

**Katie Potter:**

Hi, everybody! Welcome to our webinar today The Power of Connection, Community and Civics in Children's Books. I am Katie Potter, the Senior Literacy Manager at Lee & Low, and I will be moderating this wonderful conversation today. So, we are very grateful to be joined today by our by our talented and award-winning authors, Katheryn Russell Brown, Aixa Pérez-Prado, and Michael Genhart, and we'll be hearing from them in just a little bit. But before we begin as I mentioned, my name is Katie Potter. My pronouns are she her and hers. My physical description is, I am a white woman with long, curly brown hair, and I'm wearing a white button-down shirt and white sweater.

I wanted to go over a few housekeeping announcements before we dive into the webinar. You can enable closed captioning on your screen. In the Zoom Meeting Controls Toolbar, click the show captions icon. There is a link to Zoom support article "How to view captioning and choose your language" that we'll drop in the chat. And if you choose to enable subtitles, you can adjust the size of the captions at any time by selecting Subtitle Settings. And again, that link will also be dropped in the chat about how to do that if you need support. So, the audience today is in Listen Only Mode, but we certainly welcome any questions that you have. The Q&A button is in the toolbar at the bottom of your screen, and you can type your questions into the box that appears at any point during the webinar. But we will get to our questions and answer section at the very end, so our authors will answer the questions at the very end with our last 10 min.

So live attendees of today's webinar will be automatically entered into a sweepstakes for a chance to win a set of the incredible picture book biographies featured today: *She Was the First: The Trailblazing Life of Shirley Chisholm* by Katheryn Russell-Brown, and illustrated by Eric Velasquez; *Mercedes Sosa: Voice of the People* written and illustrated by Aixa Pérez-Prado; and *Edie for Equality: Edie Windsor Stands Up for Love* by Michael Genhart, and illustrated by Cheryl Tuesday. So, 5 lucky winners will be selected at random, and thank you all for tuning in. And last thing, this webinar is being recorded. So, following the showcase, all registrants, and we encourage everyone to sign up and register for the webinar, because even if you have to leave early, you'll still receive a link to view the recording with all, and also with all of the resources included in that email, as well. And the video will have the captions burnt on. And the video will also be posted to our Lee and Low Youtube Channel and our Share My Lesson account.

So now on to the exciting stuff. So, first, our authors will all introduce themselves, give a quick bio and very short synopsis of their book, and then we will dive into some questions about the books, including their inspiration. And then the causes that all of the incredible historical figures fought for in their different books. And then, lastly, the authors are going to

talk about some wonderful resources that you all can consult. And then we'll conclude with our question and answer at the end. So, without further ado, Aixa, can you take it away?

**Aixa Pérez-Prado:**

Sure. Hi! My name is Aixa Pérez-Prado. I am a Latina. I'm wearing a black turtleneck, swirly rainbow earrings, and I'm happy to be here today. I am the author of Mercedes Sosa: Voice of the People. Like Mercedes, I am originally from Argentina. And a little bit about the book and the person, Mercedes Sosa was a very well-known singer from Argentina, referred to as "the voice of the people" and "the voice of Latin America," or "the mother of Latin America" because of her constant singing and voice lending to people to talk about issues of oppression, of social justice, of belonging. She was truly the voice for those who were voiceless in Argentina, especially at the time of state-sponsored terrorism, otherwise known as the Dirty War. So, this book is a picture book biography about her life, how she became interested in the topics that she sang about, and what happened in the course of singing out and not having everybody, especially the government, agree with her message. And so, yeah, that's a little bit about Mercedes Sosa.

**Katie Potter:**

Okay, go ahead Katheryn.

**Katheryn Russell-Brown:**

Yes, good day, everyone. My name is Katheryn Russell-Brown, and my pronouns are she her hers. Today I'm wearing a black and white cowl-neck wool sweater. I am a Black woman, a dark brown, Black woman, and I have black hair, and it is in locks. And with regard to the story, She Was the First: The Trailblazing Life of Shirley Chisholm. I was excited to write about Chisholm because I remember when she first ran for President. I was in grade school. I was in 6th grade, and so I have always had Shirley Chisholm in mind when I think about politics. And so, I wanted to tell her story, and the more I learned about it, the more I wanted to share her story. And it's really a story about finding a girl to a woman finding her voice, and her voice became a political voice and a political force. And so that's really what the story is about. It's about her growing, her learning, and her desire to help people.

**Katie Potter:**

And Michael.

