



EDUCATOR'S GUIDE FOR CLASSROOM USE

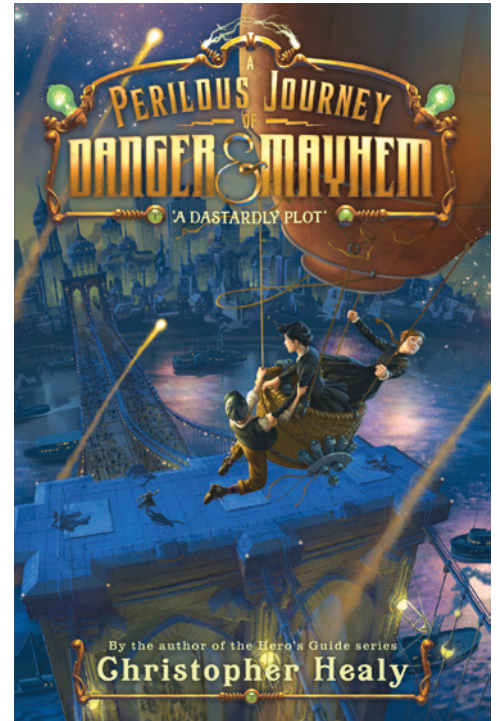
A PERILOUS JOURNEY OF DANGER AND MAYHEM: A DASTARDLY PLOT

It is 1883—the Age of Invention!

A time when great men like Thomas Edison, Alexander Graham Bell, Nicola Tesla, and George Eastman work to turn the country into a mechanical-electrical-industrial marvel: a land of limitless opportunity. And all it happens at the world-famous Inventors' Guild headquarters in New York City—a place where a great idea, a lot of hard work, and a little luck can find you rubbing elbows with the gods of industry who will usher humanity into the bright promise of the future.

Unless, of course, you're a woman.

Molly Pepper, daughter of brilliant but unknown inventor Cassandra Pepper, lives with her mother in New York. By day, they make ends meet running a small pickle shop; by night, they toil and dream of Cassandra shattering the glass ceiling of the Inventors' Guild and taking her place among the most famous inventors in America. In an attempt to find a way to exhibit Cass's work at the 1883 World's Fair, they break into the Inventors' Guild—and discover a mysterious and dastardly plot to destroy the city. The evidence points to the involvement of one of the world's most famous inventors, and now it's up to Molly, Cassandra, and a shop hand named Emmet Lee to uncover the truth—even if no one will ever know it was they who did it.



Christopher Healy is the author of the acclaimed Hero's Guide series: *The Hero's Guide to Saving Your Kingdom*, a New York Times Book Review Editor's Choice, as well as its two sequels, *The Hero's Guide to Storming the Castle* and *The Hero's Guide to Being an Outlaw*. Before becoming a writer, he worked as an actor, an ad copywriter, a toy store display designer, a fact-checker, a dishwasher, a journalist, a costume shop clothing stitcher, a children's entertainment reviewer, and a haunted house zombie. He lives in New Jersey with his wife, two children, and a dog named Duncan. You can visit him online at www.christopherhealy.com.





DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1 Throughout the book, the unsung inventor Cassandra Pepper is frustrated in her attempts to join the Inventor's Guild. Discuss with students the ways in which gaining this membership would help Cassandra. Ask why they think she (and other women inventors) were denied this privilege.

2 Molly is bold, brave, and somewhat reckless. She also has a perception of herself that might be described as a little inflated. For example, when she is caught breaking into the Inventor's Guild and encounters Emmett, who accuses her of being a burglar, she responds that she is no burglar, but is in fact a saboteur. Ask students to describe the difference. Do they agree that Molly is a saboteur?

3 Molly Pepper is no ordinary 12-year-old. When Molly's father dies, Molly steps into his role, quitting school to run her family's pickle store and to serve as her mother's assistant. She is devoted to her mother. Sometimes, Molly shows that she is proud of her important role in the tiny family. At other times her resentment is clear. Discuss with students how they would feel in Molly's situation. Do they think they could be as supportive as Molly often is? Do they think they would be resentful?

