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How History as Mystery Reveals Historical Thinking: A Look at Two Accounts of Finding Typhoid Mary

History mysteries use dual detective stories to reveal historical thinking—the on-the-scene detective solving a past mystery and the present-day historian-detective researching the past.

While the words *clue*, *evidence*, and *detective* might not be the first words you associate with history, the idea of history as a mystery to be solved by historian-detectives has a substantial and lively past. That is because the analogy of a historian to a detective solving a mystery is a strong one. Both historians and detectives try to answer the same question: What happened? Both work with evidence from the past to create a plausible narrative using only fragments left behind. Both engage in inferencing as a means of learning from evidence. Both are problem solvers.

In this article, we look at the implications of the history-mystery analogy for educators and young readers. We argue that presenting history as mystery provides a window on historical thinking that enables readers to consider what it means to “do” history. That means we must consider history as an investigative process that is much more than simply remembering or chronicling past events or drawing on the words of past authorities. To do this, we first look at how historians and educators have explored the history-mystery analogy in the past. Second, we focus on establishing a lens for reading historical nonfiction mysteries with children that is based on the concepts associated with historical thinking. Third, we apply these concepts to two accounts of finding “typhoid Mary”—accounts that emphasize the history-mystery analogy. We conclude by

making specific suggestions for using history mysteries in the classroom.

The History-Mystery Analogy

The strongest, most definitive explanation of the history-mystery analogy comes from the work of historian R. G. Collingwood, whose book *The Idea of History* (1994) makes the case for thinking about the historian as a detective. In an essay titled “The Historical Imagination,” Collingwood writes:

The hero of a detective novel is thinking exactly like an historian when, from indications of the most varied kinds, he constructs an imaginary picture of how a crime was committed, and by whom. (p. 243)

Building on this analogy, Collingwood describes how both the historian and the detective use evidence to make inferences about what happened in the past. In fact, when moving from observable evidence to a historical account, the historian sometimes asks questions and derives information from a document that it was not originally designed to answer. Collingwood refers to this process as the historian “twisting a passage ostensibly . . . thing quite different into an answer to the question he has decided to ask” (p. 270). This process of observing, questioning, and making inferences is what Collingwood claims separates “scissors-and-paste” historians—those who simply repeat the words of authorities—from “scientific historians” who draw their own conclusions.

The history-mystery analogy has been further extended by Robin Winks in *The Historian as Detective: Essays on Evidence* (1969). In this edited collection, Winks introduces essays by various historians who weigh in on the nature of historical evidence, their search for it, and how it is used to construct historical accounts. For example, Winks introduces Carl Becker's essay "Everyman His Own Historian" by stating that "We are all detectives, of course, in that at one time or another we have had to engage in some genuine deductive routine" (p. 4). Becker's essay then elaborates on this by showing in detail how we all engage in historical thinking in our ordinary lives, since "left to themselves, the facts do not speak; left to themselves they do not exist. . . ." (Becker, qtd. in Winks, p. 34).

Similarly, Winks raises the problem of credibility of eyewitness sources before introducing an essay by Thomas Spenser Jerome. Jerome then provides examples of erroneous testimony—for example, eyewitness descriptions of the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in 1906—warning us that "in addition to evidence . . . deliberately manufactured, there is also testimony which has been unconsciously falsified through defects of observation, imagination, and memory" (Jerome, qtd. in Winks, p. 183). The need for historians to work as detectives to corroborate evidence is clear.

