

STEPPING STONES™

a chapter book

History

Next Spring an Oriole

Every journey
is better with
a best friend.

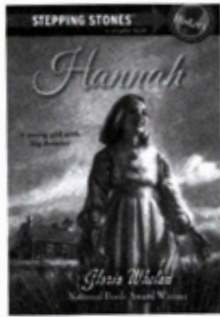
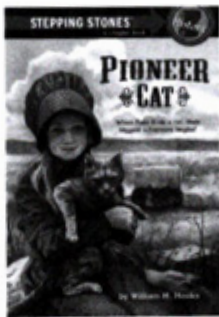
by Gloria Whelan

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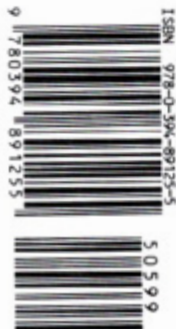
History

**Sometimes the best adventures
happened long ago!**



**Look for these nonfiction
adventures, too!**

TOTALLY TRUE
adventures



The girl was sitting so quietly I had not noticed her.

Her long black hair was braided and shiny. She wore a calico dress sewn with bright-colored beads. Her dark eyes watched me as I walked toward her.

"What is your name?" she asked.

"Libby," I said. "What's yours?"

"I am called Taw cum e go qua and I am of the clan of the eagle." Fastened around her neck was a piece of rawhide holding a tiny silver eagle.

For Jacqueline

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Whelan, Gloria.

Next spring an oriole/ by Gloria Whelan ; illustrated by Pamela Johnson.
p. cm. — (A Stepping stone book)

Summary: In 1837 ten-year-old Libby and her parents journey by covered wagon to the Michigan frontier, where they make themselves a new home near friendly Indians and other pioneers.

ISBN 978-0-394-89125-5 (pbk.) — ISBN 978-0-394-99125-2 (lib. bdg.)

[1. Frontier and pioneer life—Michigan—Fiction. 2. Michigan—Fiction. 3. Indians of North America—Michigan—Fiction.] I. Johnson, Pamela, ill. II. Title. III. Series.
PZ7.W5718Ne 1987 [E] 87-4910

Printed in the United States of America

This book has been officially leveled by using the F&P Text Level Gradient™ Leveling System.


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Next Spring
an Oriole



by Gloria Whelan
illustrated by Pamela Johnson
cover illustrated by Tony Meers

A STEPPING STONE BOOK™

Random House  New York





I

My name is Elizabeth Mitchell. I am called Libby. On my tenth birthday, April 3, 1837, my mama and papa and I left the state of Virginia and everyone we loved. That was two months ago. Since then we have come a thousand miles through woods and swamps.

Mama is from the Tidewater country and grew up in a big house with pretty things, while Papa is a surveyor from north Virginia. Mama loves the town but Papa loves the trees. When our neighbors cut down all their trees for a plantation, Papa said he was ready to leave.

Then a land-looker came by with stories about the state of Michigan, where you could

buy an acre of land for \$1.25. He said pine trees there were so tall you couldn't see their tops unless you lay down on the ground. Papa went out and bought a wagon. When he brought it home, Mama cried.

I am more like Papa. Although I was sorry to leave my friends, I was glad to put away the dresses that pinched my waist and the shoes that pinched my toes. Instead of walking two miles each way to school, where the schoolmaster, Mr. Ripple, slapped our fingers with a ruler when we didn't have our lesson by heart, Mama would teach me reading, writing, and sums. And each day there would be something to see that I had never seen before.

It was early spring when we left Virginia. I could hear orioles and thrushes for the first time since the winter. I would rather hear an oriole sing than anything else in the world. The oriole is beautiful to look at, too, with its flash of orange that turns to gold in the sun.

The wagon we traveled in was about three



times as big as my parents' bed. It had rounded bows stretched over the top. The bows were covered with canvas. Our horses, Ned and Dan, pulled the wagon. We could



take along only what would fit in the wagon and still leave room for us to make up a bed at night. Papa took his axe, his musket, and his surveying tools. I took my doll with the face Mama had painted to look just like me. Mama took the most precious things she owned—her sketchbook and pencils. We also took salt pork, corn, dried apples, a skillet, and an iron kettle.

After the two months of travel our wagon pulled into Detroit. We saw real houses made of brick and women wearing fashionable dresses. While we rode through the town I looked hard at everything to make it last. There were children playing games. There were Indians with piles of animal skins. There were stores with barrels of flour and molasses and lengths of bright-colored cloth. There were hotels with people sitting on the porches and there were ships sailing on the river. In a few hours I knew it would all be gone and we would be back in the woods, woods deeper than any we had traveled through before.



When Papa stopped the wagon at the land office, Mama got out her sketchbook and began to draw the boats. She made quick marks, like bird wings, for the sails; as though the boats could fly through the air as well as sail on the water.

Papa went into the land office to get the deed to our property. When he came out, a man walked over to the wagon to ask him where we were going. "We're taking the Saginaw Trail," Papa said.

The man shook his head until I was afraid his top hat would fall off. "Why, there's nothing there but trees," he said. "You should settle in Pontiac. A lot of that land has been cleared."

"It's the trees I'm after," Papa told him.

Later Mama asked, "Rob, that man sounded as though he believed we were daft. How do we know that the land-looker was telling us the truth?"

Papa showed her his bill of sale. "Eighty acres for one hundred dollars, Vinnie. And why should we go somewhere where every-

thing is already done? I'd rather have a hand in it."

Because it was June it stayed light a long time, so we were able to drive the wagon half-way to Pontiac. Papa said we were making nearly two miles an hour. We camped in a kind of meadow Papa called an oak clearing.

While Papa was making the campfire and Mama was mixing corn cakes, I went off a little way, but not so far that I couldn't see the wagon. Nighthawks were dropping out of the sky to catch the mosquitoes. The birds fell almost to the ground and then jerked themselves up as though someone were pulling them on strings. I looked down at my bare feet and saw that they were all red and sticky. At first I was scared, thinking it was blood, but when I looked closer I saw I had been walking in a field of wild strawberries. I hadn't tasted fresh fruit since we left Virginia. I called to Mama and Papa. In a minute we were all down on our hands and knees picking the tiny sweet berries.

There was still a little light left in the sky



when I had to climb into the wagon and go to sleep. Mama was sitting by the fire talking with Papa. She was unpinning her long hair, which fell to her waist and was the color of Virginia wheat fields. My hair is dark like Papa's. I hope someday it will be as long as Mama's; now it just comes to my shoulders.

Even though Mama and Papa were talking to each other and not paying me any attention, I didn't feel lonesome. I was excited. Our long journey was almost over.



II

After we left Pontiac, the road led through a thick woods. Papa was pleased because there were so many trees. We startled deer and made the squirrels scold from the branches. Late in the morning it began to rain. Mama and I climbed into the back of the wagon. Papa put on his oiled leather jacket and big hat.

The rain was everywhere. It poured off the brim of Papa's hat so that he could hardly see. It lay in puddles on the top of the wagon's canvas roof. If we brushed against the canvas, water dripped into the wagon. The rain slid down the backs of Ned and Dan and got into their ears so that they flicked them and shook their heads.

A simple covered wagon



will be ten-year-old Libby's home while her family travels west. Their journey will take them two months and a thousand miles, from Virginia to the wild woods of Michigan. The trip is hard, but it is exciting, too! What surprises will Libby find in rough and rugged pioneer country?

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