

## Marvelous Mabel: Figure Skating Superstar

written by Crystal Hubbard

illustrated by Alleanna Harris

### About the Book

**Genre:** Biography

**Format:** Hardcover  
40 pages, 10 x 8

**ISBN:** 9781620149560

**Reading Level:** Grade 3

**Interest Level:** Grades K-5

**Guided Reading Level:** P

**Accelerated Reader® Level/Points:**  
N/A

**Lexile™ Measure:** N/A

\*Reading level based on the ATOS Readability Formula

**Themes:** African/African American Interest, Biography/Memoir, Courage, Diversity, Dreams & Aspirations, Identity/Self Esteem/Confidence, New York, Optimism/Enthusiasm, Overcoming Obstacles, People In Motion, Sports, Sports History

**Resources on the web:**

[leeandlow.com/books/marvelous-mabel](http://leeandlow.com/books/marvelous-mabel)

### SYNOPSIS

Mabel Fairbanks was determined to learn to skate. But in the 1930s, many places didn't allow Black skaters on the ice, so Mabel practiced on a homemade rink in her bedroom! There she learned how to perform sharp turns and whizzing spins of her own creation.

Eventually Mabel needed more room to practice and returned to the rink that denied her entrance. This time she refused to take no for an answer. Once on the ice, Mabel proved that she was truly the most marvelous skater anyone had ever seen.

Written and illustrated with warmth and spirit, this is the story of how Mabel Fairbanks's determination and grit led her to become America's first Black skating superstar, whose trailblazing talent continues to ripple through the sport.

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 Crystal Hubbard

Despite her role as America's first Black figure skating star, Mabel Fairbanks never received much coverage by the mainstream press. As a result, the timeline and events in this book, and much of its dialogue (some imagined), were constructed from newspaper and magazine articles from the 1940s and 1950s, and a lengthy transcript of an interview that became public after Mabel's death.

Little information exists about Mabel's parents and early childhood, and much of that is conflicting. Mabel was born on November 14 or 15 in 1915 in Florida. Although Mabel stated her birthplace as the Florida Everglades, other sources report it was Jacksonville, Florida. When interviewed, Mabel gave her ancestry as African, English, and Seminole. Some sources report Mabel was sent to New York by kindly church members who rescued her from an abusive foster home. Others claim she went to New York in the company of brothers and sisters, with the intention of taking a secretarial course.

What is known for sure is that after her marvelous performance at the Gay Blades Ice Casino at Broadway and 52nd Street, Lewis Clark kept his word and allowed Mabel access to the ice. She caught the interest of two notable coaches: Howard Nicholson, who had coached three-time gold medalist Sonja Henie, and nine-time US Ladies Figure Skating champion Maribel Vinson- Owen. Recognizing her incredible natural talent, Nicholson and Vinson-Owen encouraged Mabel to perform in the fast, athletic, compact style she had mastered by skating on her dry-ice rink. Mabel also became adept at spirals, flying waltz jumps, spins, various "camel" spinning combinations, axel jumps, and quick stops.

By 1940, under Vinson-Owen's tutelage, Mabel had passed the tests of compulsory figures required by US Figure Skating (USFS) to compete in its sanctioned events. However, Mabel was not allowed to participate in USFS events, and this kept her out of the national and international competitions that might have given her the chance to compete in the Olympics. When producers of the Ice Capades and Ice Follies wouldn't hire her because they were afraid audiences would walk out if they saw a Black skater, Mabel found jobs with smaller all-white companies that billed her as an "added attraction."

Wally Hunter became Mabel's manager and worked with Lewis Clark to create Mabel's first ice show, which took place at the Gay Blades Ice Casino on March 15, 1942. Her touring shows often included a six-foot-by six-foot rink on which she amazed audiences with her speed and flexibility, and the tightness of her turns and spins. Mabel performed dynamic routines named "The Silver Spinning Top," "Dream Girl," "Dabbles on the Danube," "A Salute to Victory," and the "Swanee Snow Bird," an homage to her Florida origins. On May 5, 1945, The Afro American newspaper reviewed one of Mabel's shows and noted, "Particularly impressive was her 'Speed in Reverse' in which she skates backwards at breathless speed. Experts say she can skate backwards faster than most good skaters can forward."

In the early 1950s, Mabel went to Southern California, hoping to appear in one of Sonja Henie's

productions. Afraid Mabel would upstage her with her unmatched jumps and spins, Henie refused to allow her in the show. The rejection crushed Mabel, but she turned that devastation into inspiration.

