

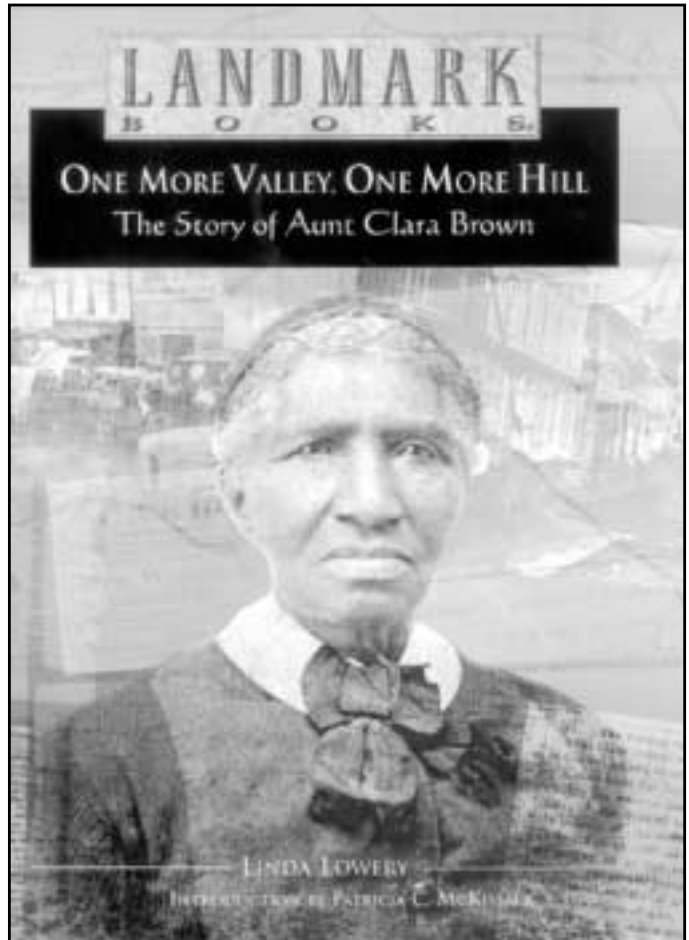
# BOOKNOTES

TEACHERS GUIDE

## thematic connections

**Determination • Hope  
Overcoming Challenges  
Prejudice**

**Grades 4 up**



Random House hardcover • 0-375-81092-7

## about the book

**This inspiring piece of American history chronicles the extraordinary—but little-known—life of black pioneer Aunt Clara Brown.**

At the age of 56, Clara Brown buys her freedom from slavery and begins to search for her daughter, Eliza Jane, who was lost to a slave auction when she was 10 years old. After living in St. Louis for a year, Clara moves to Kansas and starts her own laundry business. When the Gold Rush begins, Clara joins a wagon train that travels

to Denver, Colorado. She sets up her laundry business in a one-room house and quickly settles in, making friends with the local Indians, and learning how to get along in this new wilderness. Clara saves her money to help build a church and to aid those less fortunate than herself. When the Civil War ends, Clara diligently searches for her daughter. She offers a \$1,000 reward for word about Eliza Jane, and when she receives word that her daughter is in Iowa, Clara boards a train and heads east to find her. Eliza Jane meets Clara at the train station, and mother and daughter embrace, reunited after 46 years.

## pre-reading activity

Show students the book *Lest We Forget: The Passage from Africa to Slavery and Emancipation* by Velma Maia Thomas, and then read pages 10 and 11 about the slave auctions, showing the students the receipt for the slave purchased. Also read pages 20 and 21 about freed slaves and show students the “freedom papers.” Discuss with students the impact of these two events in the lives of many African Americans, specifically Clara Brown and her family.

## thematic connections

### QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

**Determination**—Clara Brown’s decision to do whatever it takes to find her daughter leads her on a journey across the country and is the driving force behind every decision she makes. Discuss the obstacles that are in Clara’s path and how she manages to overcome them to achieve her goals. Would Clara have achieved as much without the single-minded desire to find her daughter? Why is setting a goal the first important step in accomplishing anything?

**Hope**—Clara never gives up hope that she will find her daughter Eliza Jane, and ultimately she achieves her dream. Discuss the impossibility of Clara finding Eliza Jane in a time when there was little mail correspondence, a high rate of illiteracy, and cross-country travel was difficult at best. Would a person in the 21st century have to rely on hope as much as Clara does? How has the Internet made finding missing people easier?

**Overcoming Challenges**—Being a free black woman in the mid-1800s brings many difficulties to Clara’s life, but in spite of the laws and prejudice, Clara manages to own property and start her own successful business, eventually becoming one of the wealthiest women in the West. Discuss the laws, both social and legal, that make Clara’s accomplishments seem so remarkable. What aspects of Clara’s personality help her achieve all that she does?

**Prejudice**—In the 1800s racism was a way of life, and few people acknowledged the idea that blacks were anything more than property to be owned. How is this attitude portrayed to Clara? Which laws make ownership of property and money difficult for her? With these obstacles in mind, to what can Clara’s overwhelming success be attributed?

## vocabulary/use of language

Have students take the role of “word finder” as they read and then compile a list of words they don’t understand with their page numbers. Put students in groups of 2 or 3 and ask them to try to determine the meaning of the word from the context, and then look up the words in a dictionary to see if their definition of the

word is correct. Some words they may not know are: *treacherous* (p. 7), *epitaphs* (p. 8), *confrontations* (p. 9), *slovenly* (p. 17), *rampant* (p. 51), *intuitively* (p. 60), *grueling* (p. 68), *chaotic* (p. 71), *ravenous* (p. 74), *mirages* (p. 88), and *venomous* (p. 103).

