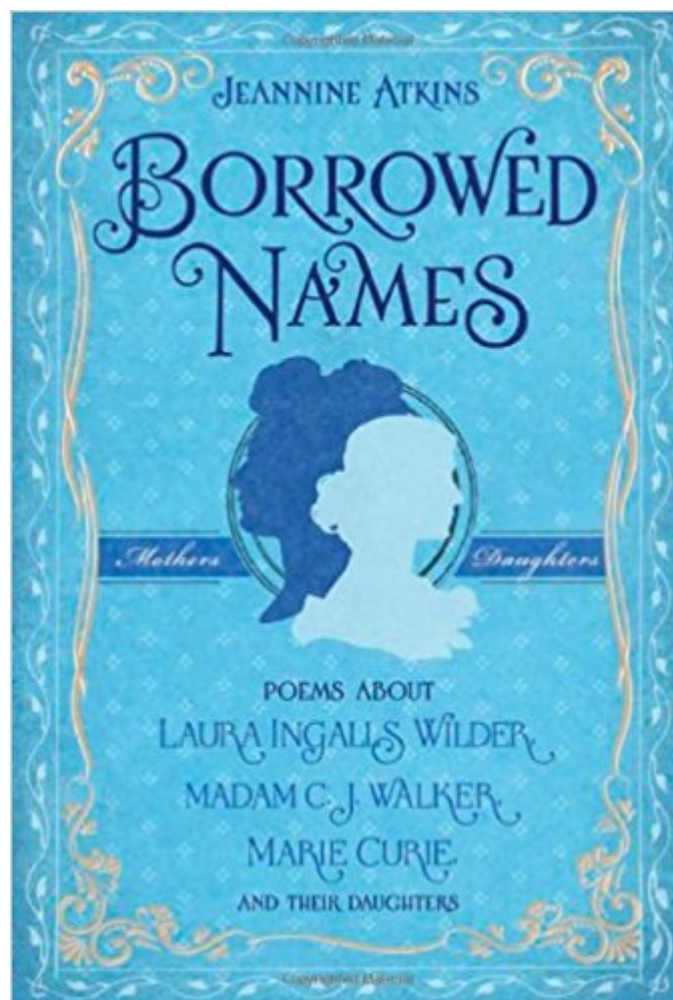




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# Borrowed Names: Poems About Laura Ingalls Wilder, Madam C.J. Walker, Marie Curie, And Their Daughters



## Synopsis

As a child, Laura Ingalls Wilder traveled across the prairie in a covered wagon. Her daughter, Rose, thought those stories might make a good book, and the two created the beloved Little House series. Sara Breedlove, the daughter of former slaves, wanted everything to be different for her own daughter, A'Lelia. Together they built a million-dollar beauty empire for women of color. Marie Curie became the first person in history to win two Nobel prizes in science. Inspired by her mother, Irène too became a scientist and Nobel prize winner. *Borrowed Names* is the story of these extraordinary mothers and daughters. *Borrowed Names* is a 2011 Bank Street - Best Children's Book of the Year.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 12 - 18 years

Grade Level: 7 - 12

## Customer Reviews

**\*Starred Review\*** In 1867, three women who achieved great success were born: writer Laura Ingalls Wilder, entrepreneur Madam C. J. Walker, and scientist Marie Curie. All three had complicated relationships with their daughters, relationships that Atkins explores in this unusual volume of poetry. Each section follows one daughter from young childhood to adulthood, sketching out the facts of her life, but creating impressions of the emotional lives beyond the facts. Rose Wilder Lane grows up in rural poverty. Constricted by her mother's expectations, she leaves the Wilder

farm to work, marry, and travel, but returns and helps to shape her mother's books. As a child, A'Lelia Walker watches her mother wash clothes for a meager living, but after her mother's hair products make them wealthy, A'Lelia grows up to become a patron of the Harlem Renaissance. Curie's elder daughter, Irène, knows early on that her mother's focus is on her work with radium. As an adult, Irène continues that work, earning her own Nobel Prize. In vivid scenes written with keen insight and subtle imagery, the poems offer a strong sense of each daughter's personality as well as the tensions and ties they shared with their notable mothers. Writing with understated drama and quiet power, Atkins enables readers to understand these six women and their mother-daughter relationships in a nuanced and memorable way. Grades 6-9. --Carolyn Phelan

"\* This book, powerful when read independently, would also make for a great readers' theater project for teens. The images created bring powerful emotions to the surface, felt by the women profiled here and by those who read this gem that belongs in any literary cedar chest, as well as in every collection. \* School Library Journal, starred review \* In vivid scenes written with keen insight and subtle imagery, the poems offer a strong sense of each daughter's personality as well as the tensions and ties they shared with their notable mothers. Writing with understated drama and quiet power, Atkins enables readers to understand these six women and their mother-daughter relationships in a nuanced and memorable way. \* Booklist, starred review \* The thirty vignettes concerning each mother-daughter pair offer just a few telling facts, beautifully phrased and skillfully arranged to evoke the most significant events and emotional trajectories of entire lives. \* The Horn Book, starred review

Borrowed Names is a very unique book in many ways. First it is written in verse. I loved that. Many of my students have learned that they like books written in verse. There are three biographies of three women and their children. The first is of Laura Ingalls Wilder and her daughter. The second is Madam C.J. Walker and her daughter A'Leïa Walker. Finally we learn about Marie Curie and her daughter Irene Joliet-Curie. Each of these biographies shows how their relationships with their daughters were formed and developed over time. I found in all three, there was usually one particular thing that drew them together. They inspired each other in so many ways. I loved learning so much about all of them and will definitely recommend this book to my students.

