

SESSION 1.2: CLOSE READ 1: Minnie Freeman

The Blizzard of 1888

In All Its Fury

A History of the Blizzard of January 12, 1888

Read the text first to get the general idea then read it again to discover:

- Who wrote the text?
- What is the author's perspective?
- When was it written?
- What would you consider fact and what would you consider opinion? Why?
(You might highlight facts in one color and opinions in another color.)

In *Heroes and Heroines of the Storm* by Ora. A. Clement we learn more of Minnie Freeman with his narrative of the event.

“Best known, perhaps, is the Minnie May Freeman incident. There are localities in Nebraska where that storm is still referred to by survivors as “the Minnie Freeman blizzard.”

Miss Freeman was teaching in a rural school called “the Midvale school” in Mira Valley, near Ord, Valley County, Nebraska. There were sixteen pupils present that day, several of them being nearly as old as the teacher, who was still in her ‘teens. The schoolhouse was made of sod, and there was enough coal on hand to keep the group warm if it were found advisable to remain all night in the building. Before time for dismissal in the afternoon, the wind broke the leather hinges of the door and blew it in. The boys repaired the hinges and put the door in place. When it was blown in again they nailed it shut.

Soon a sudden gust of wind caught the corner of the tarpaper-and-sod roof and ripped it off, leaving a large hole through which the snow began to drift. Both teacher and pupils knew that they must now prepare to leave the building for it would be impossible to keep warm with that hole in the roof. They expected the whole roof to be torn off at any moment.

The sturdy, half-grown boys and girls were mostly Nebraska-born and were undismayed by the fury of the storm. They agreed to the teacher's plan to take the whole group to her boarding place, half a mile north of the schoolhouse, and assisted her in getting the smaller pupils through a south window and in lining them up for their march against the storm. Cheeks and fingers were frosted and it was hard going, but they struggled on and eventually reached their destination safely.

Telling the story very simply, many years afterward, the teacher recalled how she and the housewife labored that evening to prepare a meal sufficient for the hungry crowd. This casual comment shows very plainly that the incident was not thought of in terms of heroism by either teacher, parents, or pupils. It was nothing but a disagreeable experience, quite to be expected on the prairie. During the evening the father of four of the pupils came, with two of his brothers, and took his children home. They walked the two miles between the two farms. Mrs. Ben Eberhart, Valley county, who was the youngest of the

Close Read 1: continued

quartet, recalled many years later how very reluctant they were to leave the rest of the pupils who were having such a jolly time at the teacher's boarding place. She also recalled how badly frozen her legs were when she reached home. She agrees with other survivors of the incident that there was no intent on the part of the teacher, the boys and girls who made the trek with her, nor the patrons of the school to treat the experience as deserving of more than passing notice.

A few days after the storm the newspapers got the story of the trek and a highly colored version of it was broadcast across the country. Miss Freeman found herself a heroine, the recipient of many gifts and congratulatory notes from unknown admirers from East to West. She modestly insisted that no credit was due her for what she did, telling one reporter that she had no ambition to become a 'second Grace Darling'. But the public continued to honor her for her prompt action in leading her pupils to a place of safety when their lives were endangered by the storm."

Source: *In All Its Fury: A History of the Blizzard of January 12, 1888*, by Ora A. Clement 1947, pages 42-43