Mabel went on to guest star on Frosty Frolics with the show's headliner, Mae Edwards. She continued choreographing and staging successful shows of her own. When Mabel retired from performing, she settled in California and decided to become a coach. She had gained the respect of her colleagues but still faced racism from rink owners and skating organizations. After the Pasadena Figure Skating Club posted a sign stating "Colored trade not solicited," Mabel took law classes at Los Angeles Community College so she could fight the discriminatory practices of skating rinks and clubs.

Mabel then took her business to the Polar Palace in Hollywood. There, she built a roster of students that included celebrities such as Nat King Cole, Tab Hunter, Eartha Kitt, Dean Martin, Sammy Davis Jr., Frank Sinatra, and their children. Mabel taught anyone with a desire to skate, regardless of race or income. She never had children of her own, but she mothered her students. She let them sleep at her home in the Hollywood Hills to make sure they could get to practices. She used her own money to help them acquire costumes and skates, and she coached promising students for free if they couldn't afford lessons.

Her students included the first African Americans admitted to US Figure Skating clubs, Atoy Wilson and Richard Ewell III. Wilson became the first African American skater to win a national competition when he earned the gold medal in the US novice men's championship in 1966. Ewell partnered with Michelle McCladdie to become the first Black skaters to win the National Junior Pairs title in 1972.

Mabel had a special knack for creating Olympians. She paired Tai Babilonia and Randy Gardner as children. They grew up to capture five US pairs titles and the 1979 World Championship. Mabel also played a role in the development of Olympic gold medalists Scott Hamilton and Kristi Yamaguchi; US National champion and Olympic bronze medalist Debi Thomas (the first African American to win a Winter Olympic medal); US National champion and the first openly gay skater Rudy Galindo; and Tiffany Chin, who was the first Asian American to win a singles title at the US Championships.

When skaters and coaches created new moves, the skills were typically named after them. However, the variations of the basic spin first performed by Mabel do not bear her name. Her contribution to figure skating was finally recognized on February 14, 1997, when she became the first African American inducted into the US Figure Skating Hall of Fame, an honor bestowed on her for coaching. Mabel was inducted into the International Women's Sports Hall of Fame in 2001 and the Professional Skaters Association Hall of Fame in 2009.

On September 29, 2001, Mabel passed away of leukemia. Yet her trailblazing talent and work continue to ripple through the sport. In January 2021, the US Figure Skating Association introduced the Mabel Fairbanks Skatingly Yours Fund, established to provide support for the training and development of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) skaters. The fund is named for Mabel's

habit of signing autographs with “Skatingly Yours.” Team USA’s Starr Andrews was the fund’s inaugural recipient. “Mabel Fairbanks’ legacy of inclusiveness continues to be a lesson to us all,” US Figure Skating president Anne Cammett said. “She helped lift and support a generation of Black, Latino, Indigenous, and Asian American skaters whose contributions in the sport continue today. This fund will continue her work while putting a much-needed spotlight on our athletes of color.”

### Selected Bibliography from the Backmatter

For additional resources that informed the writing of *Marvelous Mabel: Figure Skating Superstar*, consult the videos, books and articles listed in the Selected Bibliography from the Backmatter.

### Additional Information and Resources about Homelessness

*Marvelous Mabel: Figure Skating Superstar* discusses homelessness and what Mabel went through as an orphaned child. *The New York Times* offered a roundup of ideas and links for talking with children about homelessness: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/25/us/california-homelessness-kids.html>. While dated, “Unsheltered Lives: Teaching About Homelessness in Grades K-12” offers a wide range of resources, lesson ideas, and portrayals of homeless individuals in different circumstances. See <https://cotsonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Unsheltered-Lives-2010.pdf>.

The National Coalition for the Homeless has a Teaching Resources page that lists guides, manuals for educators and families, videos, and more, all in efforts to dispel the negative stereotypes surrounding homelessness and people experiencing homelessness. The National Coalition for the Homeless has additional articles about advocacy and ways to that you can help others in your community (<https://nationalhomeless.org/references/teaching/>).

