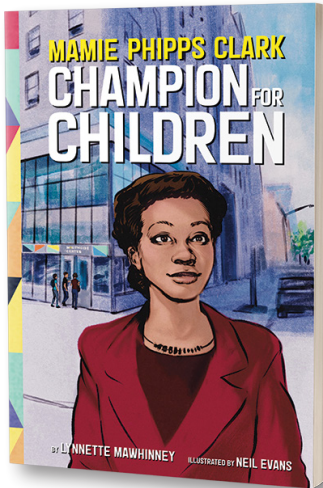




## *Mamie Phipps Clark, Champion For Children:* Interview With the Author



Magination Press author Lynnette Mawhinney, PhD, has written an inspiring graphic novel that tells the story of groundbreaking psychologist and civil rights activist Mamie Phipps Clark, PhD. Her research in the racial identity and development of self in Black children ultimately played a vital role in the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* case. Magination Press interviewed Dr. Mawhinney about creating [Mamie Phipps Clark, Champion for Children](#).

**Magination Press: When did you learn about Mamie Phipps Clark? What inspired you to write about her?**

**Lynnette Mawhinney:** Magination Press approached me to author the next book in the series, Extraordinary Women in Psychology Series, which was going to be on Dr. Mamie Phipps Clark. Since I am an educator, I knew of her through the *Brown v. Board* decision, but nothing more. She seemed to always be in the shadow of her husband, Dr. Kenneth Clark, even though they were equal partners in their work.

**MP:** Why do you think it is important for young people to know about her?

**LM:** Although most people don't know it, Dr. Clark's work has a literal direct impact on today's youth being schooled in the US. But it's more than just that. Dr. Clark was a visionary who was seriously ahead of her time. Dr. Clark started the Northside Center in Harlem almost 80 years ago and it still exists today. Back then, she created a library with all authors of color and artwork on the walls from folk of color. That is something schools and other spaces are just starting to do TODAY! She was 80 years ahead of everyone with her thinking and actions around children seeing themselves in the pages of books.

**MP:** How did you choose the news stories you included, and how did you research them?

**LM:** Researching Dr. Clark was a little bit like finding "Where's Waldo?" Back in her day, gender really played a role in how information was archived. For example, although she is Dr. Mamie Phipps Clark, newspaper articles back then would either refer to her as Mrs. Kenneth Clark, essentially erasing her

name and hard-earned doctorate, or they would attribute most of the work with her husband to just him. I had to research Dr. Mamie Clark across three different archives in three different states. When I found her, I wanted to capture her literal voice (I read pages and pages of personal letters she wrote to get her voice), and I wanted the information during her time to be reflected in the book's materials. That is why I chose news stories and real newspaper clippings to be included in the text.

**MP:** Why did you include activities in the book?

**LM:** With my picture book, *Lulu the One and Only*, I created an activity guide for youth, parents, and teachers that is free to access on my website. I love the idea of people engaging with the reading and making it easier for folks to get activities. I got a ton of feedback that people really loved the activities. So, with this book, I thought, 'why not make it part of the book itself?' This way the youth can engage with the book differently throughout the reading, and teachers who use the book in classrooms have the activities right in hand. Makes it more engaging and exciting, at least, that's my opinion.

**MP:** Why did you choose a graphic novel format?

**LM:** Graphic novels really speak to youth and adults differently than just writing prose. Especially with a biography, the graphics bring a person's story to actual life. I am grateful to Magination Press for letting me do the book in this format. I think seeing her life, along with reading about it, gives a whole new feeling and perspective to Dr. Clark's story.

**MP:** Was there any part of the story that was more challenging to write than others?

**LM:** The biggest challenge was that Dr. Clark attributed an experience she had when she was 4 years old to a pivotal moment for her advocacy work throughout her life. In particular, she talked about the lynching that happened in her town. She didn't witness it directly, but the experience around her in the moment was critical to who she was and her work. Lynchings are clearly not a happy topic and are gruesome as someone lost their life. I wanted to portray the moment from her perspective for the audience, and why it would move her to be a champion for others throughout her life.

**MP:** How was creating this book different from creating your picture book, *Lulu, The One and Only*?

**LM:** It was an extremely different process. Lulu was the art of fiction, but this book took me on a journey to find a real person. I literally had to go to libraries and archives across multiple states to do my research on Dr. Clark. Since she is a real person, I wanted to make sure I was able to honor her voice and experiences as much as I could to really bring "her" to the readers. That creates a whole different experience than Lulu, who lived as a character only in my head, and then bringing her to the pages of the book. There is more responsibility with Dr. Clark to make sure she was depicted correctly.

**MP:** How was creating this book different from writing books for adults?

**LM:** The research process was not dissimilar to what I do in my academic books. I used my skills as a scholar to research Dr. Clark, like I would with my academic, adult books, but how I convey the information is different. I

like writing for youth, as I always have to think back to how I would want this story to be told to Lynnette at 10 years old or Lynnette at 14 years old.

**MP:** Did you have a favorite book when you were a child or a teenager?

**LM:** There was a book I read as a teenager called *My Posse Don't Do Homework*. It was a memoir by LouAnne Johnson, who was an urban teacher in California. My mom randomly had it on her bedside table, and I decided to pick it up and read. This book was pivotal in me wanting to become an urban educator.