# connecting to the curriculum

**Social Studies**—The Missouri Compromise was passed in the U.S. Congress in 1821 (p. 39) and stated that “no one was allowed to own slaves . . . in the Northern ‘free’ states”; however, Missouri was a “slave” state. Have students investigate the Missouri Compromise to find out what it was, why it was needed, and about the conflict that surrounded it. How does the law affect Clara and her plan to live and work in St. Louis?

**Science**—Tuberculosis is a contagious disease (p. 51) that caused many deaths and created hardships for businesses and lifestyles in the mid-1800s. Send students to the library to research this disease. What is tuberculosis and how has the disease affected lives in the United States throughout history? Can people still contract the disease and is there a cure? What are some preventative measures people can take to protect themselves from this disease?

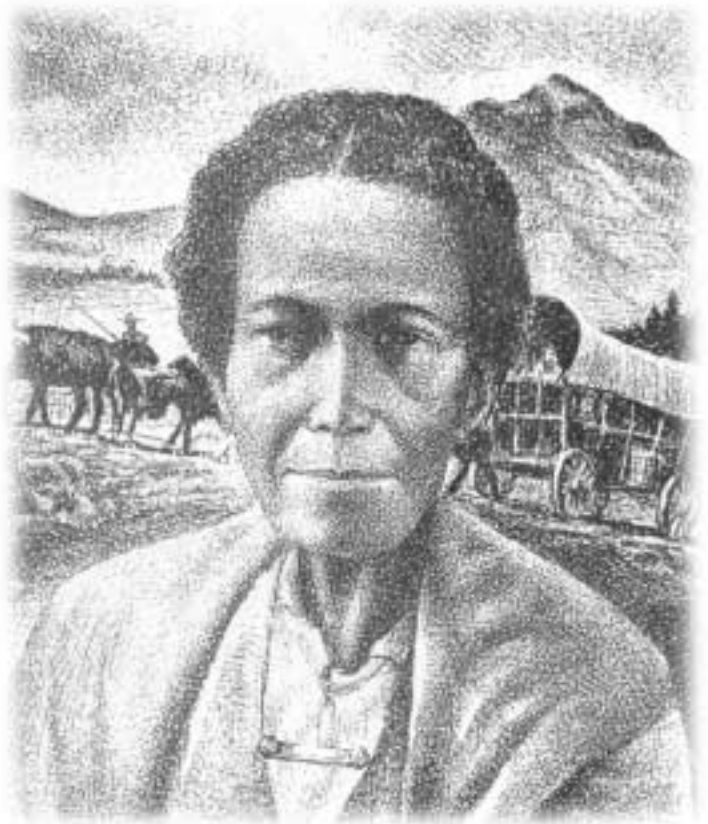
Prairie-dog towns (p. 79, 85, 91) were scattered all over the country and the people on the wagon train were entertained by their behavior and activity. Have students research prairie dogs and report on where they live, what they eat, and how they behave.

**Art**—In 1859, Clara hooks up with Colonel Wadsworth to go further west in a wagon train with about 60 other people. There is a description of the covered wagons the pioneers used on page 64. Using that description and pictures from books and the Internet, have students draw a picture of a “prairie schooner” and the terrain it would cross on its way west.

**Language Arts**—Even though Clara Brown was illiterate, suppose she had kept a journal for her daughter. Have students write journal entries for each obstacle she had to overcome; explain the challenge, how she overcame it, and what lesson she learned from the experience. Encourage students to decorate the journal as Clara might have, as a gift for Eliza Jane.

**Math**—Clara travels many miles on her journeys across the country. Ask students to make a list of the trips Clara made and which mode of transportation she used. Have students make a bar graph showing how many miles she traveled by train, in a covered wagon, on foot, and by boat, then add up the total miles she traveled in her lifetime. How long would it have taken Clara to travel these distances? How long would it take her today by train, car, or airplane?

**Speech/Drama**—Put students with a partner and have one student write a speech about Clara Brown’s life and accomplishments before giving her an award for her contribution to the United States. Have the other student write Clara Brown’s acceptance speech stating the obstacles she had to overcome, including racial relations and settling a new territory, and the lessons she learned.



## related titles

by theme

### **Lest We Forget: The Passage from Africa to Slavery and Emancipation**

**Velma Maia Thomas**

Overcoming Challenges • Prejudice  
Grades 7–11 / 0-609-60030-3  
Crown

### **Sarny: A Life Remembered**

**Gary Paulsen**

Prejudice • Hope • Overcoming Challenges  
Grades 7 up / 0-440-21973-6  
Dell Laurel-Leaf

## other Landmark Books® for middle grade readers

Grades 4 up

### **Meet Martin Luther King, Jr.**

**James T. de Kay**  
0-375-80395-5

### **The Pioneers Go West**

**George R. Stewart**  
0-394-89180-5

Grades 6 up

### **Ain't Gonna Study War No More: The Story of America's Peace Seekers**

**Milton Meltzer**  
0-375-82260-7

### **The American Revolution**

**Bruce Bliven, Jr.**  
0-394-84696-6

### **The Day the Sky Fell: A History of Terrorism**

**Milton Meltzer**  
0-375-82250-X

### **The Landing of the Pilgrims**

**James Daugherty**  
0-394-84697-4

### **There Comes a Time: The Struggle for Civil Rights**

**Milton Meltzer**  
0-375-80414-5  
HC: 0-375-80407-2

### **The Witchcraft of Salem Village**

**Shirley Jackson**  
0-394-89176-7

## about the author

**Linda Lowery** lives in Boulder, Colorado, and has written over 30 books for children and young adults. She loves children and visits schools often because she feels it is important for her to stay in tune with her audience. On that subject, she says, "I couldn't write without the energy coming back from the kids." Lowery writes with a narrative style, "because that's what I liked reading when I was little."

## on the web!

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