### Discussing Homelessness with Students

The purpose of talking about homelessness with students is to enable them to care for others, build compassion, and strengthen character. Explain that being homeless means that a person or family does not have a place to live. They might be homeless for a day or two or for many weeks or months. A homeless person or family might live in a shelter with a lot of other people, or in a car, or have no structure surrounding them. Help students understand that being homeless does not mean that a person is bad or that he or she did something wrong. Homelessness is not an illness, and it isn’t anything someone wants. It is something that happens to some people who are having a very difficult time and is sometimes caused by bad luck paired with larger economic factors. Also point out that homelessness is not necessarily permanent and often people just need some help to get settled again.

### A Note to Educators

Be cognizant of the students in your classroom and aware of students’ living circumstances prior to reading *Marvelous Mabel: Figure Skating Superstar*. Would this text be triggering for any students who have been homeless or are currently experiencing homelessness? Sesame Workshop launched

the Sesame Street in Communities initiative and offers resources for providers and caregivers on discussing homelessness with children (<https://sesamestreetincommunities.org/topics/family-homelessness/>), including specific articles for children experiencing homelessness and for children not experiencing homelessness.

## 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:

- Who are your favorite athletes? Do you have a favorite athlete? What sport do they play? Why do you like this athlete?
- What do you know about figure skating? Do you know any famous figure skaters? Do you like to watch figure skating? Why or why not?
- What are sports or activities that are meaningful to you? How do you practice? What does it mean to work on that sport or activity? How you improve, and what do you do to get better?
- 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?
- Why is important to practice something? Whether you play an instrument, sport, or are learning how to do something, how does practice help you improve?
- What do you think it means to be “marvelous?” What do you imagine when you hear the word marvelous? What are some of the characteristics of a marvelous person? What do they do? How do they make you feel?
- How does someone make a difference? What do you think making a difference means?
- 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, *Marvelous Mabel: Figure Skating Superstar*. 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 Crystal Hubbard's Biography: Read about Crystal Hubbard on the jacket back flap. Encourage students to think about how she comes up with new ideas for her books, and what could have been her inspiration for writing *Marvelous Mabel: Figure Skating Superstar*.
- Read Alleanna Harris's Biography: Read about Alleanna Harris on the jacket back flap as well as on her website <https://www.alleannaharris.com/>. Have students look at her illustrations for other books and compare and contrast her style across books. How are her illustrations among the books similar? How are they different? Does it seem like the subject matter of a book influences the style of her 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 Mabel's childhood influenced her athletic career
- why Mabel became interested in figure skating
- who helped and motivated Mabel during her skating career
- how Mabel demonstrated persistence and resilience despite obstacles throughout her life
- how Mabel exhibited problem solving skills when she was confronted with challenges
- how Mabel left a lasting impact on the figure skating community and the world
- why Mabel is considered a trailblazer in the figure skating world and how her legacy is important today

Encourage students to consider why the author, Crystal Hubbard, would want to share with young people this story about Mabel Fairbanks, the first Black skating superstar.

## 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 words can be found in the glossary at the end of the book, 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

Mabel Fairbanks, Florida, sister-in-law, Central Park, skates, skaters, shopkeeper, employers, Wally Hunter, handyman, Schrafft's Ice Cream Company, supper, Morningside Park, Gay Blades, dry ice, leap, toe

### Academic

orphaned, northbound, poverty, confusion, fidgeted, recognized, frustrated, glided, arcs, spins, colliding, rusted, dull, snugly, scuttered, disappearing, sandwiched, evaporates, flawless, strides, whizzing, savored, delighted, hesitated, scowling, disheartened, blur, marvelous, exhilaration, joyously, impressive

## 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. Where was Mabel born? What happened during her childhood?
2. Where did Mabel go after she was orphaned? Who took her in?
3. What condition did Mabel's brother and sister-in-law have in order for her to stay with them?
4. Who did Mabel see at the fish stand? What did she give to them?

5. How did her sister-in-law react to Mabel's actions at the fish stand? What did Mabel do afterwards?
6. Where did Mabel go after she left her brother's house? Where did she have to live?
7. Who approached Mabel in the park? What did she ask Mabel to do?
8. What job did the woman offer Mabel? Where would Mabel sleep?
9. Where did Mabel like to go with the baby? What did Mabel enjoy watching during their walk?
10. What did Mabel see in a shop window? What did she ask the shopkeeper for?
11. How did the skates fit Mabel? What did she do to make them fit?
12. What happened after the family's baby grew? Who came to take care of Mabel?
13. What was Uncle Wally like? How did he treat Mabel? How did he help her with skating?
14. What happened after Mabel tried skating on ice?
15. What rink did Mabel go to? What happened after she tried to get in? Where did she go after?
16. What did Wally create for Mabel to help her with her skating?
17. How did Wally's rink help Mabel practice?
18. What did Wally give Mabel before she went back to the Gay Blades rink?
19. What happened after Mabel returned to the Gay Blades rink?
20. How did Mabel skate at the Gay Blades rink?
21. What did Mr. Clark tell Mabel after her day skating at the rink?
22. How did Mabel continue her skating career? How did she open the door for the next generation of Black figure skaters?

