

DISCUSSION GUIDE

A TAKE-CHARGE GIRL BLAZES A TRAIL TO CONGRESS: The Story of Jeannette Rankin

Written by Gretchen Woelfle
Illustrated by Rebecca Gibbon

\$18.99 US / \$24.99 CAN
ISBN 9781662680120 HC
ISBN 9781662680137 eBook



ABOUT THE BOOK

For take-charge girls and boys in the making, here is the story of Jeannette Rankin, the first US congresswoman.

Jeannette Rankin was always a take-charge girl. Whether taking care of horses or her little brothers and sisters—Jeannette knew what to do and got the job done. That’s why, when she saw poor children living in bad conditions in San Francisco, she knew she had to take charge and try to change things.

But to really change things, women needed to vote. In Jeannette’s time that was illegal! So she spent years giving speeches and organizing women to demand the right to vote. And when her home state, Montana, gave women that right, Jeannette ran for Congress and became America’s first congressWOMAN!

PRAISE FOR A TAKE-CHARGE GIRL BLAZES A TRAIL TO CONGRESS

★ “This lively biography showcases one tireless activist, Jeannette Rankin from Montana, who became the first U.S. congresswoman in 1916 and whose fight for all women to have the right to vote was key in ratifying the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920. Rankin’s story is made relatable to young readers through Woelfle’s focus on how ‘take-charge’ she was, starting as a child...The section on Rankin’s campaign for Congress, in which she crisscrossed 6,000 miles of Montana by train and horse, is riveting. The illustrations,

ASTRA BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS


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done in colored pencils and acrylic inks, jauntily convey period detail." —*Booklist*, starred review

"A yes vote for this title's inclusion on children's bookshelves." —*Kirkus Reviews*

"'Take-charge girl' Jeanette Rankin inspires in this lively, quote-filled picture book about her journey to become the first U.S. congresswoman. Woelfle narrates with a conversational tone that makes Rankin feel accessible... [and] Rankin exudes confidence in quaint acrylic ink and colored pencil artwork." —*Publishers Weekly*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does author Gretchen Woelfle describe Jeannette Rankin as a "take-charge girl" in the title of the book and throughout the story? Give some examples from the story that supports this bold description.
2. Jeannette wanted a "different life" other than marrying and having children. What types of jobs and careers did she try?
3. What events and experiences inspired Jeannette to get her start in politics? What was a turning point for her?
4. How was Jeannette treated by others when she spread the word about the women's suffrage movement?
5. Despite Jeannette's success with getting women the right to vote in Montana in 1914, she was met with resistance from both men and women when she declared her intention to run for Congress. Why do you think this happened?
6. What did Jeannette pledge to do in Congress, if elected? Which groups of people did she especially want to fight for and represent in Congress?
7. What did the local newspaper initially report about the ballot count in Jeannette's election? And what was the actual outcome?

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8. Who contacted Jeannette immediately after her win? What was Jeannette's response? What would you do in this instance if you were Jeannette?
9. What did you learn from the backmatter/author's note of the book that wasn't covered in the story? Were you surprised by any information shared in the author's note? Did she succeed in her campaign pledges?
10. Look at Rebecca Gibbon's colorful illustrations and discuss how they augment the accompanying text in the book.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS + EXTRA CREDIT

- Find out more about the history of the suffrage movement. Why was it called "suffrage"? Who were the other women who worked for women's suffrage? Does the suffrage movement exist today?
- In your opinion, what personality traits did Jeannette Rankin possess that made her a success in politics?
- Jeannette Rankin traveled extensively throughout her lifetime, from Montana, to San Francisco, to New York, to Washington, DC, and back and forth across the country for four years. But traveling back then is very different than traveling today! How did Jeanette get around back in 1914? Find out more by researching methods of transportation during her era.
- Who are your local Congresspeople? Are there any women who currently represent your state in Congress? Research how they blazed their trail to Congress.
- Jeannette Rankin worked hard to get the word out for her Congressional campaign. She gave speeches, traveled, sent postcards, and mailed letters. How do her methods compare to what politicians do today? Compare and contrast past and present methods politicians use to spread their message.

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- Gretchen Woelfle’s author’s note states that since Jeannette’s victory in 1916, 397 women have served in Congress, including 94 women of color. In 2022, 24 women served in the US Senate, 125 served in the House of Representatives, and one as vice president. Research one of these women. Prepare an oral report with a PowerPoint or other visuals or your class, or decorate a bulletin board in your classroom or school hallway with an essay about one of these women.
- Who are some other “take charge girls” that you know? Think about your classmates, neighbors, friends, and family. How do they “take-charge”, and why do we need people like this in our society?

READING LIST

FIGHT OF THE CENTURY Alice Paul Battles Woodrow Wilson for the Vote by Barb Rosenstock, illustrated by Sarah Green

I DISSENT Ruth Bader Ginsberg Makes Her Mark by Debbie Levy, illustrated by Elizabeth Baddeley

KAMALA HARRIS Rooted in Justice by Nikki Grimes, illustrated by Laura Freeman

SHIRLEY CHISHOLM IS A VERB by Veronica Chambers, illustrated by Rachelle Baker

A LADY HAS THE FLOOR Belva Lockwood Speaks Out for Women’s Rights by Kate Hannigan, illustrated by Alison Jay

MADAM SPEAKER Nancy Pelosi Calls the House to Order by Carole Boston Weatherford, illustrated by Chris Hsu

ELIZABETH WARREN Nevertheless, She Persisted by Susan Hood, illustrated by Sarah Green