

Brave Girl

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{ What change is worth fighting for? }

Workers, Unite!

Clara Lemlich knows in her bones what's wrong and what's right, and even though she's just a young immigrant in a brand-new country, she's "uncrushable." She's in good company: Judaism has always been sensitive to workers' rights. Shabbat (the Jewish Sabbath) recognizes the need for everyone to take a break — including servants. In the words of the Torah (the first five books of the Bible), "Do not oppress the hired laborer who is poor and needy, either native-born or foreign-born" (like Clara!). Jewish law has also long protected the right of workers to organize, which is why many Jewish workers in the Middle Ages formed workers' guilds — kind of like unions. Many sages of the Talmud (the core collection of rabbinic writings) were also manual laborers — woodcutters, tailors, farmers, shoemakers — which may be partly why they have always honored workers like Clara.

Study or Action?

Clara values hard work, but she also values education — she goes to night school to better herself and then uses her skills to lead the fight for a fair workplace. A classic Jewish question: Which is more important, learning or doing? Rabbis have argued about this at length, but the rough consensus has been that learning is more important because it leads to doing. Clara is the perfect example: Education helps her see the bigger picture, which helps her work more effectively to make the world a better place.

"Stand Fast, Girls!"

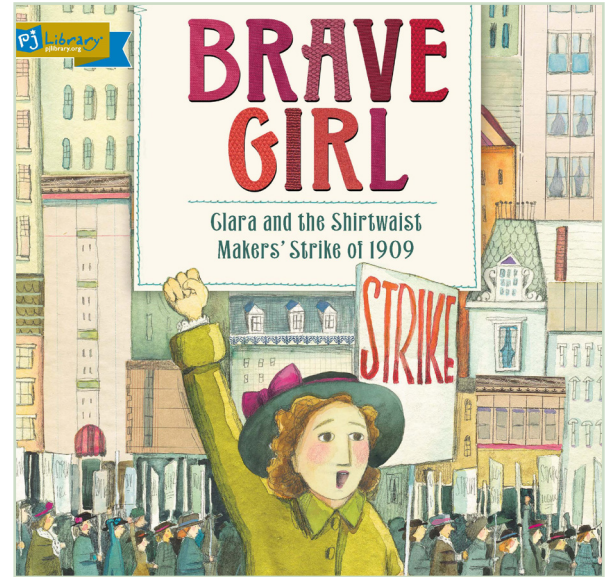
When Clara follows her conscience, she's walking in the footsteps of some great female Jewish role models, including Queen Esther, the heroine of the Purim holiday. In the biblical story of Esther, the king of Persia picked beautiful Esther as his queen without knowing she was Jewish. When the king's trusted advisor, Haman, made a plan to destroy all the Jews, Esther bravely revealed to the king who she was. The result? She saved her entire community. It was scary, but she knew it was the right thing to do — so she did it. Clara cannot stand by and witness her fellow factory workers being mistreated; Esther could not remain silent and watch her fellow Jews be persecuted. When injustice befalls others in our community, Judaism compels us to do everything we can to stop it: "Do not stand idly by while your neighbor's blood is shed" (Leviticus 19:16). To learn more, visit pjlibrary.org/bravegirl.

TALK IT OVER WITH YOUR KIDS

What was unfair about the working conditions at Clara's factory?

Many people didn't take Clara seriously because she was young, a woman, and an immigrant. What gave Clara the strength to lead the protest for workers' rights?

What difference did Clara's activism make?



HANDS ON!



There are lots of ways to protest injustice. Is there something in your neighborhood, school, or community that you think is unfair? Take a cue from Clara and speak out.

- 1 Write a letter to the editor of your local paper.
- 2 Start a petition.
- 3 Talk to lawmakers.
- 4 Organize a march!