4 Cassandra is an inventor, as she explains to Molly, because they live during the Age of Invention: *"A time of progress and innovation, where any one person's blip of ingenuity may be the spark that changes the world... Yet half the population is too busy dusting windowsills and boiling roasts and wiping baby bottoms to devote more than a few seconds to anything creative."* (PAGE 45) **DISCUSS.**

5 Part of Molly's skewed self-image is that she will not admit she is near-sighted. Yet her misperceptions caused by this problem is a theme throughout the book. She reasons, *"In adventure books, the heroes never wore eyeglasses."* (PAGE 45) What does Molly's resistance to wearing glasses say about her self-image?

6 *"...the only thing Molly could imagine worse than failing her mother would be losing her altogether."* (PAGE 51) This is a strong theme throughout the book. Make note of this observation with students, and as the book progresses, discuss with them how Molly's belief informs her actions and choices.



19TH CENTURY AUTOMATON OF A KNITTING WOMAN

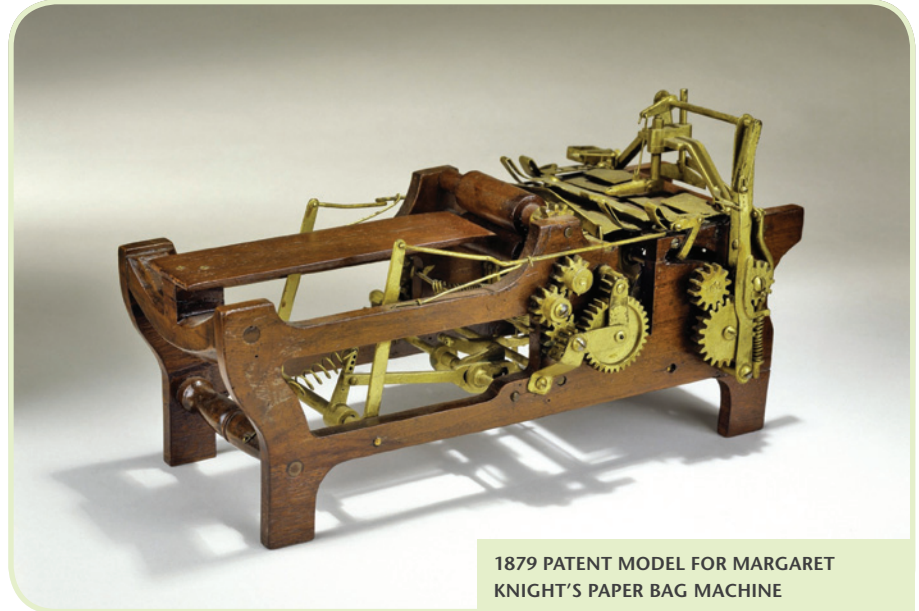
PHOTO BY RAMA. CENTRE INTERNATIONAL DE LA MÉCANIQUE D'ART, STE. CROIX, SWITZERLAND.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

7 Molly comes of age in the story as she begins to act on her own, independent of her mother. Yet there are moments when she longs for her mother's protection. Here is one example of when the two feelings exist in Molly side by side: *"Chasing the mystery boy across Manhattan all by herself, she'd felt elated. And proud. And free. But when Suspenders Man grabbed her, she fully expected her mother to pop up and save the day. Now she was disappointed in herself for feeling disappointed."* (PAGE 72) Discuss these two opposite feelings.

8 When Cassandra is arrested, Molly is distraught. *"Throughout the years, Molly had prepared herself for such an event, expected it even. But in the hundreds of times she'd played out the scenario in her mind, she never imagined she'd be watching it from afar. She always pictured herself in matching handcuffs, fighting by her mother's side."* (PAGE 148) What does this assumption of Molly's suggest about her connection to her mother?



1879 PATENT MODEL FOR MARGARET KNIGHT'S PAPER BAG MACHINE

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN HISTORY—SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

9 Molly's impulsivity gets her into serious scrapes over and over. Each time one of her actions backfires, especially when it causes trouble for someone she cares about, she is very remorseful. Yet she quickly bounds into yet another perilous situation. Ask students: "If you were a friend of Molly's, like Emmett, what could you do to help save her from herself?"

