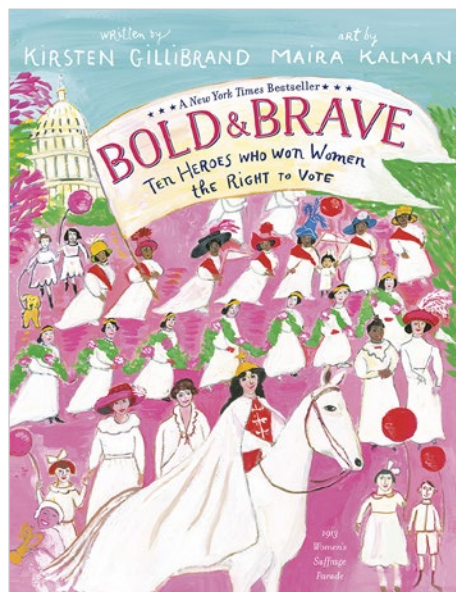
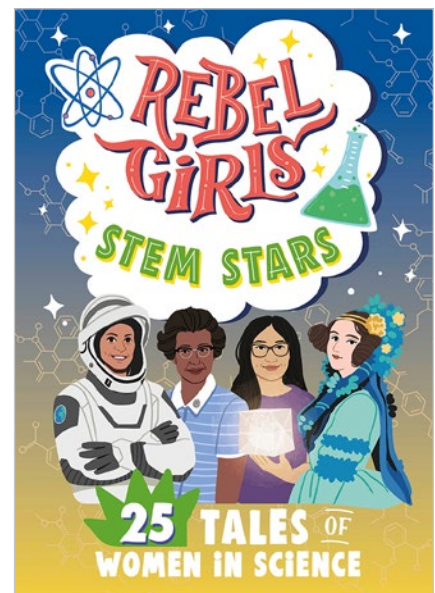
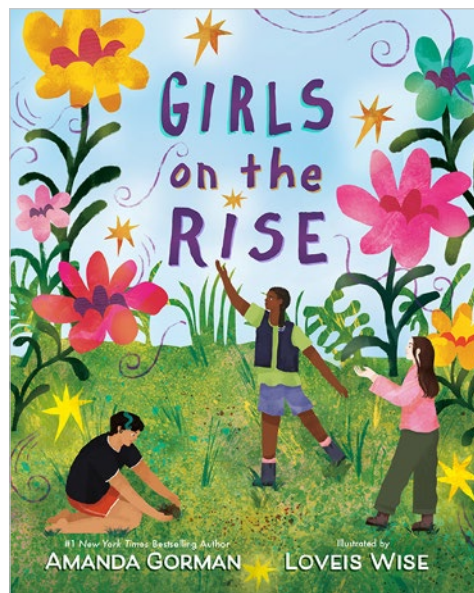


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ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

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## THEMATIC GUIDE

## Teaching Women's History ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



The activities in this guide encourage both early aged and upper-grade elementary students to read, write, and reflect on the remarkable roles of women in history and today.

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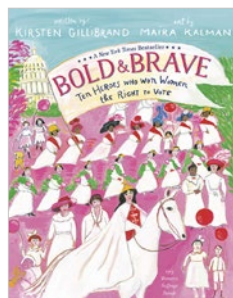
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## ■ INTRODUCTION

In celebration of Women's History Month 2025, the National Women's History Museum launched a campaign called "She Is Not a Footnote," aiming to highlight the powerful role women play in America and to foster a vision that leads to action in our schools and society. According to the campaign's research study, elementary students are often told "girls can be anything." But when children look at history books, politics, science, and technology, "they see a world where women are still the exception—not the norm."

The titles in this collection serve to reverse that perception. By amplifying the stories and achievements of women, the texts empower young readers to see themselves as dream chasers, barrier breakers, and change-makers. The activities in this guide focus on the following line of inquiry for both early- and upper-elementary students: What can we learn from women in history? Teachers can choose one or any combination of the guide's titles and strategies as they inspire students to read, write, and reflect on the remarkable roles of women in history and today.

## ■ ABOUT THE TITLES IN THIS COLLECTION



### **Bold & Brave:**

Ten Heroes Who Won Women the Right to Vote

**KIRSTEN GILLIBRAND, Illustrated by MAIRA KALMAN**

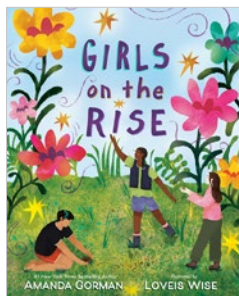
9780593302668

Dragonfly Books | Paperback

\$8.99 | 40 pages | Lexile: 1010L

Also available: **E-Book, Audio Download**

*Bold & Brave*, by Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, pairs artful portraits with impactful narratives to emphasize the accomplishments of ten heroes who won women the right to vote.



