



She Was the First! The Trailblazing Life of Shirley Chisholm

written by Kathryn Russell-Brown
illustrated by Eric Velasquez

About the Book

Genre: Biography

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Interest Level: Grades 1–6

Guided Reading Level: T

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points:
N/A

Lexile™ Measure: N/A

*Reading level based on the ATOS Readability Formula

Themes: African/African American/Black Interest, Biography/Memoir, Civil Rights Movement, Courage, Discrimination, Politics, Civics, Dreams and Aspirations, Education, Empathy/Compassion, History, Nonfiction, Overcoming Obstacles, Persistence/Grit, Respect/Citizenship, United States History, Women's History

Resources on the web:

leeandlow.com/books/she-was-the-first

SYNOPSIS

Shirley liked to be in charge. As a young girl, at home and at school, she liked to do things her way. As a student at Brooklyn College, she outtalked anyone who opposed her on the debate team. After graduating, Shirley became an educator and a community activist, standing up for the rights of women and people of color. Her small stature and fiery determination often took people by surprise. But they listened.

In 1964, Shirley took her voice and leadership to politics, becoming the first Black woman elected to the New York State Assembly, and in 1968, the first Black woman elected to Congress. She pushed for laws that helped women, children, students, poor people, farm workers, Native people, and others who were often ignored. She fought for healthcare. She spoke up for military veterans. She spoke out against war. Then in 1972, she became the first Black person to seek the presidency of the United States as a major party candidate.

Shirley Chisholm, a woman of many firsts, was a legendary political trailblazer whose legacy is a beacon for the diverse leaders of today. She opened the door for women and Blacks in the political arena and for the first Black president of the United States.

All guided reading level placements may vary and are subject to revision. Teachers may adjust the assigned levels in accordance with their own evaluations.

BACKGROUND

Afterword from Katheryn Russell-Brown

"Shirley Anita St. Hill was born on November 30, 1924, in Brooklyn, New York. Her parents, Charles St. Hill and Ruby Seale St. Hill, emigrated to the United States from Barbados. Shirley's mother was a religious woman. She took her daughters to church three times every Sunday. Shirley's father, a voracious reader and a devoted follower of the Black nationalist leader Marcus Garvey, passed along his love of politics, race relations, and history to Shirley.

"With the goal of saving money and exposing their children to Caribbean life, the St. Hills sent them to live for a time in Barbados. The three girls—Shirley, age three; Odessa, age two; and Muriel, eight months—stayed with their maternal grandmother, Emmeline Seale. They lived on her farm from 1928 to 1934. Describing life at her grandmother's house, Shirley said, "The furniture was sparse and plain, but we found Grandmother's house elaborately furnished with the two necessities: warmth and love." Shirley's education in Barbados's British-style schools was traditional and strict, and it gave Shirley a solid foundation in speaking and writing. Punishment, however, could be severe, and the teachers sometimes flogged children, including Shirley, for not paying attention in class.

"In March 1934, when the girls returned to Brooklyn, Shirley discovered that she had a new little sister, Selma. The family's economic fortunes had not improved. The Great Depression had taken hold, and Shirley saw her parents struggle to make ends meet.

"Shirley excelled in school. In high school she studied French and won an achievement award. She was also elected vice president of Junior Arista, an honor society. She received several college scholarships and had her heart set on attending Vassar College in upstate New York or Oberlin College in Ohio. However, Shirley's parents made it clear that they could not afford the room-and-board expenses at those schools. So Shirley stayed at home and attended Brooklyn College. She majored in sociology and minored in Spanish. She joined the Harriet Tubman Society, where members had discussions about Black racial consciousness and racism in American society. During this time, Shirley became concerned about issues surrounding discrimination in hiring, working conditions, pay, and advancement opportunities for Blacks and women. She was also active on the debate team. Her star matches drew the attention of Louis Warsoff, a blind, White political science professor. He strongly encouraged Shirley to pursue politics.

"In 1946, Shirley graduated from college cum laude. Teaching was one of the few professional doors open to young Black women at that time. Shirley loved children and felt she could be of service to society by pursuing a career in education. Her first job was as a nursery schoolteacher at Mt. Calvary Child Care Center in Harlem. She also earned a master's degree in curriculum and teaching from Teachers College, Columbia University in 1951 and later became director of the Child Care Center of Hamilton-Madison House on Manhattan's Lower East Side. From 1959 to 1964, she served as a consultant to the New York City Division of Daycare.