10 *"For so long, Molly had held on to the belief that, if her mother could just get her work seen, she would undoubtedly become a tremendous success. Cassandra Pepper would change the world. She would be part of history. Now she realized there were no guarantees. Not with the world being the way it was."* (PAGE 225) Ask students to discuss some of the impediments Cassandra Pepper faces as she tries to gain recognition as an inventor. Which of the impediments of 1883 are still present for women today? Which aspects of opportunities for women have improved?



EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

THE REAL DEAL?

A Perilous Journey of Danger & Mayhem: A Dastardly Plot is an adventurous mystery set in the past. Though some of the characters are based on real people and some of the settings are real, the story is the clever creation of author Christopher Healy, mixing facts and fiction to create something totally original. Careful readers may spot actual historical facts woven into the story to help tell the fictional tale. For example, the fact that Molly knows that Thomas Edison is deaf in his left ear (historical fact) becomes an important element as she tries to foil the villain in the story. The tragic reality of the Chinese Exclusion Act (actually signed into law by President Chester A. Arthur) is given context and meaning

through Emmett Lee's perilous situation. The 1883 World's Fair, though actually planned, never did take place (but it was not wiped from the memories of the assembled crowd by a Mind Melter!) Students may enjoy coming up with their own historical facts and then assembling fictional narratives whose plots turn on actual facts. These facts could be drawn from any era or field that stirs their imaginations.

THE AGE OF INVENTION

There are some pretty remarkable inventions described in Chapter 7. As a class, discuss these "revolutionary" ideas, and come up with some suggestions for other labor-saving devices that Cassandra could invent.



IN 2013, ROMANIA RELEASED A POSTAGE STAMP COMMEMORATING THE LIFE OF INVENTOR JOSEPHINE COCHRANE AND HER DISH-WASHING MACHINE.



EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

FRIENDSHIP

The relationship between Molly and Emmett is the heart of this story. Before Molly met Emmett, her best and only friend had been her eccentric mother. Through her friendship with Emmett, Molly learns a great deal about herself and about how to get along with others. There are several passages in the book that show the ways in which she grows through this friendship. Some examples follow.

"You have an interesting definition of friend," Emmett said. "We've known each other for less than twenty-four hours and have spent the majority of that time arguing."

"All friends have fights eventually. We've gotten ours out of the way early. That's just smart planning." (PAGES 78-79)

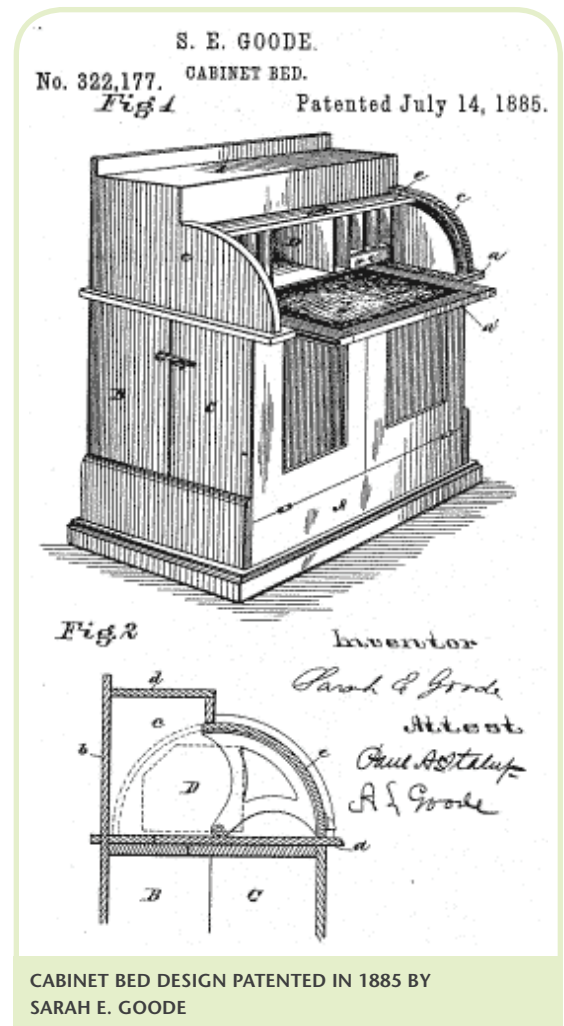
"She wasn't sure how real friendships worked, just the ones in books."