### **Girls on the Rise**

**AMANDA GORMAN, Illustrated by LOVEIS WISE**

9780593624180

Viking Books for Young Readers | Hardcover

\$19.99 | 32 pages | Lexile: AD610L

Also available: **E-Book, Audio Download**

In the picture book *Girls on the Rise*, poet Amanda Gorman encourages young readers to stay strong, lift each other up, and use their collective voices to make necessary change.



### **Rebel Girls STEM Stars:**

25 Tales of Women in Science

**REBEL GIRLS, Foreword by ANITA VANDYKE**

9798889640998

DK | Paperback

\$8.99 | 68 pages

Also available: **E-Book**

*Rebel Girls: STEM Stars* amplifies the stories of twenty-five women in science whose fearless conquering of new frontiers inspire readers to confront their challenges and pursue their dreams.



### **She Persisted: Simone Biles**

**KEKLA MAGOON and CHELSEA CLINTON**

**Illustrated by ALEXANDRA BOIGER and GILLIAN FLINT**

9780593620670

Philomel Books | Paperback

\$6.99 | 96 pages | Lexile: 770L

Also available: **E-Book, Audio Download**

In *She Persisted: Simone Biles*, by Kekla Magoon, Olympic gymnast Simone Biles serves as a model of balance, goal setting, and persistence, as well as an example of how to use one's voice for good.



### **Troublemakers in Trousers:**

Women and What They Wore to Get Things Done

**SARAH ALBEE; Illustrated by KAJA KAJFEZ**

9781623540951

Charlesbridge | Hardcover

\$18.99 | 176 pages | Lexile: 990L

Also available: **E-Book**

Sara Albee's *Troublemakers in Trousers* relays the stories of twenty-one women in history who broke rules and made trouble to get things done, all while dressing opposite to expectation.



## ■ GUIDING QUESTIONS

The following guiding questions frame some of the big ideas in this text set and can be used for reading, writing, and discussion.

1. What can reading about famous female athletes, scientists, artists, and others teach us about setting goals, facing challenges, and determining future paths?
2. What are some common characteristics found in inspirational female leaders and activists?
3. What responsibilities do famous women have to the rest of society? How can they use their fame for good?
4. What makes a person brave? What role does risk-taking play in achievement?
5. How can writing and speaking help us get our voices heard?
6. How can significant events or challenges in our lives serve as inspiration?
7. Why is it important to work together with others? How do collaboration and community strengthen us?
8. How have gender stereotypes and expectations presented barriers to women in history? How have successful women used these stereotypes and expectations to their benefit?
9. When and why have women throughout history needed to break rules to get things done? What would society have missed out on had rules been followed?

## ■ BUILDING KNOWLEDGE PRIOR TO READING

In order to provide equity and ensure students are ready to read, the following activities build knowledge, provide access, and generate excitement about women's history.

### HERSTORY BOARD

Create a digital or traditional bulletin board (or both!) to promote interest and provide knowledge about women's history. A traditional classroom bulletin board might focus on one woman from the text set, such as Simone Biles, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, or Katherine Johnson. Or it could highlight a subset of women such as scientists, suffragists, or activists. These boards build anticipation around books to be read. For ready-made women's history posters that might work on a traditional bulletin board, see [womenshistory.org/womens-history/resources](https://womenshistory.org/womens-history/resources).

A digital bulletin board builds background knowledge while promoting active participation. Students might read a short linked reference about a specific significant female and share their new knowledge with fellow students before the class starts reading a text(s). With digital boards, students not only interact with resources provided by the teacher; they can also collaborate with classmates and add topics and links. Both [padlet.com](https://padlet.com) and [miro.com](https://miro.com) provide free boards.

## ■ BUILDING KNOWLEDGE PRIOR TO READING

### WOMEN'S HISTORY WORD WALL

The texts in this set integrate some complex, content-specific vocabulary. It may be helpful to provide intentional vocabulary instruction essential for comprehension. Rather than assigning the entire list at one time, pre-teach only the words that will be important in a particular day's lesson. Ask students to stop and note when words are used in the text(s). After reading, have students rephrase meanings with partners or in writing. Words addressed can then be added to the classroom word wall, and students can engage in games and activities to solidify their learning.

