



## Light and Air

by Mindy Nichols Wendell

★ “A timeless portrayal of **resilience** and **compassion** during an epidemic.”

—*Shelf Awareness*, Starred Review

A Junior Library Guild Gold Standard Selection

### ABOUT THE BOOK

It’s 1935, and tuberculosis is ravaging the nation. Everyone is afraid of this deadly respiratory illness. But what happens when you actually have it?

When Halle and her mother both come down with TB, they are shunned—and then they are sent to the J.N. Adam Tuberculosis Hospital: far from home, far from family, far from the world.

Tucked away in the woods of upstate New York, the hospital is a closed and quiet place. But it is not, Halle learns, a prison. Free from

her worried and difficult father for the first time in her life, she slowly discovers joy, family, and the healing power of honey in the children’s ward, where the girls on the floor become her confidantes and sisters. But when Mama suffers a lung hemorrhage, their entire future—and recovery—is thrown into question. . . .

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

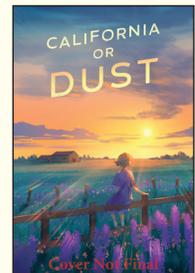
- Historical fiction is set in a real place at a specific time in history. Explain why this novel is considered historical fiction. What do you learn about the Great Depression from reading the novel? Tuberculosis, called “the wasting disease,” was very contagious and common in the 1930s. Discuss the facts about tuberculosis that are included in the book. What are the democratic principles of J. N. Adam Hospital where Halle Newton’s mother is taken? How is this especially important during the Depression?
- Many families struggled during the Great Depression. How does Halle’s family survive? Halle’s mother says, “Times are tight. Be grateful for what you have” (p. 2). What things does her mother want her to be grateful for? Compare the way Halle’s family lives to other families in the area.

- Describe Halle’s parents. Halle says, “Mama was forever putting other people’s needs and wants ahead of her own” (p. 5). Cite evidence that Halle’s assessment of her mother is correct. Discuss Halle’s relationship with Papa. Explain why Papa seems so angry. How does Halle miss the Papa she knew when she was younger? Debate whether Halle’s birthday gift from Papa is a turning point in their relationship.
- What is the first hint that Halle’s mother is sick? Doc Gray confirms that she has tuberculosis. How does Papa react to this news? Explain the following simile: “Mama’s face looked like a storm cloud” (p. 10). At what point does Halle realize how extremely sick her mother is?
- Explain what Halle means when she says, “Some people could make you feel full of light and hope, while others flattened you right down and made you feel like nothing” (p. 32). Who are the people that make Halle feel “light and hope”? Name those who make her “feel like nothing.”
- Halle becomes ill and is taken to the same hospital where Mama is. Describe the children’s hospital. Eventually Halle is moved to a children’s ward. Discuss the interaction between Halle, Flossie, Rita, and Viv. Compare and contrast the way Halle, Flossie, and Rita deal with Viv’s death. How is Flossie’s mom helpful to the girls during this time?
- Halle’s mother always told her, “Don’t borrow trouble” (p. 79). How often does Halle borrow trouble in the novel? What are the risks she takes? How does she pull Eddie and Sam into her plan to see Mama? What does Halle overhear outside Mama’s door that upsets her? Why does she run away? Melchior, the man that runs the honey house, finds Halle and takes her back to the hospital. Discuss Halle’s meeting with Dr. Fenton, the hospital superintendent.
- Mama develops complications. At what point does Papa reveal the nature of the complications? Why does he wait so long to tell her? Describe Halle’s reaction when she learns that she is going to be a big sister.
- Discuss the significance of the gift Halle gives to Flossie, Rita, Eddie, and Sam when she leaves the hospital.
- Theme is the big idea or the message in a story. What is the theme of this novel? Discuss the meaning of the title.

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**



**Mindy Nichols Wendell** taught writing and pedagogy at SUNY Fredonia for many years, where she served as the Director of the Composition Program. In 2019, she received the prestigious State University of New York Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Teaching. Mindy lives in Western New York with her husband, Steve, a retired teacher. She is located not far from the ruins of the J. N. Adam Tuberculosis Hospital, the inspiration for *Light and Air*. Learn more at [MindyNicholsWendell.com](http://MindyNicholsWendell.com).