**Michael Genhart:**

Hello, everyone! My pronouns are he and him. I am of mixed ethnicity. My mother is Mexican American, and my father is Swiss American. I have salt and pepper hair, and I'm

wearing an earring in my left ear of a hummingbird. I've got a lavender sweater over a striped lavender shirt. And I'm in my San Francisco office with a painting in the background called Rainmaker, which I love. I'm happy to be in this book company with Aixa and Katheryn, for sure, and I thank Lee & Low for this invite. I'm a clinical psychologist in San Francisco by day, and by night I write books for children. Edie for Equality: Edie Windsor, Edie Windsor Stands Up for Love is my 13<sup>th</sup> picture book and my first picture book biography. This is the story about a great injustice and how Edie Windsor, in her eighties, boldly stood up for what was right and went up against the highest court in the country. Her case challenged section 3 of the Defense of Marriage Act, and which said that marriage is only between a man and a woman. She was victorious. And what she got from that is equal protection under the law. In other words, the US Government had to recognize now gay and lesbian marriages in any states where they were already illegal. So, that's the book. And I look forward to our discussion.

**Katie Potter:**

Thank you so much, everybody. So, our first part of the webinar today is we're going to talk about how all of our wonderful authors were inspired to write about these people. So, I'd love for you all to answer the following questions: You know, why did you choose this person to write about? What were some of the most important takeaways about writing your book? What was challenging, and what was rewarding? And lastly, all the historical figures here are women, and what do you see as the opportunity in biographies on these female figures? So, Katheryn is going to first start us off. Thanks so much, Katheryn.

**Katheryn Russell-Brown:**

Okay, so I gave you a little bit of a peek inside my motivation to write the story of Shirley Chisholm, because I had a, you know, I guess, what is it? A direct connection, uh a self a person connection to Shirley Chisholm. When I was a young person, and actually around the same age as the people, I would imagine, are reading this story now. And so, in terms of of you know, the the selection of the choice, I wanted a story that would be inspirational, and one that young people could identify with. So that they could see themselves in Shirley, and even if they didn't see anything necessarily exactly the same as Shirley, that they could have a feeling for her life and her circumstances the same way that I did. And so that was what was sort of underlying the goals of of writing the book and the motivation for the book. And so, in terms of community, in terms of Shirley Chisholm's approach to to just life in general, she was very concerned about not just having her voice heard, not just being treated fairly, but that communities of people should be treated well, that people should not be treated differently because they are poor or because they hold a powerful office. And she was able to see that difference in treatment because she was as a young person

her family did not have a lot of money, her family, her parents in particular and her mother, you know, did you know, did labor, you know, worked, excuse me, as a domestic. And so, she saw how they were treated. She saw how other people with more resources and income were treated, and she was determined that she would come up with a platform, come up with a program that would allow for the unheard to be heard and the poor to be to be given a voice.

**Katie Potter:**

Thank you so much, Katheryn. And Aixa, we'd love to hear about your inspiration for writing Mercedes Sosa.

**Aixa Pérez-Prado**

Yeah. So, as I said, I'm also from Argentina like Mercedes. And I was very inspired to write about another Argentinian woman and one who was so strong and powerful in using her voice to, just like Shirley Chisholm, stand up for those who were had less than she did, or whose voices weren't being heard. So, it's funny. I think these two women were quite different, but quite similar at the same time, in wanting to speak up for people who are oppressed, in wanting to have fairness and justice and equality for all people. So I was very inspired by her as a child. I grew up listening to her music. My mother was a big Mercedes Sosa fan, as most Argentinians are. And I felt that her music had very shared values with my own for social justice, peace, human rights. And maybe, most importantly, I also had to leave my country. Mercedes had to leave Argentina because of the state-sponsored terrorism and threats to her life. So, she was in exile for a period of time. And, though that was not my case—my parents just decided I should immigrate—I also really longed for my country, and I also felt a true love and calling from my country and for my people. And Mercedes was very vocal about her love for Argentina and for all of Latin America, and that really drew me to write about her.

**Katie Potter:**

Thank you so much, Aixa, and I wanted to also mention that you created the art also, which is super important to know how incredible that is! And so, Michael, what was your...

**Michael Genhart:**

And it and it and it's beautiful artwork.

**Katie Potter:**

Yes, it's exquisite. And, Michael, tell us a little bit about why you chose to write about Edie.

