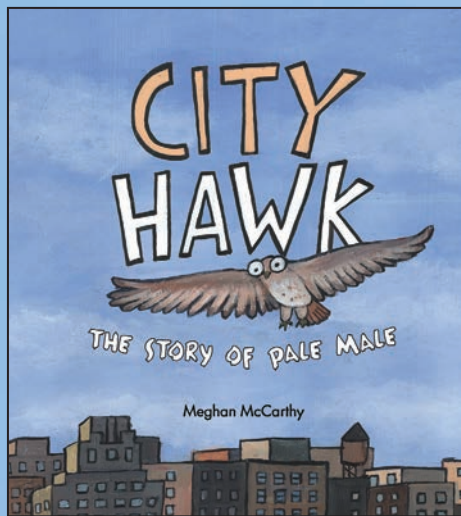
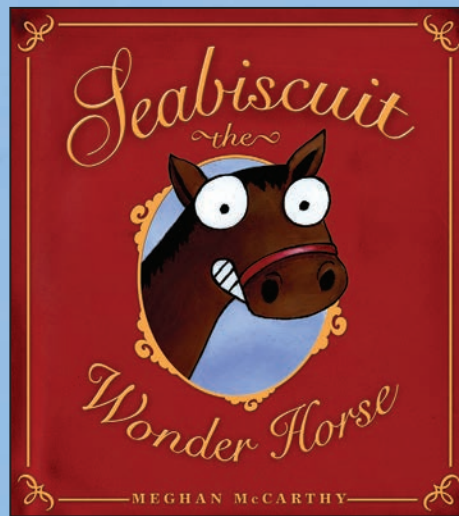


# A Curriculum Guide to Books by

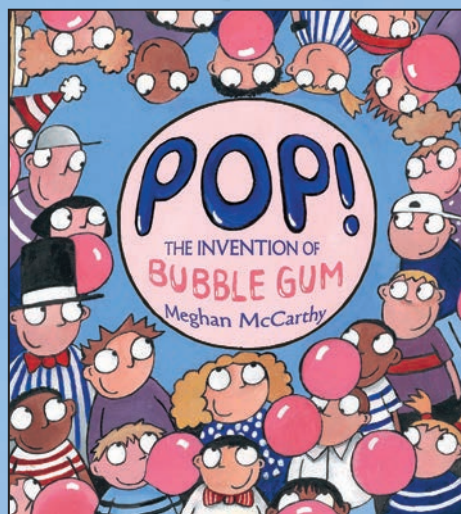
*Meghan McCarthy*



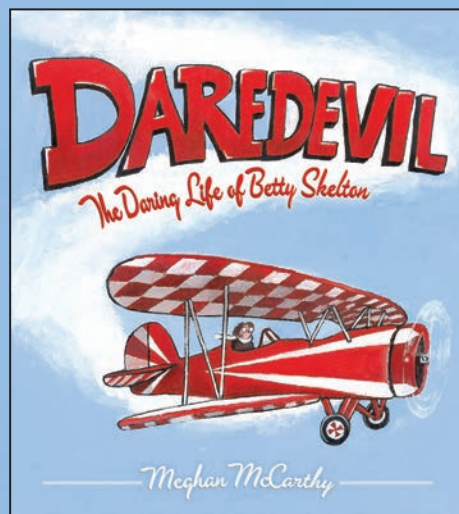
CITY HAWK:  
THE STORY OF PALE MALE



SEABISCUIT:  
THE WONDER HORSE



POP!  
THE INVENTION OF BUBBLE GUM



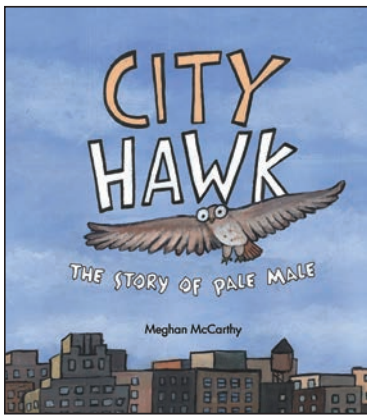
DAREDEVIL:  
THE DARING LIFE OF BETTY SKELTON

**PAULA WISEMAN BOOKS**

Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing

Guide written in 2013 by Myra Zarnowski, a professor in the Department of Elementary and Early Childhood Education at Queens College, CUNY.

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## City Hawk: The Story of Pale Male

HC: 9781416933595



### BACKGROUND/SUMMARY

A surprising story unfolded in New York City's Central Park that captured the attention of people of all ages. A red-tailed hawk—an animal not usually seen in a city environment—settled in the area. Observers named this hawk Pale Male and his partner Lola. The two hawks built a nest on an apartment building across Fifth Avenue that could be seen by observers in the park. Each day from early morning until sunset the observers watched the nest, waiting for eggs to be laid, then waiting for the babies to hatch, and finally waiting to see the babies take flight. People called it a miracle that wild creatures could so easily settle in a man-made environment.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS/ACTIVITIES

#### Key Ideas and Details

The questions and activities below draw on Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for reading informational text (RI) that ask children to ask and answer questions about a text, identify the main topic and key details that support it, and describe the relationship between a series of events, concepts, or ideas. Encourage students to cite evidence from the book when discussing their ideas.

1. Explain why Pale Male's story was both surprising and interesting. Here are some questions to think about:
  - Why were New Yorkers surprised to see Pale Male?
  - What made Pale Male and Lola interesting to "the Regulars," the bird watchers in Central Park?
  - Why is the story still interesting?
2. Have one person pretend to be one of the Regulars, while the rest of the group asks questions. The Regular should answer according to the information in the book. Here are two questions to get you started:
  - Why are you and the others called the Regulars?
  - What are you watching and waiting for?
3. Explain what was unusual about the location of Pale Male and Lola's nest.
4. Why do you think the author called the book *City Hawk*?

