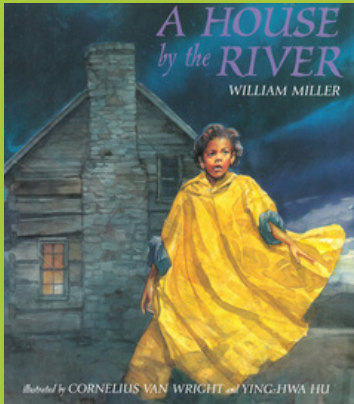


## TEACHER'S GUIDE



LEE & LOW BOOKS

# A House by the River

written by William Miller

illustrated by Ying-Hwa Hu and Cornelius Van Wright

## About the Book

**Genre:** Realistic Fiction

**\*Reading Level:** Grade 3

**Interest Level:** Grades K–3

**Guided Reading Level:** N

**Accelerated Reader® Level/Points:** 3.9/0.5

**Lexile™ Measure:** 700L

\*Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula

**Themes:** Disasters (Storms), Extreme Weather and Nature, Courage, Home, Family Life (Mothers and Daughters), Childhood Experiences and Memories, Overcoming Obstacles, African/African American Interest

## SYNOPSIS

As the worst storm in years approaches, Belinda wishes more than ever that she and her mother lived in town, where the houses are on high ground, safe from the rising river. Their old house, with its leaky roof and rickety stairs, hardly seems strong enough to endure the fierce winds and driving rain. If only her father were alive, Belinda thinks, then she'd feel safer.

But what Belinda discovers through the long night of the storm is that her house is made of more than wood and brick—it is also fortified by her family's love.

The award-winning team of William Miller, Cornelius Van Wright, and Ying-Hwa Hu present one of their most powerful works yet. *A House by the River* is an unforgettable story of love, courage, and the true meaning of home.



## BACKGROUND

**Floods:** The United States Geological Survey (USGS) Water Science School describes a flood occurring when sustained rainfall over multiple days, concentrated rainfall during a short period of time, or some time of blockage causes a river to overflow into the flat areas next to rivers (<http://water.usgs.gov/edu/>). Intense rainfall can be from severe thunderstorms or tropical storms, including hurricanes. Depending on how fast flooding occurs, people can be caught off guard whereby they are trapped, don't have necessary provisions, or are at risk of losing their homes. While some areas are geographically prone to flooding, urbanization and deforestation have contributed to flooding because they have negatively affected the land's ability to absorb rainfall, resulting in flooding. More information is available at <http://water.usgs.gov/edu/qafloods.html>. According to the non-profit American Rivers, flooding is the most common natural hazard and "over the last 50 years, Americans have seen a 20% increase in the heaviest downpours" (<https://www.americanrivers.org/rivers/discover-your-river/10-facts-about-flooding/>).

### Additional titles to teach about home:

***Journey Home*** written by Lawrence McKay, illustrated by Dom Lee and Keunhee Lee

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/journey-home>

***Going Home, Coming Home*** written by Truong Tran, illustrated by Ann Phong

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/going-home-coming-home>

***When This World Was New*** written by D.H. Figueredo, illustrated by Enrique O. Sanchez

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/when-this-world-was-new>

***Kiki's Home*** written by Kristy Orona-Ramirez, illustrated by Jonathan Warm Day

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/kiki-s-journey>

***Amelia's Road*** written by Linda Jacobs Altman, illustrated by Enrique O. Sanchez

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/amelia-s-road>

***My Diary from Here to There / Mi diario de aqui hasta allá*** written by Amada Irma Pérez, illustrated by Maya Christina Gonzalez

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/my-diary-from-here-to-there-mi-diario-de-aqui-hasta-alla>

***Home at Last*** written by Susan Middleton Elya, illustrated by Felipe Davalos

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/home-at-last>

***Home to Medicine Mountain*** written by Chiori Santiago, illustrated by Judith Lowry

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/home-to-medicine-mountain>



## VOCABULARY

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

The story contains several content-specific and academic words and phrases that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary below. Encourage a variety of strategies to support students' vocabulary acquisition: look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, create a specific action for each word, list synonyms and antonyms, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

