

COURAGE HAS NO COLOR

THE TRUE STORY OF THE TRIPLE NICKLES

America's First Black Paratroopers

BY TANYA LEE STONE

A YALSA Award for Excellence in Nonfiction for Young Adults Finalist

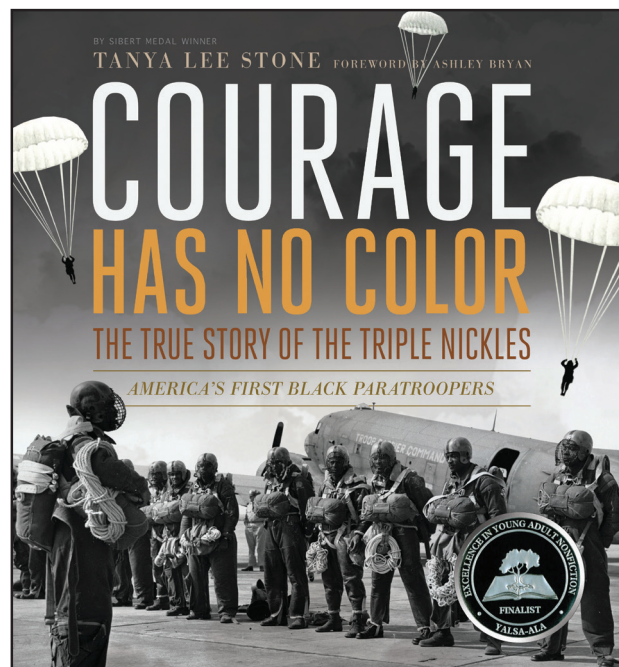
Introduction

Today, the United States armed forces are made up of brave and dedicated people of every race, creed, and culture. This was unfortunately not always the case. In *Courage Has No Color*, author Tanya Lee Stone takes readers back to the days of World War II and examines the experience of people of color in the armed forces and their determined efforts to receive fair and equal treatment, respect, and opportunities. Stone focuses specifically on the soldiers of the 555th Parachute Infantry Battalion, known as the Triple Nickles, the nation's first black paratroopers, and tells the story of their courage and contributions to America.

The Common Core State Standards call for a special emphasis on informational text, and this guide provides discussion questions, writing prompts, and research activities that will help your students explore this text more thoroughly as they work toward these standards.



Photograph courtesy of U.S. Army Air Forces



HC: 978-0-7636-5117-6 • PB: 978-0-7636-6548-7
E-book: 978-0-7636-6405-3 • Also available in audio

Before Reading

Ask students to think about the qualities that make an excellent soldier. Write the list on the board. Ask if they see anything on the list that restricts the qualities according to race or gender. Note that, sadly, many Americans may have answered that question differently at the time of World War II, when, despite the distinguished service of African Americans in World War I, black soldiers were not allowed to serve in fighting units. Read aloud the first paragraph on page 9 under the heading "The Right to Fight." Ask students to imagine themselves in the dangerous days of World War II, wanting to fight and defend their country while facing such ideas. Ask what they would have done.



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Discussion Questions

1. Colonel Howard Donovan Queen, commanding officer of the all-black 366th Regiment of the 92nd Infantry Division in World War II, is quoted as saying, “World War I [had been] one big racial problem for the Negro soldier. World War II was a racial nightmare. . . . The Negro soldier’s first taste of warfare in World War II was on Army posts right here in his own country. This in its turn caused considerable confusion in the minds of the draftees as to who the enemy really was” (page 10). What does Colonel Queen mean by that statement? What led him to believe that?
2. An amendment to the Selective Training and Service Bill stated that, “there should be no discrimination in either the selection or training of men” (page 11). Yet in 1940, President Roosevelt issued a press release saying that desegregating the armed forces “would produce situations destructive to morale and detrimental to the preparation for national defense” (page 11). Why did Roosevelt, who worked for racial equality, make such a statement? Was the amendment to the Selective Service Bill followed by the armed forces? How were black troops utilized at the beginning of World War II?
3. Bradley Biggs, one of the officers of the 555th, recounts advice given to him by Colonel Benjamin O. Davis Sr., the highest-ranking black officer in the army: “Curb your tongue [and] quiet your temper. . . . Your anger will ruin your hopes for a military career. More opportunities will come to our soldiers but we must be ready for them” (page 44). Why did Davis give this advice even when Bigg’s treatment had been so unfair? Do you think that advice is relevant today?
4. After training so intensely for combat, the Triple Nickles were sent west to be smokejumpers. Do you think their mission was important? Explain.
5. Tanya Lee Stone points out that many photographs showing black units were left out of the record. On page 63, former corporal Charles Sprowl of the 490th Port Battalion asks, “Where were we in *The Longest Day* or *Saving Private Ryan*? Where were we in the history books?” Today, efforts are being made to recognize and honor black veterans of World War II. Is this important? Why or why not? What should be done?