### 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 *Marvelous Mabel: Figure Skating Superstar* mean to you after reading the book? Why do you think the author chose this particular title?
2. How did Mabel use persistence and determination to achieve her goals? What lessons did Mabel learn along the way that influenced both her personal and professional life?
3. Read the dedications on the inside of the book. Why do you think Crystal Hubbard and Alleanna chose these dedications? Why do you think they chose to tell this story about Mabel Fairbanks?
4. How did Mabel's style as a figure skater reflect her personality? How did the way that she skated reflect Mabel's actions in real life?
5. What were some of the ways that Mabel practiced figure skating? How did she use her ingenuity to never give up her figure skating dream? Why is it important to practice



something?

6. How was Uncle Wally influential in Mabel's life and career? How did Uncle Wally play a significant role in her development as both a well-rounded person and incredible figure skater? What were some of the ways that he helped Mabel, both in her personal and figure skating lives?
7. In what ways did Mabel overcome the many different obstacles in her life, starting at an early age? What were the different techniques and ways that Mabel overcame barriers that she often faced?
8. How did Mabel confront adversity? What were the techniques that she used to achieve her dream of skating? How is Mabel an inspiring and influential person to this day?
9. How would you describe Mabel Fairbanks 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 Mabel and her life and legacy?
10. 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 Mabel Fairbank's legacy as the first Black skating superstar. What is your takeaway from this book? What would you tell a friend about this book?
2. What do you think is Crystal Hubbard's message to the reader? Think about possible motivations behind Crystal Hubbard'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 Mabel'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 *Marvelous Mabel: Figure Skating Superstar*? 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 *Marvelous Mabel: Figure Skating Superstar*, what does the idea of making a difference mean to you? Why?
7. What does resilience mean to you after reading this book? How did Mabel's passion for

skating fuel her success? Why is resilience important? How do you demonstrate resilience in your own life?

8. How has a teacher or other person close to you impacted your life? Uncle Wally inspired Mabel to persevere in her skating career and created an ice rink for her. 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 Mabel Fairbanks an essential person to learn about? How did Mabel lead the way for women and people of color in sports?

### 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 between 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: 1) Review the illustrations in order and have students summarize what is happening on each page, first orally, then in writing. 2) 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 how Mabel's story inspired them and how she demonstrated her dedication to skating.
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. Mabel Fairbanks experienced racism and prejudice 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. Mabel experienced adversity during her life—from being an orphan at a young age, to having to work for a family, to being denied access to figure skating at a local rink. How does Mabel demonstrate resilience in *Marvelous Mabel: Figure Skating Superstar*? What are the different strategies that she uses when she's feeling defeated? How does she use courage to achieve her goals?
3. Which illustration in *Marvelous Mabel: Figure Skating Superstar* best shows an emotion? Explain which emotion you think it shows. How does the image portray that emotion?
4. What gives Mabel confidence when she skates? How did she develop a positive self-esteem, even though she encountered obstacles and racism along the way?
5. Discuss how this story might change students' perspectives on homelessness. How might they change their reactions to someone experiencing homelessness or feel encouraged by Mabel's experiences?
6. 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 *Marvelous Mabel: Figure Skating Superstar*.

