



**Classroom Guide for
THE LEGEND OF
FREEDOM HILL**
by Linda Jacobs Altman
illustrated by Cornelius Van Wright
and Ying-Hwa Hu

Reading Level

*Reading Level: Grade 3

Interest Level: Grades 1–4

Accelerated Reader® Level: 4.7

Lexile™ Measure: 680

*Reading levels based on the Spache Readability Formula

Themes:

Love, Loyalty, Bravery, Sacrifice, Friendship, African American History, California Gold Rush

Synopsis

In California in the 1850s, two young girls of different backgrounds become friends. Rosabel is the daughter of slaves and Sophie is Jewish. Although Rosabel has freedom papers, her mother Miz Violet does not. When a slave catcher takes Miz Violet, the girls decide to dig for gold to buy her freedom. With a good tip from Mr. Thompkins at the assay office, the girls do find gold and make a claim for a mine. Not only do they buy Miz Violet's freedom, but they exchange their claim for all the other runaway slaves the catcher has imprisoned as well.

Background

After the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, the issue of slavery began to divide the United States. As new states were carved out of this territory, the question of whether slavery would be allowed in them arose. Neither the North nor the South was willing to upset the balance of power in Congress by having an unequal number of free and slave states. In 1820 under the Missouri Compromise, Maine entered as a free state and Missouri as a slave state. Between 1821 and 1850, six more states joined the

Union and were equally divided between slave and free states. The crisis came to a head again when California asked to join as a free state. California gained its statehood under the Compromise of 1850. Under the provisions of this compromise, California was admitted as a free state. However, it was agreed that fugitive slaves who fled to free states would be returned to their owners. The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 mandated the return of runaway slaves, regardless of where in the Union they might be situated at the time of their discovery or capture. Heavy penalties were imposed on those who aided fugitives or interfered with their return.

California's request for statehood was prompted by the discovery of gold there in 1848 and the subsequent flood of people who poured into the territory from all parts of the world. The population of California increased from about 15,000 in 1848 to more than 100,000 by the end of 1849.

Teacher Tip

This book is especially appropriate for use in February as part of your Black History Month program. The story is based on plight of runaway and escaped slaves during the pre-Civil War era.

BEFORE READING**Prereading Focus Discussion and Questions**

Before reading *The Legend of Freedom Hill* with the class, you may wish to share the background material to help students understand the setting of the story. It is especially important that students understand the role of the Fugitive Slave Act and how it impacts the characters in the story. Tell students that enslaved Africans were considered property by their owners. When slaves ran away, they became fugitives under the law. Slave catchers such as the one in this story were paid to find and return runaways to their owners.

Teacher Tip

Introduce and explain the word "abolitionist" as someone who was against slavery and wanted to abolish (do away with) it. In the story, it is abolitionists who bought Rosabel's freedom, thus making her safe from the Fugitive Slave Act.

You might also use questions such as the following to focus students' attention on other aspects of the story.

1. Do you have a special friend? How are you and your friend alike? How are you different? What are some things you would do to help your friend? How would your friend help you?
2. What might make someone an outsider? Why isn't everyone part of the same group?
3. What does freedom mean to you? What could you do to ensure freedom for other people?

Exploring the Book

Draw students' attention to the book title, THE LEGEND OF FREEDOM HILL. Discuss what a legend is. Ask students to describe other legends they have read or heard? Talk about how legends get started and how they grow.

Display the book cover. Who are the main characters in this book? Why do you think they are smiling? Does this book take place in the past or present? How do you know?

Set a Purpose for Reading

Have students write down some questions they would like answered when they read the book. For example, Where or what is Freedom Hill? What is the story behind the name? Then ask students to read to find out who is telling this story.