"During her time as an educator, Shirley Chisholm also maintained an active political agenda. She

joined the New York State Seventeenth Assembly District Democratic Club, a local political club, and was involved in numerous groups that addressed community concerns, including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Urban League. Beyond being a founding member of several organizations, including the National Organization for Women (NOW) and the Congressional Black Caucus, Chisholm was a woman of many other firsts. In 1964, she was the first Black woman elected to the New York State Assembly. In 1968, she was the first Black woman elected to the US Congress. She held her seat in the House of Representatives for seven terms (fourteen years). In 1972, she was the first Black candidate from a major political party to run for the US presidency. At the same time, she was the first woman and first Black person in the Democratic Party to seek that office. Chisholm received more than 430,000 votes in the primary and earned 152 delegates.

"Chisholm's runs for political office were not easy. She was a no-nonsense politician. Her small stature combined with her fiery and dynamic presentation often surprised people. She had a multiracial coalition of supporters and fans around the world. She worked to increase spending for education and healthcare. However, as a Black woman, Chisholm encountered both anti-woman and anti-Black backlash. Some Black men did not support her because she was a woman. Many people thought a Black man should be the first person of color to run for the presidency. White male politicians expected Chisholm to step aside. They questioned her womanhood and her race loyalty. Although these criticisms stung, Chisholm refused to be placed in a box. She was a political trailblazer who said, "I am the candidate of the people . . . who dared to be a catalyst of change."

"In 1983, Chisholm retired from Congress. She cofounded the National [Political] Congress of Black Women in 1984 and supported Rev. Jesse Jackson's presidential campaigns in 1984 and 1988. She was a popular speaker on the lecture circuit and taught at Mount Holyoke College. Another part of her work was to document her personal story. She wrote two books, *Unbought and Unbossed* (1970) and *The Good Fight* (1973). She was a mentor to many up-and-coming Black women politicians, most notably Congresswoman Barbara Lee, a Democrat from California. Chisholm also served as a role model for many other politicians across race and gender lines.

"Chisholm was married to Conrad Chisholm from 1949 to 1977. Following their divorce, she married Arthur Hardwick later that year. They were married until his death in 1986. On January 1, 2005, Shirley Anita St. Hill Chisholm passed away in Ormond Beach, Florida.

"Chisholm's alma mater, Brooklyn College, is home to the Shirley Chisholm Project, dedicated to bringing her life and legacy to the general public. The project also hosts an annual Shirley Chisholm Day on November 30, her birthday. In 2014, Chisholm was honored with a US postage stamp, and in 2015, she was posthumously awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Barack Obama, the first Black president of the United States. In 2019, Shirley Chisholm State Park opened in Brooklyn, and in 2020, a statue of Chisholm was erected at an entrance to Brooklyn's Prospect Park. It is one of only a few statues in New York City that honors a woman or person of color."

Women in Congress

The United States House of Representatives' "Women in Congress" has resources, member profiles, photographs, and more that provide additional information about critical congresswomen and their roles in politics throughout history (<https://history.house.gov/Exhibition-and-Publications/WIC/Women-in-Congress/>).

BEFORE READING

Prereading Focus Questions

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 5 and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

Before introducing this book to students, you may wish to develop background knowledge and promote anticipation by posing questions such as the following:

- What do you know about women in politics? Who are some famous female politicians that you know about? What have they done? What were some of the issues that they cared about?
- What does it mean to be persistent? How do you demonstrate persistence even though something may be challenging? Why is it important to be persistent? Do you think persistence can be learned? How so?
- How does someone "make a difference?" What do you think making a difference means? Who are some famous people who have made a difference in the United States?
- What does education mean to you? Why is education important in achieving your goals? How does education provide opportunities for people?
- Was there a time when you took a chance on something? What did you do? What was the end result? Was it worth taking a chance? How are taking chances important in your life?
- What does it mean to stand up for what's right? What are some instances in history where people had to stand up for what they believed in even though they encountered opposition?