**Michael Genhart:**

So, Edie was really an ordinary person who did something extraordinary, and I love that. And I love telling untold stories and lesser-known stories. So that was part of the inspiration. And she made a huge contribution to the queer community and changed history in the United States. So, I really think kids need to know about queer history and its history makers. Another big piece of the inspiration: she, her case, also paved the way two years later in 2015 for Obergefell which is a case that went before the Supreme Court and made same-sex marriage legal in this country. And Obergefell himself would say, "there would have been no case had it not been for Edie Windsor." Right? So, her story needed to be told. In terms of takeaways, I don't know if you want us to address those questions at this point now that you asked about. The book opens up with a quote from President Obama. "America's long journey towards equality has been guided by countless small acts of persistence and fueled by the stubborn willingness of quiet heroes to speak out for what's right. Few were as small in stature as Edie Windsor, and few made as big a difference to America." I use this quote because it captures what I wanted to share with children, that one voice really can make a difference, and that small acts of courage and bravery matter, and that it's important to fight for and correct injustices and unfairnesses when you, when you see them. Now more than ever, right? I think we appreciate that. What was challenging to write the story? I think it's when you do a biography, it's hard to know, it's hard to decide what story I want to tell, what part of someone's life. And so, you have to pick a theme. And so, I chose the theme of unfairness and injustice because I think kids really relate to that. They can sense what's unfair and the importance of righting a wrong. But you also have to figure out how to enter the story. You know what is a child going to relate to? Since it's a book for children. And, thankfully, Edie's favorite subjects in school, when she was a kid, were math and civics. And so, I got to tell her story, using equal unequal right fairness, unfairness, because of the subjects that she liked in school. In terms of what was rewarding, the whole project was rewarding. I loved doing the research about Edie and Thea. It's a love story at its heart, right? It was love that fueled Edie's pursuit of justice. And, personally, as a gay man, Edie's fight and victory helped me and so many others feel like our relationships were legitimate, as well, even more legitimate. Yeah. I think all of these women, by the way, are inspirational, and to your last question serve as mentors to children for young girls that certainly serve as mirrors and, for boys, windows. Right? So. And there are so many other books like this that are really helpful to children in that regard. And get right.

**Katie Potter:**

And getting the getting these books into the hands of young people is is critical.

**Michael Genhart:**

Yeah.

**Katheryn Russell-Brown:**

Can I just add one more thing just to...

**Katie Potter:**

Of course!

**Katheryn Russell-Brown:**

What's been said about mentorship? And I just want to say, I think with each of the stories one thing that's particularly poignant to me is the link between what these people did, what these women did, and that there is some connectivity to today. So, it's not just as if they did these things in the past, and we're just looking at history. The history has current ramifications as well. So, when I think about Shirley Chisholm, she was a mentor to Congresswoman Barbara Lee in California. She also was a mentor to former Vice President Kamala Harris. So, the work that these women were doing has impacts today. So I just wanted to add that as well.

**Katie Potter:**

Thank you so much, Katheryn. No, absolutely. All of their all of their work is still felt with us. They're still with us today. So, thank you for sharing that.

So, our next portion. It's a nice segue because we're now going to talk about exactly what these women did to raise awareness, push for change, and build community. And I'll be asking you all specific questions related to the historical figure featured in your book. So first we're going to start with Aixa. And you know what can, Mercedes, I know you talked a little bit about it when you talked about the inspiration behind writing this book, but what can Mercedes teach our kids today about her causes? How did she use her platform to speak out against all of the injustices in her country?

**Aixa Pérez-Prado:**

So, Mercedes was a woman of mixed, indigenous, and European heritage. And she really was able to use her voice to bring up and show all people what kinds of oppressive systems that indigenous people were facing in Argentina and across Latin America, as well as people of lower socio and economic means, such as her own family. And Mercedes, I think, maybe, in contrast to the other people here women represented in these books was an artist. She was very shy. She did not want to be involved with politics. She often said, "That's not for me." But she sang about it and her she only sang songs that she really felt deeply connected to her own values, and were inspirational and uplifting, and really

brought up the things that people everyday people were going through. So, she was. She was not the kind of person who would probably protest in a march, or the kind of person who might try to change a law she used. All her activism was purely through the arts. And I think that that's a powerful message for kids because it shows you, I think, that even if you are a person of lower means than than many, or who you don't have, perhaps the personality to be in front of people protesting, you can protest, and you can show what you believe in, and you can use your voice in different ways. It can be through music. It can be through art. It can be through theater. It can even be through sports, you know, and through games, and bringing people together in ways that sort of are shared by all. Everybody wants to feel inspired. Everybody wants to be in community. And Mercedes was able, with her very powerful and beautiful voice, to give a message that was really well loved and received by people who felt that they didn't have a voice.

