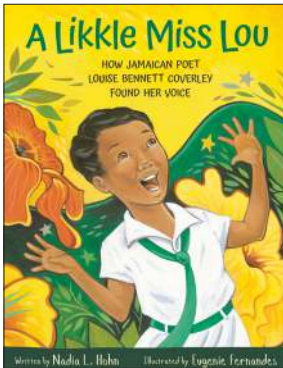




# A Likkle Miss Lou

A Guide for Teachers: Grades 1-4

Guide by Nadia L. Hohn, Elementary Teacher, Toronto District School Board, and author of *A Likkle Miss Lou*



## About the Book

*A Likkle Miss Lou* by Nadia L. Hohn and illustrated by Eugenie Fernandes tells the story of Jamaican poet and entertainer Louise Bennett Coverley's early years growing up in Jamaica. As a child, the poet, better known as Miss Lou, loved words—particularly the Jamaican Creole, or Patois, that she heard all around her. As a young writer, Louise felt caught between using British English, as her teachers instructed, and Patois. The book provides readers with an immersive look at an important figure in our cultural history and insight into Louise's uplifting and inspiring journey to find her own voice. With rich, warm illustrations and Jamaican Creole in the text bringing the story to life, *A Likkle Miss Lou* is a modern ode to language, girl power, diversity, and the arts.

## About Miss Lou

Louise Bennett Coverley became an educator in Jamaica and collected songs and proverbs of the people. Some of these songs were sung and popularized by Harry Belafonte. Bob Marley would have grown up listening to her on the radio. She lived in Jamaica throughout most of her life, London in the 1940s, Brooklyn during the 1950s, and spent her last 20 years in Toronto until she passed away in 2006.

## About This Guide

Teachers have the opportunity to work with a diverse group of students daily. The young people who enter our classrooms may come from various parts of the world, or perhaps their parents and grandparents do. They come from different religious cultures, family cultures, even neighborhood cultures. And as people move between places and spaces, languages and dialects, their behaviors, norms, expectations, and word usages change depending on the environment in which they find themselves. Linguists call this **"code switching."**

Louise Bennett Coverley was no stranger to code switching. She grew up in Jamaica during the 1920s and 1930s when Jamaica was still a British colony. Most of the population was descended from Africans who had been enslaved. The population also included Chinese and Indian indentured workers; Lebanese, Syrians, and Jews avoiding religious persecution; as well as the Arawak and Taíno, the Indigenous peoples of Jamaica.

The country was diverse, but the education system was not. Growing up, Louise's schoolbooks were written in Standard British English. And the history she learned was often about Great Britain and not Jamaica. Everyone in the country could understand and speak Jamaican Creole, or Patois—a form of old English with some West African language structures, plus loan words from other languages, such as Spanish and Taíno/Arawak. But the language was forbidden in schools and discouraged at home.

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### CURRICULUM LINKS:

#### Language Arts:

Reading  
Comprehension

### READING LEVELS:

Grade: K-5

Fountas & Pinnell: P

Lexile® Measure: 680L

Common Core: RI, L, RF, W, SL

## Discussion Topics and Activities for Students

Today, things have changed in Jamaica and much of the Caribbean. Jamaican Creole can be heard in popular songs and reggae music. The work of Caribbean writers and poets is taught in school. Thanks in part to cultural trailblazers like Louise Bennett Coverley, Jamaicans can now authentically explore and express the diversity of their culture and history.

In keeping with the book's themes of diversity and expression, this guide is organized into three sections:

1. **Jamaican Culture** focuses on the food, music, and other cultural aspects of the nation's history, as introduced in *A Likkle Miss Lou*.
2. **Language** prompts discussion about how language is used throughout the book, especially in Louise's poetry.
3. **Coming to Voice** specifically addresses the start of Louise's career, as well as the socio-emotional aspects of confidence and finding one's place in the world.

## Jamaican Culture

### Food

**Before reading *A Likkle Miss Lou*:**

**Ask students:** Do you eat any foods or dishes that are special to your culture or family? What foods do you eat at home? Does anyone else in the class know these foods? Write a list of these foods for a classroom chart.