#### Craft and Structure

To learn about craft and structure, the CCSS asks us to help students learn and understand vocabulary words and phrases, think about the features of nonfiction text, and assess the author's point of view. The questions below emphasize these understandings.

1. **Text Features.** Examine and talk about the following features of the book:
  - **Cover.** Look carefully at the front and back covers of the book. Author and illustrator Meghan McCarthy made several decisions when she created this book cover.
    - ◊ Why do you think she placed Pale Male in the center of the cover?
    - ◊ Why is Pale Male looking directly at us?
    - ◊ Why do you think the back cover shows a different time of day than the front cover?
  - **Flaps.** Examine both the front and back flaps.
    - ◊ The front flap entitled "There's a Hawk in the City!" gives a brief summary of the book.
      - What is this story about?
      - What questions do you have before reading the book?
      - After reading the book, see if your questions were answered.
    - ◊ The back flap gives information about the author and illustrator Meghan McCarthy.
      - What other books has she written?
      - Why do you think she decided to write about Pale Male?
  - **"Learn More About Central Park,"** a feature at the back of the book, gives more information about the setting—where the story takes place—and about the two architects that designed the park.
    - ◊ Who were the two men who designed the park?
    - ◊ What was the park like in its early years?
    - ◊ How did it change for the worse?
    - ◊ How was it restored and improved?
    - ◊ Why do you think Meghan McCarthy decided to tell us so much about Central Park?

2. **Concept Circles.** (See *City Hawk* Concept Circles Reproducible Sheet at the end of this section.)

The words in the circles are all used in the book *Pale Male*. Use the words in each circle to write about ideas in the book.

3. In the author's note to *City Hawk* she writes that the *Pale Male* story is for the old and the young as well as the rich and the poor. She says that the story's magic is for everyone. Do you agree? Why?
4. Compare the book you just read, *City Hawk: The Story of Pale Male* by Meghan McCarthy with *The Tale of Pale Male: A True Story* by Jeanette Winter. How are the books similar? How are they different? Here are some things you can discuss: the content, the illustrations, and the back matter.

### Writing

CCSS emphasizes writing informative and explanatory text in the early grades. The writing activities below provide experience writing to give an opinion, to inform, and to explain a sequence of events.

1. **Pretend to be one of the Regulars.** Write several diary entries explaining how you spent your time in Central Park watching, thinking, and waiting. Write entries for two or three different days.
2. **Pretend that you are Pale Male.** Tell about your experience in New York City.
3. **Write poetry about Pale Male.** Pretend that you can ask Pale Male any questions you want and that he will understand you. Your poem can be a series of interesting questions or you can write your questions and Pale Male's answers.
4. **Write a script or short play to perform.** The characters are two Regulars discussing Pale Male, Lola, and the babies. Here are some things you can talk about:
  - Central Park
  - Seeing Pale Male
  - Pale Male and Lola building the nest
  - Waiting for the eggs to hatch
  - The babies, Handsome and Gretel, learning to fly
  - Next spring in Central Park

Practice reading your lines before performing your play for your classmates.

### Extending the Experience of Reading the Book

1. Make a text set of books about Pale Male. Gather and read picture book biographies of this famous hawk:

- *City Hawk: The Story of Pale Male* by Meghan McCarthy
- *The Tale of Pale Male: A True Story* by Jeanette Winter
- *Pale Male: Citizen Hawk of New York City* by Janet Schulman

Discuss how the books are similar and different.

2. Visit the website [PaleMaleBook.com](http://PaleMaleBook.com) and click on "Pale Male Videos" to watch (1) an ABC News Report on Pale Male and Lola, (2) a preview of the PBS Nature documentary on Pale Male, and (3) a video about red-tailed hawks. What additional information have you learned?

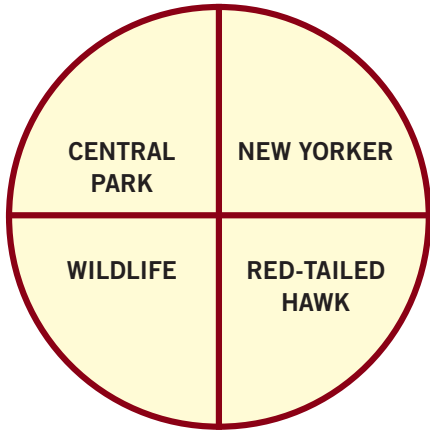




## THE STORY OF PALE MALE

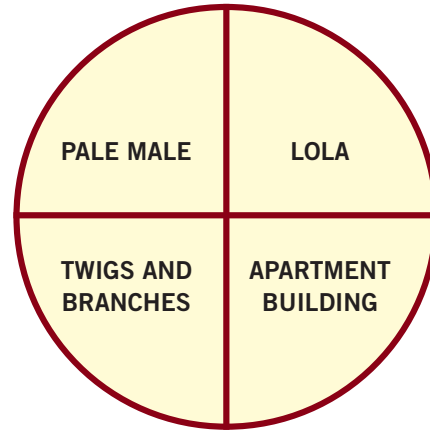
### CONCEPT CIRCLES

The words in the circles below are all used in the book *City Hawk*. On another sheet of paper, use the words in each circle to write about ideas in the book.



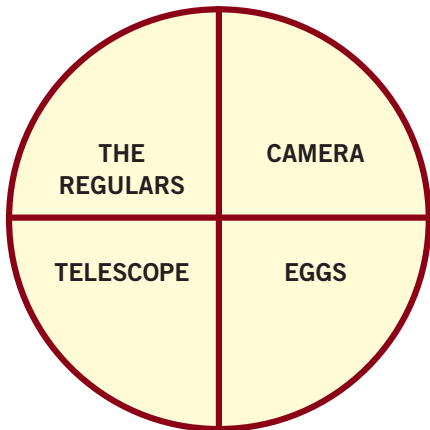
#### CIRCLE #1:

Use the words in the circle to explain what surprised New Yorkers.