Vocabulary

The Legend of Freedom Hill contains numerous colloquial expressions used by the narrator. Write some of these on the chalkboard (see suggested list below) and ask students to find them in the text. Then have students read the passages aloud to practice fluency. Help students clarify meanings of the words and phrases as used in the story.

| | | |
|------------|---------------|---------------|
| hereabouts | hightailed it | local-famous |
| nabbed | whereabouts | passle |
| miz | reckon | straightaway |
| busted out | young 'uns | thunderstruck |

In addition to "abolitionist," there are other words which may be unfamiliar to students, but which are crucial to understanding the story. Assign a student to look up each of the following words and report his or her findings to the class.

| | | |
|------------|----------|-------------|
| commenced | assay | gullies |
| crevice | shinnied | nugget |
| shackles | fugitive | disposition |
| prospector | scurried | |

READING AND RESPONDING**Discussion Questions**

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to help guide their comprehension. Encourage students to refer to passages or pages in the book to support or illustrate their responses.

1. Why does the narrator or storyteller think Rosabel and Sophie became friends?
2. How did Rosabel get freedom papers? Why didn't her mother have them?
3. Why did Miz Violet take Rosabel to California?
4. Why was the slave catcher in California?

5. How did the Kagans help Rosabel?
6. What was the girls' plan for getting money to buy Miz Violet's freedom?
7. What advice did Mr. Thompkins give the girls? Was it good advice? Why or why not?
8. Where did Rosabel and Sophie find gold?
9. Why did the slave catcher come looking for the girls?
10. Why did the girls give their mine to the slave catcher?

Literature Circles*

If you use literature circles during reading time, students might find the following suggestions helpful in developing the roles of the circle members.

- The **Questioner** might use questions similar to those in the Discussion Question section of this guide to help group members explore the book.
- The **Passage Locator** might look for lines that describe or illuminate the relationship of Rosabel and Sophie.
- The **Illustrator** might draw scenes not shown in the book. For example, the student might draw a picture of Miz Violet getting freedom papers for Rosabel.
- The **Connector** might find other books about the California gold rush.
- The **Summarizer** might provide a brief summary of the pages that the group is discussing.
- The **Investigator** might find other stories of runaway slaves or the lives of enslaved people who were freed before the Civil War.

*There are many resource books available with more information about organizing and implementing literature circles. Three such books you may wish to refer to are: *Getting Started With Literature Circles* by Katherine L. Schlick Noe and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 1999), *Literature Circles: Voice And Choice In Book Clubs And Reading Groups* by Harvey Daniels (Stenhouse, 2002), and *Literature Circles Resource Guide* by Bonnie Campbell Hill, Katherine L. Schlick Noe, and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 2000).

Reader's Response

Use the following questions or similar ones to help students practice active reading and personalize what they have read. Suggest that students respond in reader's notebooks or in oral discussion.

1. Why is this a sad story? Why is it a happy story?
2. Which character do you admire the most? Why?
3. How believable does this story seem to you? Explain your response.

4. The narrator says “. . . and a whole town learned a thing or two ‘bout what matters in this old world of ours.” What does the narrator mean? What did you learn from this story?

Other Writing Activities

You may wish to have students participate in one or more of the following writing activities.

1. Rosabel and Sophie don't have much success finding gold by watching the prospectors at work. How did prospectors in California find gold in the 1850s? Have students research this topic and write a report.
2. Challenge students to write a dialog between two of the characters in the book. For example, write what Rosabel and Sophie said to each other when they saw the slave catcher chasing slaves in the hills.
3. Let students write a poem expressing the feelings of a character in the story.
4. Have students pretend they are reporters for a newspaper in the 1850s. Have them write a news story about how Rosabel and Sophie bought freedom for Miz Violet and the other fugitives.
5. Have a group discussion about an injustice taking place today. Write a letter to the editor of a newspaper or your local Congressperson explaining this injustice and giving students' ideas for addressing it.

ELL (ESL) Teaching Strategies

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are learning to speak English as a second language.

1. Draw students' attention to the illustrations and use them to help retell the story and find pictures that relate to concrete nouns.
2. Pair strong English speakers with English language learner partners to read the book together.
3. Make a tape recording of the story for students to listen to as they follow along in the book.
4. Break down large chunks of information in the story into smaller chunks for easier comprehension.

INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

To help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas, introduce some of the following activities.