Exploring the Book

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1; Craft & Structure, Strand 5; and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

- **Book Title Exploration:** Talk about the title of the book, *She Was the First! The Trailblazing Life of Shirley Chisholm*. Then ask students what they think this book will most likely be about and whom the book might be about. What do they think might happen? What information do they think they might learn? What makes them think that?
- **Read Katheryn Russell-Brown's Biography:** Read about Katheryn Russell-Brown on the jacket back flap as well as on her website kbrbrown.net/CHILDRENS. Encourage students to think about how she comes up with new ideas for her books, and what could have been her inspiration for writing *She Was the First! The Trailblazing Life of Shirley Chisholm*.
- **Read Eric Velasquez's Biography:** Read about Eric Velasquez on the jacket back flap as well

as on his website ericvelasquez.com. Have students look into his illustrations for other books and compare and contrast his style across books. How are his illustrations among the books similar? How are they different? Does it seem like the subject matter of a book influences the style of his illustrations? Why do you think so?

- Encourage students to stop and jot in their reading notebooks during the read-aloud when they: learn new information, see a powerful image, have an emotional reaction or an idea, have a question, or hear new words.
- Have students quickly write a feeling in their notebooks during reading. After reading, ask students why they wrote down that feeling and have them write a journal entry about it.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

Have students read to find out:

- how Shirley Chisholm's childhood influenced her career
- why Shirley became interested in current events at a young age
- how Shirley's education and desire for learning inspired her to go into politics
- why Shirley wanted to speak up for others and make a difference
- what Shirley did to help people during her time as a politician
- why Shirley Chisholm is considered a trailblazer and how her legacy is important today

Encourage students to consider why the author, Katheryn Russell-Brown, would want to share with young people this story about Shirley Chisholm, the first Black woman to run for president as a major party candidate.

VOCABULARY

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 4)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

The story contains several content-specific and academic words and phrases that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary below.

Encourage a variety of strategies to support students' vocabulary acquisition: look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, create a specific action for each word, list synonyms and antonyms, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word. (Many of the Spanish words can be found in the book glossary, but there are also some that are not included. Students could be encouraged to create a log of these words—they will not be listed here.)

Content Specific

Caribbean, Barbados, Vulcania, West Indian, reed, outhouse, preacher, shopkeeper, the Great Depression, Brooklyn College, the Harriet Tubman Society, debater, Conrad Chisholm, Congress, unbought, unbossed, House of Representatives, military veterans, Democrat, Republican, campaign

Academic

inkling, handful, seamstress, domestic worker, rickety, politics, opponents

AFTER READING

Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop appreciation for the content. Encourage students to refer to passages and/or illustrations in the book to support their responses. **To build skills in close reading of a text, students should cite textual evidence with their answers.**

Literal Comprehension

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. What did Shirley like to do when she was young? How did she act with the other children in her neighborhood?
2. Where did the St. Hill family live?
3. What did Shirley's parents do for a living?
4. What did Mother and Papa decide to do with their daughters? Where did the girls go? Why did Mother and Papa do this?
5. How did Shirley and her sisters get to Grandmother Emmeline's farm?
6. What was Grandmother Emmeline like?
7. How was island living different from living in Brooklyn?
8. What did Shirley and her sisters do on the farm to help out?
9. How did Shirley perform in school in Barbados?
10. What kinds of people did Shirley see in Barbados? How did they inspire her?
11. When did Shirley and her sisters return to Brooklyn? What was life like in Brooklyn?
12. What was it like for Shirley to return to school in Brooklyn? How did the other students treat her?
13. Who did Shirley listen to at the dinner table? What did she learn?
14. Where did Shirley go to college? What did she study and what groups did she join there?
15. Who suggested Shirley try politics? Why?
16. Why was it hard for Shirley to find a job?
17. Who did Shirley stand up for when she worked within her community groups? What did she

demand?

18. Who did Shirley marry?
19. What kind of work did Shirley Chisholm do in the 1950s and 1960s?
20. What was Shirley Chisholm's first elected position in politics?
21. What did Shirley Chisholm work to do after she became an assemblywoman?
22. Whose advice did Shirley Chisholm follow as an assemblywoman?
23. How did Shirley Chisholm take her message to a bigger audience? How was this important?
24. How did Shirley Chisholm "open a door to history?"

