

## ★ **Small Shoes, Great Strides: How Three Brave Girls Opened Doors to School Equality**

**Vaunda Micheaux Nelson**

**Alex Bostic, Illustrator**

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Vaunda Micheaux Nelson's excellent book *Small Shoes, Great Strides* covers how, in November of 1960, Leona Tate, Gail Etienne, and Tessie Prevost made history by going to first grade—as the first Black students at a public school in Louisiana.

Told through the girls' points of view, the book goes through how each felt on that first day of school. It continues through the challenges they faced the rest of the year. For months, they were the only students in school, as all local white families placed hatred ahead of their own children's education. The girls received numerous death threats, with police stationed outside of their homes for protection.

All three trailblazers were interviewed for the book, resulting in specific details that bring a personal touch, grounding the important history that the girls made. The excellent illustrations have a timeless quality, showing both the girls' happy days at school and family scenes and the threats of police cars parked outside and a dead bird sent in the mail. The book's design includes some creative touches as well; for example, the text describing the girls' first-grade teacher putting paper over the windows to protect the girls is printed on a background that looks like that paper.

Once the main narrative ends, *Small Shoes, Great Strides* includes a slew of additional material resulting in quality context. That includes a summary of the Brown versus the Board of Education ruling, the story of Norman Rockwell's iconic school integration painting, more about the US Marshals Service, and updates on what each of the girls accomplished as they grew up. The result is an unmissable story about everyday courage whose notes about the importance of overcoming discrimination remain timely.

JEFF FLEISCHER (November / December 2023)

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