In addition to Collingwood and Winks, other historians and academics (see, for example, Couse [1990] and Strout [1994]) have discussed and reaffirmed the history-mystery analogy, making this idea available to educators who want to move toward an active, problem-solving approach to history in the classroom as a starting point for designing more engaging teaching methods. By casting their students in the role of detective, teachers have helped them become active problem solvers rather than passive receivers of a single "best" historical account—often referred to as memory-history (Nora, 1996). And while some educators have written their own mystery documents for students to read (Hicks, Carroll, Doolittle, Lee, & Oliver, 2004), most educators have relied on providing primary sources, asking intriguing questions, and introducing strategies for reading historical documents

as a means of involving students in the process of historical thinking (Enders, 2014; Kirchner, Helm, Pierce, & Galloway, 2011; Nokes, 2013; VanSledright, 2002; Wineburg, 2010). This approach has perhaps best been described by Gerwin and Zevin in their book *Teaching U.S. History as Mystery* (2003) as encouraging students to "view history as a puzzle—a set of dilemmas, a collection of conflicting viewpoints—in short, a mysterious and engaging subject" (p. 2). These educators encourage teachers to "design lessons to perplex, engage, puzzle, and arouse curiosity" (p. 7).



In contrast to presenting history as a finished and agreed upon story, presenting history as mystery introduces students to the thought processes that historians use as they evaluate evidence and construct historical accounts.

A Lens for Reading History: Historical Thinking Concepts

If educators want students to understand history as a mystery, they need to consider themselves detectives, examine primary sources, and understand the thought processes historians use when interpreting their sources and writing historical accounts. Yet, in some instances, the process of historical thinking remains hidden in their history books and in the instruction they receive. As a result, the only activity students are prepared to engage in after reading may be remembering what they read, not critiquing it.

In contrast to presenting history as a finished and agreed upon story, presenting history as mystery introduces students to the thought processes that historians use as they evaluate evidence and construct historical accounts. These historical thinking concepts have been described by Lévesque (2008) and Seixas and Morton (2013) as consisting of the following:

Historical context: Historians try to understand how people thought and acted in the past by learning about the context in which they lived.

Evidence: Historians use evidence—items surviving from the past—to create narrative accounts.

Ethical dimension: Historians think about what we can learn from the past—the relevance of history for our lives today.

Historical significance: Historians determine what information is important enough to remember.

Continuity and change: Historians try to understand how some things change over time and how other things stay the same. They also deal with questions of progress and decline.

Cause and consequence: Historians think about why events happen and the impact of these events.



Both authors, Bartoletti and Jarrow, create not one, but two distinct detective mystery narratives within their books.

When history is written as a mystery to be solved, it offers readers a window onto these thought processes. History mysteries (see, for example, *Searching for Sarah Rector: The Richest Black Girl in America* [Bolden, 2014] or *Secrets of a Civil War Submarine: Solving the Mysteries of the H. L. Hunley* [Walker, 2005]) emphasize the collection of evidence, the evaluation of findings, and the various perspectives of people involved. They provide a window onto the remaining fragments, the evidence, the puzzling situation, and the problem solving—the messiness that is the past unfrozen, incomplete and open to question and interpretation.

How History Mysteries Reveal Historical Thinking

In the sections below, we examine *Terrible Typhoid Mary: A True Story of the Deadliest Cook in America* by Susan Campbell Bartoletti (2015) and *Fatal Fever: Tracking Down Typhoid Mary*

by Gail Jarrow (2015) to see how the authors of these books establish a compelling history mystery and, at the same time, reveal historical thinking. These accounts, appropriate for readers in the fifth through eighth grades, follow the efforts of a sanitary engineer named George Soper to determine the cause of a 1906 typhoid outbreak in Oyster Bay, New York, and then stop its spread. Once Soper becomes convinced that the source of the outbreak is a cook named Mary Mallon, both books follow his attempts to find her and stop her from spreading disease. It's an exciting chase and a compelling aftermath.

But there is much more to these books. Both authors, Bartoletti and Jarrow, create not one, but two distinct detective mystery narratives within their books. The first is the story of George Soper's efforts to find Mary Mallon and stop her from spreading typhoid. We refer to Soper as the *detective on the scene*. The second story is each author's work as a *present-day historian-detective* using historical sense-making strategies to examine the evidence left behind.

