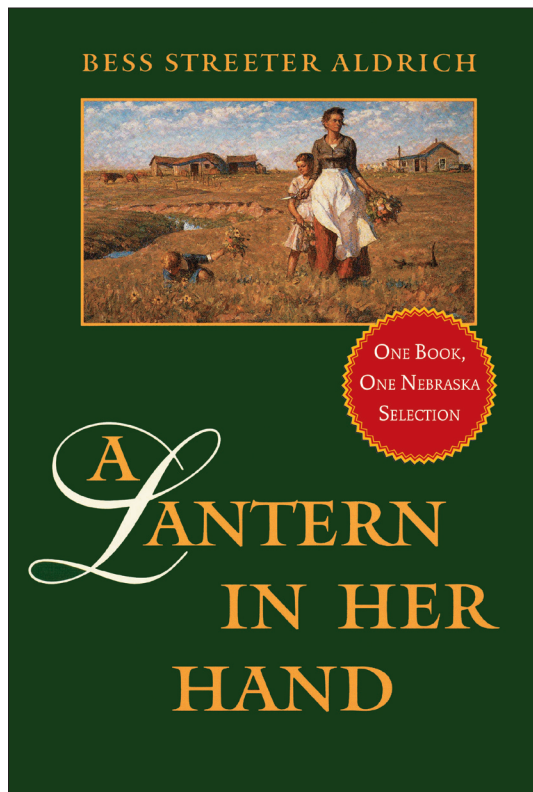


# 2009 ONE BOOK, ONE NEBRASKA SELECTION



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## A Lantern in Her Hand

By Bess Streeter Aldrich

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\$14.95 | paperback  
307 pages | 5 ½ x 8 ½  
978-0-8032-5922-5  
\$18.95 Canadian

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### Book Description

First published in 1928, *A Lantern in Her Hand* has outlasted literary fashions to touch generations of readers. In this classic story of a pioneer woman, Bess Streeter Aldrich modeled protagonist Abbie Deal on her own mother, who in 1854 had traveled by covered wagon to the Midwest.

In *A Lantern in Her Hand*, Abbie accompanies her family to the soon-to-be-state of Nebraska. There, in 1865, she marries and settles into her own sod house. The novel describes Abbie's years of child-raising, of making a frontier home able to withstand every adversity. A Disciplined writer knowledgeable about true stories of pioneer days in Nebraska, Bess Streeter Aldrich conveys the strength of everyday things, the surprise of familiar faces, and the look of the unspoiled landscape during different seasons. Refusing to be broken by hard experience, Abbie sets a joyful example for her family—and for her readers.



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# Bess Streeter Aldrich

*“Sentiment doesn’t lie in soil, or in climate, or latitude, or longitude. It lies in the hearts of people. Wherever there are folks who live and work and love and die, whether they raise hogs in Iowa or oranges in California . . . there is the stuff of which stories are made.”*

—BESS STREETER ALDRICH

Loved by readers for decades, Bess Streeter Aldrich (1881-1954) earned a national reputation with a long list of best-selling novels and with stories appearing in major magazines such as *Ladies’ Home Journal*, *Harper’s Weekly*, *Colliers*, *McCalls*, and *The Saturday Evening Post*. Her most famous novel, *A Lantern in Her Hand*, has remained a favorite since first published in 1928.

Bess Streeter Aldrich was born in Cedar Falls, Iowa, in 1881. The youngest of eight children, Aldrich began to write at an early age, winning her first writing prize at the age of fourteen. She remained in Iowa while attending Iowa State Normal School, now known as the University of Northern Iowa, graduating in 1901.

In 1907 she married Charles Aldrich and later moved to Elmwood, Nebraska. Aldrich devoted herself to raising their four children, using Elmwood and family history as a backdrop for her stories.

After her husband suddenly passed away in 1925, Aldrich turned to writing as a means of supporting her family. She wrote over 100 short stories and nine novels between 1941 and 1945. One of her early works, *Miss Bishop* (1933) was later made into the film *Cheers for Miss Bishop* (1941). Her stories are centered on Midwestern pioneer history and vividly portray strong, hardworking women. Aldrich’s hope was that future generations would gain a sense of history and understand the joys, struggles, and accomplishments that were a part of that time period.

In 1934 Aldrich was awarded an Honorary Degree in Literature from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. In 1949 she received the Iowa Authors Outstanding Contributions to Literature Award. She was later inducted into the Nebraska Hall of Fame in 1973.