Writing Prompts and Research Activities with Common Core Connections

1. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.7.1 Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.**

The men of the 555th and other black units risked their lives to serve their country in spite of pervasive racial discrimination. Why were these men willing to sacrifice so much? Cite text as evidence.



Photograph courtesy of U.S. Army Air Forces

2. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.1 Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.**

Walter Morris, an officer of the 555th, says, “It is up to me and many, many people of all races and cultures to fight the haters and racists to make this a better place to live” (page 93). Do you think the efforts of Morris and the other brave men of color who fought in World War II made a difference? Write a three-paragraph essay explaining your position.

3. CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.8 Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

Examine the examples of stereotypes in early movies and advertising on pages 14 and 15 of the book. In the evening, watch ten to fifteen minutes of advertising on television and use the Internet to find advertising images for products or current movies. Compare the contemporary advertising to that shown in the book. Does the advertising in both time periods reflect actual social conditions? Why or why not? Support your conclusions with examples and cite the sources.

4. CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

Summarize the information and events that led to the Triple Nickles' becoming smokejumpers.

5. CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.6 Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).

Do you think author Tanya Lee Stone has a specific point of view on the role of the 555th in our history? Cite specific evidence. Do you agree with her position or disagree? Explain.

6. CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.7 Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions for further research and investigation.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.8 Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

Both the Tuskegee Airmen (pages 27–29) and the 442nd Regimental Combat Team (page 70) were highly decorated units made up of minority servicemen. Choose one of these units and find more information about it. Did its members experience the same obstacles to service as the men of the 555th? Write a summary of what you learn, citing your sources.



Photograph: National Archives (342-FH-3B-42508-29999ac)

7. CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.9a Apply grade 7 Reading standards to literature (e.g., “Compare and contrast a fictional portrayal of a time, place, or character and a historical account of the same period as a means of understanding how authors of fiction use or alter history”).

Ask your school or public librarian to help you find a fictional book about a minority soldier in World War II. Compare and contrast the account in the fictional book to that presented in *Courage Has No Color*. Do the accounts present similar, different, or conflicting information? Cite examples. If the accounts differ, which do you believe is more accurate and why?

8. CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

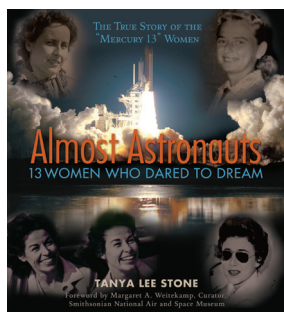
Imagine it is 1944 and you are a young black man facing the draft. One of your friends asks, “Why should I die for a country that doesn’t even trust me to train with real bullets and treats me like a second-class citizen?” Another says, “It’s our duty to fight for our country too.” Describe the situation. Write about how you would feel and what you would want to do. What would you tell your friends?

About Tanya Lee Stone



The author of more than ninety books for young readers, Tanya Lee Stone graduated from Oberlin College, worked as an editor of nonfiction books, and earned a master’s degree in science education. She moved to Vermont, wrote her first book, and has been writing ever since. Tanya Lee Stone has received many awards, including a *Boston Globe–Horn Book* Honor, a Robert F. Sibert Medal, an Orbis Pictus Honor, a Jane Addams Honor, and Flora Stieglitz Straus Award; she was also named a YALSA Nonfiction Finalist. She loves Crazy Core Skittles, chocolate-covered pretzels, the sounds of an orchestra warming up, and winter.

Also by Tanya Lee Stone:



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PB: 978-0-7636-4502-1
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This teachers’ guide was written by Lynn Rutan, retired middle school librarian and blogger for *Bookends*.