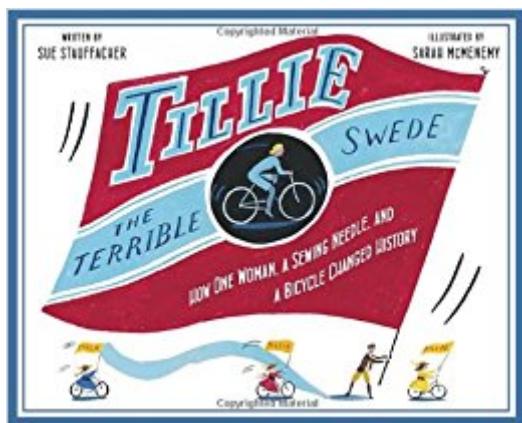


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# Tillie The Terrible Swede: How One Woman, A Sewing Needle, And A Bicycle Changed History



## **Synopsis**

When Tillie Anderson came to America, all she had was a needle. So she got herself a job in a tailor shop and waited for a dream to find her. One day, a man sped by on a bicycle. She was told "bicycles aren't for ladies," but from then on, Tillie dreamed of ridingâ "not graceful figure eights, but speedy, scorching, racy riding! And she knew that couldn't be done in a fancy lady's dress. . . . With arduous training and her (shocking!) new clothes, Tillie became the women's bicycle-riding champion of the world. Sue Stauffacher's lively text and Sarah McMenemy's charming illustrations capture the energy of America's bicycle craze and tell the story of one woman who wouldn't let society's expectations stop her from achieving her dream.

## **Book Information**

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Age Range: 5 - 8 years

Grade Level: Kindergarten - 3

## **Customer Reviews**

Gr 1-5-A picture-book biography of the tailor turned bicycling champion. After seeing her first bicycle, Tillie Anderson began saving her money to buy one. However, she wasn't interested in the kind of synchronized riding that was deemed respectable; she wanted to race. She trained by working out with weights and riding for half-hour stints. After realizing that her long skirts were a hindrance, she used her sewing skills to make a pants outfit more suited to riding. Anderson started entering races, both outdoors and in the velodrome, where she dominated the field. She soon became the spokesperson for bicycle advertisements. There was an inevitable backlash from other

riders and traditionalists, but she persevered despite being deemed unwomanly and referred to as the "Terrible Swede." While this biography offers broad-stroke information on Anderson and the state of women's issues at the time, the endpapers provide annual statistics from 1896 to 1901 regarding her "Record Breakers" as well as her "Cycling Victories." The whimsical gouache and hand-painted paper collage illustrations add to the turn-of-the-century flavor of the book, while the uniform color palette of each spread adds cohesion to the layout. A great addition to the growing number of biographies of daring women.-Stacy Dillon, LREI, New York City (c) Copyright 2010. Library Journals LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc. No redistribution permitted.

In the 1890s, when Swedish American seamstress Tillie Anderson decided to try bicycling, she faced opposition from her mother, her friends, and her neighbors. Refusing to heed their objections to her scandalous (skirtless) costume and her unladylike (fast) pace, she built up her muscles with exercise and headed for the races, where she broke the women's record in a 100-mile event. Tillie marries her biggest fan and, as the story ends, dives into a promising new pursuit: driving a motorcar. Based on Anderson's scrapbooks and memorabilia as well as articles and family memories, this picture book concludes with an author's note (inconveniently placed beneath the jacket flap) offering more information about Anderson's life as well as the bicycle craze of the 1890s. The front endpapers display fashionable items of ladies' clothing from the period, while the back endpapers spotlight Tillie's Record Breakers and Tillie's Cycling Victories. This picture-book biography celebrates an unsung heroine in women's history.

Grades K-3. --Carolyn Phelan

Follow your dreams!

I used this book for classroom project so purchased a quantity. Kids loved the story and talking to the author during her visit with the students.

good book

Cute Swedish tale

What a charming story! The author and illustrator combine their talents to create a wonderful, captivating story for all ages. Historically accurate, the story will educate and inspire readers in

many ways. Simply amazing!

Such a great book about a strong girl that chooses her own path. My girls love it! And my son too!

Tillie Anderson appeared to be a typical hard-working immigrant girl, laboring in a tailor shop. But when a man on a bicycle rides by the shop, she begins saving up her money to buy one of the new-fangled contraptions, despite warnings from her mother that bicycles aren't for ladies. Tillie wasn't interested in riding gracefully around a maypole, like other girls; she started training to get strong enough to ride fast, really fast. But there was a problem--her 19th century dresses. Soon Tillie designed herself a more aerodynamic bicycle outfit, one that scandalized the whole neighborhood. But Tillie didn't care if her friends and family thought she was "wicked"

It's always fun for kids to read about passionate, determined, ahead-of-their-time individuals, and Tillie Anderson is the perfect example of that. In the 1890s, young ladies weren't supposed to get all hot and sweaty on bikes [or on anything else, for that matter], but that was just what Tillie wanted. She wanted to cycle and she wanted to win. She devised her own workouts during an era in which it was shocking for women to be seen exerting themselves in physical ways. Using her sewing skills, she devised her own bicycling outfit, and some of her neighbors stopped speaking to her, shocked at her for being unladylike. When she entered her first century race [a race of one hundred miles], she broke the women's record by a long shot. Winning more races, she became a star, and made some racing enemies who tried to stop her by putting tacks on the tracks. Calling herself Tillie the Terrible Swede, she even had a photograph of her muscular leg published in the newspaper. This was an entertaining, well told story of a young woman who was determined to do what she was passionate about in spite of societal disapproval. I loved the pacing, the anecdotes, and the retro illustrations. I would definitely recommend this juvenile biography to children in grades 1-4.

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