These “dual detective stories” work to make the story a page-turner and at the same time reveal historical thinking. That is, the detective on the scene—like any mystery detective—tackles the perplexing problem in front of him, gathers evidence to solve it, evaluates this evidence, and resolves the mystery. In contrast, the present-day historian-detective collects evidence about the past mystery and uses historical sense-making concepts to make sense of this evidence for today's readers. In our discussion below, we show how three historical sense-making concepts—historical context, evidence, and ethics—play a major role in how each author interprets the past.

Terrible Typhoid Mary by Susan Campbell Bartoletti

Terrible Typhoid Mary focuses on the story of Mary Mallon. Readers learn about her personal background as an Irish immigrant, her employment as a cook, her personal relationships, the discovery that she was a healthy carrier of typhoid, and her treatment by officials of the Department of Health.

Threaded throughout are the two detective stories mentioned above—how George Soper tracked down Mary Mallon and how Susan Campbell Bartoletti made sense of these events from her current perspective.

George Soper, Detective on the Scene

Immediately after health department officials declared that the cause of the 1906 typhoid outbreak in Oyster Bay was a mystery, the author introduces George Soper as a detective determined to confront this mystery and solve it. Bartoletti tells us:

An epidemiologist works like a detective, gathering information from all types of sources to determine how disease spreads and how it can be controlled and eradicated. Soper retraced the steps of the earlier investigators, hoping to find a clue they overlooked. He tried to create a logical reconstruction of how the outbreak had occurred. (pp. 28–29) (emphasis added)

As the story continues, Soper is referred to as working “like a detective trying to solve a mystery” (p. 36), “building a case” (p. 37), “collect[ing] the evidence to support his theory” (p. 38), encountering “false clues” (p. 39) and “faulty memories” (p. 39), and “put[ting] the facts together” (p. 33). Some employers, he found, barely remembered the cooks they employed. Some servants refused to reveal what they knew about other servants. Still, Soper persisted.

Soper asked himself why the typhoid outbreak occurred only in one house. After interviewing the members of the household, he realized that the only change in this household was the hiring of a new cook, Mary Mallon. Soper had a theory that she could be a “healthy carrier,” a person who once had typhoid and recovered, but still had typhoid germs in her body that she could spread to others. This, in effect, proved to be correct, but only after the police forced Mary Mallon into an ambulance and took her against her will to Willard Parker Hospital where she was tested for typhoid contamination.

In the end, Soper constructed his own account of the events and came to a conclusion. Bartoletti tells us, “Soper put the facts together this way: the seemingly healthy Mary Mallon had a gallbladder and intestines teeming with typhoid bacteria”

(p. 33). It is a conclusion based on the evidence he uncovered through his persistent detective work.

Susan Campbell Bartoletti, Present-Day Historian-Detective

Writing more than 100 years after George Soper’s investigation of Mary Mallon, Susan Campbell Bartoletti examines the evidence of his investigation and shares her findings. In narrating Soper’s detective story, she uses historical thinking strategies to make sense of what happened. Most important, she makes these thinking strategies visible to us in several ways. She explains the historical context of the early 1900s and how it differs from today; she sifts through the available evidence, questions it, and opens it up for further discussion; and she considers the ethical implications of what was said and done in the past.

Explaining the Historical Context. Understanding the context of past events—how people lived and thought—helps us avoid *presentism*, or judging past events by today’s standards. It also prevents us from relying on *hindsight*, or seeing past events as inevitable because we know how they turned out.

Bartoletti counters these problems by providing extensive explanations of what life was like in 1906, the year these events began. She tells readers about what a good servant would and would not do (i.e., she would be humble and would never address her employer by his or her first name), what Mary Mallon’s daily routine as a cook was like (i.e., rising by 6 a.m., emptying her chamber pot, lighting the stove—all before preparing all the daily meals), and what a well-equipped kitchen of the time would look like (i.e., gas stove, but no refrigerator or freezer). She explains that a “good servant wasn’t uppity. She knew her place. If a servant was smarter than her employer, she never showed it. She was humble” (p. 4).

