

# Inspiring Women

Four of our year 9 students have devoted a lot of time to compiling information about inspiring women from around the world to help us celebrate

**International Women's Day** this year (08 March).

They have chosen one woman each – someone who they found to be particularly inspiring.

**Thank you, Joanna, Jiya, Elise and Koyenum.**

## Joanna's Choice - Geraldine Roman

She's a politician and journalist who's done a lot of important things for the Philippines in particular by filing bills for eco-tourism, livelihood enhancements, agricultural advancements, health and education.

She, along with other lawmakers, launched the passage of the anti-discrimination bill based on sexual orientation and gender identity - the SOGIE Equality Bill. She did this through a speech in the House of Representatives which gathered international support for the LGBTQIA+ community in the Philippines. In September 2017 the bill was passed unanimously with no lawmakers voting against it after 17 years of a political stalemate.

In February she became the first transgender official of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and in October she pushed for the same sex civil union bill - "the sky will not fall if the bill is passed."

Joanna chose her because she stood up for a variety of things, all good causes which helped her country a lot.

**Geraldine Batista Roman** (born April 23, 1967) is a Filipina journalist and politician serving as the Representative of Bataan's 1st district since 2016. She is the first transgender person elected to the Congress of the Philippines. She was named as one of the 100 Leading Global Thinkers of 2016 by US-based Foreign Policy magazine and one of "13 Inspiring Women of 2016" list by Time magazine. During the 2016 Philippine elections, Roman ran under the Liberal Party banner for the position of 1st District Representative for Bataan in the House of Representatives. She competed against Hermosa mayor Danilo Malana of Aksyon Demokratiko and won with more than 62% of the total votes. She, along with other elected lawmakers (collectively known as "equality champs"), launched the passage of the anti-discrimination bill on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity (now known as the SOGIE Equality Bill) through a speech in the House of Representatives that garnered international support for LGBT rights in the Philippines. She also filed bills regarding eco-tourism, livelihood enhancements, agriculture advancements, health, and education, which were the advocacies of her family, and were focused on the first district of Bataan.



She left the Liberal Party in May 2017 and transferred to PDP–Laban, the current ruling political party of the Philippines, to hasten the House passage of the bills that she supported. In September 2017, the SOGIE Equality Bill passed unanimously in the House of Representatives, after 17 years of political limbo, with no lawmakers voting against it. In January 2018, Roman, along with the House Speaker, filed House Bill 6595 (the Civil Partnership Bill), which seeks to legalize civil unions, regardless of gender. In February, Roman became the first transgender official of the Armed Forces of the Philippines. In October, she again pushed for the same-sex civil union bill, adding that the "sky will not fall" if the bill is passed. During the same month, she filed her certificate of candidacy for re-election in her district. In November 2018, during the first meeting of the House Committee on Disaster Management which she chairs, Roman prioritized the rehabilitation of the war-torn Islamic City of Marawi. In the 2019 Philippine elections, Roman ran under the PDP–Laban banner for the position of 1st District Representative for Bataan in the House of Representatives. She competed against Emelita Justo Lubag of Katipunan ng Demokratikong Pilipino and won with 91% of the total votes. She is a member of the following committees: Veterans Affairs and Welfare (Chairperson), Women and Gender Equality (Vice Chairperson), Appropriations (Member of the Majority), Climate Change (Member of the Majority), Poverty Alleviation (Member of the Majority), Sustainable Development Goals (Member of the Majority).

## **Jiya's Choice – Yeonmi Park**

Jiya found Yeonmi's life story to be very fascinating. She is a human rights activist and North Korean defector, but she started off as being part of a family who was reduced to smuggling Chinese, cigarettes and rice, because her father could not find a job. When Yeonmi was 8 years old, she was forced to eat bugs and grass in order to survive. She and her family managed to escape from North Korea to China, but her older sister left a few days before, and nobody knows where she is today. There her father died of colon cancer. After that, Yeonmi and her mother went to Mongolia to seek asylum, then to South Korea, and finally moved to New York City in America to try and live a peaceful rest of their lives. She rose to fame after giving a speech at the 2014 One Young World Summit, when she talked about her experience escaping North Korea and its diabolic living conditions.

Jiya finds her very inspiring because she is only 28 right now, which means that she escaped from North Korea when she was a mere 14 years old. Her story of perseverance shows us that even when times are tough, we should still stand and keep on trying, that our will to reach our goals should be that strong.



**Yeonmi Park** (Korean: 박연미; born 4 October 1993) is a North Korean defector and activist whose family fled from North Korea to China in 2007 and settled in South Korea in 2009, before moving to the United States in 2014. She was born in the North Korean city of Hyesan, close to the Chinese border. After her father was imprisoned for trading on the black market, her family were branded criminals and forced to the margins of society. They fled to China, where Park and her mother fell into the hands of human traffickers and she was sold into slavery before escaping to Mongolia. She is now an advocate for victims of human trafficking in China and works to promote human rights in North Korea and around

the globe.

Park came to wider global attention after giving a speech at the 2014 One Young World Summit—an annual summit that gathers young people from around the world to develop solutions to global problems—in Ireland. Her speech, about her experience escaping from North Korea, received 50 million views in two days on YouTube and social media, with a current total of more than 80 million. Her memoir *In Order to Live: A North Korean Girl's Journey to Freedom* was published in September 2015. Park runs the YouTube channel "Voice of North Korea by Yeonmi Park", a personal social media vlog covering North Korean news, politics, and culture. Park has also become a member of LiNK (Liberty in North Korea), a U.S. non-profit organization that rescues North Korean refugees hiding in China and resettles them in South Korea and the United States.