**Sample student responses:**

- Fish and chips
- Roti
- Palak paneer
- Samosas
- Muceca
- Tortilla
- Chicken and rice

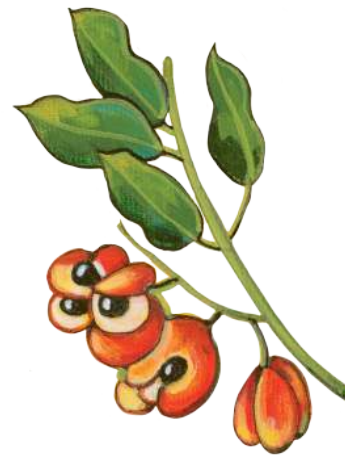
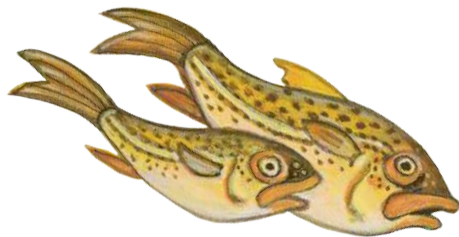


**After reading *A Likkle Miss Lou*:**

**Ask students:** The author shared some Jamaican foods in the book *A Likkle Miss Lou*. Which of these foods are new to you?

**Sample student responses:**

- Breadfruit
- Ackee
- Saltfish
- Peanut drops
- Water crackers
- Pumpkin soup



**Ask students:** Does your country have a national dish? Is there a dish you eat to honor your ancestry?

**Sample student responses:**

- America's national dishes are apple pie and hamburgers.
- Canada's national dishes include poutine, Nanaimo bars, and butter tarts.

**Extending the conversation:**

Ask each student to get a recipe from a family member for a food or snack relating to their heritage. Have students print or type the recipe neatly and decorate the sheet with photos or an illustration. Combine these recipes into a classroom cookbook. This cookbook can be part of the classroom library and photocopied so each family can receive one. Or select a few recipes to share on a classroom blog.

## Music

### Before reading *A Likkle Miss Lou*:

**Tell students:** *A Likkle Miss Lou* features three traditional Jamaican folk songs—*Hill and Gully Rider*, *Elena/Cerasee*, and *Dis Long Time Gal*. Play the songs (YouTube links provided at the end of this guide). These songs are sung in Jamaican patois.

**Ask students:** What do you think these songs mean?

**Sample student responses:**

- *Hill and Gully Rider*—Someone riding a horse on the hills. Bending down over hills.
- *Elena/Cerasee*—A girl got sick. Her belly. Her mother is lying down. Elena drank poison. Bawl for her belly.
- *Dis Long Time Gal*—Someone has not seen another person in a long time. A boy wants to hold the hand of a girl he likes.

### After reading *A Likkle Miss Lou*:

**Ask students:** Did you hear any interesting words in the folk songs or in *A Likkle Miss Lou*? What new words did you hear? Play the songs again, if needed. Have students write the new words on sticky notes. Gather the new words together onto a word wall. Or create a chart with space for each song and write down students’ ideas. Can students infer the meaning of the word using the book or song’s context?

**Sample student responses:**

- Peel head john crow, bungle, poison, blossoms, bend dung low dung

**Ask students:** After listening to the story, ask students if anything they read helped them understand the songs better.

**Tell students:** The song *Hill and Gully Rider* is featured in the story and is an example of call-and-response, a feature of many African-derived music styles. This includes African-American spirituals, gospel, Jamaican mento, and more. These songs feature a call and a response from the group. The songs were often sung during times of work, helping to build a team and pass the time.

**Share with students:** Teach *Hill and Gully Rider* to the class. The teacher is the caller and students are the response. As the song becomes more familiar, give individual students an opportunity to be the caller.

Teacher: “Hill an gully rider”  
 Students: “Hill an gully”  
 Teacher: “Hill an gully rider”  
 Students: “Hill an gully”  
 Teacher: “An I bend dung low dung”  
 Students: “Hill an gully”  
 Teacher: “An I bend dung low dung”  
 Students: “Hill an gully”



**Ask students:** Can you think of any other call-and-response songs or chants?

**Sample student responses:**

- *When the Saints Go Marching In*, *Iko Iko*, *Let My People Go*, other Jamaican call-and-response songs (*Chi chi bud oh*, *Manuel Road*, *O Carolina*)

**Extending the conversation:**

Ask students to write their own call-and-response songs or chants. Ask students to write another verse to *Hill and Gully Rider*. Have students teach their song or chant to the class.