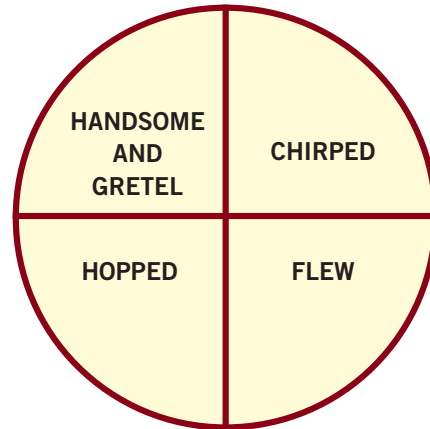
#### CIRCLE #2:

Use the words in the circle to explain where and how Pale Male and Lola built their nest.



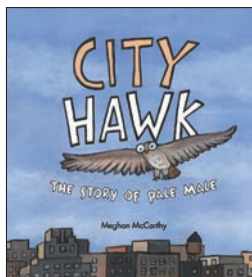
#### CIRCLE #3:

Use the words in the circle to explain the activities of the Regulars.



#### CIRCLE #4:

Use the words in the circle to explain how the babies grew and learned to fly.



### City Hawk: The Story of Pale Male

By Meghan McCarthy  
Paula Wiseman Books  
REPRODUCIBLE





## Seabiscuit: The Wonder Horse

HC: 9781416933601



### BACKGROUND/SUMMARY

During the 1930s, when many people were suffering from tough economic times, they found momentary diversion at the racetrack. An unusual horse named Seabiscuit—a wild, lazy, angry, stubborn horse—was transformed from a loser to a winner through the loving care of his owner, trainer, and jockey. As a result, Seabiscuit went from being a battered underdog to being a celebrated hero, finding his way into the hearts of millions of people. This amazing horse went on to defeat the famous horse War Admiral in 1938, providing fans with a much-needed escape from their problems and a reason to cheer. Even President Roosevelt took time out from his schedule to follow this exciting race.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS/ACTIVITIES

#### Key Ideas and Details

The questions and activities below draw on Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for reading informational text (RI) that ask children to ask and answer questions about a text, identify the main topic and key details that support it, and describe the relationship between a series of events, concepts, or ideas. Encourage students to cite evidence from the book when discussing their ideas.

1. What was life like for most people in the 1930s? How does the illustration at the beginning of the book show this?
2. Seabiscuit was changed from a wild, lazy, angry, stubborn horse to a winning racehorse. How did each of the following people help change Seabiscuit from a loser to a winner?
  - Charles Howard, Seabiscuit's owner
  - John "Red" Pollard, Seabiscuit's jockey
  - "Silent Tom" Smith, Seabiscuit's trainer
3. How did people feel when Seabiscuit won the race against War Admiral? How does the author let you know this?
4. Do you agree with the author that "Seabiscuit was America's hero"? Why?
5. **Hot Seat!!!!** Put each of the following characters on the hot seat. That means that a student pretends to be a character in the book. Other students ask the character questions. Using information from the book, the student on the hot seat answers the questions the way the character would answer. For example, if a student is pretending to be Charles Howard, two questions he might be asked are "Why did you decide to buy Seabiscuit?" and "Why did you want Seabiscuit to race against War Admiral?"

Here are some characters to put on the hot seat:

- Charles Howard, Seabiscuit's owner
- John "Red" Pollard, Seabiscuit's jockey
- "Silent Tom" Smith, Seabiscuit's trainer
- George "The Iceman" Woolf, the jockey who rode Seabiscuit in the race against War Admiral
- A fan of Seabiscuit—someone with "Seabiscuit-itis"

#### Craft and Structure

To learn about craft and structure, the CCSS asks us to help students learn and understand vocabulary words and phrases, think about the features of nonfiction text, and assess the author's point of view. The questions and activities below emphasize these understandings.

1. **Magnet summaries.** (See *Seabiscuit* Magnet Summaries Reproducible Sheet at the end of this section.) Create magnet summaries of important topics in the story.
2. **Mind Portraits: What Did People Think about Seabiscuit?** (See *Seabiscuit* Mind Portraits Reproducible Sheet at the end of this section.) Show the points of view of different people mentioned in the story by creating mind portraits.
3. Examine the author's note at the end of the book. What extra information does the author provide? How does this information help you understand how Seabiscuit became a hero and a champion?
4. Do you agree with the author that going to the racetrack was a good way for people to forget their troubles for a short time? Why?
5. Watch a video of the famous race when Seabiscuit defeated War Admiral in 1938 at: [Meghan-McCarthy.com/Seabiscuit.html](http://Meghan-McCarthy.com/Seabiscuit.html)

## Writing

CCSS emphasizes writing informative and explanatory text in the early grades. The writing activities below provide experience writing to give an opinion, to inform, and to explain a sequence of events.

1. **RAFT Writing Activity.** (See *Seabiscuit* RAFT Reproducible Sheet at the end of this section.) RAFT stands for Role, Audience, Format, and Topic. By shifting each of these features, we can think of interesting ways to write about Seabiscuit.
2. Seabiscuit really changed over time. Make a series of pictures showing how the horse changed. Then, underneath each picture, write about the change.
3. What is your opinion of Seabiscuit? Was he a hero? Write your thoughts about this horse.
4. Read *Wonder Horse: The True Story of the World's Smartest Horse* by Emily Arnold McCully. Write about how Jim Key, the Wonder Horse, was similar to and different than Seabiscuit.
5. Visit the website of author Meghan McCarthy at [Meghan-McCarthy.com](http://Meghan-McCarthy.com) to learn more about her books, writing, and illustrating. Click on "All About the Books" to find out about the author/illustrator's other books. Prepare a written summary of one of the author's books. Be sure to tell the main idea of the book and the details that help readers understand this idea.