**Katie Potter:**

Thank you so much, Aixa. You wouldn't know that I just learned so much about Mercedes that she was that she was shy. But using that, I mean, her voice is just so profound. And thank you for sharing that about the arts because I think a lot of educators and participants in our webinar today will really relate to that and bring that back with them into their their own practices. So next up, Michael, let's hear about what messages do you think Edie would send to our youth in this pivotal moment today? What can Edie teach us about standing up for what's right?

**Michael Genhart:**

I wanted to add, like Mercedes, Edie was a very shy girl, who never liked to break the rules. And she lived, you know, chunks of her young life in hiding as a lesbian because of the time. And I say that because what she ultimately did was so bold, coming from a place of not bold when she was when she was a kid. So, I think that's inspiring for kids, especially more introverted kids. You know, using different platforms to, you know, make a difference. Edie and Thea lived near Stonewall. And so, when Stonewall Stonewall happened, they of course saw what was occurring. And it that inspired them to get involved more in the queer community. And they got an idea of what it was going to take to make a difference or in terms of queer rights going forward. So, they they got very involved in the in various causes over the years. Edie also needed to secure legal help for her her cause, and it was during a time when many attorneys turned her down because they told her that it was not the right time for queer rights to go forward. She didn't listen, and thankfully, Roberta Kaplan—who you may recognize in the news lately, because she defended E. Jean Carroll against Trump and won—said yes to Edie, and as we know, they were triumphant. They used the media a lot, interviews and and newspaper reporting to to garner public awareness to support their

case against injustice. In terms of your question, though, about what would Edie share with young kids today? I think she would say something along the lines of "You you may not see the the fruits of your labor, but know what you're doing is important, and that it really is planting the seeds for for change ultimately. And that it really is important to stand up for what is right, even if you were shy as a younger person. And one voice can make a difference. And that one voice, by the way, over time, becomes a collective part of a collective. Other voices chime in. But also, to know that it's going to require persistence and patience and the ability to face adversity, right? Because there are, you know, battles along the way in terms of fights for for justice." She might also say, "Fight, fight for the world you want to live in," right? And that standing up for what's right matters because if we don't, we know nothing changes. Right, and that being quiet about something can be misinterpreted as, you know, a silent agreement, right? Or that that cause is not worth fighting for, right? I think she would also agree with John Lewis. "Get into good trouble." I think she would share that.

**Katie Potter:**

I love that, Michael, because that certainly applies to Shirley. Who we'll hear about next, Katheryn.

**Katheryn Russell-Brown:**

Yes.

**Katie Potter:**

Yeah, right. And Shirley also embodies all of the principles that Edie and Mercedes stood for. But to round out this section of the webinar. Let's talk about what Shirley can teach us about community. How did Shirley Shirley was so much about helping others.

**Katheryn Russell-Brown:**

Yeah.

**Katie Potter:**

You know. How how did Shirley uplift the groups that she cared about.

**Katheryn Russell-Brown:**

Yeah.

**Katie Potter:**

How can we impart those lessons on our young people?



**Katheryn Russell-Brown:**

So, I wanna again create some connective tissue from what Michael said and what's was earlier said Aixa said about Mercedes. Shirley was not shy, she was absolutely not shy. However, she was often dismissed because of her size and her race. She was very short, and, obviously, she was an African American woman. And people were consistently telling her, as was the case with you know, our other protagonists, that it wasn't her time. So when she wanted to run for President, she was told "Well, if there's going to be a first Black person, it should be a first African American man." So, you know there were at different points when you know she was looking for work, she was told she wasn't you know she wasn't ready to be a teacher, she wasn't ready to be a politician. And as it turns out, she was actually, and I want to read this so it's stating it clearly: "she was the first Black candidate from a major political party to run for U.S. President." Okay, we've heard a lot about firsts, but she was actually the first person the first Black person from a major to run on a major party ticket. And so, I wanted to say that about her. So now, with regard to community on the part of Shirley, what can her work teach us about community? She was, I think, at heart, a community organizer, and she was both on the ground with the folks that she represented—she was known for regularly going to community meetings and speaking up for the people—but she was also someone who would, as they say, speak truth to power. And so, in terms of her interest in and concern about community, she was a very good listener. And she was able to connect with different members of the community. In college, she was a sociology major, and she was also she minored in Spanish. So, she, these these skills gave her an opportunity to to reach out to different groups of people whether it was farm workers, women, domestics, she was she was very good at listening and then being able to use what she was hearing to to make and take action.