Social Studies

1. Interested students might prepare a presentation/demonstration about how Jewish people celebrate the Sabbath. If any students are learning Hebrew, they might share a blessing in that language.
2. Have students create a timeline covering the period in which *The Legend of Freedom Hill* takes place. Students might begin with the discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill on the American River in California, in 1848. Their timeline might include the Compromise of 1850 in which California became a state and other events up through the end of the Civil War in 1865.
3. Students might learn more about the California gold rush and its effect on Western migration and the development of California. Questions student teams might explore include: Who were the 49ers? How did the gold rush affect Native Americans? What happened to communities in California because of the gold rush?

Math

1. Have students research the price of an ounce of gold at various times during the California gold rush and at various times since then, up to the present. Encourage students to present this information graphically.
2. Ask students to estimate the cost of food staples the 49ers needed to purchase in order to survive on the trail to gold in California, such as water, flour, sugar, coffee, and bacon. Then have students find out the actual costs of these items during Gold rush time. Talk about the reasons for the disparity in prices among these basic items.

Art

Have students use the illustrations in the book to make comparison charts of life in the 1850s and the present. Categories in which students might make comparisons include: how people dressed, how they traveled, games children played, and so on.

Music

Explain to students that enslaved Africans often communicated through their music. In some songs they described their suffering. In others they spoke of escape. Songs such as "Follow the Drinkin' Gourd" contained disguised directions for those heading north toward the Big Dipper. Explore the history of these songs and teach students traditional songs such as "Go Down, Moses," "I Got Shoes," "Follow the Drinkin' Gourd," or "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" to help students get a sense of the power of this music.

Literature

Enslaved people created tales about their plantation experiences. In many of these stories, animals took the place of people. One of the most common animal characters was Brer Rabbit. Although a rabbit is small and seemingly helpless, Brer Rabbit was smart, clever, and tricky. Despite getting into trouble, Brer Rabbit usually got out of it. Read one of the Brer Rabbit tales to the class. Then have a discussion about how these tales both entertained and inspired those who told them.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Linda Jacobs Altman was born in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and now lives in Clearlake, California, with her husband and many indoor and outdoor pets. Altman has worked in the educational and library fields for many years, publishing books on numerous topics including the California gold rush and Jewish history. Altman is the author of several LEE & LOW titles. *The Legend of Freedom Hill* was named a Notable Children's Book of Jewish Content by the Association of Jewish Libraries and was included in Bank Street College's list of Best Children's Books of the Year. Her first picture book, *Amelia's Road*, a "Choices" selection by the Cooperative Children's Book Center, is a popular story about a girl in a family of migrant farm workers. *Singing With Momma Lou*, in which a young girl helps her grandmother, who suffers from Alzheimer's, regain some of her memories, is also listed as one of Bank Street College's Best Children's Books of the Year.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATORS

Cornelius Van Wright and **Ying-Hwa Hu** are an award-winning husband and wife team of illustrators. Van Wright is a native New Yorker with a degree in fine arts from the School of Visual Arts. Hu, born in Taiwan, has an Associate of Arts degree from Shih Chien College in Taipei and a B.S. in Education from St. Cloud State University in Minnesota. The two have been illustrating children's books together since 1989. Among their titles for LEE & LOW are *Zora Hurston And The Chinaberry Tree*, an *American Bookseller* magazine "Pick of the Lists" title, and the year-round favorite, *Sam And The Lucky Money*, a "Choices" selection by the Cooperative Children's Book Center and an IRA Notable Book for a Global Society. Van Wright and Hu live with their two children in New York City.

Resources on the Web

Learn more about ***The Legend of Freedom Hill***:

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/78/hc/the_legend_of_freedom_hill

Other Books by **Linda Jacob Altman**:

Amelia's Road

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/10/hc/amelia_s_road

Singing With Momma Lou

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/108/hc/singing_with_momma_lou

Other Books Illustrated by **Cornelius Van Wright** and **Ying-Hwa Hu**:

Zora Hurston And The Chinaberry Tree:

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/136/hc/zora_hurston_and_the_chinaberry_tree

***Zora Hurston And The Chinaberry Tree* in Spanish:**

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/163/hc/zora_hurston_y_el_arbol_sonador

Sam And The Lucky Money:

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/101/hc/sam_and_the_lucky_money

***Sam And The Lucky Money* in Spanish:**

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/159/hc/sam_y_el_dinero_de_la_suerte

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