# Seabiscuit: The Wonder Horse

## MAGNET SUMMARIES

Create magnet summaries of important topics in the story. Here's how.

First, begin with a key word that explains the topic. You can think of this word as a magnet that attracts other related words. Second, list other words and phrases that describe and explain the magnet word. Third, use as many words and phrases as possible to write a magnet summary about the topic.

Here is an example:

lazy	potential	angry	stubborn
gentle	<b>SEABISCUIT</b>		fast
owner	trainer	jockey	champion

**Magnet Summary:** In the beginning, Seabiscuit was a lazy, stubborn, angry horse. But with the help of his owner, who saw his potential, and his trainer and jockey, who knew how to care for him, he became a champion.

On a separate sheet of paper, try writing magnet summaries using these topics:

tough times	elegant	escape
racetrack	<b>1930s</b>	racehorses
forget their troubles		long lines for food

mighty	fastest horse in history	Samuel Riddle
challenge	<b>WAR ADMIRAL</b>	scoffed
goofy-looking challenger		grand horse

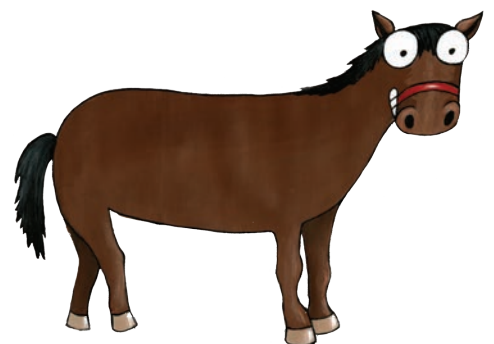
Red was injured	crammed like sardines	President Roosevelt
forty million Americans	<b>CHAMPION</b>	winner by four lengths
Seabiscuit	War Admiral	winner's circle

Create your own magnet word and related words. Write a magnet summary for your word choices. Illustrate your magnet summary.



### Seabiscuit: The Wonder Horse

By Meghan McCarthy  
Paula Wiseman Books  
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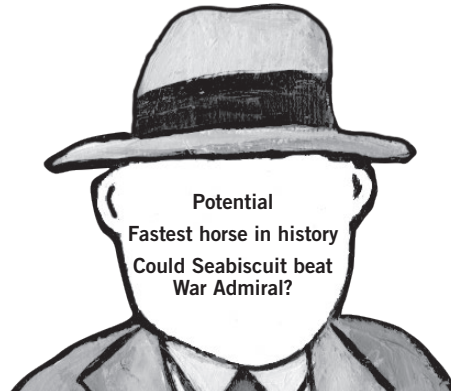
# Seabiscuit: The Wonder Horse

## MIND PORTRAITS

What did people think about Seabiscuit? You can show the points of view of different people mentioned in the story by creating mind portraits.

First, draw a picture of the person—a face with features. Second, draw an empty face with no features. Instead, show what each person thinks about Seabiscuit—what’s on the person’s mind. Use both words and pictures.

For example, here is owner Charles Howard’s face. Then, in the empty face, we see his thoughts about Seabiscuit.



On separate sheets of paper, make your own mind portraits of these characters:



**John "Red" Pollard**  
Seabiscuit's jockey



**"Silent Tom" Smith**  
Seabiscuit's Trainer



**George "The Iceman" Woolf**  
Seabiscuit's jockey in the big race



### Seabiscuit: The Wonder Horse

By Meghan McCarthy  
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**Samuel Riddle**  
War Admiral's owner







# Seabiscuit: The Wonder Horse

## RAFT Writing Activity

RAFT stands for Role, Audience, Format, and Topic.

**Role** refers to who is doing the writing. **Audience** refers to who is receiving the writing. **Format** refers to the kind of writing being done. **Topic** refers to what the writing is about.

ROLE	AUDIENCE	FORMAT	TOPIC
Charles Howard, Seabiscuit's owner	Samuel Riddle, War Admiral's owner	Letter	I challenge War Admiral to try to beat my horse Seabiscuit in a race. Why I think Seabiscuit will win.
Samuel Riddle	Newspaper reporter	Interview	Why the goofy-looking Seabiscuit will not win.
Red Pollard	George "The Iceman" Woolf	Conversation	Please race for me. Ride Seabiscuit when he races War Admiral.
Charles Howard	Himself	Scrapbook of photos and items to remember about Seabiscuit	Memories of Seabiscuit and how he changed from a slow, angry horse to a champion and hero.
Fan of Seabiscuit	Herself	Diary	Why I went to the racetrack to root for Seabiscuit

**Here are the writing ideas from the chart above:**

- As Seabiscuit's owner, write a letter to Samuel Riddle, challenging War Admiral to a race with Seabiscuit and stating why he predicts Seabiscuit will win.
- As Samuel Riddle, respond to the questions of a newspaper reporter. Tell him why the goofy-looking Seabiscuit will not win.
- As Red Pollard, convince George "The Iceman" Woolf that he should ride Seabiscuit in this place when he races War Admiral.
- As Charles Howard, make a scrapbook of photos and items to remember how Seabiscuit changed from a slow, angry horse to a champion and a hero.
- As a fan of Seabiscuit, write a diary entry about how you went to the racetrack to root for Seabiscuit when he raced War Admiral.