**Katie Potter:**

Wonderful thanks. Thank you so much, Katheryn. And, to that end, we will continue on the conversation about resources. So, what advice do you have about teaching these historical figures in the classroom? We've talked a lot about their accomplishments and what they were known for, but now we're going to dive in really to some strategies about about teaching. So, you know, again, as I mentioned, what advice do you have for educators about teaching these historical movements and figures? And how can we engage educators and families in these critical conversations? So, Michael, I'd love to start with you. More specifically, in terms of Edie, how can you get administrators, colleagues, and families on board when you're teaching about Edie and using Edie for Equality in the classroom?

**Michael Genhart:**

Okay, I'll try to tackle those those questions the best I can. I want to start, though, with a shout out to educators, especially during these trying times. As a father of an elementary and middle school teacher, I hear from my daughter all the time how tough it's it is. And the same for parents. They're on the front line. Many, many, many fighting battles to not let others dictate what their child can read. So, I want to just put that out up front. I think we're all in this together, hopefully. But I have to say, I I don't really know what it's actually like to be in the classroom, especially in in various states in the in the country. So, I'm going to offer a few thoughts, but it's with complete humbleness that I, that I share these ideas. Starting with it, does feel like this is the time when we we need to get both louder and quieter at the same time. And I'll I'll explain what I mean by that. The louder part to me is, if we can keep these books in classroom libraries, in school libraries as resources for teachers and librarians and students and parents, please let's do what we can to to make that happen because we know that succumbing to censorship is is like agreeing with it, and that no resistance really matters. We also know that censorship and ant-DEI stuff and book banning is is a real thing, of course, and that teachers are being mandated, you know, what they can say and can't say. And, in some cases, teachers can't even talk about their own family. Right? We also know that words like "diversity" and "equity" and "inclusion" we cannot use in so many classrooms now. But, as I understand it, the language is changing. The educators are trying to change the language, so that these important conversations can continue, and that they're not shut down. So, words like "belonging" and "building community" and "making room for for everyone," these make sense to me, and I hope they they stick. But I also worry that even changing the language might be problematic in the future, especially with, you know, government agencies now being told, "Hey, if you learn of a colleague or a peer still doing the DEI stuff, that's a that's reportable." Right? So, are we entering, entering a culture that involves, you know, reporting on your your colleagues and peers? So obviously, that's problematic. I think continuing to teach history is important and and historical figures. But I think it's the values that they embody that are maybe a lens through which the teaching can happen. By values I mean celebrating differences. And everyone wants, you know, equal equal protection and the same opportunities as as everyone else. So here comes the quieter part. I just wonder how many of these conversations that have been taking place in the classroom will need to be more and more at home with parents and and really engaging parents and and supporting them. Many families, of course, have these conversations already, but in those that don't, right? The importance of talking about people like Mercedes and Shirley and Edie, and all that they stand for may have to happen around the kitchen table more and more where there aren't those same restrictions. Okay. And so, your question about Edie in the classroom in particular. I think I'm talking about Edie is really more about talking about what she did and how she did it. That is, she was not a lesbian woman who was who is pushing a queer

agenda. Right? She was just fighting for fairness, right? What we all want. And so, I think, centering that. Also, I think, centering the child. Remember, we're talking about kids here, and that our goal really is to help help develop good citizens, solid citizens and good human beings. And so, we do that by hopefully teaching good good values, including things like respect. That's all she wanted. Right? Is to be be respected.

**Katie Potter:**

Thank you so much, Michael. So next, Katheryn, you know, in you know, following up on on some of the things that Michael said, you know, what resources and suggestions do you have to families about teaching about Shirley? How can we demonstrate to educators that Shirley is a critical historical figure to feature in our curriculum?