Jeannine Atkins' *Borrowed Names* is like fine chocolate - velvety texture, rich content. Her three subjects are presented not in their iconic splendor, rather as women in full, with sometimes bumpy childhoods, sometimes sour marriages, passionate in their work though sometimes drawn to it late, and all experiencing the joy and pain of mothering. It is the mothering and the daughtering that is the center of this book. Most interestingly, Atkins gives us the daughters' views of their famous mothers - the strains of the relationships, the stresses of the times - as the younger women make their own lives. The reader comes away with eyes wide open and heart moved by Atkins' surprising, ennobling work.

This is a wonderful verse novel with enough history to be informational and enough emotion to be compelling. I've already reread it...

*BORROWED NAMES* is a book of poems about Laura Ingalls Wilder, Madam C. J. Walker, Marie Curie and their daughters. Just when you think you know every thing there is to know about these wonderful women *Borrowed Names* comes out and enlightens you some more. Laura Ingalls Wilder was known for the series that came out about her life on the prairie when she was younger called *Little House on the Prairie*. The series shows a lot about her life up until she is married to her husband Almanzo Wilder. The poems about her and her daughter describe what they went through when her daughter Rose was younger and into adulthood. Madam C. J. Walker is also a fascinating person also, she basically invented hair creams for women and created jobs for the lower class women she was an inspiration to many women. As a child her daughter A'Lelia watches her mother struggle washing clothes for the rich and tells of her life with a lazy husband, and how she didn't want to have any responsibility as she was growing up in her mom's businesses. As she grew to an adult she finally relented and helped her mother with her stores but was trying to find out who she really was. Madam C. J. Walker married and used her husband's name when her hair cream became popular and began to sell. She had a big heart and was known for helping many women find their way in life. Curie's elder daughter, Irène, knows early on that her mother's focus is on her work with radium. As an adult, Irène continues that work, earning her own Nobel Prize. Atkins writes with a unique ability to draw you in with her poems and keeps you interested through out the book.

I've had this book on my nightstand for several weeks, because I knew I would want to read it slowly. So of course, I opened it last night and just kept reading. And now it's back on my nightstand, because I want to let the poems and the people in them sit for a bit, then go back to

them again and see what else they stir in me. Yesterday and today, they stirred interest and curiosity and love and sadness. Interest and curiosity, because I thought I "knew" about Laura and Rose, but found out how much there is that I could still find out about them, and because I knew almost nothing about the other women--the mothers or daughters. Love because of the pull between these mothers and daughters, the need for warmth and caring, the need to GIVE warmth and caring. And sadness, because somehow there is a layer to these poems that shows the conflict in the relationships, as well as the connections. Is it that the three mothers were such strong and, each in their own way, very powerful women? Did this set up a goal that the daughters felt they had to reach and then, perhaps, felt they didn't or couldn't reach? Or is it that all daughters have to break away from who their mother's are, to find out who they themselves might be? And some of the sadness was for the one daughter, at least, who may have learned that piece too late, too late to come back and share it with their mothers. I'm not sure yet what all the feelings ARE that Atkins has woven into these poems, or what all the feelings ARE that echo in me as a response. I am sure that she has mined deeply into these individual and universal relationships, that she has shared the gold she found with us in lines of beautiful language--both joyous and painful. And I am sure that I will pick up the book again, soon, to see what else I can find for myself.

I think this is one of my favorite books ever. Really. Full disclosure - I know Jeannine and heard her read a poem from this book at a writers retreat last summer. It was lovely and poignant, but when she described the book as a collection of poems about mothers and daughters, in the voices of Laura Ingalls Wilder, Madam C.J. Walker, and Marie Curie, I wondered a bit how that could all fit together. Then I was lucky enough to pick up an advance copy of BORROWED NAMES at ALA Midwinter, and I understood. It does fit. As beautifully as anything I've ever read. The poetry in this book is magnificent by itself, but it's the characterization of the women -- mothers and daughters both -- that makes it stand out even more. The verse shines with the creative spirit of all of these amazing women, and I really can't imagine capturing the whole give-and-take, come-together-and-go-away moments of mothers and daughters any better. I'm sitting here at my computer frowning because I can't really make my words do justice to this special book. But trust me. Just go get it.

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