



# Teacher Resource Guide

# Pauli Murray: The Life of a Pioneering Feminist and Civil Rights Activist

by Terry Catasús Jennings and Rosita Stevens-Holsey

Pauli Murray was a thorn on the side of white America [of Franklin Roosevelt and subsequent presidents] demanding justice and equal treatment for all. She was a civil rights and women's rights activist before any movement advocated for either—the brilliant mind that, in 1944, conceptualized the arguments that would win *Brown V. Board of Education of Topeka Kansas*, and in 1964, the arguments that won women equality in the workplace. Throughout her life, she fought for the oppressed, not only through changing laws, but by using her powerful prose to influence those who could effect change. She lived by her convictions and challenged authority to demand fairness and justice regardless of the personal consequences. Without seeking acknowledgement, glory, or financial gain for what she did, Pauli Murray fought in the trenches for many of the rights we take for granted. Her goal was human rights and the dignity of life for all. With this biography in verse Terry Catasús Jennings and Pauli's niece, Rosita Stevens-Holsey hope to bring Pauli's riveting story to young readers.

On September 11, 1961, **Terry Catasús Jennings** landed in the United States after a short flight from Cuba. On September 12th, she was enrolled in seventh grade in an American school. Her family, including her father who had been jailed during the Bay of Pigs invasion, was now in a free country. The only catch for twelve-year-old Terry was that she could count in English and recite the days of the week and the months of the year, but not much more. Often being the only Cuban in her school—even through college—Terry knows what it's like to be the new kid on the block—or the only brown kid on the block. Terry began to work, as an adult, at the time that the women's movement was gaining momentum. Her interest in feminism is what drew her to Pauli Murray. Terry loves to highlight the fact that we are each and all humans. Terry lives in Reston, Virginia with her husband. Her favorite pass times are playing with her grandchildren, biking and reading. She thinks Cuban food rules.

Visit Terry at [terrycjennings.com](http://terrycjennings.com)  
Follow her on Twitter: @terrycjennings and  
Follow her on Instagram: Terry.C.Jennings

**Rosita Stevens-Holsey**, niece of Reverend Dr.

Pauli Murray, is a dynamic educator, writer, activist, and community engager focused on sharing stories of historical and pioneering voices to inspire children and adults. Rosita Stevens-Holsey is president of Preserving Pauli Murray, LLC, which she founded to enhance the legacy of her aunt.

Throughout her life, Murray fought for the oppressed, not only through changing laws, but by using her powerful prose to influence those who could affect change. Murray's achievements as a writer, activist, attorney, and an Episcopal priest are now being uncovered, rendering her life and legacy stronger and more relevant.

Ms. Stevens-Holsey has followed her Aunt Pauli's lead in advocating for human rights issues and fighting discrimination against women, minorities, and those in need. Part of her present work is to support and enhance organizations' efforts to promote her aunt's legacy through speaking and personal appearances.

Ms. Stevens-Holsey shares much of her Aunt Pauli's story through her Instagram & Facebook pages.

Instagram: [preservingpaulimurray](https://www.instagram.com/preservingpaulimurray)  
Facebook: Preserving Pauli Murray

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At its heart, Pauli Murray is a story about humanity, how each and everyone of us is human. Pauli Murray was not recognized when she should have been because she was a woman and it is often the people who work without fanfare and recognition who make all the difference.. As students discuss possible themes in the book, have students look for evidence in the story to support these themes.

**Text-to-Text Connections** - Have students brainstorm other books they have read with similar themes. How are they similar? How are they different?

**Text-to-Self Connections** - Have students think about a time in their lives when they felt unrecognized and looked over. Have students think about a time they might have done that to someone else.

## Common Core

(list of standards covered in this guide)

4th Grade: ELA RL 4.1, 2, 3, 4, 6; W 4.7, 8; SL 4.1, 4

5th Grade: ELA RL 5.1, 2, 3, 4, 6 W 5.1, 7, 8; SL 5.1, 4

6th Grade: ELA RL 6.1, 2, 3, 4, 6; W 6.1, 7, 8; SL 6.1, 4, 5

7th Grade: ELA RL 7. 1, 2, 3, 4, 6; W 7.1, 7, 8; SL 7.1, 4, 5

## Verse Novel

When you first start reading Pauli Murray you might notice that it looks different than other books you've read. That's because it's a verse novel!

A verse novel is narrative poetry in which a novel-length narrative is told through using poetry instead of prose (the paragraphs and chapters you might be more used to seeing in books).

# Hunter College

Pauli Murray decided at a very young age that she did not want to stay in the South. She did not want to have to put up with Jim Crow laws anymore. She decided to attend Hunter College in New York. Even though she had graduated from a Black, North Carolina high school, however, Pauli Murray did not have enough courses to enter Hunter College. Black students were only allowed to attend eleven years before graduating in North Carolina while white students went for the full twelve years. Discuss with your students what they could do to make up that deficit. Compare it to what Pauli Murray did.