## Discussion Topics and Activities for Students

### Culture



*After reading A Likkle Miss Lou:*

**Tell students:** Sometimes clothing becomes stylish due to a mistake (like ripped jeans, for example) or someone making an unpopular decision to wear something. The Jamaican bandanna cloth is part of the national costume. In the book, Louise wears the costume on the last page of the story and in the black and white photograph. This cloth originated from India and was fairly affordable. It was worn by women who sold food in the market and was looked down upon as a sign of poverty. Louise wore the cloth in all of her performances and it became a source of pride, later adopted by Jamaicans everywhere.

**Ask students:** What clothing is in style? How is this different than old-fashioned clothing? Were you ever made fun of for your clothing?

#### Sample student responses:

- In the olden days, girls and women were only allowed to wear dresses and skirts.
- In my religion, girls can choose to cover their hair when they get to a certain age.
- I always wanted to get a brand of shoes that everyone else had, but my parents couldn't afford it. They could only get shoes that were a lot cheaper. I felt really left out.
- I always got hand-me-downs from my siblings, but then I learned about vintage clothes, which is basically wearing other people's old stuff.

### Language

*After reading A Likkle Miss Lou:*

**Ask students:** Louise began writing poetry at a very young age. She wrote one of her first poems at the age of twelve or thirteen. Let's read it:



'I wish' I wished, 'that I could be  
A poet great and with my pen  
Trace paths of peace and harmony  
For the uncertain minds of men.'

**Ask students:** Can you find the rhyming pattern/scheme in the poem? Write out the poem for the class. Have students use matching colors to mark the rhyming words.

**Tell students:** This is an example of an alternate rhyming scheme. Can you think of other poems or songs that use an alternate rhyme?

#### Sample student responses:

- Lines 1 and 3 rhyme; lines 2 and 4 rhyme.

## Discussion Topics and Activities for Students

**Tell students:** An inference is a type of educated guess in which you try to figure out what something means. Create a chart for students with a few examples from the story. Read each piece of evidence aloud and ask students to indicate what they believe the inference may be. For example:

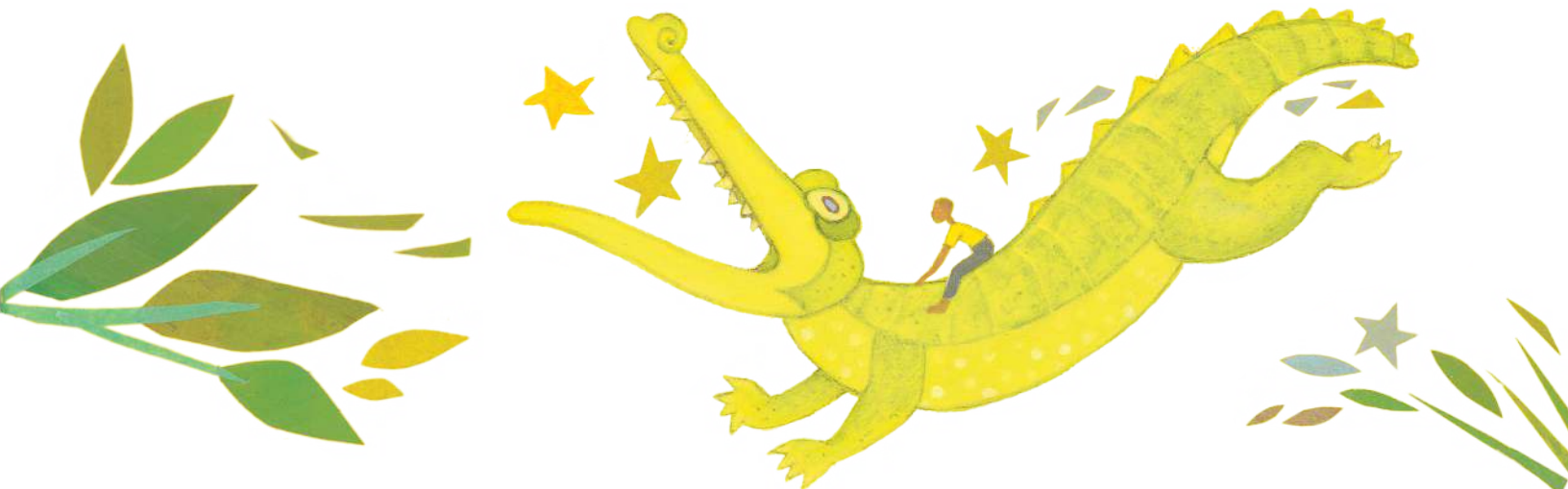
Tell students the evidence:	Sample student response of inference:
When it came to speaking, Louise’s words got stuck in her throat. But she found a way to unlock them. Her pen was the key and her notebook the door.	Louise had a difficult time saying her words. Maybe she was shy. Writing helped her express herself.
“What’s this?” her teacher asked in class the next morning. “This is not fit for a top school. It is certainly not why your mother sent you here.”	Her teacher thought that what Louise wrote was inappropriate, didn’t make sense, or that she didn’t try hard enough. Louise wrote in slang. Her mother wouldn’t like it.

