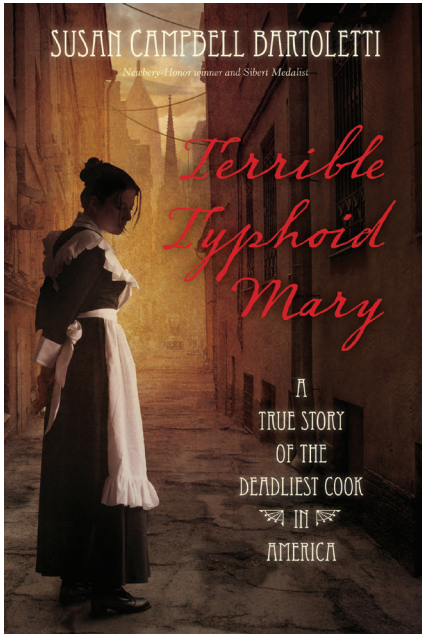


# *Terrible Typhoid Mary*

BY SUSAN CAMPBELL BARTOLETTI



## About the Book

★ “Energetic, even charming prose will easily engage readers.” — *School Library Journal*, starred review

★ “Completely captivating.” — *Booklist*, starred review

★ “Excellent nonfiction.” — *Horn Book*, starred review

With clarity, verve, and intelligence, Bartoletti presents the tale of “Typhoid Mary” Mallon, the Irish immigrant cook identified in the early 1900s as the first symptom-free carrier of an infectious disease. The author kicks off Mallon’s story with an outbreak of typhoid fever in the Long Island home where she worked as a cook. The sanitary engineer George Soper followed the trail of evidence to identify the servant as the source of the illness. With assistance from Dr. S. Josephine Baker, Soper captured and quarantined Mallon against her will on an island in the East River where she endured intrusive physical examinations for two years. After “Typhoid Mary” unsuccessfully sued for her freedom, she was released with the stipulation that she never cook again. But Mallon, who never seemed to believe that she made people sick, returned to the kitchen, a decision that sealed her incarcerated fate for three decades.

## About the Author

Susan Campbell Bartoletti is the award winning author of several books for young readers, including *Black Potatoes: The Story of the Great Irish Famine, 1845–1850*, winner of the Robert F. Sibert Medal. She lives in Moscow, Pennsylvania.

## Pre-Reading Activities

Ask students to work in small groups and use print and online resources to define the following nineteenth-century American terms: Industrial Revolution, Urbanization, First Wave of Immigration, Second Wave of Immigration, Tenement Housing, Infectious Disease, Sewage Systems, Germ Theory of Disease, and Personal Hygiene. (CCSS ELA-LITERACY.L.6-10.4-5)

**The Common Core State Standards (CCSS)** are included with the discussions and activities. You can locate the standards at: [www.corestandards.org/the-standards](http://www.corestandards.org/the-standards)

## Discussion Questions

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6-10.1 applies to each discussion question.

- Discuss the meaning of the similes, metaphors, and allusions that comprise the book’s old-fashioned chapter titles both separately and in relationship to the body of the text. (CCSS ELA-LITERACY.L.6-10.5,6; CCSS ELA-LITERACY.RI.6-10.2,4)
- Based on the information in the book’s early chapters, identify the causes, symptoms, treatment, and prevention of typhoid fever in the early twentieth century. How is the disease prevented and treated today? (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.6-10.4,6; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1,2,7; ELA.LITERACY.RI.6-10.1, 6.2-3, 6-10.4; CCSA.ELA-LITERACY.RST.6-10.1-2,4,8)
- Contrast Mary Mallon’s life as a cook in a wealthy household in the early twentieth century with portraits of servants from the same era that students are familiar with from television shows, books, and other media. (CCSS ELA-LITERACY.RI.6-10.1,7)