Extension/Higher Level Thinking

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 2 and 3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4 and 6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. What does the title *She Was the First! The Trailblazing Life of Shirley Chisholm* mean to you after reading the book? Why do you think the author chose this particular title?
2. How was Shirley Chisholm an advocate for herself and others at an early age? What were some of the things Shirley did as a young girl that prepared her for a career as a politician?
3. Why did Shirley have a hard time finding a job after college? What were some of the reasons people refused to interview her or denied her a job?
4. Why did some politicians call Shirley a "troublemaker" because she stood up for women and people of color? Why would the politicians fine a troublemaker to be a problem?
5. How did Shirley Chisholm work with community groups? Why was this important to her?
6. What does Shirley's slogan "Unbought and Unbossed" mean? Why do you think Shirley came up with this to be her slogan? How does it reflect her work and her stance as a politician?
7. In the text, the author, Katheryn Russell-Brown, writes, "Shirley didn't say or do things just to be popular. She fought for what she believed was right, not what was easy." What do you think these statements mean? Why do you think Shirley Chisholm did these things? How does this relate to you in our own life?
8. How would you describe Shirley Chisholm to a person who had never heard of her? What are some of the qualities you would use to describe her? What are the most important things to say about Shirley and her life and legacy?
9. Explore the structure of this text. Does the story describe events chronologically, as comparison, cause and effect, or problems and solutions? Why do you think the author structured the text the way she did? How does this story compare to other texts you have read?

Reader's Response

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)

Use the following questions and writing activities to help students practice active reading and personalize their responses to the book. **Suggest that students respond in reader's response journals, essays, or oral discussion.** You may also want to set aside time for students to share and discuss their written work.

1. What is one big thought you have after reading this book? Think about Shirley Chisholm's dedication to help others throughout her life. What is your takeaway from this book? What would you tell a friend about this book?
2. What do you think is Katheryn Russell-Brown's message to the reader? Think about possible motivations behind Katheryn Russell-Brown's intentions for writing the book. What do you think she wanted to tell her readers?
3. Have students make a text-to-self connection. What kinds of connections did you make from this book to your own life? What do Shirley Chisholm's experiences, thoughts, and feelings mean to you?
4. Have students make a text-to-text connection. Did you think of any other books while you read *She Was the First! The Trailblazing Life of Shirley Chisholm*? Why did you make those connections?
5. Have students make a text-to-world connection. What kind of connections did you make between this book and what you have seen in the world, such as online, on television, or in a newspaper? Why did this book make you think of that?
6. What does making a difference mean to students after reading? After reading *She Was the First! The Trailblazing Life of Shirley Chisholm*, what does the idea of making a difference mean to you? Why? Did Shirley Chisholm inspire you to make a difference in your community? How?
7. What does education mean to you after reading this book? How did Shirley's passion for education and school fuel her success in life and in politics? Why is education important?
8. How has a teacher or other person close to you impacted your life? Shirley's favorite teacher, Professor Warsoff, eventually inspired her to enter politics. Have you had a teacher or other person who really changed your life? What were some things that teacher or person did that were significant to you?
9. Why is Shirley Chisholm an essential person to learn about in our history? How did Shirley lead the way for women and people of color in politics?

ELL Teaching Activities

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 4–6)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English Language Learners.

1. Assign ELL students to partner-read the story with strong English readers/speakers. Students can alternate reading pages, repeat passages after one another, or listen to the more fluent reader.

2. Have each student write three questions about the story. Then let students pair up and discuss the answers to the questions.
3. Depending on students' level of English proficiency, after the first reading:
 - Review the illustrations in order and have students summarize what is happening on each page, first orally, then in writing.
 - Have students work in pairs to retell either the plot of the story or key details. Then ask students to write a short summary, or opinion about what they have read.
4. Have students give a short talk about what making a difference and something they can do to improve their school or community.
5. The book contains several content-specific and academic words that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary. Expose English Language Learners to multiple vocabulary strategies. Have students make predictions about word meanings, look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, list synonyms and antonyms, create an action for each word, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

Social and Emotional Learning

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1-3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4-6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1-3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-2 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4-6)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 6)

Social and emotional learning involves being aware of and regulating emotions for healthy development. In addition to understanding one's own feelings, strong socio-emotional development allows individuals to develop empathy for others and to establish and maintain relationships.