- **Genre-Specific Word Wall:** One type of word wall focuses on building vocabulary in one or more texts. Examples of women's history vocabulary appearing throughout this text set include *abolitionist*, *ambition*, *amendment*, *activist*, *civil rights*, *confidence*, *courage*, *discrimination*, *diversity*, *justice*, *liberation*, *persistence*, *resilience*, *suffrage*, and *suffragist*.
- **Traveling Word Wall:** Traveling word walls are built by students in their folders or notebooks. While the list might contain the same vocabulary as the classroom word wall, it is also handy during independent or self-selected reading, where students can note words they determine to be new, important, or confusing. For instance, a student who selects the book *Troublemakers in Trousers* might record text-specific words such as *access*, *boundaries*, *convention*, *divided*, *double standard*, *impact*, *injustice*, and *pivotal*.

## ■ ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES DURING READING

The following activities leverage women's history and literature to support students as critical readers, writers, and thinkers.

### "WE ARE" POEM

Almost every page of *Girls on the Rise* begins with "We are," such as "We are like wings, Lifting each other up, Making each other strong." Amanda Gorman utilizes this framework to amplify themes of strength, service, confidence, and collaboration. Build character and creative writing skills by challenging students to write their own "We Are" collective class poem. Students can imitate the structure of *Girls on the Rise*, using "we are" plus a simile or adjective. Students might also create accompanying illustrations, just like in *Girls on the Rise*. Alternatively, students can write individual "I am" poems using a template such as the one found here: [prhlink.com/iampoem](http://prhlink.com/iampoem). As an extension, students can record themselves performing a choral reading of Gorman's poem or an individual reading of their own poems using a digital tool. Recordings can then be shared on the class or school website.

### SEE, THINK, WONDER

*Rebel Girls: STEM Stars, Bold and Brave*, and *Troublemakers in Trousers* integrate colorful, often abstract illustrations alongside text. Select one of these images

## ■ ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES DURING READING

as an exemplar and ask students to reflect on what they see with the “See, Think, Wonder” routine. Lead students through the three analysis rounds, each time providing a more detailed lens. Students consider:

- *What do I see? (What details stick out?)*
- *What do I think? (What about the image or wording makes me think that?)*
- *What does this make me wonder? (What questions or big ideas does this image raise?)*

For example, the illustration on the last page of *Bold and Brave* is a group of young people. Students should notice the “Vote!” T-shirt, think about the representation of diverse genders and cultures, and wonder why these children are holding a “Change the world” sign. Discussion can then include why all genders can be advocates for voting rights and women’s issues. After all three rounds are complete, discuss with the class how authors and illustrators work together to support or extend a book’s big ideas. Ask: *How does taking time to consider graphics help make me a better reader? How does it help me understand people or things I didn’t know about before?* Once students have practiced analyzing image-text pairings as a large group, they can work in partners to analyze additional illustrations. Learn more about the “See, Think, Wonder” routine at: [prhlink.com/seethinkwonder](http://prhlink.com/seethinkwonder).

### **MENTOR TEXTS**

Mentor texts are model essays, books, or multimodal works that inspire students to see themselves as writers while deconstructing and reflecting on their reading. Several of the books in this set model biographical writing that captures the imagination of elementary readers through provocative text features. As they read about historic women in *Bold and Brave*, *Rebel Girls: STEM Stars*, and *Troublemakers in Trousers*, students are inspired to connect to their own interests and backgrounds while examining the purposeful choices writers make. In selecting a specific portion to use as a mentor text, consider the writing purpose. Ask students to analyze the mentor piece before applying its style, format, or a specific element to their own writing. Co-construct the first sentence, paragraph, or portion together as a class. More on mentor texts can be found at: [edutopia.org/article/curating-mentor-texts-inspire-student-writers](http://edutopia.org/article/curating-mentor-texts-inspire-student-writers). Examples from texts in this set include:

- Using *Bold and Brave* as an example, students write a short biographical account on a current female advocate, scientist, politician, or other leader. Early elementary students can write a two- to three- sentence summary like those in “A Quick Walk through American History” at the end of the book. Older students write one to three paragraphs, like the main text.
- In *Rebel Girls: STEM Stars*, each biography of an important woman in science, technology, engineering, and math is partnered with a portrait that integrates key colors, images, and quotations. Have students fold a piece of paper in half horizontally. On the left side of the page, they write a short autobiography

## ■ ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES DURING READING

that explains how a challenge or specific event in their life has led them towards a possible pathway or future dream. Students add their names in bold, bright colors at the top of this side. On the right side of the page, students use color, images, and words to create a hand-drawn or digital portrait.

