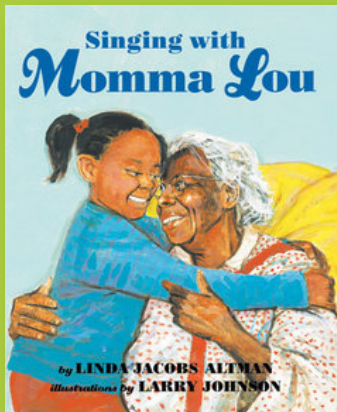


TEACHER'S GUIDE



LEE & LOW BOOKS

Singing with Momma Lou

written by Linda Jacobs Altman
illustrated by Larry Johnson

About the Book

Genre: Realistic Fiction

***Reading Level:** Grade 4

Interest Level: Grades 1–5

Guided Reading Level: R

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points: 3.8/0.5

Lexile™ Measure: N/A

*Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula

Themes: Dementia and Alzheimer's Disease, Overcoming Obstacles, Grandparents, Family Life, Disability, Empathy/Compassion, African/African American Interest

SYNOPSIS

Nine-year-old Tamika Jordan dreads visiting her grandmother at the nursing home. Momma Lou has Alzheimer's and always forgets who Tamika is. After her father shows her Momma Lou's scrapbooks, Tamika comes up with an idea to jog Momma Lou's memory. Tamika is successful in reaching her grandmother one day when Momma Lou recognizes a newspaper clipping of a Civil Rights demonstration and leads everybody in a celebration of song.

Linda Jacobs Altman tells a moving story of intergenerational love and hope, while Larry Johnson's evocative paintings bring this memorable story to life. This is a book to be shared by the whole family.

Altman learned about the effects of Alzheimer's when her mother was stricken with the disease. While it was a tragic experience, she learned from her mother the power of the human spirit



BACKGROUND

Alzheimer's Disease (From the author): "Alzheimer's disease is an age-related disorder that currently affects approximately four million Americans. It is one of the most widespread diseases among the elderly. Alzheimer's affects the memory centers of the brain, destroying healthy cells. As the cells die, memories fade and disappear. Initially, Alzheimer's sufferers may get easily confused or have difficulty thinking clearly. Later on they may forget how to do the simplest tasks, like dressing themselves or answering the telephone. Eventually they do not recognize even their closest relatives and friends. Today there is no known cure for Alzheimer's disease, but scientists are working hard to find one."—Linda Jacobs Altman

More information is available from the Alzheimer's Association website at <http://www.alz.org>. A collection of resources for children and teens, including video clips, can be found at http://www.alz.org/living_with_alzheimers_just_for_kids_and_teens.asp.

"We Shall Overcome": This song is believed to have originated from the Baptist hymn "I'll Overcome Someday." Versions of it were sung by slaves, in churches and at various protests and political meetings as early as the 1940s. It was made popular by singer Pete Seeger, who taught it at civil rights protests and rallies in the 1960s. From National Public Radio, the words "We shall overcome" were included in a speech by President Lyndon Johnson supporting the right to vote for all citizens in 1965 (<http://www.npr.org/2013/08/28/216482943/the-inspiring-force-of-we-shall-overcome>). According to *American Songwriter*, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. referenced the song in a speech in 1968 shortly before his death, saying, "There's a little song that we sing in our movement down in the South. I don't know if you've heard it," King told the Memphis crowd. "You know, I've joined hands so often with students and others behind jail bars singing it: 'We shall overcome.' Sometimes we've had tears in our eyes when we joined together to sing it, but we still decided to sing it: 'We shall overcome.' Oh, before this victory's won, some will have to get thrown in jail some more, but we shall overcome" (<https://americansongwriter.com/2015/01/lyric-week-pete-seeger-shall-overcome/>).

Additional titles to teach about illness and grief

Raymond's Perfect Present written by Therese On Louie, illustrated by Suling Wang

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/raymond-s-perfect-present>

Janna and the Kings written by Patricia Smith, illustrated by Aaron Boyd

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/janna-and-the-kings>

The Blue Roses written by Linda Boyden, illustrated by Amy Córdova

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/the-blue-roses>

Grandma's Purple Flowers written and illustrated by Adjoa J. Burrowes

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/grandma-s-purple-flowers>

DeShawn Days written by Tony Medina, illustrated by R. Gregory Christie

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/deshawn-days>

Grandfather's Story Cloth written by Linda Gerdner and Sarah Langford, illustrated by Stuart Loughridge

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/grandfather-s-story-cloth>

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>



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

nursing home, Alzheimer's disease, community room, hymns, spirituals, blues, soul, civil rights, rally, scrapbooks, choirs, demonstrations, bridal robe, protestors, angel, Christmas pageant, halo, memento, yearbooks, corsages, autograph books, ticket stubs, arrested, clipping, (feeling) blue

Academic

clasping, unclasping, gnarled, nudged, darted, silence, tenderly, impossible, memories, hint, twinkled, cheer, suited, recognize, discouraged, settled, infectious, uncertain

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. What is a nursing home? Have you ever visited someone who lives in one? What might be hard about visiting someone you care about in a nursing home?
2. What is Alzheimer's Disease? What might be hard if your loved one has Alzheimer's?
3. How does your family preserve family memories and stories? (Do you take photos, make scrapbooks, make videos, etc.?)

