



## The Laura Line

*Crystal Allen*

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A touching and funny story of one girl's journey to discover where she came from and the unlimited possibilities of who she can become, from Crystal Allen, the acclaimed author of *How Lamar's Bad Prank Won a Bubba-Sized Trophy* and *The Magnificent Mya Tibbs: Spirit Week Showdown*.

Laura Dyson wants two things in life: to be accepted by her classmates and to be noticed by ultracute baseball star Troy Bailey. But everyone at school teases her for being overweight, and Troy won't give her a second glance. Until one day, their history teacher announces a field trip to the run-down slave shack on her grandmother's property. *Heck to the power of no way!*

Her grandmother insists that it's more than just an old shack; it's a monument to the strong women in their family—the Laura Line. But Laura knows better: her classmates will never accept her once they see the shack. So she comes up with the perfect plan to get the trip canceled . . . but when a careless mistake puts the shack—and the Laura Line—in jeopardy, Laura must decide what's truly important to her. Can Laura figure out how to get what she wants at school while also honoring her family's past?

## The Laura Line Details

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Author : Crystal Allen

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## **From Reader Review The Laura Line for online ebook**

### **Gerard Villegas says**

For multiculturalism, The Laura Line has everything including a bit of mystery added with history. In this amazing novel, the reader is introduced to an African American young girl in grade school named Laura who becomes the center point that draws in such a rich story as she explores her family's roots. Laura is your typical archetype: bullied for her weight, made to feel like an outcast and embarrassed by her family's legacy particularly the slave quarters of her grandmother's estate. That all changes when she uncovers the truth particularly her ties to the famous Amistad slave ship and being descended from a long line of "special" Lauras.

The Laura Line is such a wonderful grade school to middle grade read and the protagonist is engaging and relatable. Since February is Black History Month, I highly recommend this book as a supplement to teaching children about slavery and the importance of family history.

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### **Vonna Carter says**

I went into this book expecting to like it because I'd read and loved Crystal Allen's first book, HOW LAMAR'S BAD PRANK WON A BUBBA-SIZED TROPHY. And I did like it, but by the time I reached the big, bad crisis, I loved it. I was so worried for Laura and her friend Sage. When The Really Bad Thing was about to happen, I couldn't stand it, but I couldn't look away. Crystal Allen really knows how to torture her characters! And with a character as lovable as Laura Eboni on the rack, I had to hang on tight until the very end to make sure there would be a happy ending for THE LAURA LINE. :)

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### **Juliet says**

Laura Dyson is a sassy, heart-warming character who finds her true self in the last place she wanted to look. Just buy it!

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### **Ms. Yingling says**

Laura's parents have to go off for two weeks for military training, and she is supposed to stay with an aunt. When that falls through, she ends up having to stay with her grandmother out in the country. Things are bad enough for Laura-- she's overweight and made fun of at school even though she is convinced she could be a model, and her best friend Sage is starting to hang out with the Pink Chips, a group of popular girls. She doesn't need to be with her grandmother, whose best friend is her history teacher! When the two women decide that Laura's class should visit the slave shack on the grandmother's property, Laura is beyond appalled. Why would her family glorify this? She doesn't even want to understand, even though Troy, a boy on whom she has an enormous crush, finds the history interesting. Laura is just starting to understand and appreciate the history of the shack when she is responsible for damage that occurs to it. Will she be able to fix it and come to terms with sharing her family history with her classmates?

Strengths: Interesting perspective on the continuing impact of slavery, and an intriguing look at generations of women (all named Laura) and how their lives change. Laura has very strong self esteem, and is greatly interested in baseball as well, which is a nice addition.

Weaknesses: I could have done without some of Laura's regional language, like "Oh, heck to the triple no!" Also, while it's great that she has good self esteem, her size combined with her eating habits made me feel worried for her health. As someone who can't eat chocolate because of high blood pressure and triglycerides even though I run two miles a day, it alarmed me that she was so fat other students called her "Larda" and she still didn't think anything of eating Almond Joy bars in secret. She starts off as a very spoiled and selfish character, but does improve.

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### **Shannon Hitchcock says**

I first picked up this book because of the cover. I adore books that teach a bit of history and figured that the family tree on the cover was a good indication. When I flipped to the back, I read that it was the same author who wrote **HOW LAMAR'S BAD PRANK WON A BUBBA-SIZED TROPHY**, and then I knew I was destined to read this book because I love Lamar.

