

STEPPING STONES™
a chapter book



Next Spring an Oriole



by Gloria Whelan



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





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It is Libby Mitchell's tenth birthday. It is also the day that she and her parents climb into a covered wagon and set off on a journey that takes them two months and a thousand miles. Their trip from Virginia to the deep woods of Michigan is hard, but it is exciting, too. And at its end lies their new home—a place that is rugged, wild, and full of promise.



"This gentle story . . . effectively captures the ruggedness of pioneer life without dwelling on its harshness. A good lead-in to Laura Ingalls Wilder's Little House series." —*Booklist*

"Historical fiction at an easy level is hard to find, and this pioneer story . . . is smoothly written and appealing." —*The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*

"An easy-to-read story about struggle, friendship and community." —*St. Louis Review*

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