A collection of novels and short stories by Bess Streeter Aldrich and her biography by Carol Miles Petersen are available from the [University of Nebraska Press](http://www.nebraskapress.unl.edu). In the biography, *Bess Streeter Aldrich*, Petersen reveals a woman as strong and substantial as Aldrich’s fictional heroines.



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## Praise for *A Lantern in Her Hand*

“Piercingly beautiful. . . Aldrich’s pioneer woman was based on her mother, and the integrity of her depiction of life in a sod house in the late nineteenth-century Nebraska speaks to her readers. . . . In her own introduction Aldrich writes of wanting to tell her mother’s story after her mother’s death: ‘Other writers had depicted the Midwest’s early days, but so often they had pictured their women as gaunt, browbeaten creatures, despairing women whom life seemed to defeat. That was not my mother. Not with her courage, her humor, her nature that would cause her to say at the end of her life: ‘We had the best time in the world.’”—ALLYSON F. MCGILL, *Belles Lettres*

“The language is good and sturdy and dotted with imaginative metaphors and similes (‘Silence, so deep, that it roared in its vast vacuum’). If the book tries to crowd too much life into 300 pages, well, there was a lot of life: ‘We old pioneers,’ Abbie says at the end, ‘we dreamed dreams into the country.’”—ROGER MILLER, *Milwaukee Journal*

## Additional praise for Bess Streeter Aldrich

“Wholesome without being sentimental, Aldrich’s stories represent an agreeable alternative to the more cynical and less sympathetic portraits of small-town life painted by man of her contemporaries, such as Sinclair Lewis and Edgar Lee Masters.”—MARGARET FLANAGAN, *Booklist*

“The author of over one hundred short stories, Streeter never wrote one she didn’t sell. Eschewing the sordid, she claimed that ‘one may portray some of the decent things . . . and reserve the privilege to call that life too.’ The twenty-six early stories collected here appeared in some of the most popular magazines of the day and won her a devoted readership.”—AMERICAN LITERATURE

Other books by Bess Streeter Aldrich available from the [University of Nebraska Press](http://www.nebraskapress.unl.edu):

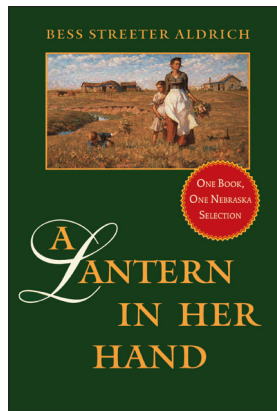
- *A White Bird Flying*
- *Journey into Christmas and Other Stories*
- *Mother Mason*
- *The Rim of the Prairie*
- *Spring Came On Forever*
- *The Collected Short Works, 1907–1919*
- *The Collected Short Works, 1920–1954*
- *Bess Streeter Aldrich: The Dreams Are All Real* (biography of Aldrich by Carol Miles Petersen)



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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

# A Lantern in Her Hand

By Bess Streeter Aldrich

1. Bess Streeter Aldrich is noted for doing extensive research for her books. Do you think that is the case with *A Lantern in Her Hand*? If so, in what areas?
2. Do you notice a change in the dialect as you read through the book? If so, how do you account for this?
3. Why do you think a university would ask social studies students to read *A Lantern in Her Hand*?
4. What are the universal themes you find in *A Lantern in Her Hand*?
5. From what outside literary sources does Aldrich quote?
6. Some have considered *A Lantern in Her Hand* a biographical work. To what extent do you agree or disagree? Explain your position.
7. How does Aldrich appeal to the reader's senses? Give examples.
8. *A Lantern in Her Hand* is set in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Do you think Aldrich stays true to the time and people? If so, how?
9. Will's death is not explained in any detail. Why?
10. Discuss the differences and/or similarities between the three main adult women who have trekked to Cedartown: Abbie, Christine Reinmueller, and Sarah Lutz.
11. What keeps Will and Abbie on the land even though so many others have returned to the East?
12. Did it seem realistic to you when Will found the two beets and a few of the early saved potatoes, and they "feasted" on these with Henry and Sarah Lutz?
13. Aldrich has been called a romantic realist, a painter with pencil and word, much as Norman Rockwell was with brush and palette. What are some examples of this from *A Lantern in Her Hand*?
14. Aldrich was one of the most popular writers in the country from the 1920s to the mid 1950s. How does this book support that popularity?



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