Use the following prompts to help students study the socio-emotional aspects of this book.

1. Shirley Chisholm experienced racism and prejudice in the United States because of her race. How do you respond to racism or discrimination when you experience it yourself and/or when you see it happen to others?
2. How did Shirley Chisholm's persistence and resilience lead to her eventual decision to run for president of the United States? Show evidence from the book.
3. Which illustration in *She Was the First! The Trailblazing Life of Shirley Chisholm* best shows an emotion? Explain which emotion you think it shows. How does the image portray that emotion?
4. How do you think Shirley and her sisters felt after their mother went back to the United States and they continued to live in Barbados? How do you think they overcame their sadness and anxiety?
5. Choose an emotion that interests you: happiness, sadness, fear, anxiety, frustration, hope, perseverance, and so on. Illustrate or act out what that emotion looks like in *She Was the First! The Trailblazing Life of Shirley Chisholm*.

INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

(Introduction to the Standards, page 7: Students who are college and career ready must be able to build strong content knowledge, value evidence, and use technology and digital media strategically and capably)

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas. These can also be used for extension activities, for advanced readers, and for building a home-school connection.

English/Language Arts

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Read *Little Melba and Her Big Trombone* (also by Katheryn Russell-Brown (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/little-melba-and-her-big-trombone>) along with *She Was the First! The Trailblazing Life of Shirley Chisholm*.** Analyze the differences and similarities among the main characters' actions in these texts. What risks did they take to achieve their goals? What did they have to do to overcome obstacles in their lives? How did they demonstrate bravery and courage despite racism and sexism? Why do students think Katheryn Russell-Brown decided to write a book about these powerful women? How are Melba Liston and Shirley Chisholm similar? How are they different? Provide students with a graphic organizer to differentiate the two titles, and then have students write an essay answering the previous questions.
- **Use *She Was the First! The Trailblazing Life of Shirley Chisholm* along with *Seeds of Change* ([leeandlow.com/books/seeds-of-change](https://www.leeandlow.com/books/seeds-of-change)), *Midnight Teacher: Lilly Ann Granderson and Her Secret School* ([leeandlow.com/books/midnight-teacher](https://www.leeandlow.com/books/midnight-teacher)), and *In Her Hands: The Story of Sculptor Augusta Savage* ([leeandlow.com/books/in-her-hands](https://www.leeandlow.com/books/in-her-hands)) to show students powerful Black women in history.** Use a graphic organizer to compare and contrast Shirley Chisholm, Wangari Maathai, Lilly Ann Granderson, and Augusta Savage. How do these women inspire you to fight for what they believe in? Have students write a reaction after the graphic organizer exercise about these important women in history to address how and why they risked their lives to change those of others.
- **Have students come up with a list of questions to ask author Katheryn Russell-Brown.** What do students want to know about the process behind writing a children's book? How did the author come up with the idea to write *She Was the First! The Trailblazing Life of Shirley Chisholm*? What about her other books? Consider contacting Katheryn Russell-Brown and inviting her to your school, library, or other relevant setting for an author visit (<http://krbrown.net/CHILDRENS.html>).
- **Encourage students to prepare a presentation or write an essay about something in their community about which they are passionate.** Shirley helped people of color, people who were sick, and people in need during her time in political office. What is something you want to improve in your school, neighborhood, or community? Why is this an important cause? What are some ways you can help others or improve this specific issue?

Students may share their findings with a partner, small group, or the whole class.

- **Consider using *She Was the First! The Trailblazing Life of Shirley Chisholm* as an anchor text to teach students about biography writing.** The “Our Journey Westward” blog has tips and step-by-step instructions on how to ease students into writing biography and the different techniques and strategies that are used to make engaging and informative stories (<https://ourjourneywestward.com/picture-books-teach-biography-writing/>). Afterward, have students select a picture book biography in their classroom and create their own books about that historical figure. Have students conduct a research study about their own historical figures from a picture book of their choosing to simulate the process behind *She Was the First! The Trailblazing Life of Shirley Chisholm*. Have students identify the different features in *She Was the First! The Trailblazing Life of Shirley Chisholm* that would help inform their own book about their historical figure. What kinds of information do students need to research? How should they present the information in the book? What images, diagrams, or photographs would be helpful to their readers?
- **Allow students to come up with their own political campaign for the presidency.** Shirley’s slogan was “Unbought and Unbossed.” What would students’ own political slogan be? What issues would they speak about? Why should they be elected president? How would they help others? Like Shirley Chisholm, encourage students to debate, in partners or in small groups. Students may prepare posters to showcase their slogans and their platforms.
- **Have students write an essay or reaction to Shirley Chisholm’s quote on the back cover: “I ran because somebody had to do it first. In this country, everybody is supposed to be able to run for president, but that has never really been true.”** What do students think of when they read this statement? Why do they think Shirley Chisholm said that it hasn’t been true that everybody is supposed to be able to run for president? How do they think her statement applies to our country’s political system today? How does Shirley Chisholm’s statement inspire them to think about politics and women in politics in the future?

