Literary Genre Bibliography: Biography

Grades K-2


**Summary:** Yuyi Morales and her infant son cross the bridge from Mexico to the US when baby Kelly was just two months old. They came not knowing English or understanding American ways. They were introduced to the public library and spent many days there, learning English, storytelling and found that through books “...we can find our path and purpose.”

**Audience:** The book appeals to a young audience, but could be used in upper grades as an introduction to an art activity or writing a memoir.


**Summary:** Dorothy Vaughan, Mary Jackson, Katherine Johnson, and Christine Darden were four African-American women who worked at the National Advisory Commitee for Aeronautics, which became NASA in 1958. These extremely talented mathematicians worked as NASA for the space program before machines did the work. They experienced segregation and sexism which made their jobs extremely difficult. They worked, ate and used separate bathrooms from the white women, while lacking respect for their intelligence from their male counterparts.

**Audience:** The book would make a great read-aloud during Black History Month, Women’s History Month or Biographies for Optimist Good Reader.

Grades 3-4


**Summary:** Venus and Serena Williams integrated hard work with talent to become the tennis stars they are today in a predominantly white sport. Coached by their father and supported by their family, they overcame teasing and threats to eventually become the first two sisters in tennis history to rank numbers one and two in the world.

**Audience:** There is a need for books about contemporary female African-American athletes at a reading level attainable by many at the elementary level. This is a good one.


**Summary:** Born in 1810, William was taken out of the fields by his owner, Colonel Lewis, to apprence as a blacksmith. His talent was obvious, and he focused on buying himself out of slavery. Allowed to keep a few coins, he began saving and planning. After buying his freedom, and later his wife’s and child’s, he spent the next 26 years buying freedom for his extended family.

**Audience:** This book would work well as a read aloud, with great sounds and discussions about white escorts necessary when African-Americans left the plantation.
Grades 5-6


**Summary:** Mary Lemist Titcomb was an innovator who pushed gender and career boundaries in the early 20th century. She was an advocate for the poor and middle-class in rural communities, she looked for ways for them to take advantage of the free library. She came up with the first horse-drawn book wagon, the first generation of our current Bookmobiles. Designed with the appearance of a scrapbook, the book has short chapters and many photographs.

**Audience:** In the current age and popularity of the Iowa City Public Library’s Bookmobile, this would be a fun read for upper grades.


**Summary:** Diane Guerrero tells her own story of growing up with undocumented immigrant parents and the devastating effect on her life when they were deported. As is the case with many undocumented immigrants, from the time they arrived from Colombia they took on all kinds of low-paying jobs, dreaming of a better life for themselves and, particularly, their children. Although they kept a low profile, Guerrero’s parents were detained and deported in 2001, when she was 14. Left behind to totally fend for herself, Guerrero moved in with family friends until she went to college. The trauma of her experience finally caught up with her when she suffered from depression. Eventually, she landed a part on *Orange Is the New Black*. Now Guerrero also works to help undocumented families and to fight for their rights.

**Audience:** This book reads like a piece of fiction and would appeal to upper grades interested in stories of immigration.