

TINY TOTS IN TIARAS AND TUXEDOS

The Life, Love, and Business Success of Kermit B. Hill



BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION GUIDE

This guide is designed to help book clubs explore Kermit B. Hill's extraordinary journey, from segregated Arkansas and wartime government service to the creation of Tiny Tot Nursery School, an educational institution that became part of the St. Louis community for six decades.

“An accessible, valuable addition to the histories of Black businesswomen in America.”

- Kirkus Reviews



MEET THE AUTHOR & DAUGHTER

Francene Mary Diane Hill

Email: francene@tinytotalums.com

Phone: 301-641-0879

Book Website: TinyTotBook.com

Author Website: Francene-Hill.com

Before You Begin

A note for the discussion leader

Tiny Tots in Tiaras and Tuxedos blends biography, memoir, and historical narrative. It draws on family memories and a substantial documentary record, including 80 personal love letters, hundreds of photographs, original War Department files, and more than 100 news clippings.

The goal of this guide is not to prescribe one interpretation of Kermit B. Hill's life. Instead, it is to give your group room to consider the choices, pressures, achievements, relationships, and historical forces that shaped her story.

A simple 60-minute format

- **5 minutes — Opening:** What was your first reaction to Kermit's story?
- **15 minutes — Her Journey:** Discuss the choices and turning points that shaped her life.
- **15 minutes — History & Opportunity:** Consider race, gender, migration, work, and social change.
- **15 minutes — Tiny Tot Legacy:** Explore education, entrepreneurship, Black pride, and community.
- **10 minutes — Reflection:** What part of Kermit's story stays with you, and why?

You do not need to use every question. Choose the questions that best fit your group and allow the conversation to develop naturally.

Conversation agreements

- Invite different interpretations; disagreement can deepen a discussion.
- Distinguish what the book documents from what you infer as a reader.
- Give members space to connect the historical story to contemporary questions without losing sight of its time and place.

Part I — A Life of Choices

Kermit's story moves through work, marriage, motherhood, entrepreneurship, and community leadership. Use these questions to explore the person behind the accomplishments.

Her journey

- Which part of Kermit's journey surprised you most: her work as a probation officer, her wartime government service, or her creation of Tiny Tot? Why?
- How did Kermit's early life and the world in which she was raised shape the opportunities available to her?
- What qualities did Kermit demonstrate repeatedly as she moved through different stages of her life?
- At what point did you begin to see Kermit not simply as a mother or educator, but as an entrepreneur and community leader?

Marriage, work & family

- How did the expectations placed on married women influence Kermit's choices?
- What does the transition from government employment to creating a business suggest about adaptability and agency?
- How do family responsibilities and personal ambition interact in Kermit's story?
- Were there moments when you wanted Kermit to make a different choice? What does your reaction reveal about your own expectations?
- How did Kermit's confidential logistics role at the WWII Pentagon build the personal independence and resolve needed to launch a solo enterprise in segregated 1950s St. Louis?

Love & humanity

- How did the personal material in the book affect your understanding of Kermit beyond her public accomplishments?
- What did the love letters and family perspective add to the portrait of Kermit?

Think about it

If you had to describe Kermit in three words after reading the book, what would they be—and what moments support your choices?

Part II — History, Race & Opportunity

Kermit's life unfolds against major changes in American history. Kirkus notes the book's connection to the Great Migration, civil rights and Black Power movements, and the history of Black women entrepreneurs.

Race & place

- How does Kermit's experience growing up in segregated Arkansas shape the story that follows?
- What does her move into urban opportunity reveal about the larger experience of Black Americans during the Great Migration?
- How did the social environment of mid-20th-century America shape what Kermit could—and could not—take for granted?

Women & entrepreneurship

- What barriers facing Black women entrepreneurs are visible in Kermit's story?
- What made Kermit's decision to create Tiny Tot significant for its time?
- How does Kermit's story challenge assumptions about when and how women become entrepreneurs?

Community & Black pride

- Why do you think Kermit wanted young Black children to experience themselves as kings and queens?
- What did the coronations, performances, fashion shows, and graduations communicate to preschool children and families beyond the events themselves?
- How can an educational institution become part of a community's cultural identity?

Connect the history

- Which historical context in the book would you like to learn more about?
- Did reading Kermit's personal story change how you think about any period or issue in American history?

Part III — Tiny Tot as an Institution

Tiny Tot Nursery School of St. Louis, Inc. as a business operated from the Hill family home and grew into a longstanding St. Louis institution. The annual King and Queen Coronation became a signature community event

Education & leadership

- What was distinctive about Kermit's approach to early childhood education?
- Why might public speaking, performance, ceremony, and presentation be powerful tools for developing confidence in young children?
- What does the Tiny Tot experience suggest about the relationship between education and identity?

Building something lasting

- What transformed Tiny Tot from a nursery school into a community institution?
- Which aspects of Kermit's leadership seem most responsible for Tiny Tot's longevity?
- What is the difference between building a successful business and building a lasting institution?
- What can today's educators, parents, and entrepreneurs learn from Kermit's example?

The meaning of the crown

- The coronation was more than a pageant. What messages about dignity, possibility, beauty, and belonging did it send?
- How might the experience of being publicly celebrated as a child influence a person later in life?
- What modern programs or institutions serve a similar purpose in their communities?