Crystal Allen nailed the voice in this MG novel. Here's a sample: "Sweet Mother of Teen Vogue magazine, I'm model-marvelous in this new outfit!"

Our protagonist, Laura Dyson, is not your typical heroine. She's overweight and the other kids call her "Fat Larda." What I love about Laura is that she has spunk. Sure, it bothers her that the other kids tease her, but Laura likes herself. She knows she's special.

My one criticism of **THE LAURA LINE** is that I didn't find the plot totally believable. Laura's grandmother has a slave shack sitting on her property. Laura doesn't live very far from her grandmother, close enough that she can stay with her grandmother and still attend the same school when her parents are away, yet we're supposed to believe that Laura doesn't know her family history, that she hasn't ever read the journal inside the slave shack. That didn't ring true for me. Otherwise, I thoroughly enjoyed **THE LAURA LINE**, and will definitely be on the lookout for the next Crystal Allen novel.

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### **Donna says**

Author Crystal Allen says the moral of the story is: "Love yourself. Love your 'Line.' Live your dreams."

Your "Line?" What's that, you say?

Stay tuned.

In the meantime, know that those words sum up the many messages contained in "The Laura Line," Allen's second book for folks ages 8 to 12. Her first for that age group is "How Lamar's Bad Prank Won a Bubba-Sized Trophy."

“I seem to naturally write for middle graders,” Allen says. “Their voices flow so easily for me, and I love that age group.”

“The Laura Line” protagonist is Laura Eboni Dyson, who uses the vernacular in the modern manner of a 13-year-old. She emphasizes her thoughts emphatically with “heck to the double yes!,” her analogies are reflective of an early teen’s mindset, and her language, in general, is colorful and expressive, and conveys grown-up thoughts just as an adolescent would. From Laura’s feelings and self-assessments to her crush on her “hunky chunky,” Troy, to the realization of her ancestry – her “line,” Allen transforms herself into an early teen, not only with language, but with imagery.

For example, Laura imagines herself in the facial dimple – yes, inside the dimple – of her “ultra-cute” crush, Troy. Silly, perhaps, but typical for a seventh-grader. Or, in describing her grandmother’s hallway, Laura paints a picture: “The walls leading down the hall are painted a green I’ve never seen in any crayon box … It’s not gross-green or even puke-green, but it definitely belongs in the sick-green family.” (Is this not the voice of a 13-year-old?!)

Not only is Allen keyed into the lingo of an early teen, she is also aware of the mentality. She hones in on the initial stages of teen angst, the time when appearance – in this case, weight – begins to supersede important things like others’ feelings, or the wealth of one’s ancestry.

Laura and her BFF Sage are overweight. They have a loyalty that is strong, perhaps strengthened by their … “well … you know,” as they would say. And while their weight doesn’t prevent them from being adolescent fashionistas or from emulating models, or from applying and re-applying lip gloss, “just in case,” they do strategize to avoid attention.

They are tops in their hobbies: Sage is a talented photojournalist – yes, in middle school, and Laura has a mean arm. She even teaches her baseball beau Troy a thing or two … or three. And the girls eventually get it! They realize their abilities and backgrounds make them, not their weight. When Laura does get it, it is then that we root for her constantly, turning the pages proudly and triumphantly because she is “handling hers.”

We see Laura’s weight as an issue skulk backstage, as more substantive matters like others’ feelings come forward.

As the story progresses, loyalty and the alliance among the girls is increasingly prominent. Laura’s pitching talent is highlighted. Her self-estimation increases, as her dependence on others’ opinions of her decreases.

That blossoming is fun to watch. But the best part is watching Laura’s confidence crest when she discovers the Laura Line. She detaches herself from the “Fat Larda” label and assumes her position in a lineage of Lauras – eight predecessors named Laura whose stories are housed in a shack and cemetery on her grandmother’s farm.

At first, Laura Eboni is afraid of “the shack,” – in fact, she didn’t want to go to stay with her grandmother because of it – and she regards it ashamedly as a slave shack that she does not want her classmates to see. “There it is representing a gazillion different levels of wrong and, worse, the number-one reason I didn’t want to come here,” Laura laments.

But upon her eventual entrance into the shack and investigation of it and its stories, she quickly comes to know and appreciate the Lauras and their legacies as altruistic slave, teacher, restaurant owner, athlete,

seamstress/model, journalist, loan officer and scientist. This is when Laura begins to love her "Line," as Allen so instructs readers.