## 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)

- **Conduct a Black women in sports mentor text study, featuring Crystal Hubbard's picture books *Marvelous Mabel: Figure Skating Superstar* and *Catching the Moon: The Story of a Young Girl's Baseball Dream*** (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/catching-the-moon>). Analyze the differences and similarities among Mabel Fairbanks and Marcelina Lyle in both 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 discrimination in their sports? Why do students think Crystal Hubbard decided to write a book about these powerful Black female athletes? How are Marcelina Lyle and Mabel Fairbanks 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 *Marvelous Mabel: Figure Skating Superstar* along with Stacey Abrams: *Lift Every Voice*** ([www.leeandlow.com/books/stacey-abrams](http://www.leeandlow.com/books/stacey-abrams)), ***She Was the First! The Trailblazing Life of Shirley Chisholm*** ([www.leeandlow.com/books/she-was-the-first](http://www.leeandlow.com/books/she-was-the-first)) **along with *Seeds of Change*** ([leeandlow.com/books/seeds-of-change](http://leeandlow.com/books/seeds-of-change)), ***Midnight Teacher: Lilly Ann Granderson and Her Secret School*** ([www.leeandlow.com/books/midnight-teacher](http://www.leeandlow.com/books/midnight-teacher)), **and *In Her Hands: The Story of Sculptor Augusta Savage*** ([www.leeandlow.com/books/in-her-hands](http://www.leeandlow.com/books/in-her-hands)) **to show students powerful Black women in history.** Use a graphic organizer to compare Mabel Fairbanks, Stacey Abrams, Shirley Chisholm, Wangari Maathai, Lilly Ann Granderson, and Augusta Savage. How do these women inspire you to follow your passions and fight for what you believe in? Have students write a reaction after the graphic organizer exercise about these important Black women in history to address how and why they changed the world. Why is it important to learn about these critical historical figures?
- **Read other books that portray people experiencing homelessness, for instance pairing *Marvelous Mabel: Figure Skating Superstar* with *A Shelter in Our Car*** ([leeandlow.com/books/a-shelter-in-our-car](http://leeandlow.com/books/a-shelter-in-our-car)). Talk about how each book presents different details and circumstances about homelessness, and the importance of considering different perspectives and situations when learning about a social issue. Refer to the Background section of this guide for more information and resources about teaching homelessness in the classroom.

- **Conduct a Crystal Hubbard author study featuring her titles from Lee & Low, including *Marvelous Mabel: Figure Skating Superstar*, *Catching the Moon: The Story of a Young Girl's Baseball Dream* ([leeandlow.com/books/catching-the-moon](https://leeandlow.com/books/catching-the-moon)), *The Last Black King of the Kentucky Derby* ([leeandlow.com/books/the-last-black-king-of-the-kentucky-derby](https://leeandlow.com/books/the-last-black-king-of-the-kentucky-derby)), and *Game, Set, Match Champion Arthur Ashe* ([leeandlow.com/books/game-set-match-champion-arthur-ashe](https://leeandlow.com/books/game-set-match-champion-arthur-ashe)).** Compare the different themes that each of the texts present. What historical figure and athlete is featured in each book? What is the athlete known for? Why do you think Crystal Hubbard selected these Black historical athletes to write about? Display a chart in front of students with four different columns so that students can brainstorm and organize their ideas. Then, students can write their reactions in a comparative essay and discuss what they learned from the books and how these historical Black athletes paved the way in their sport and what kind of legacy they have today.
- **Afterwards, have students come up with a list of questions to ask author Crystal Hubbard.** 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 *Marvelous Mabel: Figure Skating Superstar*? What about her other books? Why does she like to write about famous athletes? How are sports important to her? Consider contacting Crystal Hubbard and inviting her to your school, library, or other relevant setting for an author visit.
- **Write a critical essay about how Mabel Fairbanks paved the way for Black women and women of color in figure skating, using evidence from the texts and additional articles and resources.** *The Los Angeles Times* "The Ice Mother Blazed the Skating Trail for Others" (<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1998-feb-19-ls-20524-story.html>) provides additional information about Mabel Fairbanks and how she revolutionized the figure skating world, particularly for BIPOC people. Please note that the N word is used in this article. Have students refer to the articles, books and resources in the Bibliography in the back of *Marvelous Mabel: Figure Skating Superstar* for further research and to inform their writing. What racism and discrimination did Mabel Fairbanks face in her life? What was she denied as a figure skater? How did she overcome these obstacles and continue to skate? How is she an inspirational figure today?
- **Students can write a piece about a hobby, such as a dance or a sport, that's meaningful to them.** Do students have a hobby, such as a sport or another activity, that their family members or friends do that is also important to them? Did they ever struggle with it in the beginning, or feel embarrassed about it? Students can write a small moment piece or another reflection on their hobby, how it makes them feel, how they practice, and why it's meaningful to them. If possible, students can show off the hobby to the class or bring in an artifact that demonstrates their hobby to the class.
- **Consider using *Marvelous Mabel: Figure Skating Superstar* as an anchor text to teach students about biography writing.** ReadWriteThink's "Writer's Workshop: The Biographical Sketch" 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://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/writers-workshop-biographical-sketch>). Afterwards, have students select a picture book

biography in their classroom and create their own book about that historical figure. Have students conduct a research study about their own historical figure from a picture book of their choosing to simulate the process behind *Marvelous Mabel: Figure Skating Superstar*. Have students identify the different features in *Marvelous Mabel: Figure Skating Superstar* that would help to inform their own book about their historical figure. What kinds of information do they need to research? How should they present it in the book? What images, diagrams, or photographs would be helpful to their reader?

