



**Clara Luper
Memorial
Rising Star
Teaching
Award
2018**

**In 2018, the Oklahoma Council for
Social Studies began an annual
tradition of presenting the
Clara Luper Memorial
Rising Star Teacher Award.**

**Clara Mae Shepard Luper
grew up near Hoffman, Oklahoma
and graduated with an education
degree from Langston University.**

As social studies educators, most of us know Ms. Luper as a local and national civil rights pioneer. Her leadership in the 1958 Oklahoma City sit-in movement at Katz Drugstore ignited a successful nonviolent protests nationwide.

For over a decade, she mentored the members of the NAACP Youth Council during its campaign to end the segregation of public accommodations. Ms. Luper also led campaigns to gain equal banking rights, employment opportunities, open housing, and voting rights.





Active in the national civil rights movement, she participated in the 1963 March on Washington and took part in the Selma to Montgomery marches.

Her civic activism continued through her 1972 campaign for the U.S. Senate.



When asked by the press if she, a black woman, could represent white people, she responded:

“Of course, I can represent white people, black people, red people, yellow people, brown people, and polka dot people.

You see, I have lived long enough to know that people are people.”



But many of us may not be as familiar with Ms. Luper's forty-year career as a social studies educator. Clara Luper received her masters degree in American history at the University of Oklahoma, being the first African-American admitted to the program. She taught at Taft, Pawnee, and Spencer before joining the faculty at Oklahoma City's Dunjee High School.



In 1968, she transferred to Northwest Classen High and later to John Marshall High School.

Upon her retirement from Oklahoma City Schools in 1989, Ms. Luper stated:

“I learned from my white students; they learn from me. The beauty of America is in the diversity of her people.”



Ms. Luper's energy for life was contagious, as was her belief in our individual potential. Her enthusiasm for history and government inspired so many others to become teachers.

If anyone had the privilege of being one of Ms. Luper's students, he can attest to the experience as eye-opening, memorable, and beyond extraordinary.



On a daily basis, Ms. Luper exhibited the traits to which all of social studies teachers aspire. She didn't lecture about the past, she engaged her students in active dialogue about history and how it continues to impact their lives today. Her classroom was a safe place where opinions could be challenged respectfully, where opposing perspectives of the past and present were explored, and where learning was regarded as a lifelong pursuit.



In some of her manuscripts, Clara Luper elaborates on her philosophy of a student-centered teaching classroom.

In “My Philosophy of Teaching” she writes, “I felt that teachers were a distributor of a product that could be easily distributed to the students.”

She describes her new philosophy of teaching, which she called “The Diamond Philosophy.”



1) All Students are diamonds, regardless of Race, Creed, Religions, or Economic conditions.

2) Diamonds need special care. They need to be discovered. Hidden talents and dreams can only be discovered with special care and digging.

And finally, Show off and preserve your diamonds. Give each student the confidence of victory.

Perhaps without realizing it, so many of our paths crossed those of Clara Luper's the spring of 2018. As champions of our students' education, we walked to the state capitol to fight for causes as worthy as Ms. Luper's. The steps we took had already been blazened by Ms. Luper. In fact, many of us probably approached the capitol along a portion of 23rd street, appropriately named the Clara Luper Corridor.



Over the years, Ms. Clara Luper has been honored in many ways:

Oklahoma Hall of Fame

National Education Association's

Rosa Parks Memorial Award

NAACP's National Service Citation

This year, the University of Oklahoma named its Department of African American Studies in her honor.





**Educator
History Teacher
Civic Activist
Mentor
Role Model**

**With the blessing of the Luper family,
the Oklahoma Council for Social Studies
wishes to recognize Ms. Luper's legacy
through our annual
Clara Luper Memorial
Rising Star Teaching Award.**

Clara Luper
Memorial
Rising Star
Teaching
Award



A portrait of an elderly woman with short, curly white hair and glasses, smiling. She is wearing a dark top with a white fringed shawl. In the background, there is a faint, larger portrait of a man with glasses. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

Clara Mae
Shepard Luper

May 3, 1923 - June 8, 2011