

Nevertheless, She Persisted

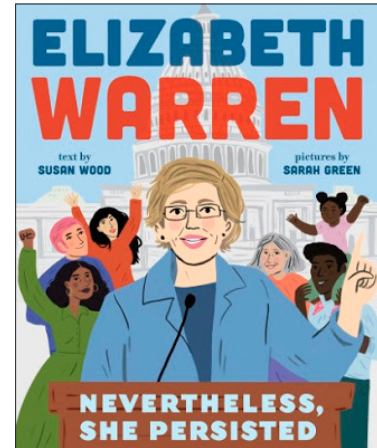
By Susan Wood

Illustrator: Sarah Green

Abrams Books for Young Readers, New York

Review by Ari Samuel Alkalay Appel

Often, what we choose to tell children is a better representation of the state which we are in than what we we say to adults. Susan Wood and Sarah Green have given us a gem that shines brightly, a statement about a woman who defines what this planet is missing.



With a title reminiscent of *The Little Engine That Could*, *Nevertheless, She Persisted* is a beautifully written and illustrated portrait of a fiery senator's humble upbringing, her life as a mother and wife, and her successful career. Wood and Green have created a tool for teaching young children that anything is possible and especially that being a woman should never prevent someone from fulfilling her dreams.

The journey of the first female senator from Massachusetts is filled with trials: financial instability throughout Warren's youth, dismissal from her university program due to her status as a young mother, unemployment after law school, and the perpetual quest for balance between family life and professional endeavors. Warren does not heroically trounce these challenges but rather navigates them with grace by adhering to the principle of persistence.

If every piece of children's literature has a moral, the moral of *Nevertheless, She Persisted* is to always be persistent. It is important to mind that the word "persistence" also connotes difficulty. What I like most about the book is that it does not guard young readers from the realities of middle-class life in America. In exploring the theme of persistence, it also probes the specter of erasure for being a woman or for being poor. The threat of losing one's identity is always present, yet the story gives young readers a simple guiding principle: always, always persist. Persist at what you believe in, fight with your words, and people will listen.

The story is human and immediate, though sometimes clumsy in returning to its central theme. For example, in telling of Warren's high school debate club, Wood states that Warren learned about "getting battered, but not beaten" as she made her way to the state championship. This language seems out of place for a high school debate club. Even though a children's book should have a consistent moral, to assume that a child cannot understand specific language in a variety of situations underestimates his or her creativity and intelligence.

Despite this weakness, *Nevertheless, She Persisted* is full of strengths. One illustration shows a gated manor with a private pond near four shacks, juxtaposing the wealth of one family with the poverty of four others. This disparity is what Warren wants us to notice. The text discusses income inequality due to corporate greed and Warren's work against it as

Wilderness House Literary Review 13/2

a law professor. Three blue birds fly through the foreground of the illustration, freer than the people below. Fortunately, Warren is someone with something to say about this.

Nevertheless, *She Persisted* paints Warren as a fighter singularly motivated by the benefit of all, inspired by her humble upbringings to create a better world. Nevertheless, *She Persisted* gives children a heroine and reinforces that with a little help from one's family, persistence is all every child needs.



**** Ari Samuel Alkalay Appel is a poet and essayist who lives and works in Roxbury. He enjoys cycling and woodworking during his free time. He grew up in Newton, Massachusetts, where he graduated from Newton North High School. He studied at Whitman College in Eastern Washington, where he obtained a degree in Rhetoric Studies. He also studied at the University of Buenos Aires in Argentina.