

# HOLIDAY HOUSE

# EDUCATOR'S GUIDE



HC: 9780823439638 · e-book: 9780823450336

## *Stitch by Stitch: Elizabeth Hobbs Keckly Sews Her Way to Freedom*

by **Connie Schofield-Morrison**  
illustrated by **Elizabeth Zunon**

### ABOUT THE BOOK

This awe-inspiring African American woman, a talented seamstress, born enslaved, bought freedom for herself and her son.

Elizabeth Hobbs Keckly was born in 1818, enslaved to a Virginian plantation owner. As a teenager, Lizzie was sent to work as the only slave on a small plantation, where the work was endless and the masters treated her with unspeakable cruelty. A new master, learning Lizzie could sew, sent her to work for a tailor, who paid the master, not Lizzie, for Lizzie's work.

The beautiful gowns that Lizzie created were displayed in the tailor's window and soon attracted the attention of the wealthiest women in Virginia. Among them was Mrs. Jefferson Davis, who also introduced Lizzy to Mary Todd Lincoln. Though Lizzie first had to borrow money from her wealthy patrons to buy her freedom, once she was free, she was able to earn money of her own and pay them all back.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Study the cover of the book. What does the clothing of the main character and the subtitle of the book reveal about the time period in which the book takes place? Identify the items in the cover art. A symbol is an idea represented by a word or a picture. Point out an example of symbolism in the cover art. What does it represent?
- Elizabeth Hobbs Keckly was born into slavery. How does the first page reveal the love her parents had for her? What does she mean when she writes that she was free in "God-like thought"?
- Lizzy and her mother, Aggy, were the property of Armistead Burwell. Her mother made all the clothing for the Burwells, and the quilts for their beds. How does Aggy teach her art form to Lizzy? What else does her mother teach her? Explain why slaves were forbidden an education. How is Lizzy's ability to read and write reflected in the quilts she made?



- Describe the brutal treatment of the slaves. How is Lizzy affected by the sale of Little Joe at an auction? Point out Mr. Burwell, Little Joe's mother, and Lizzy in the illustration pp. 10–11. Explain Lizzy's statement: "The sunny face of the slave is not always an indication of the sunshine in the heart" (p. 11). Discuss how the facial expression and mannerisms of Mr. Burwell show that he only cares about the business at hand.
- Study the illustration on pp. 12–13. What is taking place outside the window? Why is Lizzy crying? What does Lizzy contribute to the Burwell household? Explain why she receives such harsh treatment from Mrs. Burwell.
- Lizzy is eventually sent to live with Mr. Burwell's oldest son. Study the illustration on pp. 14–15. Discuss Lizzy's tears. What does the embroidered piece represent? Lizzy was eventually sent to St. Louis. Compare and contrast the Garland household with the Burwell household. How does Lizzy's kind heart help the Garlands?
- Lizzy became well-known for the beautiful dresses she created. Compare the way she made dresses to the way clothing is made today. Discuss the meaning of couture. How might the dresses Lizzy made be considered couture dresses today? Explain how Lizzy became well-known among the society ladies in St. Louis.
- Discuss Lizzy's path to freedom. How does she pay off her debt to Mrs. Le Bourgois and the ladies of St. Louis? Why is paying the debt so important to her?
- Lizzy moves to Washington, D.C. Make note of her clients. Irony is when something happens that is the opposite of what is expected. What is ironic about Lizzy making dresses for Varina Davis, the wife of Jefferson Davis, and Mary Anna Custis Lee, the wife of Robert E. Lee? How does the dress Lizzy designs and sews for Mrs. Lee bring her more clients? Explain how Lizzy becomes Mrs. Lincoln's dressmaker. Describe the friendship that develops between the two women. What causes their friendship to become strained?
- The illustrations are done in oil paint, paper, fabric, ribbon, embroidery, and appliqué. Point out examples of each medium in the book. How are the illustrations appropriate representations of Lizzy's life?

Guide created by Pat Scales, retired school librarian and independent consultant, Greenville, South Carolina.

## ABOUT THE CREATORS

Photo credit: Connie Morrison



**Connie Schofield-Morrison** is a mother, author, and entrepreneur. She and her high-school sweetheart and husband, Frank D. Morrison, run an online and brick-and-mortar art gallery called Morrison Graphics in Atlanta, Georgia, that Connie manages while also taking care of their five children and writing books in her spare time. *Stitch by Stitch* is her first book with Holiday House.

Photo credit: Elizabeth Zunon



**Elizabeth Zunon** is an illustrator of over ten picture books, including *Stitch by Stitch*, which is her first book with Holiday House. Born in New York and raised in South Africa, she attended the Rhode Island School of Design and graduated with a BFA in Illustration. Drawing and painting have always been important to Elizabeth, whose love for the craft was fueled by the bright, vibrant colors of everyday West African fabrics and tropical vegetation. Elizabeth lives in Albany, New York.

