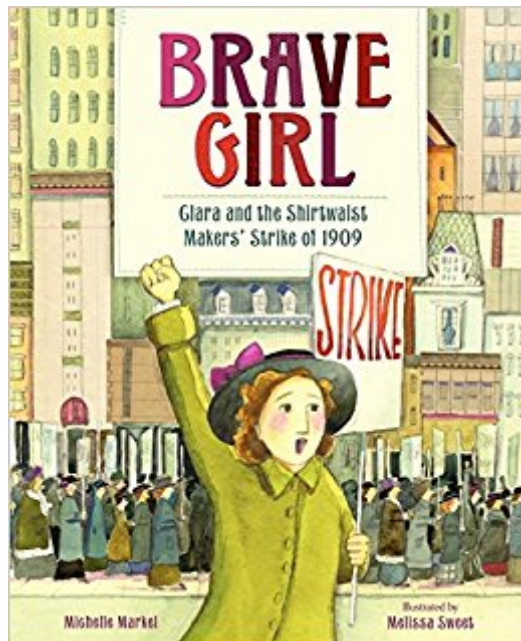




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Brave Girl: Clara And The Shirtwaist Makers' Strike Of 1909



Synopsis

The true story of the young immigrant who led the largest strike of women workers in U.S. history. This picture book biography about Ukrainian immigrant Clara Lemlich tackles topics like activism and the U.S. garment industry. The art, by Caldecott Honor winner Melissa Sweet, beautifully incorporates stitching and fabric. A bibliography and an author's note on the garment industry are included. When Clara arrived in America, she couldn't speak English. She didn't know that young women had to go to work, that they traded an education for long hours of labor, that she was expected to grow up fast. But that didn't stop Clara. She went to night school, spent hours studying English, and helped support her family by sewing in a shirtwaist factory. Clara never quit, and she never accepted that girls should be treated poorly and paid little. Fed up with the mistreatment of her fellow laborers, Clara led the largest walkout of women workers the country had seen. From her short time in America, Clara learned that everyone deserved a fair chance. That you had to stand together and fight for what you wanted. And, most importantly, that you could do anything you put your mind to. This picture book biography about the plight of immigrants in America in the early 1900s and the timeless fight for equality and justice should not be missed.

Book Information

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Age Range: 4 - 8 years

Grade Level: Preschool - 3

Customer Reviews

K-Gr 3-This picture-book biography of Clara Lemlich, a spitfire who fought hard for better working conditions, is an engaging, informative introduction to her activism as well as to the deplorable state of the U.S. garment industry in the early 1900s. Ukrainian-born Lemlich came to the United States with her parents to escape the Kishinev pogrom of 1903, only to be thrust into another appalling nightmare: the American shirtwaist factories. She began on a small scale to encourage her coworkers to strike, but at a union meeting, when even men wouldn't call for a walkout, she rose and shouted to the large gathering that the time for a strike was now, inspiring tens of thousands of women to leave their stations in the factories. Markel's style is clean and clear, making Lemlich's story accessible to a young audience. Readers are treated to solid information with a buoyant message about standing up for what is right. Sweet has created an outstanding backdrop for Markel's text with a vibrant collage of watercolor, gouache, blank dress-pattern paper, bookkeeping pages, stitches, and fabric pieces. This spirited account concludes with additional material on the garment industry and a solid bibliography. A first purchase.-Alyson Low, Fayetteville Public Library, AR

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Starred Review In the winter of 1909, a brave girl named Clara Lemlich, only five feet tall, picketed for workers' rights. She arrived in America along with hundreds of other immigrants from eastern Europe, hardly speaking any English. But instead of her father being hired, it's Clara the factories want, and off she goes to make women's clothing in a garment factory from dawn till dusk. The conditions are appalling: "If you prick your finger and bleed on the cloth, you're fined. If it happens a second time, you're fired, and more. While the men at the factory don't think girls are strong enough to strike, Clara proves them wrong, eventually leading the largest walkout of women workers in U.S. history. Markel's informative text buzzes with details of the oppressive conditions and neatly plays up Clara's can-do spirit, but she perhaps tries to cover too much territory, and as a result, omits some crucial explanations (e.g., why can't Clara's father get hired?). However, Robert F. Sibert Medalist Sweet (*Balloons over Broadway*, 2011) creates punchy, vibrant collages that make up for any shortcomings. The zingy images masterfully (and appropriately) incorporate fabric and stitches as well as old images of checks and time cards. One particularly moving picture is seen from above as row upon row of workers toil away. A detailed note about the garment industry and a selected bibliography conclude. This book has fighting spirit in spades •you go, Clara! Grades K-3. --Ann Kelley