### Content Specific

roost, lowland, flood wall, hilltops, trough, cornmeal, gas station, chimney, buckets, loft, ladder, tin roofs, current, pecked

### Academic

yard, patch, wandered, beneath, threatened, swollen, pounded, angrily, envied, rumble, thunder, squealed, stranding, drenched, shivering, popped, hissed, narrow, factories, accident, puzzled, tracks, related, moaned, bravely, worse/worst, stomach, tighten, shaky, terrible, gusts, creaked, protecting, romping, breakable, fresh

## BEFORE READING

### Prereading Focus Questions

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)  
(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

Before introducing this book to students, you may wish to develop background knowledge and promote anticipation by posing questions such as the following:

1. Take a look at the front and back covers. Take a picture walk. Ask students to make a prediction. Do you think this book will be fiction or nonfiction? What makes you think so? What clues do the author and illustrator give to help you know whether this book will be fiction or nonfiction?
2. Introduce the topic of home.
  - On chart paper, create a KWL chart about shelters and different types of living situations. (What do you think you know about homes? What do you want to know? What have you learned?) Record students' responses in the first column. (You will return at the end of the read aloud to reflect on and record what they have learned.)
  - Model looking up or have a couple of students look up the definition of home in the dictionary. Elicit students' ideas about what a home is.
  - Ask students to discuss this definition with a partner: What does the word home make students think or feel? What questions do they have about people without homes? Encourage them to base their questions on what they already know—from their lives or from books.
  - Have pairs share their responses with the whole class and record their questions under the second column of the KWL chart. Possible questions include: What is the difference between a shelter and a home? Why do people live in different types of homes? What makes a place a home? What are the characteristics of a safe home?
  - Tell students that the class will explore many of these questions. Ask them to remind you, as you find answers to their questions, to record the answers to the questions in the KWL chart (third column).
3. Tell me what you know about courage. Describe a time you witnessed an example of courage. Can you feel afraid and still show courage? Why or why not? What is the best advice you have ever received from someone about courage or bravery?
4. What do you know about natural disasters, including storms and flooding? What causes flooding? What can a community do to stay safe?



- Have students compare the cover picture with the title, *A House by the River*. Why might having a house by a river in a rainstorm be significant? What do you predict might happen in the story?
- Why do you think I chose this book for us to read today?

### Exploring the Book

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1, Craft & Structure, Strand 5, and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)  
(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

Talk about the title of the book. Then ask students what they think this book will most likely be about and whom the book might be about. What do they think might happen? What information do they think they might learn? What makes them think that?

Take students on a book walk and draw attention to the following parts of the book: front and back covers, title page, author and illustrators' dedications, and illustrations.

### Setting a Purpose for Reading

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

Have students read to find out what happens to Belinda in the storm, how she finds courage, and how her perspective changes toward her home. Encourage students to consider why the author, William Miller, would want to share this story with young people.

## AFTER READING

### Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop appreciation for the content. Encourage students to refer to passages and/or illustrations in the book to support their responses. **To build skills in close reading of a text, students should cite evidence with their answers.**

### Literal Comprehension

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)  
(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

- How does Belinda feel about the other children and families who live in town?
- Why does Belinda want to live in town in one of the houses on the hill?
- What happens when the rain comes each spring? What do storms do to the river?
- Why won't Belinda's mother move into town and out of this house? Why is the house special to her?
- What makes the rain worrisome for Belinda and the other children living outside of town? How does the rain change Belinda's environment?
- What is the purpose of the buckets?
- Why does Belinda live in this house and this part of town?
- Why did her mother and father leave the North? What were they seeking?
- Why do Belinda and her mother go upstairs?
- What do you know about Belinda's family?
- Why does Belinda miss her father?
- Why does Belinda's home have a rock pathway leading up to the door? What does that tell you about how frequently it storms?
- What challenges does Belinda face?

### Extension/Higher Level Thinking

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 2 and 3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4 and 6)  
(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

- How does Belinda's mother make Belinda feel safe?
- Do you think Belinda's mother is ever scared during the storm? Why or why not? Can someone feel afraid and still show courage? Why or why not?
- Does Belinda feel safe? Why or why not? What do we need in order to feel safe?



