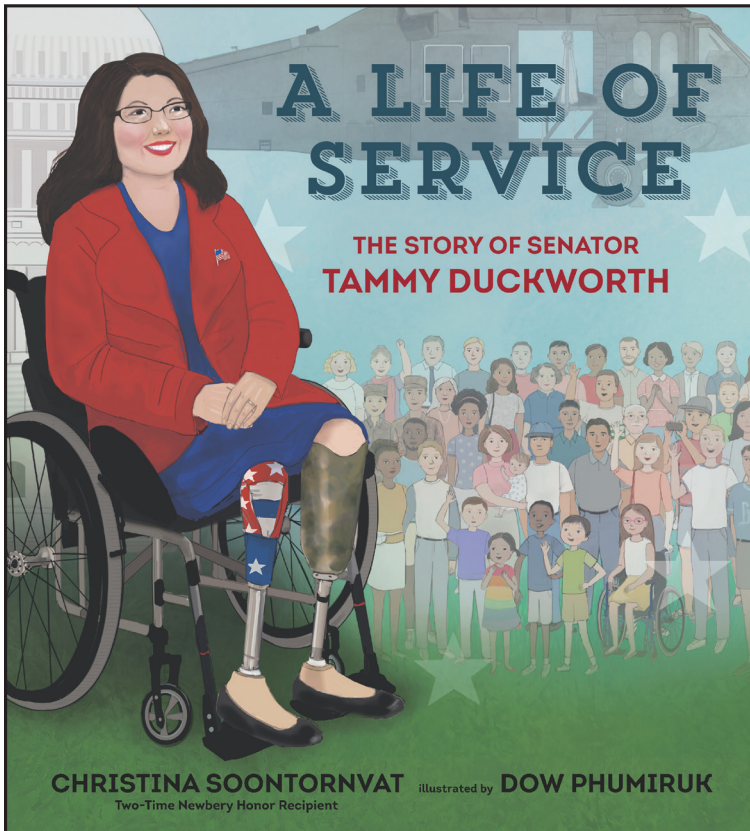


# A LIFE OF SERVICE

## THE STORY OF SENATOR TAMMY DUCKWORTH

CHRISTINA SOONTORNVAT

ILLUSTRATED BY DOW PHUMIRUK



Senator Tammy Duckworth has logged a long list of “firsts” during her tenure as the first Thai American woman elected to Congress, including being the first woman with a disability to serve in the House and Senate. But while she dreamed of serving her country from a young age, Tammy’s path was not without its challenges. In this dramatic account, award-winning creators Christina Soontornvat and Dow Phumiruk chronicle Tammy’s journey. From her childhood fight to keep her family from homelessness to her service in the US Army to her recovery from grievous injuries sustained in the line of duty, Tammy never lost her determination to keep going against staggering odds.

Evoking Tammy Duckworth’s spirited nature with sensitivity and joy, this uplifting account of a groundbreaking military veteran and rising political star will inspire readers to dream and achieve. A time line and suggestions for further reading are included.

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Also available as an e-book and in audio

### Common Core Connections

This guide, which can be used with large or small groups, will help students meet several of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts. These include the reading literature standards for key ideas and details, craft and structure, and integration of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI), as well as the speaking and listening standards for comprehension and collaboration and for presentation of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL). Questions can also be used in writing prompts for independent work (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W).



## Discussion Questions

1. Describe Tammy Duckworth's childhood. Where did she live at different times? What were some of the positive aspects of how she grew up? What details do you learn from the narrative? What information and emotions do the illustrations convey?
2. What were some of the challenges that Tammy Duckworth faced in her life before she joined the military? How did she deal with them, and what does that tell you about her?
3. What inspired Tammy Duckworth to join the military? What did she like about it? Why did her unit matter so much to her? What are some of the things she learned in the military, both professionally and personally? Why do you think she loved flying helicopters?
4. Describe the day that she was injured and what happened. How was she rescued? What were her injuries? What was her recovery like? Who and what helped her face the long road to getting better? What do you learn from the pictures that you don't find in the narrative?
5. Why did other members of the military in the hospital start asking Tammy Duckworth for help? What did she do for them? What does her response to their requests show about her character?
6. What inspired Tammy Duckworth to run for political office? What was her path to getting elected? What problems did she face while she was running for office? What did she hope to do when she was elected?
7. "When Tammy was sworn in as senator, she racked up a long string of firsts." What were the firsts? How do the illustrations convey them? Why are the firsts important? What does the fact that none of these had happened before tell you about the history of our country and government?
8. Why is the book titled *A Life of Service*? Recap some of the ways that Tammy Duckworth has served other people and her country. Why is public service so important? What are some other ways to be of service?
9. How do these words describe Tammy Duckworth's approach to physical recovery? How do they also describe other aspects of her life?

