students and staff to reach their highest potential, it is discarded. Every new philosophy, action and assignment has to meet that expectation.

The founding principal of the school, Jon Walk, had two years to conceptualize the school, do research, find the best staff he could, and get parent buy-in before the school opened. He and his staff put in long hours designing a school that would lead to the success of this “at risk” population of students. Once school started, they had to forge relationships with the students, while dealing with tensions rising from the intermingling of two rival gangs—not an easy way to begin a school year! Now, twenty years later, armed with a lot of enthusiasm, focus, and a continuous push for excellence, they manage to graduate 95% of their seniors with most of them going onto some post-secondary education.

Throughout the book, author Casanova details how Cibola actually put into practice the five components that have led to their success: high expectations, leadership, counseling and guidance, the instruction of English learners, and the continuous search for improvement. I highly recommend to anyone involved in a school reform, and the process of restructuring their school culture to one of high expectations and excellence, to read this book.

Questions/comments? Email Michele@nsrfharmony.org.

BOOK REVIEW: THE IMMORTAL LIFE OF HENRIETTA LACKS

BY: REBECCA SKLOTT
NEW YORK: BROADWAY PAPERBACKS, 2011

By Dave Lehman, Connections Editor, National Facilitator

First, a quick overview from the back cover of this totally captivating book – a “Best Book of the Year” on ten book lists including O, The Oprah Magazine, Publishers Weekly, and Kirkus Reviews as well as winner of ten other “book prize” or “critic’s pick” or “must read” awards, including the Los Angeles Times, and the Times of U.K.

“Her name was Henrietta Lacks, but scientists know her as HeLa. She was a poor black tobacco farmer whose cells – taken without her knowledge in 1951 – became one of the most important tools in medicine, vital for developing the polio vaccine, cloning gene mapping, and more. Henrietta’s cells have been bought and sold by the billions, yet she remains virtually unknown, and her family can’t afford health insurance. This phenomenal New York Times bestseller tells a riveting story of the collision between ethics, race, and medicine; of scientific discovery and faith healing; and of a daughter consumed with questions about the mother she never knew.”

It’s that phrase - “collision between ethics, race, and medicine”- that leads me to strongly recommend this book to all educators concerned about issues of equity and diversity, race, class and social justice. Although it reads like a novel, this is non-fiction at its best, involving a ten year quest by the author - the first book of this award winning science
writer - to understand the
details of Henrietta’s life and her
legacy. This quest will take you
back to the segregated south
of the 1920s. - Henrietta was
born in 1920, living in a small
shack with her parents and
seven siblings, outside Roanoke,
Virginia, where the family still
farmed tobacco as their slave
ancestors had done. After her
mother died in 1924 she was
raised by her father’s family in
Clover, Virginia.

Rebecca Sklott will take you
to Johns Hopkins Hospital on 5
February 1951 where and when
Henrietta was diagnosed with
cervical cancer, and Dr.
Howard Jones taking a sample
of those cancer cells for further
investigation. You’ll learn how
these cells, labeled “HeLa,”
followed the history of the
medical and pharmaceutical
development of methods for
culturing cells as it became a
commercial enterprise. -
essential not only to research on
the causes and treatments of
all kinds of cancers, but also to
the development of drugs for
treating herpes, leukemia,
influenza, hemophilia,
Parkinson’s disease, and for
study of such diverse interests as
lactose digestion, sexually
transmitted diseases,
appendicitis, human longevity,
and mosquito mating. In author
Skott’s words, – “Like guinea
pigs and mice, Henrietta’s cells
have become the standard
laboratory workhorse.” That
statement is still true today,
some sixty years later.

But you’ll also learn of the
black oral history dating back
to the 1800s of white “night
doctors” who kidnapped black
slaves for medical research, -
shades of Nazi Germany. You’ll
learn of Crownsville Hospital
Center, formerly the Hospital
for the Negro Insane, and
Henrietta and Rebecca’s
efforts to learn about what
happened to Henrietta’s sister.
It was in this hospital that
research was conducted on
patients without their consent,
including “pneumo-
encephalography” in which
holes were drilled into the skulls
of patients such that fluid
surrounding the brain could be
drained and air pumped in so
X-rays could be taken of the
brain through the skull. And
you’ll learn of how the family
struggled through the days of
segregation and into the
present, never receiving
compensation for the HeLa cells
These are sold to research
laboratories throughout the
world, without any real laws to
protect patients’ rights. It’s not
a pretty picture, and one which
Rebecca tells keeping faith to
the dialogue of the native
dialects. - as one of Henrietta’s
relatives told Sklott – “If you
pretty up how people spoke
and change the things they
said, that’s dishonest. It’s taking
away their lives, their
experiences, and their selves.”

Reading this book not
only gave me as a former
biology teacher enough of the
details of the medical research
and legal issues involved in the
HeLa cells, but also a deep
appreciation of yet another
chapter in the history of African-
Americans in this country. This is
a history which as educators we
need to understand if we are to
fully engage in the education
of young African-Americans in
whatever school we’re in,
wherever it’s located.

Questions/comments? Email
davelehman@mac.com