“Children will empathize with her initial fears as well as with her sense of belonging as she begins to feel the solidity of her home and her family.”

–*Booklist*

“Watercolor illustrations portray the loving relationship between this African-American mother and child, as well as Belinda’s fears.”

–*School Library Journal*

“Luminous illustrations track the storm’s progress and make Belinda’s snug surroundings–leaky roof and all–glow. A quiet book... with an unassuming, but sturdy, message.”

–*Kirkus Reviews*

4. Can love be a kind of home? Why or why not?
5. Why do Belinda and her mother sit near the window throughout the storm rather than hide under the covers or somewhere away from the storm? What is Belinda’s mother trying to teach her?
6. How do you know Belinda’s mother is good at solving problems?
7. Describe the relationship between Belinda and her mother.
8. What makes Belinda’s home special to her mother and her?
9. Belinda’s mother tells her this is the worst storm they have had in ten years. Why doesn’t Belinda’s mother leave the house with Belinda? Do you think she made the right decision to stay in the house during the storm? Why or why not?
10. How does Belinda change her feelings about the house from the beginning to the end of the story? What causes her to change her mind from fearful to grateful?
11. Compare Belinda’s home and her dream home. What would she change about her home at the beginning of the story? What do you think a perfect or “dream” home look like? Do such homes exist? Why or why not?
12. What would make Belinda’s life easier?
13. Imagine someone offers to buy Belinda’s home. Do you think Belinda would sell it? Why or why not? What about her mother?
14. What effect do storms have on the schooling of Belinda and other children living outside of town? Why do they fail to attend school sometimes?
15. What time of year is Belinda most likely to miss out on school? Why?
16. What is the difference between a need and a want? Can you give me some examples? Would a place to live in town fulfill a need or a want for Belinda? Why?
17. What are the characteristics of a home?
18. Why is a home/shelter important? Why is it a human need?
19. Do you think this story is timely and realistic? Why or why not? How does this story relate to conditions in your own community (or country)?
20. Imagine you are the mayor of Belinda’s town. Do you think families like Belinda’s who live far out of town should be forced to live closer to town? Why or why not? How could the community take better care of all families who come from different types of living situations?
21. What do you think will happen next (at the end of the story)? Why? What will Belinda and her mother do? What would you do?



## Reader's Response

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)

Use the following questions and writing activities to help students practice active reading and personalize their responses to the book. **Suggest that students respond in reader's response journals, essays, or oral discussion.** You may also want to set aside time for students to share and discuss their written work.

1. Do you agree or disagree with Belinda's mother that their home is special? Describe what you appreciate about your own home situation. What makes your living situation special to you and your family? How do you and your family make it feel like a home?
2. What does *home* mean to you? How might the concept of *home* vary for different people?
3. Belinda and her mother show bravery throughout the storm. Describe a time you were brave, witnessed someone being brave, or helped someone else feel less scared.
4. Have you ever experienced an extreme weather or natural event? What happened? How did you react? Who was with you to make you feel better?
5. At first Belinda is envious about living in town on the hilltops. What advice would you give Belinda about envying others?

## ELL/ESL Teaching Activities

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 4–6)  
(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English Language Learners.

1. Assign ELL students to partner-read the story with strong English readers/speakers. Students can alternate reading between pages, repeat passages after one another, or listen to the more fluent reader.
2. Have each student write three questions about the story. Then let students pair up and discuss the answers to the questions.

3. Depending on students' level of English proficiency, after the first reading:
  - Review the illustrations in order and have students summarize what is happening on each page, first orally, then in writing.
  - Have students work in pairs to retell either the plot of the story or key details. Then ask students to write a short summary, synopsis, or opinion about what they have read.
4. Have students give a short talk about what they admire about Belinda or her mother in the story. Alternatively, students can describe a personal story about having courage or a time they witnessed an act of courage.
5. The book contains several content-specific and academic words that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary. Expose English Language Learners to multiple vocabulary strategies. Have students make predictions about word meanings, look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, list synonyms and antonyms, create an action for each word, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

## INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

(Introduction to the Standards, page 7: Students who are college and career ready must be able to build strong content knowledge, value evidence, and use technology and digital media strategically and capably)

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas. These can also be used for extension activities, for advanced readers, and for building a home-school connection.