**Katheryn Russell-Brown:**

Yeah, so to that last question, I think this is tied to the mentorship role that she's played. So she's not, you know, saying earlier, just a historical figure, or like my kids like to say, you know, just someone born in the 1900s like you, Mom. But there is a clear connection. And so, I think her work, her efforts, her strategies, maintain, or rather, are still relevant, excuse me, today. So, I think just just in terms of you know her approach, that's what I would say to that. As far as not just being relevant, but just kind of how to get her story out there and stories like hers out there at a time when books that address race issues are being targeted, or books that talk about unpleasant but true histories are being targeted. And so, one of the things I thought about while Michael was talking was certainly, you know, kind of what the shift is, and has been in terms of being in the classroom versus being at home. But I think in terms of being able to expose more students to, you know, a broader group of stories, I think one way to do that might be to get stories from students presented in the classroom. And then that's a way that they could be talked about. And you know, if students were, for instance, given an opportunity to interview a neighbor or to interview, you know a friend of the family, and some of these stories come up, then teachers can talk about them in the context of what students have shared. So, I think this is going to require a level of creativity that is, you know, may not have been asked before, but we can't stop telling the stories. We can't stop sharing them with children because it's the truth. So, these stories represent real people, real real fights, real you know, real political decisions. And so yeah. So I mean, those are that's just just one thought I had is, you know, kind of turning things around and having children getting kind of, you know, getting the stories bringing them to the classroom where they can then be talked about because the teacher didn't initiate, or in any way to attempt to, you know, to to get to indoctrinate young people.

**Katie Potter:**

Hmm, thank you. Thank you so much, Katheryn. Actually, I have something really fascinating, and we could talk about at the end, but Carla España says, "I learned Chisholm was instrumental in the foundation of my Puerto Rican and Latinx Studies Department at Brooklyn College." Where where Carla teaches. So that's a wonderful thank you for sharing that Carla. So, Aixa. Lastly, how can you know Mercedes model, teaching with Mercedes in the classroom, how can that model these critical conversations? And I'd love to, you know, for you all to share for you, Aisha, to share about your work with peace linguistics, and how that's influenced your work, and and if you could let everybody know about that as well. And dealing with the pushback and criticism about children's books.

**Aixa Pérez-Prado:**

Yeah. So, building on what Katheryn was talking about, I think the focus—and I'm going to answer this as a university professor, which is my other other life besides children's books, and also as an artist. Okay? I think that the focus should be on sort of inquiry over ideology. So, we're really approaching these people their histories and their stories as a problem that we want to explore and discover with curiosity. Like asking the question, why did this happen? What if they'd done something else? What if their actions had been different? Why did the author make the choices to write about the person in this way? And why does the art look like that, as well? There's as an illustrator most illustrators hide things all over their books, little Easter eggs. I have a bunch of hidden things in Mercedes book that I encourage children to question. Like, why is there a bird on every page, or is there a bird on every page? What does that represent? So, really tapping into like using these books as a vehicle to teach creative and critical thinking and inquiry-based pedagogy is, I think, where to go with this because it shifts the focus from we're teaching history that we don't really, not everyone wants us to teach is to we're teaching kids to think and teaching kids to be curious and teaching them to wonder and teaching them to listen with understanding and empathy and thinking flexibly and all of these habits of mind, I'm also a habits of mind trainer. So, I really focus on in my own teaching to inspire curiosity, right? And just as a musician will not play with one note or an artist use only one color or a show writer have only one character, we need a variety of colors, notes, tones, hues, and personalities in the classroom to bring up all kinds of questions and to really raise children's curiosity about the world. And I think all of these women that we've heard about are certainly figures that ask us to ask questions of them and to be curious about how they made the choices they made in their lives. And every child is the main character of their own story, right? So, as Katheryn was talking about the storytelling or telling their own stories. I think that these books are also springboards for telling your own story and inquiring about the own history of your family and the challenges that have come up as maybe as immigrants, or as for other reasons in your family. And how this could be a story. And how could you tell the

story? Would you tell it in a book? Would you tell it in a painting? Would you tell it in music? How would you tell your own story? I think that's really the way we have to tackle this new our, I don't know how new it is, but this world we're living in right now where books are being challenged for what they contain. Focusing it to books being used as vehicles of critical thinking, of discovery, and of inspiring curiosity and creativity in classrooms.

**Katie Potter:**

Thank you so much, Aixa. I love that we're we're ending on not ending yet but concluding this section of our webinar. So, thank thank you so much for that. And before we get into our question-and-answer section, I want to make sure that we have about 10 min for our Q&A. So, we have all of our resources are free a [leeandlow.com](http://leeandlow.com). And so, I wanted to announce our new Biography Toolkit that we just that our in-house literacy team created. Our Literacy Specialist designed this with educators, administrators, librarians, families in mind on how to teach with biographies. So, there's lots of different activities and ways that you can incorporate biographies in your own educational practice. So, feel free to check this out and next. And we're also all linking these in the chat. We have free educator guides for all of these books. Edie is in progress, but Mercedes and She Was the First both have free educator guides, which have lots of activities and other ways to engage with the book in the classroom or library, whatever setting that you're in. We also have book lists and other resources at [leeandlow.com](http://leeandlow.com).