*Inch by inch, falling, getting up, and falling again.*

*And again.*

*Get back up.*

*Keep fighting.*

10. One of the things Tammy Duckworth realized as a child was that "her country's true power came not from its military strength but from the ideals it had been founded upon." What ideals did she mean? Why did she think they were important? How has she used her life to promote those ideals?

## Classroom Activities

### NOTE TO SELF

Share the video “Note to Self” in which Senator Duckworth writes to her younger self. Have students discuss which parts of her note overlap with what they learned in *A Life of Service* and which parts add new information. Ask students to discuss her advice: “You’ll learn that perfection isn’t what matters. It’s how you respond to hardship and failure that defines you.”

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P\\_Q11uJAqSw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P_Q11uJAqSw)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.S.1

### LEGACY OF PUBLIC SERVICE

As a class, review “Tammy Duckworth’s Ongoing Legacy of Service” at the back of the book. Then have students break into small groups, with each group discussing one of the issues and why it matters. They should write down at least four reasons the issue is important. Reconvene as a class and have each group share their conclusions.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.R.1; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.1

### CHANGING THE WORLD

After the students discuss Tammy Duckworth’s legacy and issues, ask them to consider how they would like to improve things for their community, state, or country. Have them write a short essay or give a short speech with at least three areas they would be interested in working on and why. Discuss the ideas as a class.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.1; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.1

### WHO REPRESENTS YOU?

Ask students to name elected officials they know of, from local council members to the US president. Ask the class to do further research to find more such officials. Have students discuss which one(s) they’d like to write to. The letter or email written individually, in groups, or as a class could be a request for information, a suggestion to support an issue, a response to the official’s actions in office, or a similar message.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.2; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7

### WE ARE YOUR DEFENSE

Either as a class or with students working in pairs, explore information about the US military, starting at the government websites below. Have students consider questions like what the military does, what different branches of the service do, duties within those branches, who can join, and so on. Research can take a variety of approaches, including searching online, finding print sources, or interviewing relatives or community members with military experience. As a class or in pairs, prepare a multimedia presentation with narrative, visuals, interview recordings, and music.

