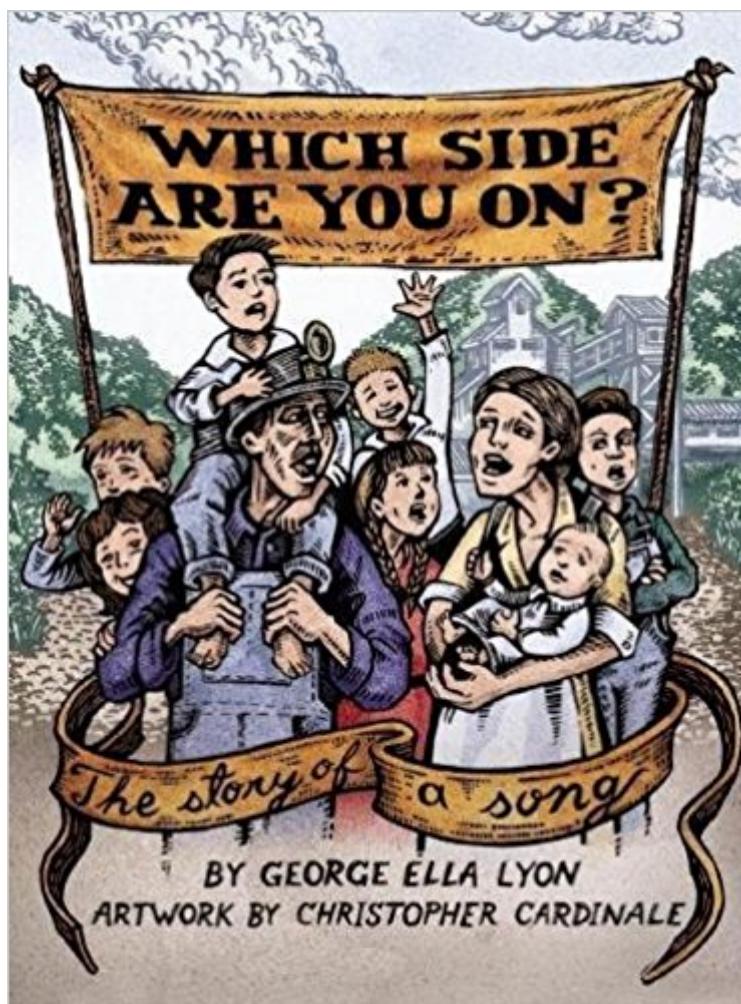


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# Which Side Are You On?: The Story Of A Song



## Synopsis

Which Side Are You On? tells the story of the classic union song that was written in 1931 by Florence Reece in a rain of bullets. It has been sung by people fighting for their rights all over the world. Florence's husband Sam was a coal miner in Kentucky. Many of the coal mines were owned by big companies, who kept wages low and spent as little money on safety as possible. Miners lived in company houses on company land and were paid in scrip, good only at the company store. The company owned the miners sure as sunrise. That's why they had to have a union. Miners went on strike until they could get better pay, safer working conditions, and health care. The company hired thugs to attack union organizers like Sam Reece. George Ella Lyon tells this hair-raising story through the eyes of one of Florence's daughters, a dry-witted, pig-tailed gal whose vantage point is from under the bed with her six brothers and sisters. The thugs' bullets hit the thin doors and windows of the company house and the kids lying low wonder whether they're going to make it out of this alive; wonder exactly if this strike will make their lives better or end them, but their mother keeps scribbling and singing. "We need a song," she tells her kids. That's not at all what they think they need. Graphic novelist Christopher Cardinale brings Florence's triumphant story to life in true rip-roaring union style. Selected as an IRA Notable Book for a Global Society and a 2012 Skipping Stones Honor Book.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 9 - 11 years