## Elise's Choice – Patsy Takemoto Mink

Patsy overcame lots of obstacles in her life; both her illness and countless experiences of discrimination. She was denied the chance to study medicine (despite having two majors in chemistry and zoology), as well as not being able to practise law in her state nor take a job due to interracial marriage. Despite these hurdles, she still went on to become the first Asian American to serve in the US congress, with only the help of her family and a few unpaid volunteers, unlike the usual campaign teams that most politicians have. Even with this title, she never forgot her journey to success and continued to fight for gender and racial equality, affordable childcare and bilingual education. She co-wrote the *Title IX Law* which stated that “No person in the US shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.” Elise feels the relevance to us today in an educational setting and finds it moving that one woman managed to do so much. Her commitment and steely determination are extremely admirable and she didn't let all the people in the world who thought non-white women were inferior to them, get her down.

**Patsy Matsu Mink** (née Takemoto; December 6, 1927 – September 28, 2002) was an American attorney and politician from Hawaii. Mink was a third-generation Japanese American. After graduating as valedictorian from Maui High School, she attended the University of Hawaii at Mānoa for two years and enrolled at the University of Nebraska, where she experienced racism and worked to have segregation policies eliminated. After illness forced her to return to Hawaii to complete her studies, she applied to 12 medical schools to continue her education but was rejected by all. Then, she opted to study law and was accepted at the University of Chicago Law School. When she graduated, she was unable to find employment and moved to Hawaii. When she was refused the right to take the bar examination, due to the loss of her Hawaiian territorial residency upon marriage, she challenged the sexist statute. Though she won the right to take the test and passed the examination, she could not find employment because she was married and had a child. Her father helped her open her own practice in 1953 and around the same time she became a member of the Democratic Party. Hoping to work legislatively to change discriminatory customs through law, she worked as an attorney for the Hawaiian territorial legislature.



The following year, she ran for a seat in the territorial House of Representatives. Winning the race, she became the first Japanese-American woman to serve in the territorial House and later, the first woman to serve in the territorial Senate. In 1960, Mink gained national attention when she spoke in favour of the civil rights platform at the Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles. In 1964, Mink ran for federal office and won a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives. She was the first woman of colour and the first Asian-American woman elected to Congress, and also the first woman elected to Congress from the state of Hawaii. While in Congress in the late 1960s, she introduced the first comprehensive initiatives under the Early Childhood Education Act, which included the first federal child-care bill and worked on the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. In 1970, she became the first person to oppose a Supreme Court nominee on the basis of discrimination against women. Mink initiated a lawsuit which led to significant changes to presidential authority under the Freedom of Information Act in 1971. In 1972, she co-authored the Title IX Amendment of the Higher Education Act, later renamed the Patsy T. Mink Equal Opportunity in Education Act in 2002. Mink was the first East Asian-American woman to seek the presidential nomination of the Democratic Party. She ran in the 1972 election, entering the Oregon primary as an anti-war candidate. She was the federal Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs. She also served as the president of Americans for Democratic Action and then returned to Honolulu, where she was elected to the Honolulu City Council, which she chaired until 1985. In 1990, she was again elected to the U.S. House, serving until her death in 2002. During her second six terms in office, she continued to work on legislation of importance to women, children, immigrants, and minorities.

## **Koyenum's Choice - Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie**

Koyenum finds Chimamanda particularly inspirational because of the way that she has used speeches and the written word to oppose oppression and help spread messages of feminism and anti-racism. Her TEDx talk and essay, 'We Should All Be Feminists', strives to correct assumptions and misconceptions of what feminism is and the kind of person you have to be to be called a feminist. It encourages people from all walks of life to get involved and to join the fight for women's rights.

In her previous TED talk, the 'The Danger of a Single Story', one of the most viewed TED talks of all time, Chimamanda challenged stereotypes and worked to redefine the narrative surrounding Africa and what it means to be an African.

Koyenum finds her books to be beautifully written and convey important messages and themes through the art of fiction.



**Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie** (born 15 September 1977, in Enugu, Nigeria) is a Nigerian writer whose works include novels, short stories and nonfiction. She was described in The Times Literary Supplement as "the most prominent" of a "procession of critically acclaimed young anglophone authors [which] is succeeding in attracting a new generation of readers to African literature", particularly in her second home, the United States. She grew up on the campus of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, where her father was a professor and her mother was the first female Registrar. She studied medicine for a year at Nsukka and then left for the US at the age of 19 to continue her education on a different path.



She has written the novels *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), and *Americanah* (2013), the short story collection *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009), and the book-length essay *We Should All Be Feminists* (2014). Her most recent books are *Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* (2017), *Zikora* (2020) and *Notes on Grief* (2021). Adichie spoke on "The Danger of a Single Story" for TED in 2009. It has become one of the most-viewed TED Talks of all time with over 27 million views. On 15 March 2012, she delivered the "Connecting Cultures" Commonwealth Lecture 2012 at the Guildhall, London. Adichie also spoke on being a feminist for TEDxEuston in December 2012, with her speech "We should all be feminists". It initiated a worldwide conversation on feminism and was published as a book in 2014. It was sampled for the 2013 song "\*\*\*Flawless" by American performer Beyoncé, where it attracted further attention.

She has received several honorary doctorate degrees from a range of universities. She has also received several awards, such as a MacArthur Genius Grant, a Hodder Fellowship at Princeton, a fellowship at Harvard, a MacArthur fellowship, the Africa Freedom Prize 2020, the International Herman Hesse Prize, and she was named on OOOM Magazine's World's Most Inspiring People in 2019.