While the story has some similarities to Allen's early life (the scenery is the same as her grandmother's farm on which there was a shack-like house), it isn't really autobiographical, she says. Unlike Laura who entered the shack under the influence of infatuation, Allen "never ventured inside and to this day, I regret it," she shares.

Reminiscing about that, she "began to put several 'what ifs' together concerning the little shack-like house, the cemetery, and my own personal actions. Soon thereafter, Laura visited my thoughts and the journey began to 'The Laura Line,'" Allen says.

One suspects Allen had a good time writing this book, as it is a book with U.S. history and family history. It has a heroine and positively frames African-American families, Allen says. She believes to paint the African-American family as lopsided with heavy negative leanings is "unfair."

"I write books where race is not the issue or the focus," she says, "yet my main characters are African American. In 'How Lamar's Bad Prank Won a Bubba-Sized Trophy,' Lamar could have been any boy or any race, but I chose him to be black. In 'The Laura Line,' Laura could have been of any race dealing with her ancestry.

"To me, this genre of book offerings depicting young black characters as normal, with everyday problems that all young people face, (is) sorely underwritten."

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### **Glenajo says**

Great, realistic story about a girl who grows from learning about her roots. Highly readable for middle school kids.

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### **Trisha Doucet says**

I read this book because my daughter chose to complete her Summer reading project on this book. I thought it was really good.

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### **Margaret says**

I LOVED this book! I especially like the way Crystal Allen's way of weaving history into the story and making it accessible and engaging.

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## **Lahari says**

Realistic/Historical Fiction  
328 pgs

Laura Eboni Dyson is a 13 year old girl who is teased by her classmates. The only things that she wants in her life is for her classmates to stop teasing her for being overweight and to be noticed by Troy Bailey, the cute baseball star. Laura Eboni comes from a long line of Lauras, the Laura Line, and the first Laura's home, an old slave shack, is still on her grandmother's property. Laura hates the shack, and thinks it stands for bad things like shackles and death: Her grandmother insists that she's wrong. Grandma says that the shack is a monument to all the strong women in their family, and that the shack has only good things. When Laura's teacher schedules a trip to the shack, Laura is desperate to cancel it. However, she finds the true meaning of the shack and the Laura Line, and realizes that it's something to be proud of.

I really liked this book because it showed how generations of family can be connected, through life and death. Laura thinks that her heritage is something to be ashamed of, but it isn't. I think it's cool that her family keeps the Laura Ledger to show future Laura's all about the Laura Line. That way they can see who their ancestors were and all their accomplishments. I loved learning about the different Lauras and how each one did something different. The book really shows you how to honor your family's roots. Overall The Laura Line is a really great book that teaches you how important family is.

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## **Kelly Boggs says**

This was a good book. Laura's voice through the whole story stayed true. I could hear one of my student's voice as I read ("heck to the double no" and my hunky chunky" along with so many other phrases). Laura is a great friend whom I would wish to have as a middle schooler. It was fun to tag along with Laura on her journey to discovering herself.

My favorite quote from this book is on page 219. "As long as you get up more times than you fall down, you'll be a winner."

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## **Angela says**

I read this with my son who is reading it for a summer reading project at school. I really liked the idea of a female protagonist with a long line of strength behind her. Her discovery of where she came from and who she is is a great message for the intended audience. The only reason I didn't give it 5 stars was because the voice of Laura grated on my nerves, like the author was trying so hard to make her sound like a teenager, she came across as a stereotype.

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## **Mel Raschke says**

Crystal Allen took the time to celebrate those who have gone before and this book was a stellar collection of great people in both person and spirit. The book was heartfelt, refreshing and emotionally honest and

reminds me that we should never short sell our young folk. Your ancestors are not the only ones nodding their approval.

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### **Pamela Tuck says**

I really admire how The Laura Line takes superficial beauty standards and smash them to pieces. This was an enjoyable read with a true-to-life main character who faced true-to-life teen issues: weight, identity, popularity, bullying, rejection, etc.

Crystal Allen's heartwarming story seamlessly weaves history into this contemporary tale, as Laura discovers how the past, that she's reluctant to learn about, becomes the beacon of strength, defining who she could become. I also appreciated how Ms. Allen created unique catch-phrases to portray Laura's own unique character, and also produce a YA novel with "clean" language and scenes (not too common in today's YA novels). I had no problem passing this novel on to my teenage and pre-teen daughters.

The empowerment of the Laura line, raised from the pride and struggle each one of them faced, makes this book an excellent read for ANY girl or woman coping with their own battles with society.

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### **Molly says**

Absolutely loved it!

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