- **Have students think about expository nonfiction versus narrative nonfiction.** How was reading *Marvelous Mabel: Figure Skating Superstar* different from reading a newspaper article about Mabel? Have students read the article, "I've Cried Enough for All Of Us: The Mabel Fairbanks Story" (<http://skateguard1.blogspot.com/2015/03/ive-cried-enough-for-all-of-us-mabel.html>). Have students create a Venn Diagram with the headings, "Narrative Nonfiction: *Marvelous Mabel*" and "Expository Nonfiction: 'I've Cried Enough for All Of Us: The Mabel Fairbanks Story.'" Students can compare the different formats of the texts and the information they learn in both. What did they learn from both texts? What was it like to take in information from a picture book about Mabel Fairbanks versus a newspaper article about her?
- **Have students write an essay or reaction to Mabel Fairbanks's quote at the end of the book: "When I began skating, I was the only one out there fighting, and I had to fight that much harder. If I had been allowed to go to the Olympics or Ice Capades like I wanted to then, I may not have helped other Blacks like I did and coached such wonderful skaters. And I think all that has been just as important and meaningful."** What do students think of when they read Mabel's statements? Why do they think Mabel said that she wouldn't have helped other Black figure skaters if she was allowed to go to the Olympics? How do they think her statements applies to Black female figure skaters today? How do Mabel's statements inspire them to think about Black women in figure skating and the future of diversity in the sport?
- **Have students write an essay or reaction to the Afterword from *Marvelous Mabel: Figure Skating Superstar*.** Afterwards, have students reflect on the following guiding questions in an essay: What did they learn from this section after reading *Marvelous Mabel: Figure Skating Superstar*? What additional information did they learn that was new about Mabel Fairbanks? How did this affect what they thought about the book? Why do you think author Crystal Hubbard decided to include this Afterword featuring more details about Mabel Fairbanks?

### Social Studies

(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 conduct a research project on Black female athletes.** Students can focus on the following questions: What sport does this athlete play? What is her platform and what issues does she care about? How did she become a professional athlete? What obstacles did she have to overcome to become a professional athlete? How has she made a difference

in her sport? Resources online include Refinery29's "11 Amazing Black Women Athletes You Should Know About" (<https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/black-female-athletes-women-in-sports>), *Oprah Magazine's* "25 Famous Black Athletes That've Made History" (<https://www.oprahdaily.com/entertainment/g37027000/famous-black-athletes/>), and *Women's Health* "19 Inspirational Black Female Athletes Who Made (And are Continuing to Make) History" (<https://www.womenshealthmag.com/uk/fitness/running/g34218951/inspiring-black-female-athletes/>). HerCampus "The Incredible Black Women of the Figure Skating World" also provides more information about professional Black figure skaters (<https://www.hercampus.com/school/waterloo/incredible-black-women-figure-skating-world/>). Students may share their athlete in a visual presentation of their choosing, using reputable resources from books and websites.

