

MELANIE CROWDER

AUDACITY



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Discussion Guide

*Inspired by the true events of the
Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Uprising*

Dear reader,

Thank you for reading and sharing AUDACITY!

Clara Lemlich Shavelson lived an astonishing life—I am honored to have a part in sharing her remarkable story. Below you'll find a series of discussion questions, divided by the sections in this book: Tinder, Spark, Flame, Fire, and Blaze, as well as some questions devoted to the extra content at the end of the book.



I hope you find this resource to be a thought-provoking complement to Clara's story that enhances the group reading experience. I'm always thrilled to videoconference into classrooms or book clubs after they have finished reading the book for a brief Q&A, so please don't hesitate to get in touch!

My very best,
Melanie Crowder

TINDER

1903

- Clara taught herself to read and write when she was denied the opportunity to attend school. The author has stated in interviews that this adversity early in Clara's life played a large part in shaping her tenacious spirit. What other notable historical figures were shaped by dramatic and even traumatic experiences from their youth?

Current events: discuss the disruption in education caused by the pandemic. How might this event in young peoples' lives shift their developing sense of self, the qualities that define them, and their trajectory in life?

- Religious persecution has plagued civilization for centuries. Separate into small groups with each responsible for one of the world's major religions. Research current and/or historical instances of persecution and present your findings to the whole group. Discuss similarities and differences.

Community connection: create a service project the group can participate in to promote tolerance, empathy, and understanding in your community.

SPARK

1904-1905

- Explore the immigrant experience in the 1900s compared to now. What are some similar aspects? What has changed since Clara's journey across Europe and the Atlantic, and into the United States in 1904?

Extension: develop a service project to welcome and support immigrants in your community.

- Discuss the poetic form of this novel. Why do you think the author chose to tell this story in free verse poetry? If this is your first encounter with a verse novel, how is the reading experience different than you anticipated? What poetic techniques have you noticed the author employing so far? What has surprised you, given you pause, and what do you love about the form?

FLAME

1905-1907

- One of the most dangerous aspects of working in a sweatshop in the early 1900s was the frequently locked exit doors; workers couldn't easily get out of the building in case of an emergency. However, such actions also had a psychological impact that is less frequently examined. Explore what that sense of powerlessness must have been like for Clara and her contemporaries. Discuss an aspect of current working conditions, local or global, with similar physical or psychological impacts on safety and well-being. How can we, as global citizens, create change for impacted workers?
- What are worker's unions and why are they controversial? Are any unions active in your area? How do they provide support to workers in your community? Are there any laws in your state that restrict or hinder union membership? Discuss the intersection of capitalism and the labor movement, as well as the group's opinion of what a just, equitable balance between the two might look like.

FIRE

1908

- This section of the book begins with New Year's Eve, which causes Clara to reflect on the cultural and religious differences between the community she grew up in and her new home. Reflect on local customs, holidays, and observances and how they might strike an individual new to the community.

Extension: Take the opportunity to learn about a religious holiday or tradition observed by people in your community of which you've never taken part. If several members of your group do the same, share back, searching for similarities or points of connection that cross cultural boundaries.

- What is a strike and why do they happen? Discuss recent strikes that have had a local impact or that have made national headlines. What significant differences exist between strikes in Clara's time versus the strikes we see today? What has changed? What hasn't? In your opinion, what still needs to change?

BLAZE

1909

- Throughout the novel, the author has used bird imagery to parallel Clara's journey. Select from the text one of your favorite instances and read the poem aloud to the group. If someone were writing a book about you, what element of nature might they use to illustrate your emotional, mental, or physical state as you moved through that journey? Try it: write a poem using an element of your surroundings to reflect your inner state.
- Research Clara's impromptu speech at Cooper Union and the resulting Uprising of the 20,000. What surprised you about the images or other information you uncovered? Had you heard of the event prior to reading the novel? What other lesser-known aspects of American history do you think should be a part of our collective understanding?

Extension: Research the Triangle Factory fire and its impact on the labor movement in the United States.

BACKMATTER

- **Historical Note:** This book is a work of historical fiction. Why do you think the author chose to tell Clara's story as a work of fact-based fiction instead of strict nonfiction? What did the story gain as a result of that artistic choice?
- **Interview:** As a part of her research, the author interviewed Clara's descendants. Do you feel that reading their words shifted or enhanced your understanding of who Clara was? Why or why not?

Extension: Interview a member of your own family about a relative who is no longer with us. Once you've learned everything you can, try to write a few poems in their voice, then share what you've learned and created with family members.