Grade Level: 4 and up

## Customer Reviews

WHICH SIDE ARE YOU ON is beautiful, lyrical, and important, subtly showing us the importance of music and--even better--how anyone can make a difference, no matter their circumstances, as long as they put their heart and soul into it. A treasure. --Silas House, author of "Eli the Good", 2010 Storylines/NYPL Winner."Written from the point of view of a striking miner's child, this picture book tells how the song "Which Side Are You On" came to be written... As unusual as the subject may be for a picture book, the story has real power and so do the best of the illustrations. The music and lyrics appear on the back cover." -- Carolyn Phelan "Booklist, November 15, 2011""What a perfect time for this picture book's arrival..."Which Side Are You On?" is an old song with new relevance for a generation facing a dubious future."--"NY Journal of Books"WHICH SIDE ARE YOU ON is beautiful, lyrical, and important, subtly showing us the importance of music and--even better--how anyone can make a difference, no matter their circumstances, as long as they put their heart and soul into it. A treasure. --Silas House, author of "Eli the Good""It's a high-stakes account of grace under pressure."--"Publisher's Weekly""Cardinale's digitally colored scratchboard art is dynamic...Given that many of the same [labor] conditions exist today, only changed by mechanization, the music and lyrics included may well find use in the current generation. Lyon has given today's readers a stirring story."--"Kirkus Reviews""Lyon and Cardinale make a perfect match for this picture-book homage to a 1931 rallying cry born under duress in Harlan County, Ky... Although this book describes a historical event, it can open a gateway to understanding terms such as "collective bargaining," what that right has meant, and to consider what it means today."--"Self Awareness""The story is a good and important one, and it is well told for an elementary-school audience...Cardinale's folksy, woodcut-style paintings include several memorable images."--The New York Times "What a perfect time for this picture book's arrival..."Which Side Are You On?" is an old song with new relevance for a generation facing a dubious future."--NY Journal of Books "The story has real power and so do the best of the illustrations."--Booklist "Which Side Are You On? is beautiful, lyrical, and important, subtly showing us the importance of music and--even better--how anyone can make a difference, no matter their circumstances, as long as they put their heart and soul into it. A treasure."--Silas House, author of Eli the Good "It's a high-stakes account of grace under pressure."--Publisher's Weekly "Cardinale's digitally colored scratchboard art is dynamic...Given that many of the same [labor] conditions exist today, only changed by mechanization, the music and lyrics included may well find use in the current generation. Lyon has

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Come all you poor workers  
Good news to you I'll tell  
Of how the good old union  
Has come in here to dwell.  
Which side are you on?  
Which side are you on?

I had the great privilege to meet the wonderful George Ella Lyon at a Children's Literary Conference in Redlands, California. She is a wonder author, and storyteller. And she plays the guitar and sings too. She was one of the keynote speakers and we got to have one-on-one time with her. She offered us a lot of insight on the process of writing for children. *Which Side Are You On?* Is a great story for all ages.

This is an inspiring story of how Florence Reese came to write a song that is sung around the world: "Which Side Are You On?" The writing and the art together depict life in a company mining town in 1931. What keeps this from being a 5-star book in my opinion is that, in order to tell the story to the reader, the author has the children ask questions they wouldn't have asked, because their every-day life experience would have provided the answer. An example is when one child asks, "Why don't the sheriff stop them?" just so that Ma can reply, "The company pays him not to. They own Sheriff Blair as sure as they own this house." It is certainly true that the company owned Sheriff Blair, but I think the kids would have known this and wouldn't have asked the question, at least not this way. That aside, this is a book well worth reading. The way the words of the song are wound around mining tools on one page, and machine guns on another page, help drive home the fact that there are two sides in the struggle of working people for a better life and a better world.

A fun copy

My boyfriend and I bought this for his mother and it is the perfect present for her. I can't wait to see her open it. Came in safe packaging, fast shipping, great price!

When the coal miners in Kentucky form a union and start a strike, a family hides behinds its doors.

In the meantime, Ma, Florence Reece, writes a song that makes history. Children ages 5-8 will read this historical story book, and learn this song, and will feel empowered to fight for their rights.

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