Social Studies/Geography

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Have students research obstacles to women, such as sexism, in politics today. What obstacles prevent women in the United States from getting into politics?** What about in other countries? Students can research online from different articles, such as The New York Times’ “A Woman, Just Not that Woman;”: How Sexism Plays Out on the Trail” (<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/11/us/politics/sexism-double-standard-2020.html>). Students can share their findings in an essay and then conduct a small group or whole class discussion about how sexism is evident in politics nationally and globally.
- **Have students conduct a research project on a woman of color in political office.** Students can get ideas from women in politics from current events or history. Students can focus on the following questions: What is the politician known for? What is her platform and

what issues does she care about? What obstacles did she have to overcome to get elected? How has she made a difference in office and in her community? Resources online include Rutgers University's "History of Women of Color in U.S. Politics" (<https://cawp.rutgers.edu/history-women-color-us-politics>), The Washington Post's "Women of color in Congress are challenging perceptions of political leadership" (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2019/01/04/women-color-congress-are-challenging-perceptions-political-leadership/>), and "The Spike In Political Mobilization of Women of Color in the U.S. Will Define 2020" (<https://www.forbes.com/sites/bonniechiu/2019/09/18/the-spike-in-political-mobilization-of-women-of-color-in-the-us-will-define-2020/#558386de367f>). Students may share their historical figure in a visual presentation of their choosing, using reputable resources from books and websites.

- **Conduct a research study on women who have run for president in the United States.** Rutgers University has a list of all female presidential and vice presidential candidates (https://cawp.rutgers.edu/levels_of_office/women-presidential-and-vice-presidential-candidates-selected-list). Students can select one of the candidates to learn more about and answer the following questions: What issues did the candidate care about? What was her political experience before running for president? What was her party and platform? Why did she run for president? Students can present their findings in a visual format of their choosing.
- **Encourage students to select a resource from the "Author's Sources" section at the back of *She Was the First!*** Students can examine the piece, whether it's a book, video, photograph, or website, and write a reaction to how they think the author and illustrator were informed by this information and how it helped develop the text. Have students consider what kind of resource it is, how they know that it contains accurate and correct information, and why research is critical in developing a book. The Library of Congress has a lesson plan for further information about teaching students about using primary sources (<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/>).
- **Have students create a timeline of Shirley Chisholm's life from the biography and elaborate on the events that happened during the time period.** To help students understand the historical context of Shirley's life, encourage them to research the events in the book by gathering photographs and other primary source documents about the particular events mentioned and creating a timeline. Display both enlarged timelines in the front of the class so that students have easy access to both the dates and events. Students may work in groups in different years (i.e. 1940-1950) and then add their events and findings to the class timeline.
- **Display and enlarge a map of the world for students to identify and locate Barbados and New York City.** Identify and locate Barbados on the map, and then identify and locate New York City. How far did Shirley and her mother and sisters have to travel? What are the climates like in both Barbados and New York City? Why do they differ?