## Writing

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 2 and 3 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)



1. Have students imagine they are feeling afraid during a storm or extreme natural event and describe what they do to make themselves or a younger family member feel better. What makes them feel safe? Whom do they want with them to feel safe?
2. Have students write a time journal from the perspective of Belinda. As Belinda, students should enter a few sentences in the journal at each hour as the storm approaches and recedes. What happens as the storm develops, happens, and recedes? How does Belinda's feelings change?
3. The author, William Miller, uses descriptive language and sensory details in the story. Have students identify three examples of sensory details (sight, smell, sound, touch, and taste) from the story that most appeals to him or her. Review or teach sensory details as a valuable tool writers use to engage readers. Then challenge students to write their own stories that using sensory details.

## Social Studies

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7 and 9)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1 and 2, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 5 and 6, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. Have students look for an article in newspapers and magazines featuring young people demonstrating courage. Discuss the different ways someone can show courage. After the discussion, have students write an essay describing the characteristics of a courageous person.
2. Have students investigate a non-profit or government agency in their community or state that deals with emergencies, including extreme weather or natural disasters. Have students share out and compare the different organizations.
3. Allow students to find and post photographs of different types of shelters that people use in the United States. Discuss with students the importance of shelter and the characteristics of a successful home. What makes a living space safe and secure?

4. If there is a recent natural disaster in the news or recently affected the community, lead an age-appropriate, truthful conversation. Allow students to guide the discussion by asking questions to gauge where they are in processing the information, such as:
  - What questions do you have? What have you heard?
  - What do you know about the situation or group of people involved?
  - Who are the countries or communities involved?
  - How are different communities (or countries) coming together over this extreme weather event or natural disaster?
  - What would you like to do to help?
  - Additional support and information on talking to students about disasters or crises is available from the American Academy of Pediatrics: “Promoting Adjustment and Helping Children Cope After Disaster and Crisis” (<https://www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/aap-health-initiatives/Children-and-Disasters/Pages/Promoting-Adjustment-and-Helping-Children-Cope.aspx?nfstatus=401&nftoken=00000000-0000-0000-0000-000000000000&nfstatusdescription=ERROR%3a+No+local+t>) and PBS Parents: “Talking with Kids About News” (<http://www.pbs.org/parents/talkingwithkids/news/questions.html>).
5. Pair a news article on a storm or flooding with *A House by the River*. Find an article at students' reading level from Newsela (<https://newsela.com/>), ReadWorks.org, Time for Kids (<http://www.timeforkids.com/>), Scholastic News (<http://magazines.scholastic.com/>), or another current events organization for children. As a whole group, compare the depiction of the natural event in both the book and article: How does each describe the storm/flood? How does *A House by the River* help us better understand the effects of the storm? How does the news article help us better understand the events and the effects of the storm? What events and details do both texts agree on? How do the texts present information similarly and differently? Finally have students write a response to the following question: why do you think the author, William Miller, of the picture book wants to share this story with young people and as a fictionalized story?



## Science

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7 and 8)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1 and 2, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 5 and 6, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

Ask students to investigate different types of water problems in the United States. In small teams, have students research water pollution, water shortages, climate change (including flooding), the aging of water infrastructure, and more. Then create new groups with one representative of each research team to present to each other. As a whole group, host a debate on what will the United States' biggest water problem be (or if there won't be any at all). Students should write a post-debate reflection answering: 1) Will the United States have a water problem in the future? Why or why not? 2) If so, what will the biggest water problem be and why?

## English Language Arts

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 2 and 3 and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 9)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. Read another story about characters' connection to their homes, including: *Journey Home* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2416>), *Home to Medicine Mountain* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2830>), *Lily's New Home* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2917>), *Home at Last* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2405>), *Amelia's Road* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2352>), and *Going Home, Coming Home* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2794>). Have a class discussion and then follow up with students in individual essays with students arguing whether homes are a particular structure, a state of mind, both or something else.
2. Share another story about a child's relationship with her mother after losing her father: *A Shelter in Our Car* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2853>). In pairs, have students compare how the mothers in both books show their daughters they love them. What does each mother do to make her family's situation better? As a whole group, have students create a list of ways young people can help their

families who face challenges, including natural disasters or loss of a family member.

