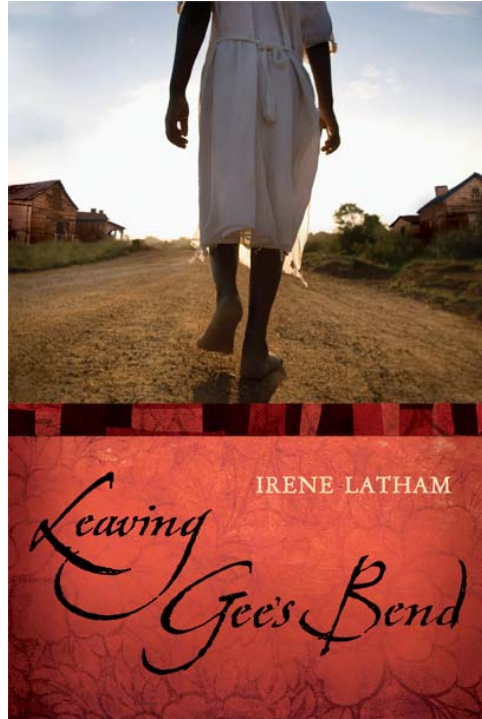


Leaving Gee's Bend

DISCUSSION GUIDE

“Mama always said every quilt tells a story. Every piece of cloth, every stitch and every bit of cotton stuffed between the seams tells a secret about the one who made the quilt.”

- *Ludelfhia Bennett*



G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2010
ISBN: 978-0-399-25179-5

About the Book

Ludelfhia Bennett may be blind in one eye, but that doesn't mean she can't put in a good stitch. In fact, Ludelfhia sews all the time, especially when things are going wrong. But when Mama gets deathly ill, it doesn't seem like even quilting will help. Mama needs medicine badly - medicine that can only be found in Camden, over forty miles away. That's when Ludelfhia decides to do something drastic - leave Gee's Bend.

Beyond the log cabins, orange dirt, and cotton fields of her small sharecropping community, Ludelfhia discovers a world she could never have imagined. Fancy houses, cars, and even soda pop! But there's also danger lurking for a young girl on her own, and Ludelfhia begins to wonder if she'll ever see Gee's Bend or her Mama again. Despite the twists and turns, Ludelfhia weathers each challenge in a way that would make her Mama proud, and may even save the day not just for Mama, but her entire town.

Set in 1932 and inspired by the rich quilting history of Gee's Bend, Alabama, *Leaving Gee's Bend* is a heart-touching tale of a young girl's unexpected adventure.

Pre- reading Activity

Quilting as Tradition

Quilts made in Gee's Bend are unlike any other quilts. **View quilts** (see resources). Ludelphia learns to quilt from her mother, who learned from her mother, who learned from her mother.

What is tradition? The handing down of information, beliefs, or customs by word of mouth or by example from one generation to another without written instruction.

What traditions do you have at school? (i.e. assemblies, pajama day, graduation ceremonies)

What traditions did your parents learn from your grandparents?

What traditions have been handed down to you?



JESSIE T. PETTWAY born 1929
Bars and string pieced columns

Questions for Discussion

1. Ludelphia uses pieces of cloth to tell her story. What cloth would you use to tell your story?
2. Gee's Bend is an isolated place, and Ludelphia has never been anywhere else. How does this fact make it harder for her to leave?
3. Ludelphia worries that Mama's illness is all her fault because of the rumor about Etta Mae being a "witch." What happens that makes Ludelphia believe the rumor is true?
4. How does Ludelphia's blindness in one eye affect her life?
5. Ludelphia thinks about all the things Mama says. Do you think Mama gives good advice? What advice does your mother give you?
6. Ludelphia can't decide whether Mrs. Cobb is good or bad. What does Mrs. Cobb do to confuse her?
7. Ludelphia's family are sharecroppers. How is this different from slavery?
8. After Ludelphia loses her quilt top, she talks about Etta Mae playing the piano "in her mind" and decides to do the same thing with quilting. Have you ever done something "in your mind?"
9. When Mrs. Cobb comes to Gee's Bend to collect, Ludelphia and Etta Mae do something drastic to distract Mrs. Cobb. Does it help?
10. The Red Cross plays an important role in the story. What other disasters do you know of that the Red Cross has sent help?
11. What do you think Ludelphia's next quilt will look like? What story will it tell?

Activities

LANGUAGE ARTS

1. Think of a time when you or someone you know needed help. Write a letter to the Red Cross or other social service agency to request their help.
2. Interview a grandparent about family traditions. Make connections about what traditions have been abandoned and which ones are still being carried on.

MATHEMATICS

1. Many of the Gee's Bend quilters used one geometric shape to form another. For example, they used triangles or rectangles to make a square. Use the Gee's Bend Quilt Template (attached) and ask students to use crayons to create different shapes. Each student's square can then be used to create a classroom quilt.

SCIENCE

1. A "tessellation" is a continuous pattern of interlocking shapes with no spaces between them. Quilts use them, and they are found in nature, in places such as honeycombs, fly eyes, and tree bark. Think of other tessellations you have seen in nature. Also hunt for manmade tessellations, such as ice cube trays, sidewalks, and chocolate bar squares.