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- Describe the reasoning used by the “epidemic fighter” George Soper to eliminate food, water, and members of infected households to conclude that the Irish immigrant cook Mary Mallon was responsible for several typhoid fever outbreaks in New York. (CCSS ELA-LITERACY.RI.6-10.8; CCSS ELA-LITERACY.RH.6.3,10; 9-10.3,10)
- How did ideas about public sanitation, the germ theory of disease, and personal hygiene influence the attitudes of Mary Mallon, George Soper, and Dr. S. Josephine Baker toward infectious diseases and one another? (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.6-10.4-6; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-10.1-2,4,8,10; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6-10.1-5,8; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.6-10.1-2,4,8)
- With Mary Mallon’s unpublished six-page letter her few remaining words, ([www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/typhoid/letter.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/typhoid/letter.html)), Bartoletti notes that much of what we know about the deadly cook comes from other people. Analyze quotations from different individuals throughout the book to form a balanced portrait of Mary Mallon. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.6-10.5-6; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6-10.1-3,5,8; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-10.1-3,8-9)
- Cite the possible reasons Bartoletti gives in Chapters 13 and 14 that could have influenced Mary’s decision to return to cooking after her initial release from quarantine. Which is the most credible? (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6-10.6; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.6, 6-10.8)
- As opposed how they dealt with the healthy men who also transmitted typhoid fever, the courts and media stigmatized and isolated Mary Mallon for years. Trace and evaluate the evidence in the book that supports Bartoletti’s suggestion that sexism played a role in the challenging circumstances of Mary’s life after her identification as a “healthy carrier.” (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6-10.1; 6.2, 8-10.2, 6-7.3, 9-10.3, 9-10.6, 6-10.8; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-10.2,10)
- Bartoletti concludes, “Despite [George Soper’s] vainglorious tendencies, he seems to have had a genuine interest in improving the lives of others and making the world a more sanitary place.”

Using evidence in the text, argue for or against this assessment. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6-10.6; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.6, 6-10.8,10)

## Discussion Questions

- Ask students to use descriptions in the book as well as other print and online resources to create labeled drawings of tenement housing in New York City in the early 1900s that show how overcrowding and unsanitary living conditions contributed to outbreaks of typhoid fever and other infectious diseases. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.6-10.4-6; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-10.7,10; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6-10.7; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6-10.2,7)
- Have students create an online classroom book featuring illustrated cooking metaphors that tell the complicated story of “Terrible Typhoid Mary.” (CCSS ELA-LITERACY.RI.6-10.1-3; CCSS ELA-L.6-10.4-6; CCSS ELA-LITERACY.W.6-8.2,4; CCSS ELA-LITERACY.W.6-10.6)
- Using information in the body of the narrative, the photo album and the timeline, ask students to design a “Typhoid Mary” trading card. Draw a picture of Mary on the front and the time and place of her birth and death, an engaging quotation, and explanation of her notoriety on the back. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.6-10.1-3,6; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-10.7,10; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.2,8-10.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6-10.2)
- Based on the descriptions of Mary’s character and behavior and speculation about her relationship with August Breihof, write an imagined encounter between the two in which Mary confronts the man about betraying her to the authorities. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.6-10.1-3,6; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6-10.3-4; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6-10.3)
- In the reporting style of “yellow journalism,” the New York American published an illustration of “human typhoid germ” Mary Mallon in 1909 that shows her cooking a pot of steaming skulls. Have students create an original headline and/or picture that also sensationalizes or exaggerates the story of “Typhoid Mary” in the manner of contempora-

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neous newspapers. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.6-10.5; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-10.2,4,7,10; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.4-7,9-10.4; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6-10.2,4,10)

- Soper, Baker, and the *New York Sun* give differing accounts of how Mallon was discovered working as a cook in an infected maternity hospital in 1915. In order to determine the veracity of these reports, have students examine the chapter endnotes and bibliography to learn if they are primary or secondary documents and when they were published. After considering the possible motivations of people and institutions, have students cast their votes for the most believable story. (CCSS.ELA-RH.6-8.9,10, 9-10.1-2,6, 9-10.9; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6-8.9)
- After the Supreme Court of New York dismissed Mary's writ of habeas corpus in 1909, she declared, "[The judges] want to get credit for protecting the rich . . . I am the victim." Using evidence from the text that includes prevailing notions of the time about the connections between immigration, poverty, and illness, write a draft argument for or against Mary's supposition that she was discriminated against on the basis of her socioeconomic status. Share the draft with peers and adults and then write a final argument that incorporates their feedback. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.6-10.4-6; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-10.8,10; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6-10.1, 6.2,8-10.2, 6-7.3, 9-10.3,6, 6-10.8; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6-10.1,2,4,5,9,10)
- "Typhoid Mary" is a classic example of the conflict between government's responsibilities to protect the public health and the civil rights of its citizens. Have students dramatize Mary's story as if it were a reality show or a courtroom where her fellow contestants or jury members decide whether or not she should go free after hearing arguments for and against her release. (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.6-10.3,6; CCSS.ELA.LITERACY.SL.6-10.1,4,6)
- Using Venn diagrams and considering the legal principles of unlawful search and seizure, due process, and informed consent, ask students to

work in small groups to research twentieth-century quarantine cases related to such infectious diseases as tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, SARS, and ebola and compare and contrast them with the case of "Typhoid Mary" Mallon. (CCS.ELA-LITERACY.H6-10.2,7,10; CCS.ELA-LITERACY.L.6-10.4-6; CCS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6-10.1-2,10)

This guide was created by Julie Corsaro.