



## BUFFALO FLATS

by Martine Leavitt

### ABOUT THE BOOK

Based on true-life histories, *Buffalo Flats* shares the epic, coming-of-age story of Rebecca Leavitt as she searches for her identity in the Northwest Territories of Canada during the late 1800s.

Seventeen-year-old Rebecca Leavitt has traveled by covered wagon from Utah to the Northwest Territories of Canada, where her father and brothers are now homesteading and establishing a new community with other Latter-Day Saints. Rebecca is old enough to get married, but what kind of man would she marry and who would have a girl like her—a girl filled with ideas and opinions? Rebecca decides to set her sights on something completely different. She loves the land and wants her own piece of it. When she learns that single women aren't allowed to homestead, her father agrees to buy her land outright, as long as Rebecca earns the money—480 dollars, an impossible sum. She sets out to earn the money while surviving the relentless challenges of pioneer life—the ones that Mother Nature throws at her in the form of blizzards, grizzles, influenza, and floods, and the ones that come with human nature, be they exasperating neighbors or the breathtaking frailty of life.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What is pioneer spirit? Discuss what brought the pioneers from Utah to Buffalo Flats. What hardships do they face? Discuss their greatest challenges.
- Describe the sense of community among the settlers. How do they help one another through tough times?
- Most of the settlers are Latter-Day Saints. What are the rules and beliefs of their religion? How does religion play a role in the pioneers' daily lives?
- Throughout the novel there are references to "being good." Why does Rebecca think that she was born more "naturally wicked than others"? Cite scenes from the novel that illustrates Rebecca's "goodness."

- What is the community's view of women? Explain what Rebecca means when she says that women aren't really "persons" (p. 138). Why is Rebecca surprised when her brother, Zach, marries Florence?
- What is Florence's view of women's rights? Debate whether Zach views women's rights differently than his peers. How might Florence and Rebecca be viewed as "kindred spirits"?
- Describe Liza, Rebecca's mother. Compare and contrast her with other women in Buffalo Flats. Explain what her mother means when she says "a daughter might have what a woman cannot" (p. 22). How does she manipulate Samuel, her husband, into supporting her daughter's dream of owning land?
- How is Liza both a woman beyond her times, and a woman of her times? How is she an early example of a "silent protester" for women's rights?
- Contemplate the Sempel family. How does Rebecca justify taking milk from Brother Sempel's cow?
- What is the first clue that something is wrong at the Sempel home? Why does Rebecca's father think they should stay out of the matter? How does Liza eventually convince him that they should call on the Sempels?
- Liza is taken to jail for shooting Brother Sempel. How does the judge respond to Liza Leavitt's case? Why does Brother Sempel drop the charges? Explain Rebecca's thoughts when she realizes that her father lied to Brother Sempel.
- Rebecca's best friend is LaRue Fletcher. Explain the following metaphor: "LaRue's heart was a jewelry box – it sang when you opened it" (p. 32). Rebecca's brother, Ammon, is in love with LaRue and wants to marry her, but her father thinks they should wait.
- Contrast the way Brother Fletcher and the Leavitt family react to the news that LaRue is pregnant. What makes Brother Fletcher change his mind and allow LaRue and Ammon to get married?
- Debate whether Rebecca is jealous of Radonna. How does Rebecca recognize her jealousy as a vice? Discuss whether Levi knows how to deal with Radonna's flirtatious nature. Throughout the novel, Rebecca has pined for Levi. Why does she reject his marriage proposal at the end of the novel?
- Coby Webster is a special friend to Rebecca and the entire Leavitt family. Explain why Rebecca thinks there is no one good enough for Coby. What is the first hint that Coby has romantic feelings for Rebecca? Discuss what he most admires about her. Why is she blind to his feelings?
- Rebecca and Coby see an elk. What does this sighting symbolize to Coby? Debate whether this moment causes Rebecca to see Coby differently. At the end of the novel, Coby buys the land that Rebecca wants and gifts it to her. How is this a proposal? She says to him, "I mean to be a person" (p. 227). How is she a person in his eyes?
- What is the central theme of the novel? How do the secondary themes contribute to the central theme?
- In the Author's Note, Martine Leavitt says she hopes that she has reflected the "clan culture" of Buffalo Flats. Make the argument that she has successfully achieved her goal.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Photo Credit: Alexandria Rowley

**Martine Leavitt** is the author of several award-winning books for young readers, including *Calvin* (winner of the Governor General's Award), *My Book of Life by Angel* (finalist for the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize and winner of the Canadian Library Association Young Adult Book of the Year) and *Keturah and Lord Death* (finalist for the National Book Award). She teaches in the MFA program in Writing for Children and Young Adults at Vermont College of Fine Arts, where she is serving as the Katherine Paterson Endowed Chair. Martine lives in High River, Alberta. Visit her at [MartineLeavitt.com](http://MartineLeavitt.com).