## School-Home Connection

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strand 2 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 5 & 6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. Encourage students to draw a family portrait of their own families. Ask for volunteers to share their pictures with the group and name the people shown. Alternatively, have your students bring in a copy of a family photograph to share with the class. Students can write about these photographs and post them in the classroom.
2. Have students to create a family tree of their own families including extended family members and anyone they identify as being a part of their family.
3. Support students in creating a picture of their home (by whatever definition of home means to them) or a special place and the people with which they live. Students should include a paragraph or two describing the picture and why it is significant to them.

## Additional titles to teach about loss:

***The Three Lucys*** written by Hayan Charara, illustrated by Sara Kahn

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/the-three-lucys>

***Calling the Water Drum*** written by LaTisha Redding, illustrated by Aaron Boyd

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/calling-the-water-drum>

***Bird*** written by Zetta Elliott, illustrated by Shadra Strickland

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/bird>





## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**William Miller** is the award-winning author of numerous books for children from LEE & LOW BOOKS, including *Night Golf*, *Richard Wright and the Library Card*, *Rent Party Jazz*, *The Piano*, *Zora Hurston and the Chinaberry Tree*, and *Frederick Douglass: The Last Day of Slavery*. A former professor of African American literature and creative writing at York College in Pennsylvania, Miller now lives in New Orleans, Louisiana.

## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATORS

**Ying-Hwa Hu** and **Cornelius Van Wright** are a husband-and-wife team who have illustrated dozens of award-winning children's books. Their illustrations have been praised by Kirkus Reviews as "bright, detailed and dynamic, vividly depicting... characters' facial features and personalities." Other titles they have done with LEE & LOW BOOKS include *Sam and the Lucky Money*, *The Legend of Freedom Hill*, and *Baby Flo: Florence Mills Lights Up the Stage*. They live in New York City.

## ABOUT LEE & LOW BOOKS

**LEE & LOW BOOKS** is the largest children's book publisher specializing in diversity and multiculturalism. Our motto, "about everyone, for everyone," is as urgent today as it was when we started in 1991. It is the company's goal to meet the need for stories that children of color can identify with and that all children can enjoy. The right book can foster empathy, dispel stereotypes, prompt discussion about race and ethnicity, and inspire children to imagine not only a world that includes them, but also a world where they are the heroes of their own stories. Discover more at [leeandlow.com](http://leeandlow.com).

## ORDERING INFORMATION

### On the Web:

[www.leeandlow.com/contact/ordering](http://www.leeandlow.com/contact/ordering) (general order information)

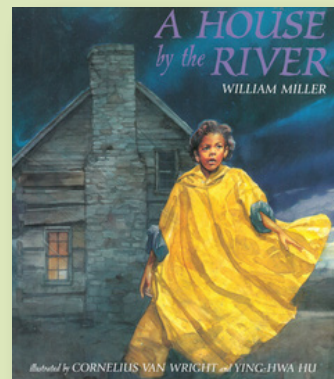
[www.leeandlow.com/books/a-house-by-the-river](http://www.leeandlow.com/books/a-house-by-the-river) (secure online ordering)

**By Phone:** 212-779-4400 ext. 25

**By Fax:** 212-683-1894

**By Mail:** Lee & Low Books, 95 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016

## Book Information for A House by the River



\$9.95, PAPERBACK

978-1-62014-305-6

32 pages

\*Reading Level: Grade 3

\*Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula

Interest Level: Grades 1–5

Guided Reading Level: N

Accelerated Reader® Level/  
Points: 3.9/0.5

Lexile™ Measure: 700L

**THEMES:** Disasters (Storms), Extreme Weather and Nature, Courage, Home, Family Life (Mothers and Daughters), Childhood Experiences and Memories, Overcoming Obstacles, African/African American Interest

### RESOURCES ON THE WEB:

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/a-house-by-the-river>

All guided reading level placements may vary and are subject to revision. Teachers may adjust the assigned levels in accordance with their own evaluations.