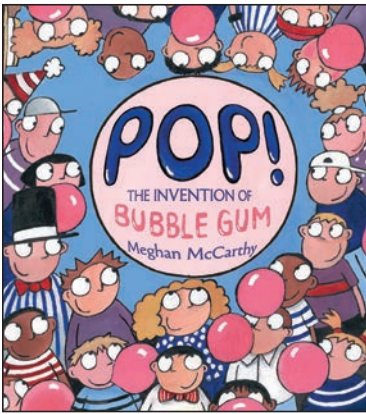
**Try adding your own ideas to the chart. Share these ideas with your classmates.**



### Seabiscuit: The Wonder Horse

By Meghan McCarthy  
Paula Wiseman Books  
REPRODUCIBLE





## POP! The Invention of Bubble Gum

HC: 9781416979708



### BACKGROUND/SUMMARY

Walter Diemer was an accountant for the Fleer family candy and gum factory in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, during the 1920s. His job was to balance the budgets and keep the accounts in order. Walter's life abruptly changed when the company's experimental laboratory—scientists with their beakers, pots, and tubes—moved right next to his office. At first, he just looked at the experiments. Later, he began to actively experiment with various gum mixtures, trying to make a new, more exciting gum. Walter's persistence paid off when he created a gum that chewers could use to blow bubbles. The first batch of his gum quickly sold out and it went on to become a big seller. Walter Diemer's invention added to the happiness of children around the world.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS/ACTIVITIES

#### Key Ideas and Details

The questions and activities below draw on Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for reading informational text (RI) that ask children to ask and answer questions about a text, identify the main topic and key details that support it, and describe the relationship between a series of events, concepts, or ideas. Encourage students to cite evidence from the book when discussing their ideas.

1. Answer the following *5W* and *How* questions about Walter Diemer's invention:
  - a. Who was Walter Diemer?
  - b. What did he invent?
  - c. When did he make this invention?
  - d. Where did he make this invention?
  - e. Why was the invention important to the company?
  - f. How did he succeed in making this invention? What did he do?

Use this information to think of a headline that could have announced Walter Diemer's invention in the newspaper. For example: *Perfect in Pink: Bubble Gum Sells Out in an Afternoon*

Then write a newspaper article explaining Walter Diemer's invention. Use your headline as the title of the article. Include the information about the *5 Ws* and *How* in the article.

2. What problems did Walter Diemer have to solve in order to invent bubble gum? How did he solve these problems? Begin by explaining his first attempts to "add a bit of this and that." Next, tell about the gum he created that became "hard as a rock." Finally, describe his successful pink gum that sold out in a single afternoon.
3. What qualities did Walter have that made him a good inventor?
4. Why did people think Walter's gum was exciting? Do you agree?
5. Why is *Pop!* a good title for this book?

#### Craft and Structure

To learn about craft and structure, the CCSS asks us to help students learn and understand vocabulary words and phrases, think about the features of nonfiction text, and assess the author's point of view. The questions below emphasize these understandings.

1. Discuss the meaning of the word *invent* with students.
2. To invent something means to create something new, like a new product. Inventing involves using your imagination and creativity. Tell why Walter Diemer's bubble gum is called an invention.

Read more about the invention of bubble gum at the following websites:

About.com. "The Invention of Bubble Gum"  
<http://history1900s.about.com/od/1920s/qt/bubblegum.htm>

Ideafinder.com. "Bubble Gum"  
<http://www.ideafinder.com/history/inventions/bubblegum.htm>

Discuss what you learned. What new information did you learn about bubble gum? What questions do you have about bubble gum? How could you find the answers to your questions?

3. **List, Group, and Label.** Below are some words and phrases from *Pop!* Write these words and phrases on cards or pieces of paper. Group the words and phrases that belong together because they are about the same topic or idea. Then give each group a name. Explain your groups of words to your classmates. For example, *accountant*, *balance budgets*, and *add numbers* all describe Walter Diemer's Job at the Fleeer Family Factory.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Philadelphia</li> <li>• vanilla</li> <li>• factory</li> <li>• Fleeer family</li> <li>• accountant</li> <li>• job</li> <li>• numbers</li> <li>• balance budgets</li> <li>• gum</li> <li>• experimental laboratory</li> <li>• office</li> <li>• sap</li> <li>• beakers, pots, and tubes</li> <li>• big secret</li> <li>• wintergreen</li> <li>• chewing gum</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ancient Greeks</li> <li>• American Indians</li> <li>• spruce tree resin</li> <li>• bubbles</li> <li>• bubble gum blowers</li> <li>• kettles</li> <li>• gum experiment</li> <li>• mixtures</li> <li>• cinnamon</li> <li>• coworkers</li> <li>• inventor</li> <li>• batch</li> <li>• sold out</li> <li>• truckloads</li> <li>• delivered</li> <li>• gum-blowing contests</li> </ul> |
|---|--|

4. Examine the text features on the pink pages at the end of the book. These pages provide extra information that is not in the main part of the book. Make a chart showing each text feature. Provide an example of the extra information that feature provides. A sample chart might look like this:

TEXT FEATURE	EXTRA INFORMATION
Additional Information about the Person the Book Is About ("Walter Diemer: More about the Man Behind Bubble Gum")	<p>Walter Diemer's invention helped save the Fleeer company.</p> <p>Many workers at the factory thought Walter Diemer's invention was too heavy and would break the mixer.</p>
Additional Facts ("Facts about Gum")	Detectives use gum to help find criminals. They compare their teeth marks in the gum to their dental records.
"More Facts about Gum"	The largest bubble on record is twenty-three inches.
Source of Quotes ("Quotes in the Book Can Be Found in the Following Books and Articles")	One article answers the question, Is chewing gum good for you? According to a <i>Boston Globe</i> article, sugarless gum can be good for your teeth because it causes you to produce saliva, which washes your teeth.