HISTORY

1. Examine a map (attached) of Gee's Bend and discuss how the geographic isolation contributed to the development of this community.
2. Draw a timeline of the important events in Ludelphia's story.



ART

1. LEAVING GEE'S BEND was inspired by an art exhibit. Visit a museum or examine museum books and have students write poems or stories about a piece of art of their choosing. Then host a "Poetry and Paint" exhibition.
2. Examine the FSA 1937 photos from Gee's Bend (see Resources) and write poems or stories about the pictures.

MUSIC

1. The Gee's Bend quilts are variations on traditional quilt patterns. Create variations in music by listening to a familiar song, then dividing students into small groups or "bands." Ask each group to improvise this familiar tune by inventing sounds with their feet, hands, or other instruments. Changing the words is also a form of improvisation. Discuss the differences and similarities in each band's variation.

Additional Resources

BOOKS

Beardsley, John, and William Arnett, Paul Arnett, Jane Livingston, Alvia Wardlaw *The Quilts of Gee's Bend*, Atlanta: Tinwood Books, 2002.

McKissack, Patricia *Stitchin' and Pullin' a Gee's Bend Quilt*, New York: Random House, 2008.

Pettway, Tinnie *Gee's Bend Experience*, Birmingham: That's Sew Gee's Bend, 2008.

WEBSITES

<http://www.prairiebluff.com/blackbelt/geesbend.html>

A brief history of Gee's Bend

<http://www.pulitzer.org/works/2000-Feature-Writing>

2000 Pulitzer Prize winning story of Mary Lee Bendolph's life in Gee's Bend, written by J.R. Moehringer, staff writer for the *Los Angeles Times*

<http://www.tinwoodmedia.com>

Images of Gee's Bend quilts and exhibitions

<http://www.quiltsofgeesbend.com>

Information about the quilt makers and the Quilter's Collective

<http://mathforum.org/pubs/boxer/student.tess>

A fun explanation and demonstration of tessellations

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/fsahtml/fachap05.html>

FSA photographs of the Gee's Bend community, taken in 1937

AUDIO

<http://www.flypmedia.com/issues/09/#15/1>

VIDEO

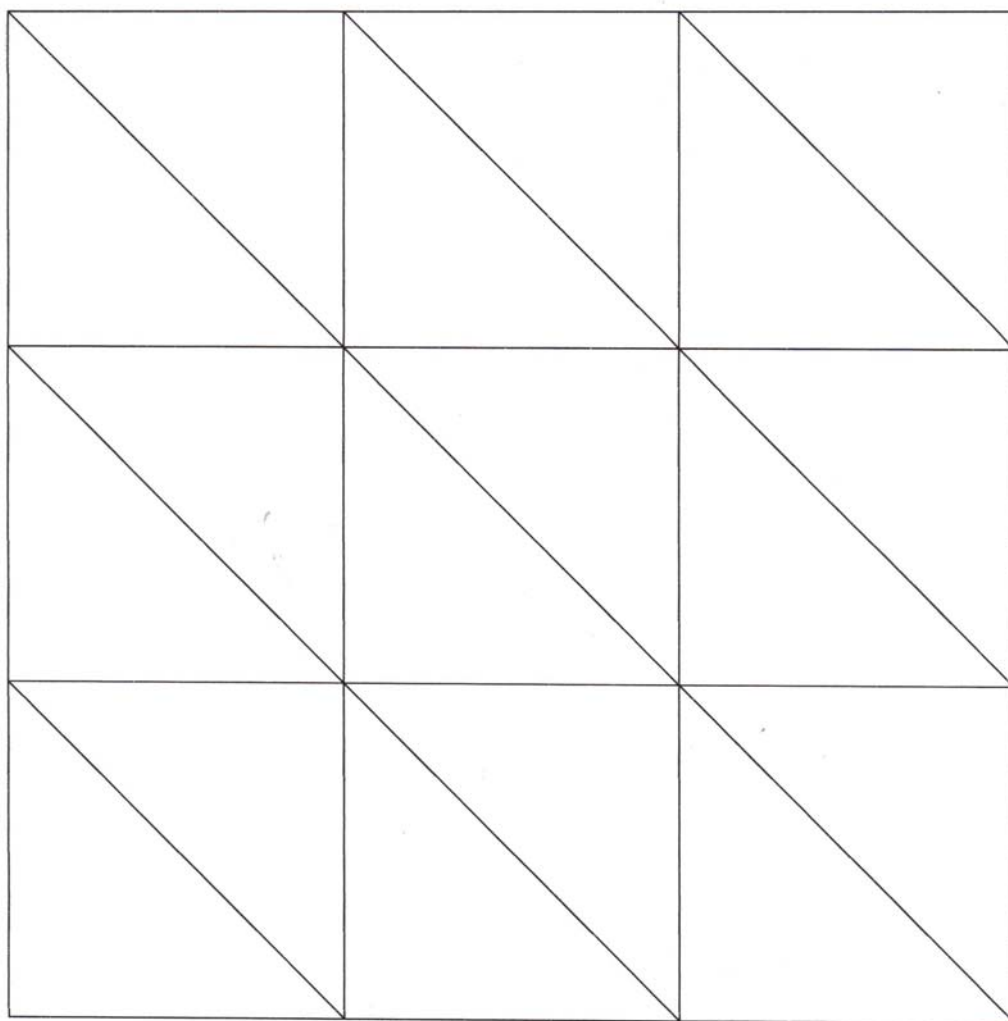
The Quiltmakers of Gee's Bend: Alabama Public Television with Hunter Films, 2004.