And so, our question and answer. So, Carla wants to know, and this relates to our resources part of the webinar about, you know, what texts, or it sounds like, you know, what text songs, documentaries, or archives would you partner with your book to put them in conversation with each other? How in or I would say in the classroom, you know, what would you pair alongside your book to teach to young people? That's a great question. Thank you, Carla.

**Aixa Pérez-Prado:**

I would definitely have the music of Mercedes Sosa.

**Katie Potter:**

Right.

**Aixa Pérez-Prado:**

Analyzing the lyrics. That would be a, I think, a wonderful thing to do. There's also documentaries and interviews and lots of other information but using music in the classroom is always very valuable, and as a listening and even speaking activity for English

Language Learners, as well as other learners, and to promote that peace linguistics and using words of empathy and belonging that are throughout her songs.

**Katie Potter:**

Thank you, Aixa.

**Katheryn Russell-Brown:**

Yeah, I would add, for Shirley, speeches. She gave some incredible speeches. So, in addition to documentaries, there's been a couple of them recently with Regina King playing Shirley Chisholm and Uzo Aduba, I'm sorry if I'm mispronouncing her name, playing Shirley Chisholm, as well. So, and Shirley herself, which was great for me doing research on her, actually wrote two autobiographies. So, I had that as, you know, reference points as well. And there have been biographies and chapters and and books on her. So there was a lot to draw from and archive material in Brooklyn Museum.

**Katie Potter:**

So, lots of primary, yeah, lots of primary source documents, which is always, you know, needed in

**Katheryn Russell-Brown:**

Yeah.

**Katie Potter:**

the classroom.

**Michael Genhart:**

Same with with Edie. She

**Katie Potter:**

Yeah.

**Michael Genhart:**

She wrote a memoir. Robbie Kaplan also wrote the story of the case. And there are some really great documentaries about Edie and Thea and and Edie's pursuit. But I also wanted just to mention something that came up in a previous conversation that Aixa and Katheryn and I had with with Lee & Low in preparation for the webinar, in terms of what else to pair these texts with to the, to the question, because Aixa made a really really interesting point in that conversation about what are already exists in schools. And that is a school's mission

statement is filled with values that are no different, or the books that we're presenting and other books like them, share values that are no different from the values that are already hanging in classrooms, right? Hanging on the walls of classroom as far as the school's mission statement. So, I'm just trying to speak to the controversy around books like this, right? And the zealousness around "Let's get rid of them. Let's not teach them." They're they're no different, really, from what's already in the classroom, right? These shared values. So, I just wanted to highlight that point.

**Katie Potter:**

That was an idea originally suggested by one of our authors, Laleña Garcia, she wrote, *How We Can Live and What We Believe*, our Black Lives Matter, activity book, and then it became a picture book. And she's a kindergarten, a New York City-based kindergarten educator, who, whenever she's asked about controversial, or you know, the controversy surrounding her books or talking about quote sensitive topics in the classroom, she encourages educators and families to go back to the mission statement, and what what can they pull from that that relates to the topics that they're discussing? And everybody wants to be empathetic and have compassion and embody community. And so, we encourage, you know, that was such a salient point from Laleña. And you can also see the webinar, our Black Lives Matter webinar, featuring Laleña. But thank you, Michael, that's that's such a great point.

**Michael Genhart:**

Thanks for that that reference, too, I didn't realize that.

**Katie Potter:**

Oh, sure. So, for all of you, we had a wonderful question from one of the participants who registered. If you could ask the subjects of your respective picture book biographies one question, what would it be?

**Michael Genhart:**

Hmm. I I think I would ask Edie, would you do it all over again in the in this current climate?

**Katie Potter:**

Right.

**Michael Genhart:**

Specifically with the current makeup of the Supreme Court?

**Katie Potter:**

Hmm.

**Michael Genhart:**

And relatedly, I think I would ask Robbie would you do it? Would you take this on? Or how would you go about it differently given, given the current makeup of the Supreme Court?

**Katie Potter:**

Hmm, Katheryn, what were you going to say?