How does this information add to your understanding of the invention of bubble gum? Why do you think the author included this extra information?

5. Watch videos related to *Pop!*
- a. Get some illustrating pointers from author and illustrator Meghan McCarthy. Watch Meghan draw a bubble gum machine at [Meghan-McCarthy.com/pop.html](http://Meghan-McCarthy.com/pop.html)
  - b. Another video on the author's website shows the record holder for blowing the world's biggest bubble gum bubble. Watch this at [Meghan-McCarthy.com/pop\\_recordholders.html](http://Meghan-McCarthy.com/pop_recordholders.html)
  - c. Examine examples of gum art and watch videos of gum artists at work at [Meghan-McCarthy.com/pop\\_art.html](http://Meghan-McCarthy.com/pop_art.html)

## Writing

CCSS emphasizes writing informative and explanatory text in the early grades. The writing activities below provide experience writing to give an opinion, to inform, and to explain a sequence of events.

1. At the end of the book, on the pink pages, the author wrote:  
*American kids spend about a half billion dollars on gum each year. Everyone loves bubble gum! The next time you blow a big bubble, remember Walter Diemer. You have him to thank.*  
Do you agree with the author that we should be grateful to Walter Diemer? Why?
2. Create three-panel comic strips showing events in the book. (See *Pop! Comic Strips* Reproducible Sheet at the end of this section.)
3. February 1 is Bubble Gum Day. On this day, kids get to chew bubble gum in school if they contribute 50 cents or more to a charity. To learn more about Bubble Gum Day, visit [BubbleGumDay.com/Bubble\\_Gum\\_Day/Bubble\\_Gum\\_Day.html](http://BubbleGumDay.com/Bubble_Gum_Day/Bubble_Gum_Day.html). Here you can read about the history of Bubble Gum Day, listen to a radio broadcast about it, and find activities to do on this special day. After learning more about Bubble Gum Day, write a letter to your teacher or principal about why your class should participate. Give reasons why celebrating this holiday would be a good idea. Use words like *because*, *since*, and *for example* as you explain your reasons.
4. Imagine that you were in one of the pictures in the book. Write about what you see, hear, feel, smell, and taste. Imagine that you can use all your senses to describe what is happening. As an eyewitness, describe what is happening.  
For example:
  - What if you were with Walter Diemer when he began experimenting with gum?
  - What if you were with Walter Diemer when he produced the perfect batch of bubble gum?
  - What if you were there on the first day Walter Diemer's gum sold out in an afternoon?
  - What if you attended one of Walter Diemer's gum-blowing contests he had for neighborhood kids?
5. Make a text set of books about inventors. Gather and read picture book biographies about inventors such as:
  - Thomas Edison
  - Leonardo da Vinci
  - Margaret E. Knight
  - Madam C. J. Walker
  - Philo Farnsworth
  - Bob and Joe Switzer
  - Benjamin Franklin
  - George Washington Carver
  - Alexander Graham Bell

**Write about one inventor:** What was special about this person? What did he or she invent? Why? How?

**Write about two or more inventors:** In what ways were they alike? In what ways were they different?
6. Visit the website of author Meghan McCarthy at [Meghan-McCarthy.com](http://Meghan-McCarthy.com) to learn more about her books, writing, and illustrating. Click on "All About the Books" to find out about the author/illustrator's other books.