About the Author



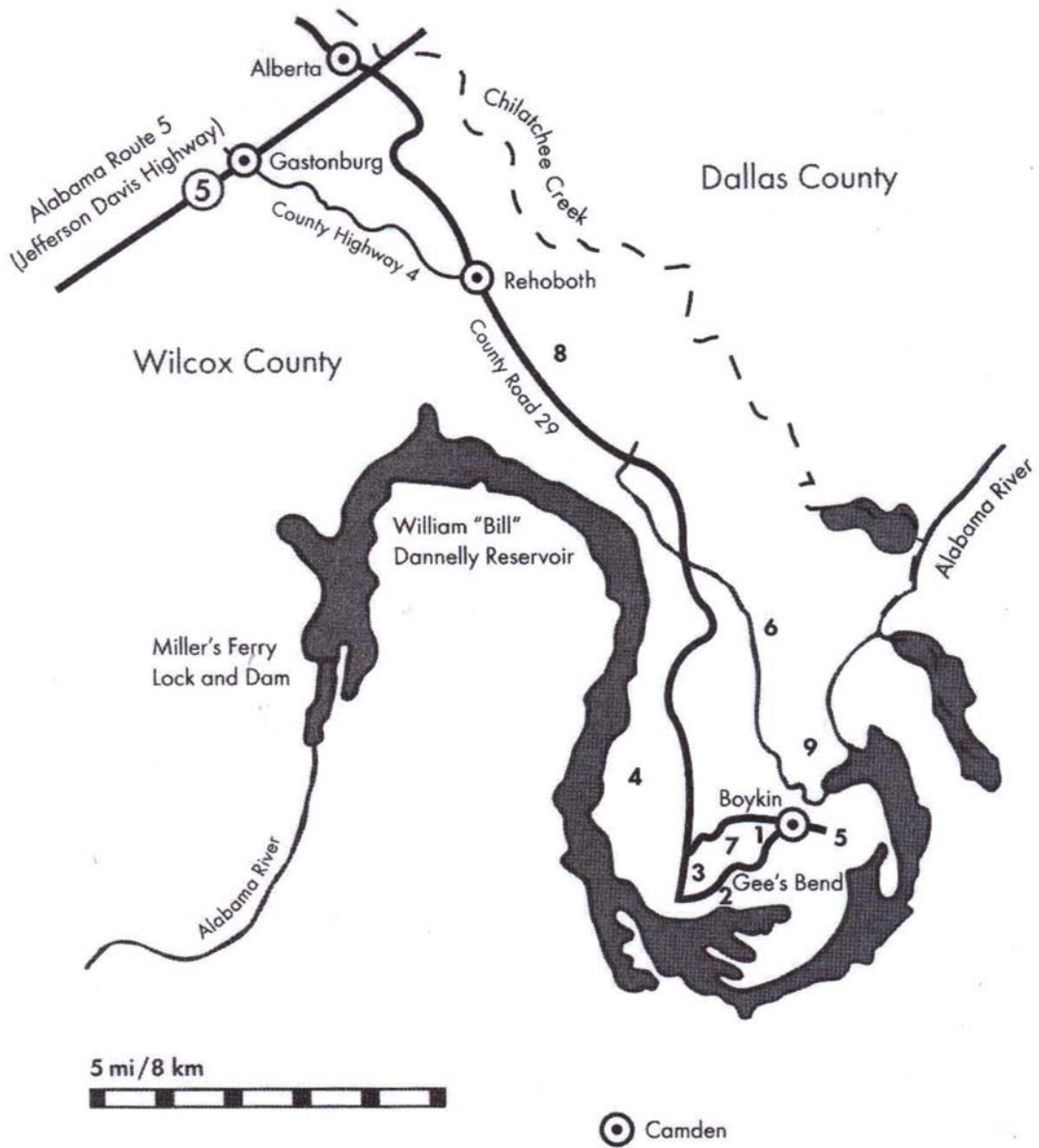
Irene Latham stitched her first sewing card when she was four years old. She lives in Birmingham, Alabama, just 120 miles from Gee's Bend. Her mama always said, "err on the side of love," so she writes about characters who do just that. www.irenelatham.com

Gee's Bend Quilt Template



LEAVING GEE'S BEND
www.irenelatham.com

Map of Gee's Bend



- 1 Pettway 2 Sodom 3 Brown's Quarters 4 White's Quarters 5 Hotel
 6 Foster Creek 7 Sandy Hill (site) 8 Freedom Quilting Bee 9 "Over the Creek"

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