Clara Lemlich is my Grandmother. On behalf of my entire family, I would like to thank all of you who offered such kind comments about her. I can assure you that not only was she a force to contend with in the shops but she was also a wonderful Grandmother as well. Did you know she was a vegetarian, had season tickets to the New York Opera, walked 3 miles everyday and made the best rugelach a grandchild could want!

In my Kindergarten class, we are doing a unit on "Change Makers" which got started with Martin Luther King Jr. I wanted to include other change makers that helped inspire change through non-violent action. I am so excited to be including her in my unit. Nicely illustrated, and simple enough for my 5 and 6 year old students.

Get a jump on Women's History Month with this new picture book about Clara Lemlich, a remarkable 20th century labor leader. Picture books about early 20th century Jewish women labor leaders are not exactly published every day in the picture book universe, so I was especially eager to read this new work, illustrated by award-winning illustrator Melissa Sweet, about Clara Lemlich, best known for organizing the shirtwaist makers' strike of 1909. We first meet Clara as she is arriving in the United States, part of the mass of immigrants. But Clara is different--she's "got grit, and she's going to prove it. Look out, New York!" Social justice is an overriding theme of this book, and we see through Clara's eyes the injustices of life in early 20th century America for the impoverished immigrants. "This was not the America she'd imagined." Girls are hired to make blouses for a few dollars a month, wages desperately needed to help support their families. Markel vividly describes the factories in just a few words--only two toilets, one sink, and three towels for 300 girls to share, and better not be a few minutes late or bleed on a piece of cloth if you've pricked your finger or you'll lose half a day's pay or even be fired. But little Clara Lemlich is not one to sit back and take it. She organizes strikes, and despite being arrested repeatedly, and beaten, she is not easily silenced. But she realizes that a general strike of all the garment workers is what's needed to make the bosses stand up and take notice, and at a union meeting, she calls for women to launch the largest walk-out ever. Clara is the leader of the Revolt of the Girls, as the newspapers call it. And eventually the owners meet some of their demands, including a shortened work week and better wages. Markel ends her elegie to Lemlich on a hopeful note, emphasizing how Clara's actions helped thousands of workers. "proving that in America, wrongs can be righted, warriors can wear skirts and blouses, and the bravest hearts may beat in girls only five feet tall." An afterword provides

further details about the history of the garment industry, and the role of Jewish immigrants in the business. Strangely enough, Clara is never identified as Jewish in the main text of the book, although she is shown shouting in Yiddish for a general strike. Back matter also includes a selected bibliography of general and primary sources. I would have also liked to have seen something on Clara Lemlich's later life. For example, she continued advocating for the oppressed her entire life, even helping to organize nursing home orderlies in the retirement home where she spent the end of her life. Melissa Sweet's remarkable illustrations integrate the garment industry in a very literal fashion into her depiction of Clara's life. She uses watercolor, gouache, and mixed media, and pieces of fabric and sewing machine stitching are front and center in nearly every illustration. Some of the illustrations are particularly moving, including the one in which rows and rows of factory workers are shown from directly above, with the hundreds of girls appearing faceless and indistinct from each other like cogs in a wheel. I also loved the "girl power" illustration of Clara calling for a general strike--Sweet depicts Clara from behind, with hundreds of people in the audience raising their fists in solidarity and with her call for a strike in an oversized text balloon, with the word "Strayk!" (or strike!) in bright red lettering! This is a must-have for anyone interested in exposing their children to important issues and people in the social justice movement, as well as outstanding women in history, those who chose to try to make a difference in an era when women were encouraged to make their dominion at home.

Fantastic quality and condition

Fun book. My kids really enjoyed it. My daughter is an activist herself and she took it to her room to read and "get ideas."

Wonderful book

This is exactly the book I have long wanted to share w/ my children -- the story of a brave, Jewish woman/girl and her fight for justice. I am so appreciative to the authors.

FOR MY GRANDSON...WHO IS BRIGHT AND EAGER TO LEARN ABOUT THOSE WHO HAVE CHANGED THE WORLD.

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