- **Have students research obstacles to women, such as sexism, in athletics today.** What obstacles prevent women in the United States from becoming professional athletes? What about in other countries? Students can research online from different articles, such as *The New York Times's* "8 Times Women in Sports Fought for Equality" (<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/08/sports/women-sports-equality.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 athletics nationally and globally.
- **Conduct a research study on the racism against Black figure skaters and the history of exclusion in the sport.** Mabel Fairbanks fought against racism and discrimination in figure skating throughout her life, and figure skaters are facing the same issues today. Have students consult the following articles from NBC News (<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/-dont-look-black-figure-skaters-face-barriers-entry-young-age-rcna15816>), *The New York Times* (<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/25/sports/figure-skating-worlds.html>), Today (<https://www.today.com/news/sports/black-figure-skater-surya-bonaly-started-quad-craze-30-years-ago-rcna16766>), and PBS (<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/at-the-olympics-where-are-the-black-figure-skaters>). What did students learn about racism against Black figure skaters? What are some of the racism and discrimination that these Black figure skaters face? What are they doing to combat the racism and discrimination in their sport? How are Black figure skaters speaking out? Students can put together their findings in a critical essay and relate what they learned to *Marvelous Mabel: Figure Skating Superstar*, and how Mabel was fighting for these issues during her lifetime.
- **Have students read about different organizations working to add more diversity to the world of figure skating.** *The New York Times* article, "When I Skate it just Feels Free" is about the organization Figure Skating in Harlem (<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/05/style/figure-skating-harlem-women-of-color.html>) (<https://www.figureskatinginharlem.org/>). The Detroit Dream Skating Academy is the first Black women-owned figure skating club in Detroit and was featured on Good Morning America (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gqg85MrGbtw>) (<https://dreamdetroit skate.com/>). Mariyah Gerber, professional figure skater, co-founded the Figure Skating Diversity and Inclusion Alliance (<https://www.si.com/olympics/2022/08/22/mariyah-gerber-figure-skating-diversity-efforts-100-influential-black-women>) (<https://www.fsdia.org/>). Joel Savalry founded Diversify Ice in Washington D.C. to inspire more Black and Brown athletes to pursue figure skating

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ieG5-iAqjPc>) (<https://diversifyice.org/>). Mabel Fairbanks also has a scholarship, the Mabel Fairbanks Skatingly Yours Fund, to financially assist and support the training and development of BIPOC figure skaters (<https://www.usfigureskating.org/support/donate/mabel-fairbanks-skatingly-yours-fund>). How are these organizations bringing diversity to the traditionally white world of figure skating? How are they important for young people to build confidence? Why is it critical to bring figure skating to more people of color? What are the goals of these organizations? Why is it important to provide more access to figure skating, and for young people to see themselves in the athletes from their sport? Have students research about figure skating opportunities in their communities.

- **Encourage students to select a resource from the “Author’s Sources” section at the back of *Marvelous Mabel: Figure Skating Superstar*.** 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 Mabel Fairbanks’s life from the biography and elaborate on the events that happened during the time period.** To help students understand the historical context of Mabel’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. 1930-1940) and then add their events and findings to the class timeline.

### 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)

- **Review the photographs from Flo Ngala’s exhibit, “Harlem Ice: The Selects Folder”** ([teenvogue.com/gallery/black-female-ice-skater](https://www.teenvogue.com/gallery/black-female-ice-skater)) ([https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/14EXufu9htdMLtRZ1AapQBK0t8i5-h2ydgKTYTH3BTbl/edit#slide=id.g567bf4c577\\_0\\_149](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/14EXufu9htdMLtRZ1AapQBK0t8i5-h2ydgKTYTH3BTbl/edit#slide=id.g567bf4c577_0_149)). Nigerian Cameroonian New York-based photographer and former figure skater Flo Ngala captured photographs of Black figure skaters participating in the Figure Skating in Harlem programming. Students can reflect on the following questions as they examine the photographs: what kinds of emotions do they see on the figure skaters’ faces? What do they notice about the style of photography? How do they notice the figure skaters and how they move their bodies as they skate? How do they think these figure skaters feel when they’re out on the ice? Students can reflect on what it was like to look at these photographs with a partner or small group.



- **Encourage students to watch the ABC news video, “Mabel Fairbanks and Breaking the Color Barrier in Figure Skating”** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k-kW4bSdx2o>). What did students learn about Mabel Fairbanks from watching this video? How did Mabel's former figure skating students speak about her? How was Mabel Fairbanks instrumental in the field of figure skating? How did she pave the way for the future of Black figure skaters in the United States? Students can write a reflection essay about what it was like to watch this video in conjunction with *Marvelous Mabel: Figure Skating Superstar*.
- **Have students create a drawing, painting, or other visual representation of a sport or hobby that they care about.** Why did students choose this sport or hobby? Students can create posters, paintings, or other visual representations of sport or hobby 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 Alleanna Harris. Visit Alleanna's website for a complete list of all her children's books** (<https://www.alleannaharris.com/>). If possible, display the books for students to examine the illustrations, and have students brainstorm how Alleanna'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 Alleanna Harris.** What is her process behind creating the illustrations for a children's book? What medium did she choose to create the illustrations? Why? How did she capture Mabel's figure skating techniques in her illustrations? Consider contacting Alleanna Harris for a school visit (<https://www.alleannaharris.com/>).
- **Encourage students to select the illustration that resonated with them the most from *Marvelous Mabel: Figure Skating Superstar*.** 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?
- **Analyze Mabel's quote, “That's not skating, that's dancing”** (<https://dancespirit.com/mabel-fairbanks-black-skater/>). What do you think Mabel meant by this? How is figure skating like dancing? Why is it important to incorporate dance techniques into figure skating? What kinds of dance moves or techniques do you think is important when figure skating? Have students look at photographs of Mabel Fairbanks and other figure skating videos from the time period to see how different elements of dance were incorporated in Mabel's figure skating.
- **Write and design a commemorative plaque for Mabel Fairbanks.** What would you want to say about Mabel Fairbanks in a paragraph? What were the most important parts of her life, and what would you want to share with visitors? What was Mabel passionate about, and what is her legacy? Why should people learn about Mabel Fairbanks? Students can create artwork for their plaque to display around the classroom.
- **Ask students to create portraits of people who are their personal role models in their sport or hobby they enjoy through drawing, collage, or photograph.** In writing, students should describe what actions and qualities they admire about this person.