<https://www.usa.gov/join-military#item-214225>

<https://www.defense.gov/About/>

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.5

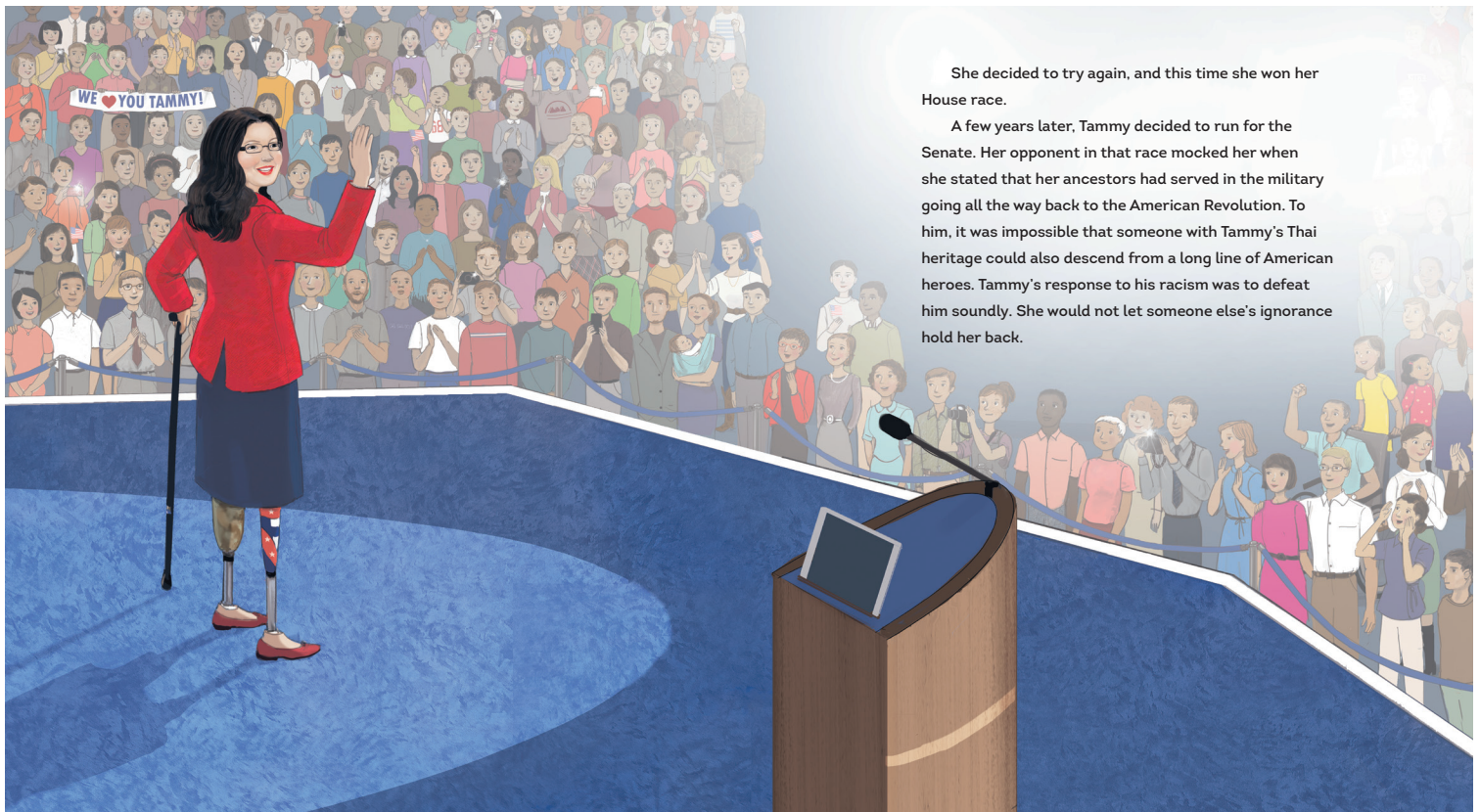


### ABOUT CHRISTINA SOONTORNVAT

Christina Soontornvat is the acclaimed author of picture books, chapter books, nonfiction, and middle-grade fiction, including the Newbery Honor-winning fantasy *A Wish in the Dark*. Her narrative nonfiction book *All Thirteen: The Incredible Cave Rescue of the Thai Boys' Soccer Team* received a Newbery Honor, a Robert F. Sibert Honor, and the Kirkus Prize, among other honors and awards. She lives in Austin, Texas.

### ABOUT DOW PHUMIRUK

Dow Phumiruk is an award-winning illustrator of several picture books, including *Counting on Katherine* by Helaine Becker and *Maya Lin* by Jeanne Walker Harvey. Originally from Thailand, Dow Phumiruk lives in Colorado.



She decided to try again, and this time she won her House race.

A few years later, Tammy decided to run for the Senate. Her opponent in that race mocked her when she stated that her ancestors had served in the military going all the way back to the American Revolution. To him, it was impossible that someone with Tammy's Thai heritage could also descend from a long line of American heroes. Tammy's response to his racism was to defeat him soundly. She would not let someone else's ignorance hold her back.

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These questions were prepared by Kathleen Odean, a school librarian for more than fifteen years who now gives professional development workshops about new books for children and teens. She chaired the 2002 Newbery Award Committee and served on earlier Caldecott and Newbery Award committees.