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, illustrations, and author's note.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

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

Have students read to find out about:

- how Tamika's attitude about visiting her sick grandmother changes during the story
- how Tamika figures out how to connect with her grandmother despite her memory loss

Encourage students to consider why the author, Linda Jacobs Altman, 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)

1. What does Tamika’s family do on Sunday afternoons? How does Tamika feel about it?
2. Who does Tamika see when they arrive at the nursing home? What is Momma Lou doing? What does Tamika say?
3. What does Momma Lou talk about with Tamika’s parents?
4. What does Tamika do that her parents don’t like? Why does she do it?
5. What memories are in Momma Lou’s scrapbooks?
6. What does Tamika bring with her to the nursing home?
7. What does Tamika bring to each of her visits? How does she prepare for each visit? What do she and her grandmother do together?
8. How does Momma Lou change as her health gets worse?
9. What does Tamika say about the newspaper clipping? How does Momma Lou respond? What do the others in the room do?
10. What does Tamika do to remember her visits with Momma Lou? What does she do to help herself feel better when she’s sad?

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)

1. What does Tamika’s mother mean, “That is reason enough?”
2. What does Tamika remember talking about with her grandmother? What’s different now?
3. Why does Momma Lou’s singing make Tamika want to run away and hide?
4. What’s the difference between smiling just with your mouth and smiling with your eyes? Why has Momma Lou’s smile changed?
5. Why don’t Tamika’s parents remind Momma Lou that Martin Luther King has been dead for years?
6. Why are the photos of Tamika with Momma Lou special? Why do you think her father wants to look at the scrapbook with Tamika? What does he mean, “Now I figure that’s worth a few Sunday afternoons, memory or no memory?” What does Tamika decide to do?
7. What’s different about Tamika’s visit to the nursing home when she brings her baby picture?
8. How is the time Tamika and her grandmother spend together different now than before Momma Lou became ill? How is it still special?
9. Why is the fact that Momma Lou stops singing so discouraging to Tamika’s parents?
10. What do you think makes Tamika choose the newspaper clipping as her last attempt to reach her grandmother?
11. What does “the laugh was infectious?” mean? Usually going to jail is bad; why do you think the clipping made Momma Lou laugh so hard? Why do you think so many people join in the singing?
12. What does it mean when Tamika knew, “this wasn’t about one yellowed newspaper clipping?” What responsibility does Momma Lou pass onto Tamika when she says, “Don’t lose this?”



“This bibliotherapeutic title will help to serve need, and the story is straightforward and inspirational. Johnson’s acrylic paintings are done in somber and institutional hues, which prove a suitable backdrop for this thoughtful story.”—*School Library Journal*

“ This worthy source for any family dealing with the anguish of Alzheimer’s provides assurance to children that their experience isn’t unique as well as a blueprint for a proactive approach even young children can undertake.” —*Kirkus Reviews*

“This delicate story, with a bittersweet conclusion, gives children a realistic but softened look at a devastating illness. ”
—*Booklist*

13. Do you think the ending of the story is happy or sad? Why?

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. How does Tamika change during this story? What do you think she learns?
2. If Momma Lou were still able to communicate, what do you think she would say about Tamika’s actions? How do you think Tamika’s efforts during her visits make Momma Lou feel?
3. Why is it important to remember one’s family history? What’s one story you’ve heard from your family history that’s meaningful to you? What story about your childhood do you hope your future family members will hear?
4. What is the significance of the song “We Shall Overcome” in the story?
5. Based on Tamika’s actions and the stories about Momma Lou before she became ill, how are Tamika and Momma Lou similar? What traits do they share?

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 a grandparent or other special elderly person.
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.

English Language Arts

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1-3 and Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strand 9)

(Writing Standards, Text Types and Purposes, Strands 2 and 3)

1. Return to your conversation from before reading about why it might be hard to visit a nursing home. Ask your students how they feel about spending time with the elderly. What's enjoyable and what's challenging? Discuss what advice Tamika might have for other children who spend time with elderly or ill family members. Have students create a brochure or poster in Tamika's voice that could be shared with other children who visit a nursing home.
2. Ask students to create an additional "scrapbook page" for the scrapbook Tamika makes at the end of the book that commemorates her visits to Momma Lou in the nursing home. What might Tamika want to share with her own children and grandchildren one day about this experience?
3. Read other books about characters with Alzheimer's disease or dementia, such as *Grandfather's Story Cloth* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/grandfather-s-story-cloth>).

Compare the characters' experiences to Tamika's and her family's.

4. Read other books about children's relationships with their grandparents, such as *Sunday Shopping* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/sunday-shopping>) or *Seaside Dream* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/seaside-dream>). Discuss why relationships with grandparents are special and what children can learn from their grandparents.
5. Create a class scrapbook about your year together. Include photos, mementos, student artwork and ask students to write a "story" to explain each item.