**Katheryn Russell-Brown:**

Well, that those were good questions. I would ask something probably a little bit lighter because she wrote a lot about what her feelings were about you know how hard it is to get things to change. But I would ask her a question about music because she loved to dance, and I love that she talked about that, you know, especially in you know, all the hard work that she did, and you know the setbacks, but that she that was the way she relaxed. And she even won a top prize at a dancing competition. So, I would ask her to say something about some of her favorite music, and just seeing if there was some thread between the music and the work that she had done. But I would I would also be interested in asking her, in addition to, is there ever going to be a woman president? But also, whether or not you know you know the what her view is today on the way people are going about pushing back and and pushing, struggle forward. Just what what she would say about the contemporary climate, and what the I think Michael brought this up, as well, you know what should be, what should be done in response.

**Katie Potter:**

Thank you, Katheryn. And Aixa, what would you ask Mercedes?

**Aixa Pérez-Prado:**

I would probably ask Mercedes, first what do you think about the art in my book?

(Laughter)

How do you feel about that? And I really tried to do right by her. But I would also maybe ask her, what would you sing about today? Like what would what people and what issues would you want to lend your voice to today?

**Katie Potter:**

Yeah. Nice. So, our last question, and this, you know, this, this will conclude our webinar, but it goes back to our first question, but we'd like we'd love to hear about what inspired you



to become a writer in the first place? And, I'm adding on to that question, how would you encourage young people to be who want to become writers? How would you encourage them? Aixa? Do you want to start?

**Aixa Pérez-Prado:**

Well, okay. So, my father was a writer and an artist, as well as a doctor, and he told me from, I think, birth that I was a writer and an artist. And and he thought everything I wrote was brilliant. Like I could write the worst poem ever read,

(laughter)

and I still have some of them, and he was just like, "Wow, how did you come up with that? You know that is so good." And I think that, so I was inspired by the 12,000 books in my house, by my storytelling grandmothers, and by my father's absolute belief that I was a writer and an artist.

**Michael Genhart:**

Aw.

**Katie Potter:**

That's wonderful. Michael.

**Michael Genhart:**

When my daughter was applying to college, obviously I knew that she was going to be leaving home, and while I had a full-time practice, I spent many, many volunteer hours at her schools over the years in the library, of course, helping the librarians. And one of our favorite activities when she was little was reading picture books together. We just loved that. And so, upon her departure, I thought, well, what else am I gonna do? Or can I do? And I thought, well, maybe I'll figure out maybe I'll write a picture book. Not realizing how incredibly hard it is.

(Laughter)

**Katie Potter:**

Of course.

**Michael Genhart:**

Super hard. But it really was about it brought me back to that time with her, our favorite time together. That was the inspiration. And what would I share with the young kids who were interested in writing? I would say, if you have stories to tell, dear, just start writing. Just

start writing on the paper. And if you want to do drawings that accompany those stories, then draw, you know? Don't worry how it turns out at this point, just, you know, write down a story that maybe only you can tell, right? And just start by writing and drawing.

**Katie Potter:**

Thank you, Michael. And lastly, Katheryn.

**Katheryn Russell-Brown:**

So, my dad was a writer, too. So Aixa and I have that in common. My dad was a playwright also. So, he wrote books. He wrote plays. He even wrote a movie, *Five on the Black Hand Side*, which won an NAACP Image Award many years ago.

**Katie Potter:**

Wow! Cool!

**Katheryn Russell-Brown:**

And and so he was always an inspiration. And I don't know that we had was it 11 or 17,000 that Aixa said? I don't think we had that many books, but we may have had that many albums. And so my dad was always well when there were just regular typewriters. He was typing, listening to jazz and typing, and I would always see see him doing that. And so that was inspirational to me and big picture. But after I had my twins, who are now 19, that was a great motivation for me to write children's books because I was often going to bookstores and often not seeing—this is 2,005—often not seeing what I thought were enough books that represent you know you're more likely to see books about ducks and cows and elephants than brown people. So those are motivations for me, having my kids, and then my dad being a writer. And then for children who want to write, read and write, read and write, write and read. I think they go hand in hand. And look up and look at the sky.

**Katie Potter:**

That's such a wonderful way to conclude our session today. So thank you all so much. Thank you for dedicating your time and efforts to this webinar, and I know our audience loved absolutely everything you all had to say about what an incredible conversation this has been. So, if anybody has further questions or needs a certificate of completion for today, please email me [kpotter@leeandlow.com](mailto:kpotter@leeandlow.com). I'd love to hear from you and thank you all. And we will see you soon.

**Michael Genhart:**

Thank you. Bye.

**Katheryn Russell-Brown:**

Thank you.

**Katie Potter:**

Bye.