How do they relate to this person? What do they admire about the way that they play their sport or create their art? Why is it important for students to connect with people they admire in their sport or art?

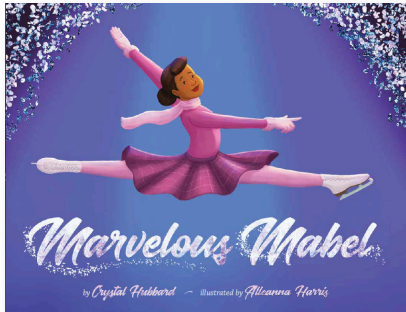
### School-Home Connection

(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 Crystal Hubbard.** Have students investigate other titles by Crystal Hubbard at their local school or public library. 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 Crystal Hubbard's message is for young readers across all three books?
- **Encourage families and children to learn more about figure skating.** If families don't have access to an ice rink, families and children can watch figure skating videos from the Olympics or other professional events. Who are their favorite figure skaters? Did they have a favorite Olympic figure skater? Why? Why do they like to watch and/or figure skate? Families can research public ice rinks, if available, in their area.
- **If accessible, have students and families research other titles featuring historical BIPOC (Black, Indigenous & People of Color) female athletes.** How did they shape history? How did they react to and handle the situation when they were faced with obstacles? How did they change their sport and make an impact on the world? Consult the New York Public Library's list of recommendations (<https://www.nypl.org/blog/2021/01/20/books-featuring-black-athletes>) and Lee & Low's book list featuring girls and women in sports (<https://blog.leeandlow.com/2018/02/07/book-list-girls-and-women-in-sports/>).




## Ordering Information


### General Order Information:

[leeandlow.com/contact/ordering](https://leeandlow.com/contact/ordering)

### Secure Online Ordering:

[leeandlow.com/books/marvelous-mabel](https://leeandlow.com/books/marvelous-mabel)

 **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

**Crystal Hubbard** is a full-time writer and former sports journalist. Her Lee & Low titles *The Last Black King of the Kentucky Derby*, *Catching the Moon: The Story of a Young Girl's Baseball Dreams*, and *Game, Set, Match, Champion Arthur Ashe* have been included on Bank Street College's Best Children's Books of the Year and ALA's Amelia Bloomer Project lists, among other honors. Hubbard lives in Missouri with her family. You can find her on Twitter at @XstalBooks.

## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

**Alleanna Harris** is a children's book illustrator and artist. As a kid, she would doodle on notebooks in school and on programs in church. She graduated with honors from the University of the Arts with a BFA in animation, and it was during this time she realized her love for illustration. Harris finds inspiration in the beauty of everyday things. She lives in New Jersey. Find out more about her at [alleannaharris.com](https://alleannaharris.com).

## REVIEWS

"A long-overdue spotlight on a trailblazing athlete... An account of a sports pioneer that should be widely read and shared." —*Kirkus Reviews*

"Fans of the Winter Olympics, strong female characters, and underdog stories will flock to this title." —*Booklist*

"Perseverance lies at the center of this affecting biography of Mabel Fairbanks (1915–2001), 'America's first Black figure skating star.'" —*Publishers Weekly*

"VERDICT Every twist and turn is captured and the movement is dynamic in this book; a pleasure to read and to share. Highly recommended for early nonfiction collections." —*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](https://leeandlow.com).