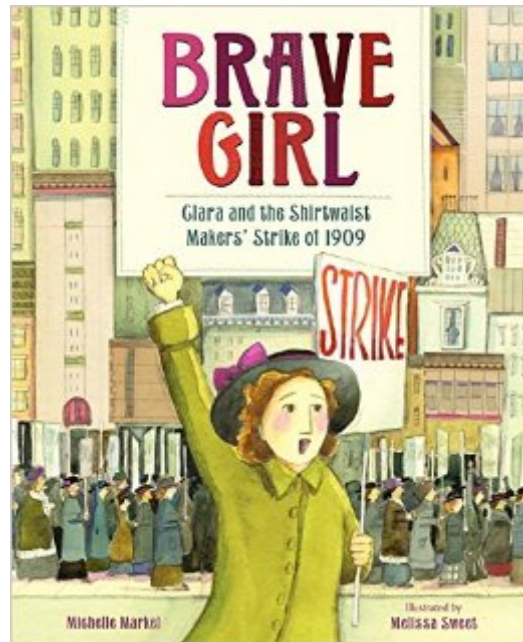


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# Brave Girl: Clara And The Shirtwaist Makers' Strike Of 1909



## Synopsis

From acclaimed author Michelle Markel and Caldecott Honor artist Melissa Sweet comes this true story of Clara Lemlich, a young Ukrainian immigrant who led the largest strike of women workers in U.S. history. This picture book biography includes a bibliography and an author's note on the garment industry. It follows the plight of immigrants in America in the early 1900s, tackling topics like activism and the U.S. garment industry, with handstitching and fabric incorporated throughout the art. When Clara arrived in America, she couldn't speak English. She didn't know that young women had to go to work, that they traded an education for long hours of labor, that she was expected to grow up fast. But that didn't stop Clara. She went to night school, spent hours studying English, and helped support her family by sewing in a shirtwaist factory. Clara never quit, and she never accepted that girls should be treated poorly and paid little. Fed up with the mistreatment of her fellow laborers, Clara led the largest walkout of women workers the country had seen. From her short time in America, Clara learned that everyone deserved a fair chance. That you had to stand together and fight for what you wanted. And, most importantly, that you could do anything you put your mind to. Supports the Common Core State Standards.

## Book Information

Lexile Measure: 760L (What's this?)

Hardcover: 32 pages

Publisher: Balzer + Bray; First Edition edition (January 22, 2013)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0061804428

ISBN-13: 978-0061804427

Product Dimensions: 8.5 x 0.4 x 10.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (25 customer reviews)

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[Social Activists](#) #60 in [Books > Children's Books > Education & Reference > History > United States > 1900s](#)

Age Range: 4 - 8 years

Grade Level: [Preschool - 3](#)

## Customer Reviews

When I saw this book at our public library, I wondered if it would be something my eight-year-old daughter could understand. After all, I had never really explained what strikes were about, much less a little-known historical event (to me at least) of the Shirtwaist Makers' Strike of 1909. I had little to fear as author Michelle Markel brings this event to life with simple yet evocative text, and her collaboration with Caldecott Honor-winning illustrator Melissa Sweet results in a beautifully-illustrated and well-worded picture book that made for an engaging read. Both my daughter and I loved the way the author introduces readers to Clara: "The surprise is dirt poor; just five feet tall, and hardly speaks a word of English. Her name is Clara Lemlich. This girl's got grit, and she's going to prove it. Look out, New York!" Diminutive Clara Lemlich may have been, but this girl certainly had courage and resilience. Forced to abandon schooling to help her immigrant family make ends meet, Clara worked at the garment factory with hundreds of other impoverished young girls, locked into an unsanitary work environment and toiling away for low wages. Yet Clara did not let her circumstances wear her down, instead this fiercely-determined young woman continued her education by checking books out of the local library and taking night classes. Clara was also concerned about her fellow garment workers' rights, and advocated for better working conditions, finally leading them and other women factory workers in the largest walkout of its kind in the history of the United States. The story is compelling and held my daughter's attention.

On Labor Day, we should take time to remember the individuals who stood up for workers' rights. These brave individuals would not tolerate deplorable work conditions or unfair wages. They approached their employers and let their voices be heard. Even though their actions are noteworthy and exemplify what it means to be an American, their stories are rarely shared with children. One recently published picture book, *Brave Girl: Clara and the Shirtwaist Makers' Strike of 1909* by Michelle Markel and Illustrated by Melissa Sweet (2013), brings this important part of US history to a young audience. The book takes the reader back to the beginning of the 20th century when the American population was rapidly increasing due to mass immigration. Immigrants oftentimes worked long hours for meager pay. Clara Lemlich (1886-1982), a Ukrainian Jew immigrated with her family to the US after a Kishinev pogrom in 1903. Instead of continuing her education during the day, Clara's salary was needed for her family's rent and food. After working her long shift as a garment worker, Clara spent additional hours taking classes. In the US, she observed the injustices that her fellow immigrants endured as workers in sweatshops. As a result, Clara sought ways to constructively change their situation. She effectively corralled her fellow female workers to stand up for their rights. Clara led walkout and strikes. She was arrested and physically abused, but

continued to persevere. Her efforts caused the largest walkout of women workers in US history (1909). Each Labor Day, activists like Clara should be remembered. After the 1909 strike, many employers allowed unions to be organized. In many instances, employees' work conditions were dramatically improved.

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