

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

## Bess's Log Cabin Quilt

by  
D. Anne Love

---

### Book Information

D. Anne Love, Bess's Log Cabin Quilt  
Quiz Number: 14133  
Bantam Doubleday Dell, 1995  
ISBN 0-440-41197-1; LCCN  
123 Pages  
Book Level: 3.7  
Interest Level: MG

Bess's father is away helping settlers on the Oregon Trail, and her mother is sick with swamp fever. Bess's only hope of getting the money to save the family farm is to win the quilt contest at the town fair.

**Topics:** Canadian Content, Canadian Content (All); Family Life, Illness; Family Life, Money Crisis; History, Frontier/Pioneer Life; Places, Farms; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 1-3

### Main Characters

Bess Morgan the principal character in the story; a brave young girl who realizes she can save the family farm if she finishes her quilt and wins the quilting contest at the fair

Dr. and Mrs. Winslow the couple who help Bess and her mother while Mrs. Morgan is sick

Liza McCormick a good friend of Bess's; the two girls meet again at the fair

Mr. Morgan Bess's father, who has been gone seven months helping a wagon train travel the Oregon Trail

Mr. Trask a man who makes loans and threatens to take the Morgans' land

Mrs. Fairchild a friend of the family, who is confident she will win the quilting contest

Mrs. Morgan Bess's mother, who becomes ill while trying to take care of the farm while her husband is away

### Vocabulary

**Cayuse** a tribe of Indians native to Oregon

**Oregon Trail** a trail from Missouri to the West Coast that many pioneers traveled during the settlement of the West

**quinine** a medicine used to treat malaria (swamp fever)

**swamp fever** malaria, an infectious disease transmitted by mosquitoes

### Synopsis

Bess Morgan wishes her family had never left Missouri. The Morgans left their home to live in Oregon, and it's a lonely life for a young girl. Papa has been gone seven months traveling with a wagon train, and Bess and her mother are anxious for him to come home. Taking care of the farm keeps them both busy, and they fill their evenings with singing and quilting. Quilting doesn't really appeal to Bess, and she easily becomes impatient with her uneven stitches. Mama tells her that making a fine quilt requires patience.

One evening, Bess discovers her mother isn't feeling well and becomes worried. She calls on the doctor, who informs them Mrs. Morgan has "swamp fever." Bess is instructed to give Mama medicine twice a day, and in a few weeks she would be "good as new." At the same time, another disaster strikes when Mr. Trask comes to the cabin and demands Mrs. Morgan sign over the farm to him for payment on a loan Papa took out just before he left on his travels. Mr. Trask tells the Morgans they have thirty days to come up with the money, or the farm is his.

When Bess discovers there is going to be a cash prize at the fair's quilting contest, she becomes determined to enter and win the money to save the farm. The young girl works night and day to finish her Log Cabin quilt, all the while praying for the safe return of her father.

Bess ties for second place in the contest and returns home with one hundred dollars only to discover Papa has returned and has already paid Mr. Trask. Mama says the money will be saved for Bess's schooling.

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

## Bess's Log Cabin Quilt

by  
D. Anne Love

---

### Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

#### Initial Understanding

Bess is only ten years old. Why do you think she feels such a need to save the farm from Mr. Trask?

*Responses may include her desire to help her mother, the fact she is the only one who is capable of doing something about the money (because Mama is sick and Papa is gone), and Bess's personality is such that she is determined and resourceful.*

#### Literary Analysis

Why do you think the author chose a quilting contest as a way for Bess to get the one hundred dollars necessary to save the farm?

*Quilting was an important and popular life skill for young women during this time period. It seems it was a task Bess didn't necessarily enjoy. It makes sense and adds to the plot to put her in a situation where she needs to focus on something she has little patience for in order to win the contest.*

#### Inferential Comprehension

Do you think you would have the determination Bess showed after deciding to enter the quilting contest? Could you complete a task you found you didn't like? How would you choose to raise the one hundred dollars if you had been in Bess's place? How would choices be different today?

*Answers will vary. Students might share tasks they dislike and give examples of how they would accomplish saving the farm. They should respond with other ways to raise the money relevant to the time period, as well as give examples of modern money-making ideas.*

#### Constructing Meaning

How might the story be different if Bess hadn't won the contest? We know Papa had paid off the loan when he reached Fort Boise. Does this make a difference to the plot? Do you think Bess would have finished the quilt if she had known the loan had been paid?

*Bess's determination would likely have motivated her to finish the quilt and enter the contest even with the debt paid.*

### Teachable Skills

**Recognizing Setting** The story takes place near Salem, Oregon. Oregon was considered a fresh and exciting territory with plenty of farmland for new settlers. The Oregon Trail ran from Missouri to Oregon. Have students map out the Oregon Trail and plan a wagon train trip. Have them consider what they would take along in the wagon; what supplies they would need based on the number traveling in their party and the length of the trip; what decisions need to be made; what items will have to be left behind; and what is valuable enough to take along.

**Understanding Literary Features** The recurring theme throughout the story involves Bess's determination and bravery. Have students discuss the bravest things they have done in their lives. Would they be resourceful enough to face the dangers Bess faced? Do they have the will power to do something they don't like if they had to?

**Understanding Characterization** Have students put themselves in Bess's place and create a journal as she and her parents travel the Oregon Trail from Missouri. What might the entries include? Have them record such things as Bess's emotions, the activities and events along the trail, weather patterns, dangers, and discoveries. Students should feel free to create moments of suspense.

**Understanding the Author's Craft** Allow students to choose a part of the story and rewrite it. Perhaps Bess doesn't win the contest. What if

**Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for**  
**Bess's Log Cabin Quilt**  
**by**  
**D. Anne Love**

---

Papa doesn't return? What might happen to Bess and Mama? Would they return to Missouri? What if Mr. Trask returns for the farm before Mama and Bess can raise the one hundred dollars?

Students might consider the situation with the Cayuse Indians. If they had been friendly to Bess and Mama, how might that scene have been different?