(PAGE 96)

"Molly had been so focused on her separation from her mother that she'd never stopped to consider how much Emmett had already lost. She vowed at that moment that she would see Emmett through this. It was what her mother would do." (PAGE 178)

"Molly recognized the lost look in Emmett's eyes. He was freezing up, doubting his own plan. She needed to jump in." (PAGE 189)

Students may want to consider these four examples and write a short reflection on the ways Molly grows and changes through her friendship with Emmett.



CABINET BED DESIGN PATENTED IN 1885 BY SARAH E. GOODE



EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

MOLLY'S HEROICS

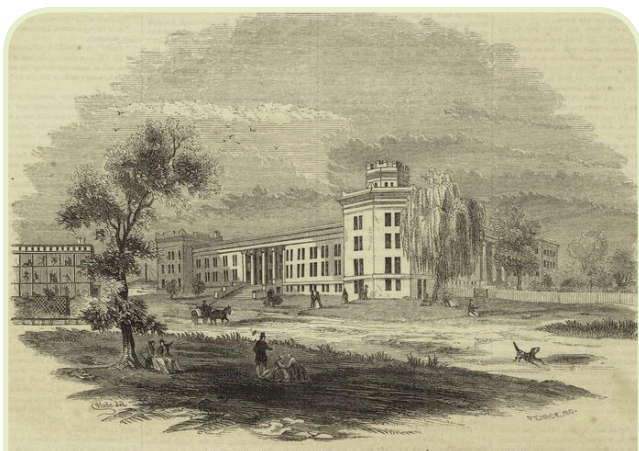
In Chapter 33, as Molly hurtles westward on the Orphan Train, her mother captive in the asylum on Blackwell's Island, it seems like her situation couldn't get any worse. Yet when Tiny Girl grabs the front of Molly's dress and says: "Tell us the truth: Are we in danger? Are we on some kind of perilous journey?"

Molly shows what strong stuff she is made of, when she stands up and replies:

"Yes!...Of course we are. Look at us. We're all orphans or half-orphans or unwanted kids. We've been living in tiny rooms or filthy alleys or abandoned book carts. We've been dining on bread crusts and cheese rinds. We've all been hungry

and tired and sick, and we've had to will ourselves to get better and move on, because it's not as if we had another choice. And on top of that, we're girls! What hasn't been hard for us? What hasn't felt dangerous? So, yeah, we're all on a perilous journey. And we should feel pretty darn good about ourselves for surviving this far. But: think how much easier it'll be if we look out for one another." (PAGE 258)

Discuss this crucial passage with the class. How does it reflect the story overall? How does it underscore the book's larger themes about society, equality, and opportunity?



19TH-CENTURY IMAGE OF BLACKWELL'S ISLAND ASYLUM WHERE CASSANDRA PEPPER WAS HELD CAPTIVE

THE BROOKLYN BRIDGE

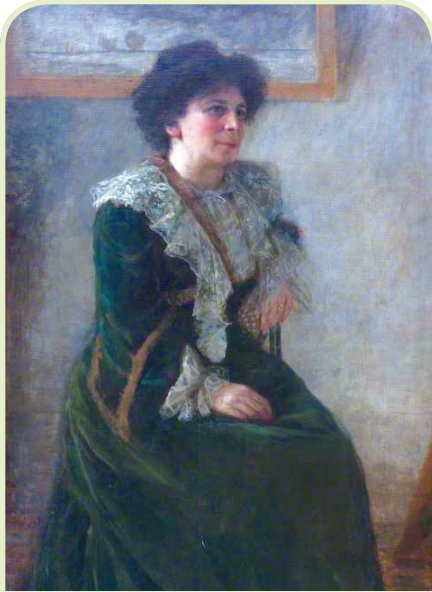
The construction of the Brooklyn Bridge is an amazing story in and of itself. [Here](#) is a brief excerpt from the Ken Burns America documentary "The Brooklyn Bridge" about its construction. Students may want to find out more about this engineering feat, still remarkable over 130 years later.