- In *Troublemakers in Trousers*, essays about women in history are paired with clever subtitles such as “Girls Rule” for an Egyptian ruler, “Harriet the Spy” for Harriet Tubman, and “Foul Weather Friends” for pirates Anne Bonny and Mary Read. Ask students to consider a female advocate, scientist, politician, or leader in today’s world. What would be an appropriate subtitle or hashtag for that person, and why? Alternatively, students might select a subtitle (early elementary) or hashtag (upper elementary) for their life so far, and be ready to share out.

### PODCASTS

Some of the entries in *Rebel Girls: STEM Stars* feature QR codes that link to accompanying podcasts. For example, when students scan the QR code on Ada Lovelace’s entry, they are linked to the Rebel Girls app, where they can find both a “rebel story” and a sleep story about this young, nineteenth-century mathematician. As a class, listen to a podcast that accompanies one of the young women featured in the book. Challenge students to listen for information included in the podcast but not in the written text entry. For instance, it is only in the podcast that students learn Ada’s father was the famous poet, Lord Byron. Discuss how the podcast differs from the written text, including music and sound effects. Ask: *How can listening to podcasts extend our knowledge and add to our enjoyment of reading?* Invite students to write and record a podcast for one of the Rebel Girls without a QR code or for a different woman in history or current times. Free podcast tools for students can be found at [audacityteam.org](http://audacityteam.org) or [wevideo.com](http://wevideo.com).

### BOOK CIRCLES

Some of the texts in this collection provide opportunities for small-group or book-circle work. Before breaking into mixed-ability or differentiated small groups, the teacher will model the focus reading skill with one of the titles from this set. Then, students will move into small groups in order to apply the skill or strategy. In mixed-ability reading groups, students can jigsaw-read a longer or more complex passage, such as one of the entries in *Troublemakers in Trousers*. For example, chapter five’s entry on Lady Mary Montagu includes six subsections. Assign a subsection to each of six small groups, and ask group members to read either independently or in partners prior to discussing the big ideas they want to take back to the class. In *Girls on the Rise*, differentiated small groups can meet to work on decoding, word recognition, or fluency skills using one to two pages of the picture book. For example, page eight provides practice in word recognition with its multiple repetition of the word “different.” And in *She Persisted: Simone Biles*, book-circle groups can discuss the questions and suggestions for persistence at the end of the text (pp. 58–61). After small-group time, the large class resumes



## ■ ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES DURING READING

and the teacher can quickly reinforce big ideas and takeaway skills.

### PAIRED TEXTS

Paired texts (also known as companion texts) hook readers, provide relevance, and open entry points to new ideas. When students read two texts together, they use high-level thinking to determine similarities and differences in style, structure, and essential truths. Two books from this set that work well as paired texts are *She Persisted: Simone Biles* and *Girls on the Rise*. In *She Persisted*, readers learn that Simone Biles excelled not only in the gym, but also as a public advocate for issues such as race, mental health, and foster care. While Biles is the most decorated female athlete in history, winning countless medals at the Olympics and other events, she is also the youngest person ever to win the Presidential Medal of Freedom. In *Girls on the Rise*, readers are encouraged to “stand up on (their) own” in order to be heard and help others. As Gorman’s poem asserts, “When one girl stands up, She is never alone.”

Ask students to examine the two books as a pair, reflecting on how Simone Biles in *She Persisted* models the spirit illustrated throughout *Girls on the Rise*. Students might work in pairs to find specific lines in the poem that reflect Biles’s story, as told in *She Persisted*. Students should note how verses such as “We look straight into the face of fear” and “When a girl rights what’s wrong, she brings others along” demonstrate Biles’s strength, courage, and advocacy. Discuss with students: *How are these two books different and alike in style and message? How does reading two books together help us understand both better?*

### KWI PROBLEM SOLVING

In *Rebel Girls: STEM Stars*, women and girls like Alice Min Soo Chun, Dasia Taylor, and Sophie Germain encounter roadblocks and challenges along the path to becoming STEM stars. Whether the conflict was in society or in the laboratory, these successful females relied on problem-solving skills to overcome hurdles and achieve their goals. Build student resilience, perseverance, and growth mindset by providing practice in problem solving. Ask students to apply the KWI problem solving routine to one or more scenarios, such as a math or science problem, a literature analysis, or even a social situation. The steps of KWI are:

- **KNOW:** What do we already know about the problem?
- **WHAT:** What is the core question or task?
- **IDEAS:** What are some possible solutions?

After trying possible solutions, students are ready to evaluate their thinking and determine what they might do differently in the future. When students use the KWI strategy routinely, they become cognizant of critical thinking habits that they can use in any problem-solving situation, they build habits of mind, and they see themselves as problem solvers. For more on KWI, see: [prhlink.com/edweek](http://prhlink.com/edweek).

