Discover text sets that feature female historical figures and girl characters who exhibit independence and determination as they solve problems, strive for their dreams, and achieve their goals. These mentor texts star women and girls who are thinkers and role models to inspire all children. Discussion questions and activities to use in the classroom follow each text set.
UNIT: Past Versus Present

Grades K-2

In this unit, compare and contrast how gender is viewed in historical versus modern time periods. Use Catching the Moon, Little Melba and her Big Trombone, and Zora Hurston and the Chinaberry Tree as a platform to talk about women in history. Then read Marisol McDonald Doesn’t Match, Black All Around, and Allie’s Basketball Dream, with modern-day female characters who stand up for themselves. Have readers think about:

• Explain to students how Catching the Moon, Little Melba and her Big Trombone, and Zora Hurston and the Chinaberry Tree took place in the past. Marisol McDonald Doesn’t Match, Black All Around, and Allie’s Basketball Dream all take place in today’s times. How do the girls and women in the historical fiction and biographical titles make it possible for the girl characters featured in today’s titles to express and be themselves?

• Compare and contrast the characters across the titles—track character and personality traits, and then analyze them afterwards. What do these girls and women have in common? What makes them special and unique? What personality traits do they share? Why are those traits important to their identity and who they are?

• Consider who mentored and championed these women and girls on their journeys. What role did other women play in their lives? Where are some examples of men championing women and girls?
UNIT: Influence of Grade & Time Period

Grades 3-5

In this unit, support students in analyzing how these characters navigated perceptions of women during that particular time period and setting.

- How do these women and girls transcend stereotypes associated with their gender during the time period featured within the text?

- How do the characters and historical figures in this collection change people’s views of them in the time and place the book is set?

- Conduct settings studies on each of the books, and then compare and contrast the settings and the main characters within the setting. How do people perceive women in that setting and time period? How does the setting make it difficult for the characters to achieve their goals? How did the characters rise above the obstacles they encountered in their environment? Have students create a chart of the different settings and analyze the different social and economic contexts within that setting.

- Now consider the social movements of our time. What challenges do women face today? Compare the time period of each book to our present moment. What circumstances have improved for women and girls, if any?

- Consider conducting this unit alongside a Women’s Suffrage movement. Analyze the norms of the Women’s Suffrage movement in contrast with the norms today. Have students research what the Women’s Suffrage movement wanted to address and who were the leaders, and who were not the leaders. Have students analyze how the characters of these books, if at all, reflect or represent any of the sentiments that leaders of the Women’s Suffrage movement expressed during this important time period in history.
UNIT: Conflict Analysis

Grades 6-8

In this unit, students will analyze the different conflicts presented in the six texts, including conflicts within the protagonists, conflicts with their peers, and conflicts in the larger world. How are those conflicts relevant in society? How do those conflicts relate to sexism? How do these characters attempt to resolve their conflicts? How and why do those conflicts resolve or not resolve?

- Have students examine the conflicts within the characters’ selves. What problems do the girls featured in these books have to face within themselves? Why are they dealing with those conflicts? What external factors create their internal conflicts?

- Have students examine the characters’ conflicts with their peers. What are their relationships like with family and friends? What kinds of conflicts occur in their relationships with peers? Why do they have these conflicts with peers? What external factors create these peer conflicts?

- Have students examine the characters’ conflicts with the world. What conflicts within their societies make it difficult for these characters to achieve their goals? Think about global issues, such as gender expectations, racism, and other social conflicts. How do these characters confront and deal with these challenges? How does sexism play into these global and societal conflicts?

AHIMSA - written by Supriya Kelkar
- In this historical novel, Gandhi asks for one member of each family to join the fight for independence from the British, and when Anjali’s mother is jailed for doing so, Anjali must step out of her comfort zone to take over her mother’s work. https://www.leeandlow.com/books/ahimsa

INK AND ASHES - Written by Valynne E. Maetani
- When Claire Takata finds out that her deceased father was once a member of the yakuza – a Japanese crime syndicate – the secret threatens her friends and family, her newfound love, and even Claire’s own life. https://www.leeandlow.com/books/ink-and-ashes

TOFU QUILT - Written by Ching Russell
- In this autobiographical novel in verse, Yeung Ying, a young girl in Hong Kong in the 1960s, aspires to become a writer, against the conventions of society and her family. https://www.leeandlow.com/books/tofu-quilt

UNDER THE MESQUITE - Written by Guadalupe Garcia McCall
- Lupita, a budding actor and poet in a close-knit Mexican American immigrant family, comes of age as she struggles with adult responsibilities during her mother’s long illness. https://www.leeandlow.com/books/under-the-mesquite

SUMMER OF THE MARIPOSAS - Written by Guadalupe Garcia McCall
- In this creative retelling of The Odyssey, fifteen-year-old Odilia and her younger sisters embark on a journey to return a dead man to his family in Mexico, and must outwit monsters and witches to make it back home again. https://www.leeandlow.com/books/summer-of-the-mariposas

RATTLESNAKE MESA - Written by EdNah New Rider Weber, illustrated by Richela Renkun
- This true account of a spirited Native American girl’s experiences growing up on a reservation and attending Phoenix Indian School in the 1920s is written in an engaging, unconventional style and accompanied by dramatic photographs. https://www.leeandlow.com/books/rattlesnake-mesa

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