**Tell students:** In Jamaica and all over the world, the way someone speaks can tell of the life they lead, where they were raised, their job, where they studied, and even their wealth. Louise’s mother was a seamstress and had poor and rich customers. She worked with everyone, so Louise heard many different ways that Jamaican people spoke. She wrote her poetry in Jamaican patois and it helped Jamaicans feel proud of the way they spoke inside their homes.

**Ask students:** Can you tell me the new words you heard in the book? What is the standard English way of saying this word? Do you know how to say this word in another language or in a different way? Make a three-columned chart on the blackboard or on chart paper. Label each heading: Jamaican Patois, Standard English, and Other Examples.

Jamaican Patois	Standard English	Other Examples
grung	ground	terra, dirt, sol, soil
in yah	in here	here, ici, aqui, my grill, personal space

**Tell students:** Metaphors and similes are figures of speech. A **simile** is comparison of one thing to another that often uses “like” or “as.” A **metaphor** is when one word or concept is used to describe another more symbolically. In *A Likkle Miss Lou*, similes and metaphors are used often. Create a chart of phrases from the book, and ask students to identify if they are similes or metaphors.



## Discussion Topics and Activities for Students

### Coming to Voice

#### Before reading *A Likkle Miss Lou*:

**Tell students:** Louise was shy as a young person. In the story: “Louise thought of speaking in front of her new friends and teachers, and she panicked—the words lodged in her throat again.” It also did not help that people in Jamaica were looked down on for speaking Patois outside of their homes. When she was a teenager, Louise turned down an opportunity to perform her poetry at a big Christmas event at her church. Her mother had to encourage her again and again to take the opportunity. This was the first time Louise performed publicly and received payment for it.

**Ask students:** What does it mean to find your voice?

#### Sample student responses:

- You feel more confident. You can speak your mind. You remembered what you were going to say. You are not afraid to speak in front of a big group.

#### After reading *A Likkle Miss Lou*:

**Ask students:** How does it feel when you have something to say?

#### Sample student responses:

- It feels like I’m going to burst. It feels like it’s at the tip of my tongue. It feels like I’m going to spill. I feel annoyed when I can’t get it out.

**Ask students:** What might stop you from saying something?

#### Sample student responses:

- It might be a secret and you are not allowed to tell. Your friend tells you not to tell anyone. You might be afraid it will hurt someone’s feelings. You might get in trouble. The person you want to tell is busy.

**Ask students:** Do you speak the same way with your friends? Teachers? Parents? Families?

#### Sample student responses:

- No. Yes. I have to really remember my manners around my mom. I speak in Spanish with my *abuelo* and *abuela* (grandparents). My twin and I have some words we made up and only we understand.

**Ask students:** Do you speak a different language at home than at school?

#### Sample student responses:

- Patois. Spanish. Urdu. Punjabi. Portuguese. Kreol. Mandarin. Cantonese. Arabic. Pashto. Somali. Amharic. Gujarati. Hindi. Bengali. French.

**Ask students:** Are there some words you would not say in front of others?

#### Sample student responses:

- I would not swear in front of others. Sometimes I feel embarrassed about my home language or afraid someone will laugh at me. Sometimes people make fun of my words or my accent or my name.



After reading *A Likkle Miss Lou*:

**Tell students:** In *A Likkle Miss Lou*, Louise leaves an old school and starts going to a new school.

**Ask students:** How did things change in her new school?

**Sample student responses:**

- She felt better. The teacher was nicer. She had more friends. She had a chance to show her talent. Everybody liked her. She got a fresh start.

