

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](mailto: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

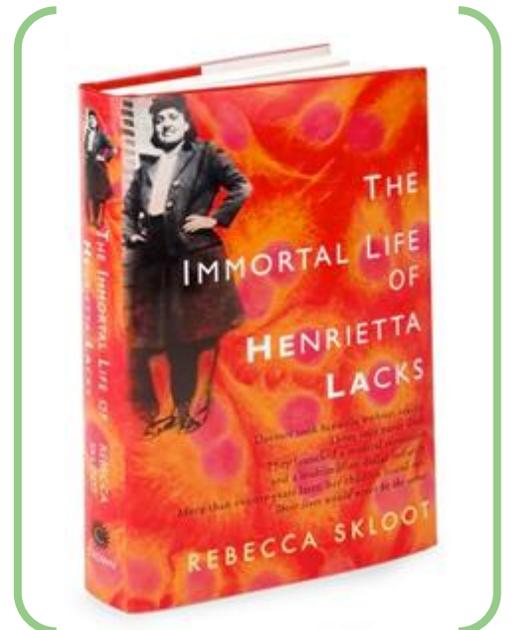
writer - to understand the details of Henrietta's life and her legacy. This quest will take you back to the segregated south of the 1920s. - Henrietta was born in 1920, living in a small shack with her parents and seven siblings, outside Roanoke, Virginia, where the family still farmed tobacco as their 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

Sklott'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](mailto:davelehman@mac.com)