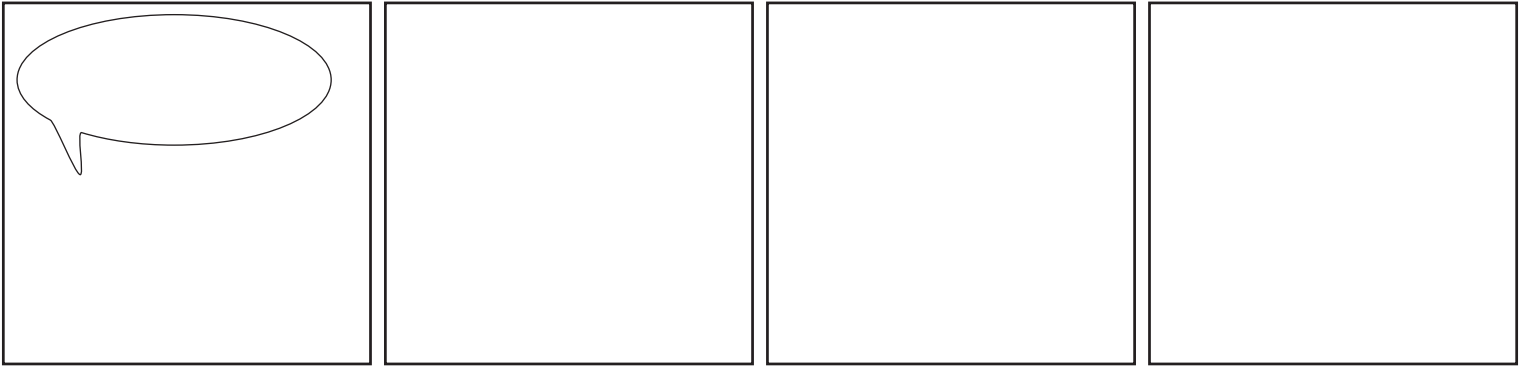




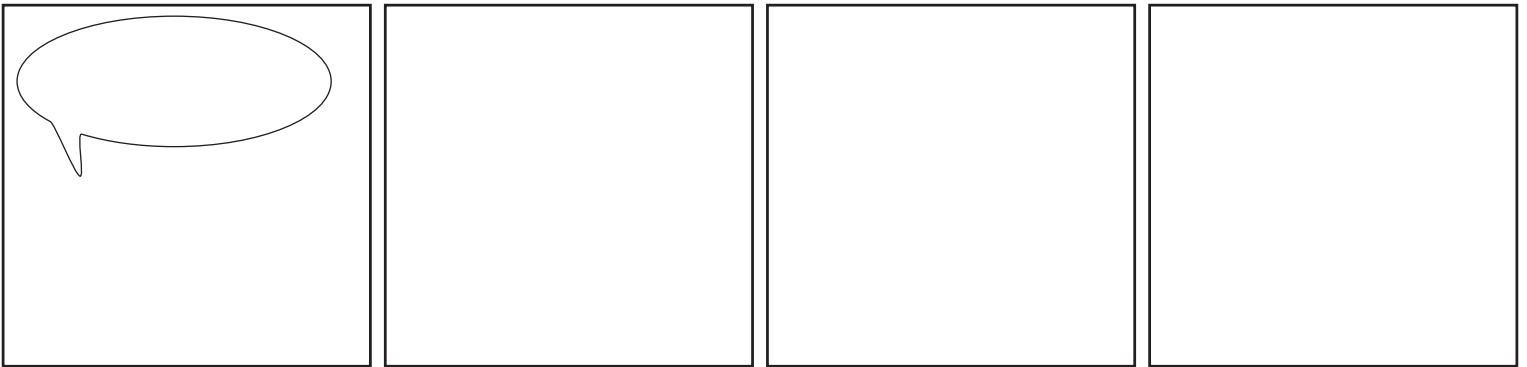
## POP! COMIC STRIPS

Illustrate each panel. Use the ideas below to begin each comic strip. Add additional dialog and a picture to each frame.

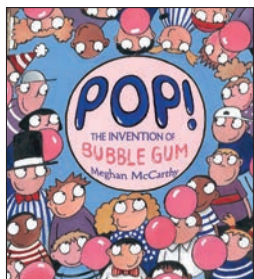
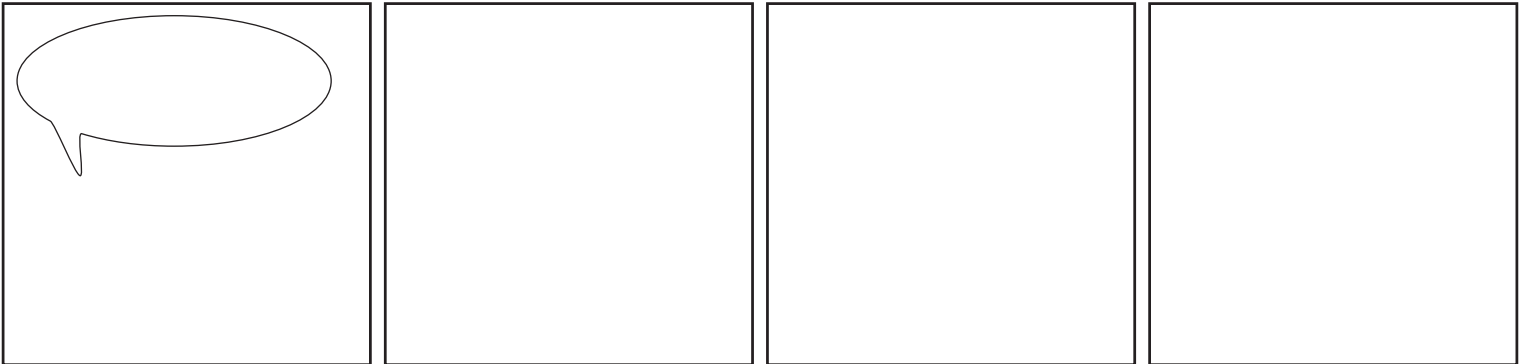
In the comic strip below, show how Walter Diemer began by watching the experiments as his boss asked him to do, and then began to experiment himself.



In the second comic strip, show how Walter Diemer didn't give up when his gum mixture turned hard as a rock.



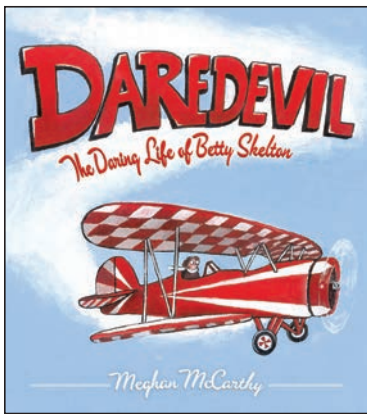
In the third comic strip, show what happened when Walter's gum sold out in one afternoon.



### POP! The Invention of Bubble Gum

By Meghan McCarthy  
Paula Wiseman Books  
REPRODUCIBLE





## Daredevil: The Daring Life of Betty Skelton

HC: 9781442422629



### BACKGROUND/SUMMARY

Betty Skelton was known as “the first lady of firsts” because she broke speed, altitude, and distance records in the air, on the ground, and in the water. At a time when most women did not even consider flying airplanes, driving racecars, or training to go into space, Betty Skelton did just that. *Daredevil: The Daring Life of Betty Skelton*, by Meghan McCarthy, shows young readers how one woman *dared* to pursue her goals and dreams—even when they did not match those of most other girls growing up in the 1930s.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS/ACTIVITIES

#### Key Ideas and Details

The questions and activities below draw on Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for reading informational text (RI) that ask children to ask and answer questions about a text, identify the main topic and key details that support it, and describe the relationship between a series of events, concepts, or ideas. Encourage students to cite evidence from the book when discussing their ideas.