Science and Social Studies

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

(Writing Standards, Research to Build and Present Knowledge, Strands 7-9)

1. Have students research Alzheimer's disease in small groups. The "For Kids and Teens" section of the Alzheimer's Association website has numerous resources (http://www.alz.org/living_with_alzheimers_just_for_kids_and_teens.asp). Have students produce informational posters or pamphlets to educate others about this disease. Or, have each group research a different disease or challenge that can impact the elderly and families and present findings in a "symposium" format that promotes empathy and understanding.
2. Have students research various organizations and events that support Alzheimer's research. Discuss the impact on various stakeholders of participating in events such as Walk to End Alzheimer's (https://act.alz.org/site/SPageServer/?pagename=walk_homepage) or The Longest Day (http://act.alz.org/site/TR?fr_id=9704&pg=entry): participants, families of those who have Alzheimer's, Alzheimer's patients, and the research community. If you've expanded your discussion to other health issues that impact families (See #1), discuss events and efforts which support those causes, too. If possible, plan a way for your class to support one of the efforts.



3. Listen to the song “We Shall Overcome” with your class. Discuss the idea of a protest and why this song became a popular one for people to sing when standing up for their beliefs. Ask students to write or draw about current world problems or situations they would like to “overcome.”
4. Read other books about the civil rights movement, such as titles from this collection. Make connections between information in these books and Momma Lou’s experiences.

Art

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strand 7)

1. Revisit the book illustrations to study how the illustrator depicts Tamika’s facial expressions. Brainstorm specific words to describe some of her emotions (e.g., resentful, inspired, playful, content, joyous.) Have students paint self-portraits or a portrait of a family member and pay special attention to the subject’s facial expression. Share finished work as a class, asking each student to describe how the facial expression evokes a memory or tells a story about the painting subject.
2. Revisit the book illustrations to study how the illustrator depicts the love between Tamika and her grandmother. What aspects of his paintings show this love? Have students create drawings or paintings of themselves with a cherished family member or friend, focusing on conveying their love for that person in the artwork. Share stories about the artwork with the class or in partners.

Home-School Connection

*(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strand 7)
(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strand 1)*

1. In this article from National Public Radio (<http://www.npr.org/2013/08/28/216482943/the-inspiring-force-of-we-shall-overcome>), the song “We Shall Overcome is described as one “that just [says] exactly what we were doing and what we were feeling.” Have students ask adult family members to share songs that evoke strong memories of particular times in their lives. Invite families to share the songs and related stories at school.

2. Ask families to help students make a family scrapbook or scrapbook page to document treasured family memories. Include options for students who may not have access to family photos, such as creating artwork or using related images found online. This link shares an idea for making a scrapbook to honor one specific person (<https://www.leeandlow.com/educators/homeschooling/make-a-grandma-and-me-scrapbook>).
3. Ask families for ideas about how to brighten the lives of patients in a local nursing home. (Someone may have a connection to an employee or a resident.) Have students make cards or seasonal decorations for residents or fulfill another relevant need.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Linda Jacobs Altman is the author of LEE & LOW's *The Legend of Freedom Hill* and *Amelia's Road*, named a "Choices" selection by the Cooperative Children's Book Center. Altman learned about the tragic effects of Alzheimer's when her mother was stricken with the disease. While it was a tragic experience, she learned from her mother the power of the human spirit. Altman, who lives in Clearlake, California, frequently writes for the educational market.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Larry Johnson has illustrated several children's books, including *Knoxville, Tennessee* by Nikki Giovanni, *When Joe Louis Won the Title*, and LEE & LOW's *The Secret to Freedom*, praised by *School Library Journal* for its "expressive acrylic paintings . . . rich in color and emotion." He also serves as a Youth Minister at a Baptist church and is a cohost of a weekend sports radio show. Johnson and his wife live in Stoughton, Massachusetts. Visit him online at larryjohnsonart.com.

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.

ORDERING INFORMATION

On the Web:

www.leeandlow.com/contact/ordering (general order information)

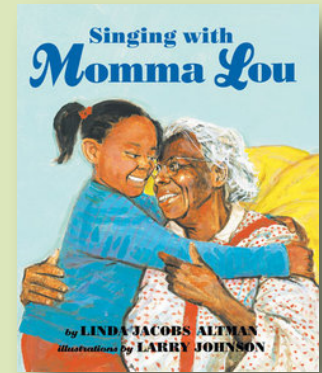
<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/singing-with-momma-lou> (secure online ordering)

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 Singing with Momma Lou



\$9.95, PAPERBACK

978-1-62014-227-1

32 pages, 8- 1/4 X 10-1/2

*Reading Level: Grade 4

*Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula

Interest Level: Grades 1–5

Guided Reading Level: R

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points: 3.8/0.5

Lexile™ Measure: N/A

THEMES: Dementia and Alzheimer's Disease, Overcoming Obstacles, Grandparents, Family Life, Disability, Empathy/Compassion, African/African American Interest

RESOURCES ON THE WEB:

<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/singing-with-momma-lou>

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