THE ORIGINAL NAME OF THE BROOKLYN BRIDGE WAS THE GREAT EAST RIVER SUSPENSION BRIDGE, SHOWN HERE IN AN ENGRAVING BY CURRIER & IVES FROM 1881. THE NAME WAS OFFICIALLY CHANGED IN 1915.



EXTENSION ACTIVITIES



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INVENTOR HERTHA MARKS

WOMEN INVENTORS

The fictional Mothers of Invention were actually all real inventors who lived at the time this story is set. Their lives and accomplishments are fascinating to explore. For students who want to learn more about these women, here are some links to get them started:

[Hertha Marks](#)

[Mary Walton](#)

[Margaret Knight](#)

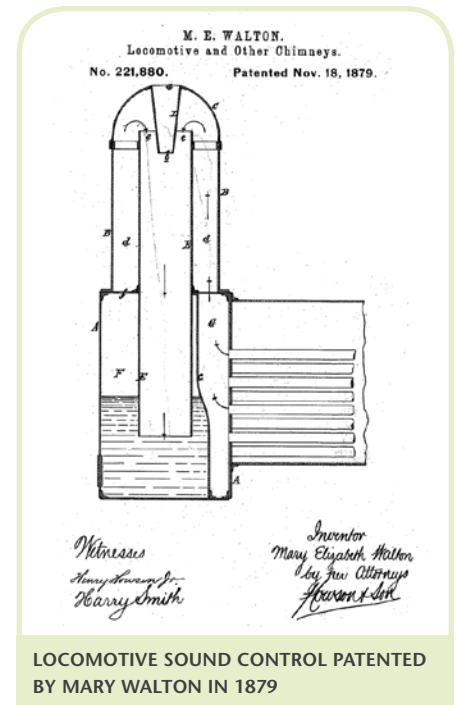
[Sarah Goode](#)

[Josephine Cochrane](#)

If students want to learn more about women inventors in general, [here is a useful resource](#).

NELLIE BLY

A brief mention is made of the pioneering journalist Nellie Bly on page 303 when the Mothers of Invention are trying to free Cassandra from Blackwell's Island. As Christopher Healy noted above, she was a true American hero. Students who want to know more about her life and work may start their research [here](#).



LOCOMOTIVE SOUND CONTROL PATENTED BY MARY WALTON IN 1879



FOR MORE INFORMATION

BOOKS

The Brooklyn Bridge: How the Roebings Connected Brooklyn to New York, by Peter J. Tomasi (author), Sara DuVall (illustrator). Harry N. Abrams, 2018. This graphic novel details the Brooklyn Bridge's construction over the course of more than a decade.

Orphan Train Girl, by Christina Baker Kline. HarperCollins, 2018. The young readers' edition of Christina Baker Kline's *Orphan Train* follows a twelve-year-old foster girl who forms an unlikely bond with a ninety-one year old woman.

Landed, by Milly Lee. Pictures by Yangsook Choi. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2006. The story of a Chinese immigrant boy trying to join his father in America after the 1882 passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act.

Women Who Dared: 52 Stories of Fearless Daredevils, Adventurers, and Rebels, by Linda Skeers. Illustrated by Livi Gosling. Sourcebooks Jabberwocky, 2017. Brief biographies of 52 women who have one thing in common—they did not allow fear or social pressure to stop them from achieving their individual accomplishments.

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE

[Facing History and Ourselves: "The Legacies of Chinese Exclusion"](#)

This unit, designed for upper-elementary students, provides context for a deep exploration of the causes and consequences of the Chinese Exclusion Act. With background and ample resources, it presents many answers to the question: "How has the history of Chinese exclusion shaped enduring attitudes about difference, citizenship and American identity?"



GRAND DISPLAY OF FIREWORKS ON OPENING NIGHT OF BROOKLYN BRIDGE, MAY 24, 1883