Discussion challenge

Imagine Tiny Tot did not exist. What would the St. Louis community have lost? What does that question reveal about the value of institutions that are easy to overlook?

Part IV — Reading the Archive

One of the book's distinguishing features is the evidence behind the narrative. Kirkus specifically praised the wealth of photographs, news clippings, handwritten letters, and other visual elements.

The sources

80 love letters	Personal correspondence between Kermit and her then boyfriend, Augustus Hill offering an intimate window into relationships and private life.
War Department files	Primary-source material connected to Kermit's wartime government service.
100+ news clippings	African American media coverage of Tiny Tot and its place in the community.
Hundreds of photographs	Visual records that help preserve people, places, ceremonies, and moments.

Discuss the evidence

- How did the photographs affect the way you imagined Kermit and Tiny Tot?
- What can a photograph communicate that a written description cannot?
- What might love letters reveal that newspaper coverage would not?
- How does documentary evidence affect your trust in a historical narrative?
- What responsibilities does an author have when reconstructing scenes from historical records and family materials?

A deeper question

- What happens when private family history becomes part of the public historical record?
- What are the benefits—and what might be complicated about that process?
- How does Francene Hill's daughter-archivist perspective shape the authenticity and emotional depth of the narrative?

Part V — Meet the Author

Francene Mary Diane Hill is Kermit B. Hill's daughter and grew up surrounded by Tiny Tot. Over the years, she worked in roles ranging from teacher's assistant to bus driver before serving as a Board Member and Assistant Director. She holds a B.A. in Psychology from Smith College and an M.S. in Human and Family Studies from Penn State University.

Questions for Francene

- What inspired you to tell your mother's story?
- What did you discover during your research that surprised you?
- What was it like working with your mother's love letters and historical records?
- How did growing up at Tiny Tot influence the way you understood your mother?
- How did you decide which parts of your family history belonged in the biography?
- What do you want readers to understand about Kermit that they might not have understood before reading the book?
- What did writing the book teach you about your mother?
- What do you hope readers carry forward from Kermit's legacy?

Invite the author

Would your group like to continue the conversation with Francene?

Author Francene Mary Diane Hill is available, as schedule permits, for book-club conversations, author panels, speaking engagements, and community events.

REQUEST AN AUTHOR BOOK CLUB CONVERSATION



Francene Mary Diane Hill,
Author and Daughter of Kermit B. Hill

Contact Information:

Email: francene@tinytotalums.com

Phone: 301-641-0879

Book Website: TinyTotBook.com

Author Website: Francene-Hill.com

Continue the Story

If Kermit B. Hill's story sparked conversation in your group, keep exploring the questions of history, entrepreneurship, education, family, and legacy.

Share the reading experience

- Invite members to identify one passage or moment they would recommend to someone who has not read the book.
- Compare the different ways members interpreted Kermit's choices.
- Discuss what parts of the story deserve greater recognition in American history.

Ready to read together?

Tiny Tots in Tiaras and Tuxedos

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Hardcover: \$36.99 **Paperback:** \$21.99 **eBook:** \$5.99

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About the book

Kirkus Reviews describes *Tiny Tots in Tiaras and Tuxedos* as an engaging biography, memoir, and historical narrative—and an important addition to the literature on mid-20th-century Black women entrepreneurs.

The story is built from a remarkable archive of family and historical materials and follows Kermit from segregated Arkansas to wartime government service and ultimately to the Tiny Tot Nursery School of St. Louis, Inc., which became a cornerstone of the city for decades.

Stay connected

Visit the *Tiny Tots in Tiaras and Tuxedos* website for the latest book news, historical stories, author events, media coverage, and additional resources for readers and book clubs.

TinyTotBook.com

Book club organizers: Contact Francene Mary Diane Hill at francene@tinytotalums.com for author appearances, review copies, event invitations, or book-club conversations.

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Theme Discussion

WOMEN & ENTREPRENEURSHIP

What does Kermit's story reveal about building a business when there is no established path?

BLACK HISTORY

How does the personal story help you understand broader historical changes differently?

MOTHERHOOD & AMBITION

What does the book suggest about balancing family and professional purpose?

IDENTITY & REPRESENTATION

Why might the Tiny Tot coronations, fashion shows and celebrations have mattered so deeply?

COMMUNITY

When does an institution become part of a community's identity?

LEGACY

What evidence shows that Kermit's impact continued beyond her own working years?

DEEP-DIVE QUESTION

If you had to explain Kermit Hill's legacy to someone who had never heard of Tiny Tot, what three words would you choose—and why?

Closing The Conversation

Invite each member to complete one sentence:

“The moment I will remember most is...”

“Something this book taught me about history is...”

“Something this book taught me about entrepreneurship is...”

“Someone who helped shape my life is...”

“The legacy I hope to leave is...”

OPTIONAL GROUP ACTIVITY

Create a “legacy map.” In the center, write Kermit Hill. Around her, list the people, institutions, children, families, alumni and communities touched by Tiny Tot. Then add one circle for each person in your book club and identify one person or institution that shaped their life.

RECOMMEND THE BOOK

If your group enjoyed the book, choose another club, library, organization or friend who might benefit from its story. Share the Tiny Tots in Tiaras and Tuxedos Book Club page and invite them into the conversation.