**Ask students:** Have you ever been the new student? How did you feel?

**Sample student responses:**

- Yes. It was good because I came to the US. It was bad. I felt lonely. I was teased a lot. I did not understand everyone. They did not understand me. I met my best friend. I made a lot of new friends. I liked this better than my old school.

**Ask students:** What are some things that you have done or could do to welcome a student who is new to your school?

**Sample student responses:**

- I can smile. I can help. I can invite them to eat lunch. I can play with them.

**Tell students:** Louise had a special talent with words. Both poems featured in the story were written when she was about thirteen years old. She would eventually get a column in *The Gleaner*, a Jamaican newspaper, and begin to perform her poetry while still a teenager.



**Ask students:** Do you have a special talent? What is it?

**Sample student responses:**

- I can help my mother cook. I know how to sing a song from memory. I am very good at scoring goals in soccer. I memorized my multiplication tables.

**Ask students:** How do you feel about showing or sharing your talent with other people?

**Sample student responses:**

- I feel shy. I don't care. I can't wait to perform.

**Ask students:** Who encourages you to use your talent?

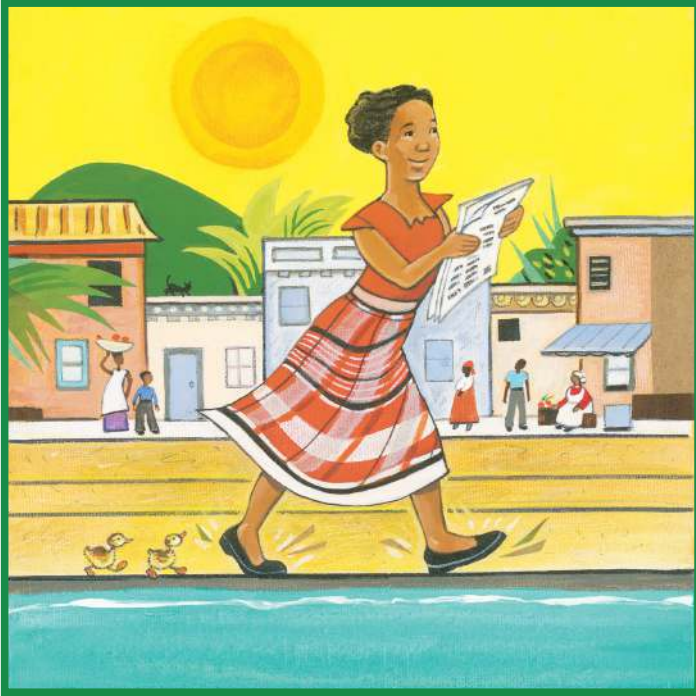
**Sample student responses:**

- My mom, my dad, my teacher, my friends.

**Extending the conversation:**

- Design a poster that promotes your talent if you were to use it in the future. For example, create a poster to promote a concert in which you will play the guitar.
- Write a letter to Louise to encourage her to recite her poetry.

## Resources



Folk songs in *A Likkle Miss Lou* that can be found on YouTube:

- *Hill and Gully Rider* by the Jolly Boys  
<https://youtu.be/tCpTkfYVHpQ>
- *Dis Long Time Gal* by Louise Bennett Coverley  
[https://youtu.be/\\_Fy39wPedmY](https://youtu.be/_Fy39wPedmY)
- *Elena* by the Melodians  
<https://youtu.be/j6BAo7V1bJc>

Other songs:

- *Simmer Down* by Bob Marley & the Wailers, which features several Jamaican proverbs that Miss Lou would have popularized  
<https://youtu.be/7xo-BCAjMiM>
- *Teacher, Teacher* by Dennis Alcapone  
<https://youtu.be/daN0Tsd6OTU>

- *Dutty Tuff* by Louise Bennett Coverley/Miss Lou  
<https://youtu.be/TMRnWmSN6MI>
- *Brown Girl in the Ring* by Boney M.  
[https://youtu.be/ywA\\_aZp1Vd8](https://youtu.be/ywA_aZp1Vd8)
- *Banana Boat Song (Day O)* by Harry Belafonte  
<https://youtu.be/6Tou8-Cz8is>

Before she became a Jamaican icon, Miss Lou was a girl who just wanted to be heard in the language she loved.