1. Betty Skelton didn't act the way most girls did in the 1930s. What did she do that was so unusual?
2. How was Betty Skelton's life different from yours? For example, Betty wanted to be a navy pilot but couldn't because she was a woman. Nowadays both men and women can be navy pilots.
3. Here's your chance to create an imaginary interview. Imagine that you could ask Betty Skelton questions about her daring career and that she would answer you. One person in the class should pretend to be Betty Skelton. The others should ask her questions about her life. Include questions about big, important events like her first plane ride and small details like the fact that her dog, Little Tinker, always flew with her.

While you are preparing your interview, you might be interested in listening to a real interview with Betty, which can be found at [C-spanVideo.org/program/292945-1](http://C-spanVideo.org/program/292945-1). See if you can add questions and answers based on what you heard Betty say.

4. Have students make a scrapbook of important events in Betty's life. Draw three or four pictures showing Betty as a daredevil. You can show her in a plane, racecar, speedboat, or training with future astronauts. Write a sentence below each picture to describe what is happening. What would Betty want to remember? You could also download real pictures of Betty from the Internet by typing her name into a search engine website, such as Google. How does your scrapbook show that Betty was a daredevil?

#### Craft and Structure

To learn about craft and structure, the CCSS asks us to help students learn and understand vocabulary words and phrases, think about the features of nonfiction text, and assess the author's point of view. The questions below emphasize these understandings.

1. **What does it mean to be daring?** This activity asks students to work together to discuss and order related words from *daring* to its opposite, *cowardly*. These words are polar opposites. But what words come in between? What word comes after *daring*? That is, it's more like *daring* than any other word. What word comes next? Then what? Students should discuss the shades of meaning between the words as they order them to complete this activity.

To begin, teachers and librarians can watch a seven-minute video showing a teacher using this activity, which is called a *semantic gradient*. You can find the video at [ReadingRockets.org/strategies/semantic\\_gradients/](http://ReadingRockets.org/strategies/semantic_gradients/). Then put the following words on cards:

daring  
fearless  
cowardly  
afraid  
adventurous  
hotheaded  
shy  
cautious

Discuss the meaning of each of the words. Then have the children work with a partner to order the words from most daring to least daring. As they agree on the order, have them paste the words on a long strip of paper.

As a class, review what the students have decided. The conversation is an important part of the activity. It is not necessary for everyone to agree on the order of the words.

2. **Create a Word Splash.** Randomly place a number of vocabulary words and phrases used in the book on a sheet of paper. Have the students connect two of the words and use them in a sentence that tells about Betty Skelton. The sentences can be oral or written and illustrated. Some words you can use are:

- metal plane
- navy base
- amazing
- legal
- license
- career
- aerobatic flying
- fly a plane
- preferred
- inverted ribbon cut
- barefoot
- “L’il stinker”
- altitude record
- racecar
- broke the women’s record
- astronauts
- Mercury Seven
- *Look* magazine

Here’s a sample sentence using two items from the list:

During Betty Skelton’s amazing career, she became famous for the inverted ribbon cut, a flying stunt.

3. Examine the nonfiction text features in the book. Make a chart showing each text feature and what that feature tells the reader. A sample chart might look like this:

TEXT FEATURE	EXTRA INFORMATION
Front Cover	Title, author, illustrator
Back Cover	Pictures that give clues about what the book is about
Title Page	Title, author, publisher
Fun Facts	Extra information about Betty Skelton that is not in the main text
Quotes	Betty Skelton’s exact words
Time Line	Events in Betty Skelton’s life from birth to death

4. Get some insight into how the author/illustrator Meghan McCarthy paints her illustrations. Watch the following two videos:
- a. “Betty Skelton Painting in Progress” at [YouTube.com/watch?v=x9t3yNks2kw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x9t3yNks2kw) shows how McCarthy painted the copy of the *Look* magazine cover that appears in the book.
  - b. “Betty Timelapse” at [YouTube.com/watch?v=6M6EsAxp8DY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6M6EsAxp8DY) shows the development of a painting over time. This is the painting of Betty in 1951 when she succeeded in breaking an altitude record.



## Writing

CCSS emphasizes writing informative and explanatory text in the early grades. The writing activities below provide experience writing to give an opinion, to inform, and to explain a sequence of events.

1. What is your opinion of Betty Skelton? Do you admire her because she was a daredevil or do you think she was foolish to take so many risks? Write your opinion and tell why you think the way you do.
2. Draw and write about why Betty Skelton was called a daredevil. Explain why people thought she was daring.
3. Tell how Betty Skelton learned how to fly and then became a stunt pilot. Use words like *first*, *next*, and *finally* to explain what happened. Check to see that the order of events is correct.
4. Give your opinion of this book. Give reasons to explain your opinion.
5. Using an illustration in the book showing two or more people, imagine that these people could talk. What would they say? Write a one-page play with two or more characters based on the picture. Act it out with a partner or partners.

For example, using the picture of Betty and her father, have them talk about why they agreed she should take her first flight at age twelve. Here's an example of how to begin:

Betty: Dad, I cannot tell you how excited I am to fly. Even though I am only twelve, I know a lot about flying. I know I am ready to fly by myself.

Dad: You cannot tell your mother about this. She would be very upset.

Betty: Okay, Dad, you have my word. I know it's not legal, so we'll keep this a secret.

Dad: Let me boost you up into the plane. Good-bye!

Betty: Dad, this is amazing. It's my dream come true. I know I want to be a pilot. I will not change my mind.

## Extending the Experience of Reading the Book

1. Make a text set of books about woman pilots. Gather and read picture book biographies of these pilots:
  - Bessie Coleman
  - Amelia Earhart
  - Blanche Stuart Scott
  - Harriet Quimby
  - Ruth Law
2. Visit the website of author Meghan McCarthy at [Meghan-McCarthy.com](http://Meghan-McCarthy.com) to learn more about her books, writing, and illustrating. Click on "All About the Books" to find out about the author/illustrator's other books.

