

When Clara Lemlich immigrates to America with her family, she expects opportunities. What she gets is an unfair and exploitative labor system. Girls and women who work in garment factories are underpaid, mistreated, and punished for any small infraction. Clara encourages her fellow workers to go on strike. (Could this have been the first “Women’s March?”) Gaining fair treatment takes a long time, and there are so many challenges that might have forced her to quit. The sheer determination she shows in facing her powerful oppressors brings tears to my eyes.

Although this is a picture book, the story gives lots for older girls to think about and enjoy. I love how Sweet’s illustrations mirror the story, seemingly sewn right onto the pages. Make sure you read the Author’s Note in the back for more context about the garment industry, and how the rights that Clara and her co-workers fought for are still benefiting workers today.

I hope that this book will prompt you and your girl to have conversations about issues that she cares deeply about, and what she can do about them. All of our girls need to hear that they have the ability to create change. So, if your girl notices something in her community that’s not right, ask her what she’s going to do about it. Think of yourself as part of her crew, but she’s the director. The simple act of noticing something wrong and taking action to fix it will serve as an enormous lesson in the years to come, even if she doesn’t exactly reach her goal.

## Munch 'n' Chat, 20-30 minutes

As grown-ups and girls arrive, allow some time for snacking and introductions or catching up.

## Ice-Breaker, 10-15 minutes

Everyone in the group should pair up with someone, ask each other a question, and discuss for five minutes. Then, give 5-10 minutes for pairs to introduce each other and share a bit about each other's answers. Here's something you could try:

- *When was a time that you were pretty sure you were not going to succeed, but you kept going anyway?*
- *What happened, and how did you feel about it?*

## Book Discussion, 30 minutes or so

You might decide to start the discussion with every member saying her favorite part of the book before reading discussion questions. Some groups might have time to get to all of these questions, but many groups will pick one or two questions and spend the whole meeting discussing those. Feel free to come up with your own discussion questions, or bring up any ideas that came up while you were reading.

- When the author says Clara is “uncrushable,” what does she mean?
- What word would you use to describe Clara? If you can, use a part of the story to show why that word fits Clara.
- What was the first clue in the story that Clara is not an ordinary person?
- What do you think of the rules that the workers in garment factories had to abide by? Why did they accept these rules?

- Do you think Clara ever felt discouraged about reaching her goals? Why or why not?
- Which parts of the book surprised you, and why?
- Why do you think the author mentions Clara's size?
- How are you similar to Clara?

### Leadership Goals, 15 minutes

What do you feel strongly about? It could be an issue within your family, school, or larger community? What are you going to do about it? In pairs, brainstorm general ideas for how you could make positive changes around this issue.

Now, pick one small action that makes sense as a starting point. Maybe you have to invite people to a meeting, find a company's address, or jot down notes for a letter. Pick one *small* action that will help you get started on your plan. Next month, check in about whether everyone did her action.

Girls and grown-ups might decide to share around the circle so everyone has a turn, or give time so anyone who wants to share can do so.

### Closing, 5 minutes

Make sure you've chosen a date for your February meeting before parting ways. Happy reading!

## Further Reading

If you really loved this book, and you'd like to read more books like it, here are some suggestions. If there are other books you would like to recommend, we'd love to hear them! Please share them on our **Girls Leadership Book Club Facebook Group** so our community can keep growing our list of great titles.

*When Jessie Came Across the Sea* by Amy Hest, illustrated by P.J. Lynch - A lyrical story of a young girl who emigrates from Europe at the turn of the century. Though her heart aches for the grandmother and home she left behind, she eventually puts down roots in her new country.

*Alabama Spitfire* by Bethany Hegedus, illustrated by Erin McGuire - The picture book biography of Harper Lee shows how uncompromising she was about her life and work.

*Hidden Figures* by Margot Lee Shetterly - The best-selling book about the African-American women who worked at NASA to launch the first space shuttle comes in an adult edition, a young readers' edition, and, NOW, a picture book!

*Shaking Things Up: 14 Young Women Who Changed the World* by Susan Hood - Each of these fourteen young activists is the subject of a wonderful poem and a piece of art by a variety of talented illustrators.

*Mae Among the Stars* by Roda Ahmed, illustrated by Stasia Burrington - Gorgeous picture book biography of Mae Jemison, the first African-American woman in space.

*Violet Mackerel's Pocket Protest* by Anna Branford - In this short chapter book, Violet and her friend Rose try to save a most beloved tree from being cut down.