## ■ SYNTHESIS ACTIVITIES AFTER READING

### VISION BOARDS

In *She Persisted: Simone Biles*, readers learn that Simone had a vision for her future as an Olympic gymnast, and she manifested that vision by setting goals and creating plans. Once students have read about Biles and other successful figures from the texts in this set, challenge them to create vision boards where they are able to visualize their dreams, see end goals, and envision the steps to get there. Younger elementary students can create their vision boards using paper, stickers, cut-out images, and quotations. Upper-grade students might design a digital vision board on Canva ([canva.com/create/vision-boards/](https://canva.com/create/vision-boards/)) or SlidesGo ([slidesgo.com/vision-board](https://slidesgo.com/vision-board)). To scaffold, teachers can share examples and provide templates, or students can design freehand. Provide prompts such as “Some of my dreams and goals are,” “I would love to be,” and “Hobbies I enjoy are.” Display the boards in the classroom or on the class website, and encourage students to talk about their vision with classmates.

### CHANGE-MAKER AVATARS

The power of a single voice is a central idea in *She Persisted: Simone Biles*, *Rebel Girls: STEM Stars*, and *Bold and Brave*. Readers are encouraged to listen to all voices, to persist through challenges, and to use their individual abilities to make positive change. Challenge students to select a historic or contemporary change-maker from one of the texts and to provide that person a voice in the form of an avatar. Students might research Simone Biles in *She Persisted*, who speaks out on behalf of mental health, or Valentina Muñoz Rabanal in *Rebel Girls: STEM Stars*, who advocates for girls in technology. Or, students can choose one of the women's suffrage leaders in *Bold and Brave*, such as Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, or Inez Milholland. Using a free tool like Adobe ([adobe.com/express/create/avatar](https://adobe.com/express/create/avatar)), students can write a script and create an avatar from their own voiceover or audio file. Alternatively, students can create a classroom wax museum. After researching how their figure used their voice to make a difference, students prepare a “script,” dress like their chosen change-maker, and strike a pose. When classmates or visitors push their pretend button, students deliver their script in character.

### PROJECT-BASED LEARNING

Informational texts like the books in this set provide young readers the opportunity to learn about history and the world around them, including what needs to change. Whether it is correcting traditional social narratives, taking responsibility for the natural world, or creating new technology, these titles encourage students to see themselves as action-takers and change-makers. Using one or more of the text set books as inspiration, solicit student input and, as a class, create a shared project that enables all students to take transformative action. Take pictures of the action and share on a school bulletin board, district website, or local news station. Examples of project-based learning activities inspired by the texts in this set include:

## ■ SYNTHESIS ACTIVITIES AFTER READING

- Improve a landscape, recycling, or other earth-friendly effort at school or in the community (*Girls on the Rise*; *Rebel Girls: STEM Stars*).
- Initiate or join a peer helper or tutoring program at school (*She Persisted: Simone Biles*; *Girls on the Rise*).
- Make a podcast, video, or storyboard about a person in history that needs her/their story told (*Rebel Girls: STEM Stars*; *Bold and Brave*; *Troublemakers in Trousers*).
- Create a school mural or bulletin board that communicates student learning about a social justice issue (*Girls on the Rise*; *She Persisted: Simone Biles*; *Bold and Brave*).

## ■ ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The following resources provide additional information and ideas for engaging students in women's history.

- National Women's History Museum Digital Classroom Resources:  
[womenshistory.org/students-educators/digital-classroom-resources](https://womenshistory.org/students-educators/digital-classroom-resources)
- Rebel Girls:  
[rebelgirls.com](https://rebelgirls.com)
- Teaching Resources for Women's History and Women's Rights:  
[prhlink.com/educationblogs](https://prhlink.com/educationblogs)
- "What Does 'Girl Power' Really Mean?":  
[prhlink.com/smithsonianmag](https://prhlink.com/smithsonianmag)
- Women's History Month for the Classroom:  
[prhlink.com/neaorg](https://prhlink.com/neaorg)
- Women's History Toolkit:  
[prhlink.com/natwmnhstalliance](https://prhlink.com/natwmnhstalliance)

## ■ ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS GUIDE

Laura Reis Mayer is a professional learning consultant from Asheville, NC. She develops content and facilitates learning for national education organizations. A twice-renewed National Board Certified Teacher, she taught middle school, high school, and college English, speech, drama, and literacy. She has written more than forty teacher guides for multiple publishers.

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