# Sharecropper

At the beginning of her activism, Pauli Murray was involved with the Odell Waller case. It was a case in which a Black man shot a white man in self-defense. But the Black man was sentenced to die. The U.S. Constitution has always guaranteed the right to be tried by a jury of your peers, but there was not a black face in the jury that tried Odell Waller. Have your students research the poll tax. Compare the cost of paying the poll tax to an average weekly wage. Discuss the poll taxes effects not only on jury selection and the chance that a person of color could receive a fair trial, but also on the inability to have persons of color elected to offices who could then change the laws that kept them subordinated to whites.

# Women's Movement

Pauli Murray was asked to be a member of President John F. Kennedy's Commission on the Status of Women. That commission developed a very comprehensive report and had many recommendations. Have your students research President Kennedy's mandate to the commission and compare it to the commission's report. Discuss the motivations of both the President and the women members of the commission. Unfortunately, the Commission's report was delivered a couple of weeks before President Kennedy was assassinated. Have your students research what advancements, if any, took place because of the commission's work. Discuss with your students what might have happened if President Kennedy had not been killed.

# 1964 Civil Rights Act

As a result of the President's Commission on the Status of Women, a network of women formed—capable, intelligent women. Many held positions in the government. Since there was no e-mail then, they wrote letters telling each other of opportunities and problems. With her habit of writing letters for everything, Pauli Murray was at the apex of that network. She was one of the forces that kept the members together.

In 1964, Representative Howard Smith of Virginia, added what he considered to be a ridiculous amendment to the 1964 Civil Rights Act. He inserted equal rights for women in the work place to the Act so that the act would not pass in Congress. He didn't count on Pauli Murray and the network of women. Murray wrote letters to the President, the First Lady, Senators and Representatives stating that if women were not included, half of the population would be disadvantaged.

**Discuss:** The congressmen wanted to give Black men equal pay for equal work, but were afraid they would lose some votes if they included women. Why do you think this was such a conundrum for them?

**Note for Teachers/Parents:** This information is designed to help provide background for students as they read about Pauli's life and be a starting point for discussions.

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## Reading Response Questions

A few ideas for incorporating these questions into your reading of Pauli Murray...

- Have students keep a journal while they read and answer questions as you read.
- Utilize Think-Pair-Share and discuss these questions throughout the reading.
- Select a couple of questions for students to write a longer written response. This is an opportunity to cite evidence in their writing to support their answers.

### **"Pauli Murray never fit in."**

This is the very first line in the book. Before you continue reading, make a prediction: In what ways do you think Pauli didn't fit in? How do you think she handled it?

Have you ever felt the same?

What happened early in Pauli's life that likely changed the course of her life?

Why did Pauli want to go to college in New York?

Why did Pauli have to quit her job at the switchboard?

Why wasn't Pauli accepted at the University of North Carolina?

What causes did Pauli fight for during her lifetime? How did she fight?

What were some of the roadblocks in Pauli Murray's path and how did she succeed in spite of them?

Can you recall a time when you needed to overcome stumbling blocks to accomplish something, but eventually you were able to complete it after hard work and determination?

What lessons did you learn while reading about Pauli Murray that might better prepare you to be successful in life or to be a productive member of society?

Can you describe an incident when you advocated for something you believed in. What about a time you advocated for someone you didn't know well?

Think of Pauli Murray. She was an "other" in her own community. Think about how she might feel if people did not accept her as a human being. Share how you would feel if you were an "other" in your own community—of a different skin color, a different nationality, different abilities, different gender identity.

Pauli Murray was a hero, she was a feminist, a civil rights activist, a poet, a priest, a person who changed the world. What do you admire most about her?







# Timeline

Create a timeline of Pauli Murray's life and accomplishments. Include a short note about the significance of each event or how it made the world a better place.

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# Picture Books

Write and illustrate a picture book about Pauli's life. Think about the important people and events of Pauli's life. What lesson do you think Pauli would want kids to learn through the picture book?

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# Reader's Theatre

Write a Reader's Theatre script about the life of Pauli Murray. Think about the important events and accomplishments of Pauli's life and decide how you want to re-enact her life.

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# Go Live!

Create a vlog series as if you were a journalist following Pauli Murray. Get creative with how you would share significant events and accomplishments in Pauli's life.

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**Note for Teachers/Parents:** Students can choose one, or more, of these activities to help showcase everything they have learned about Pauli.

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## **BRAINSTORM**

What issues or problems in your neighborhood or school do you want to change?

## **BRAINSTORM**

Choose one problem.

What ideas do you have for how you can make help change this problem?

## **THE PLAN**

Review your ideas and put together a plan for how you can help make a difference with this problem/issue. Then go and do it!

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## Vocabulary Bookmark

**Pauli Murray** may contain words that are new for you. Use this list as a bookmark and while you are reading, use context clues to investigate the meanings of these words. On the back of the bookmark, write down other new words you find in the book.

Amendments  
Anvil  
Confrontation  
Daunting  
Discrimination  
Fortification  
Grievances  
Indignities  
Inferior  
Innate  
Reconciliation  
Resonated  
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