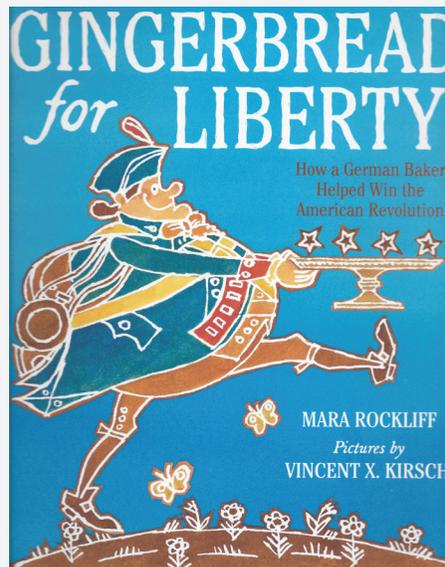


## First Opinion: A Heroic Patriot Rolls Up His Sleeves

Rockliff, Mara. *Gingerbread for Liberty!* Illus. Vincent X. Kirsch.  
New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015. Print.

Lotta Larson



As students of history, it is easy to forget facts and figures or dates and details. However, the intricate stories of human heroism and adventure are more difficult to ignore and tend to linger in our minds long after we close a historic chapter. As teachers, we're constantly looking for such stories that will capture our students' attention and challenge their minds, while tackling the historical concepts that are to be taught. In *Gingerbread for Liberty!*, author Mara Rockliff and illustrator Vincent X. Kirsch bring to life common facts about the Revolutionary War through the interwoven story of Christopher Ludwick, a German-born baker residing in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. A true patriot, this baker decided to leave the city he loves to join General Washington's Revolutionary War efforts, but he quickly discovered that he was too old and too fat to fight. Undeterred, the baker rolled up his sleeves, built ovens, and began feeding Washington's troops—one hungry soldier at a time. "No empty bellies here! Not in my America!" the baker declared (unpaged).

As the war progressed, the British king contracted the Hessians, a German regiment, to help squelch the revolutionary efforts and the Continental Army. Sensing big trouble, the baker persuaded General Washington to send him on a special mission to British camps to speak

to the Hessians, “who came from the land where I was born” (unpaged). Once there, with the promise of full bellies, he convinced many Hessian soldiers to switch sides. “As the baker spoke, the soldiers seemed to see the fragrant steam rising from his ovens. They could almost smell the spicy gingerbread, and taste the sweet, buttery icing on their tongues” (unpaged). A true hero, the German baker played an important role in the Revolutionary War efforts, using his wit, resolve, and true talents.

Based on true historical accounts, *Gingerbread for Liberty!* provides a unique portrait of a little-known hero of the Revolutionary War that can be enjoyed by readers of all grade levels. While the story itself is simple, the Author’s Note includes extensive information about the baker and lists the resources Rockliff used to create the story. The end papers offer a recipe for simple gingerbread cookies, complete with an ingredient list and illustrated step-by-step directions. Boosting the gingerbread theme, Kirsch’s watercolor illustrations depict scenes reminiscent of gingerbread cookies outlined in frosting throughout the story. Pages of cinnamon-colored soldiers and houses, outlined in white, remind readers of rows of baked gingerbread cookies.

While there are many well-known heroes of the Revolutionary War, as a former fifth grade teacher, I wish I had been familiar with the unsung champion, Christopher Ludwick. His story is captivating, and his adventures offer readers a new perspective on heroism. Wanting to fight for the land he loved, the baker was not discouraged upon realizing that he was not suitable as a soldier. On the contrary, he channeled his talents and determination to contribute to the revolutionary cause, and managed to make an impactful difference in his own way. I believe my former students would have rallied behind the baker and expressed interest in learning more about his life and actions, using the end matters as a springboard for further research and discussion. I also picture this book being welcomed in primary grade classrooms as a cherished addition to any gingerbread-themed unit. The informational text features, along with the eloquent narrative and lovely illustrations, provide a well-rounded rendition of human heroism and adventure. Now, that is a story students of history are sure to remember.

### **About the Author**

**Lotta Larson** is an associate professor at Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kansas. From there she earned a bachelor’s degree in elementary education in 1999 and a PhD in curriculum and instruction in 2007. She teaches a plethora of literacy-related courses to both undergraduate and graduate students. As a former fifth grade teacher, she spends a great deal of time in schools providing professional development and working with students. Her research agenda explores the use of digital reading devices in K–12 classrooms and the ways in which students can become strategic digital readers, in addition to enjoying traditional forms of children’s literature. Larson has published multiple articles and book chapters about effective ways to integrate literacy and technology to support reading comprehension and instruction. She is an avid reader of both e-books and print texts and loves sharing great book ideas with others.