Art & Media

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9, and Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Have students create a drawing, painting, or other visual representation of a cause in their community that they're passionate about, inspired by Shirley Chisholm.** Why did students choose this particular cause? Students can create posters, paintings, or other visual representations of the cause that they're passionate about, and then display their work in small groups or for the whole class to see.
- **Consider having students conduct an illustrator study about Eric Velasquez.** Another Lee & Low titles that Eric illustrated is *As Fast As Words Could Fly* ([leeandlow.com/books/as-fast-as-words-could-fly](https://www.leeandlow.com/books/as-fast-as-words-could-fly)). Visit Eric's website for a complete list of all of his children's books (ericvelasquez.com/). If possible, display the books for students to examine the illustrations, and have students brainstorm how Eric's illustrations are similar across the books, or how they differ per book.
- **As a follow-up activity, have students come up with questions to interview the Eric Velasquez.** What is his process behind creating the illustrations for a children's book? What medium did he choose to create the illustrations? Why? Consider contacting Eric Velasquez for a school visit (ericvelasquez.com/).
- **Encourage students to select the illustration that resonated with them the most from *She Was the First! The Trailblazing Life of Shirley Chisholm*.** Have students write a reflection about the illustration. What stood out to them? How did it make them feel? What did it make them think about?

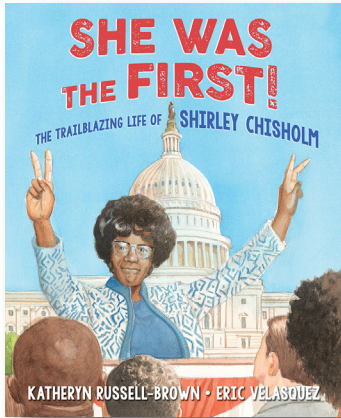
School-Home Connection

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 7 and 9)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strand 4, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7-9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1-3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4-6)

- **Provide students with a list of other titles by Katheryn Russell-Brown.** Have students investigate other titles by Katheryn Russell-Brown at their local school or public library, or with their family through her website (<http://krbrown.net/CHILDRENS.html>). What themes do her books have in common? What topics do the books share? How are the characters similar? How are they different? What do you think Katheryn Russell-Brown's message is for young readers across all three books?
- **Have students investigate different organizations in their community that help people.** What resources are in the community to help people complete their education, get support on learning English and other language-learning skills, or have access to medicine? Students may bring their findings to class and build a map or book of resources to share so that all families have access.



Ordering Information

General Order Information:

leeandlow.com/contact/ordering

Secure Online Ordering:

leeandlow.com/books/she-was-the-first

By Phone: 212-779-4400 ext. 25

By Fax: 212-683-1894

By Mail:

Lee & Low Books, 95 Madison Avenue,
New York, NY 10016

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Katheryn Russell-Brown is a professor of law and director of the Center for the Study of Race and Race Relations at the University of Florida. She was inspired to write this biography by Shirley Chisholm's tenacity, wit, and willingness to fight for the rights of others. Russell-Brown lives in Gainesville, Florida. You can visit her online at krbrown.net/CHILDRENS and [@KRussellBrown](https://twitter.com/KRussellBrown).

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Eric Velasquez has illustrated more than thirty acclaimed picture books. Among the honors he has received are the Pura Belpré Illustrator Award, an NAACP Image Award, and the Coretta Scott King/John Steptoe Award for New Talent. He also teaches book illustration at the Fashion Institute of Technology. As an art school student, Velasquez had the awesome experience of actually meeting Shirley Chisholm. He lives in Hartsdale, New York, and you can find him online at ericvelasquez.com, [@ericvelasquezny](https://www.instagram.com/ericvelasquezny), and [ericvelasquez.com](https://www.facebook.com/ericvelasquez).

REVIEWS

"Important history made beautiful and engaging." —*Kirkus Reviews*, **starred review**

"This succinct biography emphasizes Chisholm's leadership qualities and her slogan and attitude ("Unbought and Unbossed"), which enabled her to break through racial and gender barriers despite discouragement from others." —*Booklist*

"Russell-Brown, with the help of Velasquez's expressive watercolor art, vividly brings Chisholm's experiences to life with storytelling that will appeal to a wide variety of ages—those both aware and unaware of her legacy." —*School Library Journal*

ABOUT LEE & LOW BOOKS

LEE & LOW BOOKS is the largest children's book publisher specializing in diversity and multiculturalism. Our motto, "about everyone, for everyone," is as urgent today as it was when we started in 1991. It is the company's goal to meet the need for stories that children of color can identify with and that all children can enjoy. The right book can foster empathy, dispel stereotypes, prompt discussion about race and ethnicity, and inspire children to imagine not only a world that includes them, but also a world where they are the heroes of their own stories. Discover more at leeandlow.com.