In addition to descriptions of Mary Mallon’s immediate environment, Bartoletti also explains the general knowledge and attitudes of the time. In the early 1900s, for example, there were “strict ideas about womanhood and marriage. . .” (p. 46). The ideal woman should be married, have children, and not work outside the home. Mary Mallon did not fit

this ideal—one possible reason that George Soper had so much trouble understanding why she resisted his efforts to help her. She needed her job, and to keep it, she needed to be seen as healthy.

The author also makes a number of “now-and-then” contrasts that provide further insight into the historical context. One of these contrasts deals with the power of the Department of Health. Today, Bartoletti tells readers, health officials must obey the law. The Fourth Amendment of our Constitution protects citizens from unreasonable searches and seizures. In 1907, however, the New York City Department of Health “could create laws, pass the laws it created, and enforce the laws it made” (p. 63). When George Soper convinced health department officials that Mary Mallon must be apprehended even against her will, they simply agreed to do it. Clearly, this would not be acceptable procedure today.



Historical accounts are based on evidence, but this evidence is rigorously examined and evaluated.

Examining the Evidence. Historical accounts are based on evidence, but this evidence is rigorously examined and evaluated. Bartoletti models this process in a number of ways—by asking questions, noting gaps in available information, speculating on possible answers to her questions, and offering interpretations.

Bartoletti presents historical evidence to her readers and, at the same time, raises questions about it. When she explains that the New York City Department of Health forced Mary Mallon to undergo tests to see if she had ever had typhoid and still had the germs in her body, the author asks these questions: “If Mary Mallon didn’t agree to the examination, did the city have the right to take her into custody? To force her to submit to an examination? What about Mary’s civil rights?” (p. 60–61). When further explaining that the health department quarantined Mary against her will, the author asks, “Did it have the right to quarantine Mary, a woman who *seemed* to make others sick while she remained

healthy?” (pp. 92–93). In this way, readers see that raising questions about historical evidence is a part of historical thinking.

Bartoletti further explains that there are gaps in historical evidence and that when thinking about these gaps, we can responsibly speculate about what might have happened. Among the many examples she provides is her discussion of the tests performed on Mary Mallon’s blood, urine, and feces specimens. Mary had her good friend August Breihof take her specimens to a laboratory that was different from the one used by the health department. When the second laboratory reported that Mary didn’t have typhoid and never had it in the past, Bartoletti suggests several possible reasons for this finding: First, the specimens had not been delivered in an appropriate time frame. Second, the lab technicians could have been careless and didn’t obtain correct results. Third, Mary was an “intermittent carrier,” someone who was not always emitting typhoid germs. Fourth, the city wanted to experiment on her and didn’t care if she was a carrier or not. All of these are possibilities.

Finally, Bartoletti offers her own conclusions about some of the evidence uncovered. When Mary revealed that she feared the health department wanted to perform surgery on her and even kill her, Bartoletti comments that Mary’s conclusion “wasn’t baseless. Stories of murderers and grave robbers who sold bodies to medical doctors for anatomic study and dissection are found in Irish history and folk history” (p. 83). When a newspaper article claimed that Mary’s life in quarantine was one of total isolation, Bartoletti writes, “This wasn’t entirely true” (p. 99). Bartoletti notes that Mary had become friends with a nurse named Adelaide Jane Offspring and that the two were often seen walking together on the island. Offspring herself “later wrote that Mary was permitted to have visitors” (p. 99). As a present-day historian-detective, she sets the record straight by sharing her thoughts and conclusions.

Raising Ethical Questions. The major ethical question raised by this book is this: Was Mary Mallon treated fairly? There is evidence on both sides, making this an intriguing question. On the one hand, Mary was a danger to people, causing illness and

death. She refused to believe that she was a typhoid carrier, and despite strong warnings not to work as a cook, she continued to do so. She had to be stopped.

On the other hand, the Department of Health took unusual steps, depriving Mary of her rights guaranteed by the Constitution against unreasonable searches and seizures. They did this while keeping their actions secret. Had they overstepped their bounds? Was George Soper simply using Mary for his own advancement? Were other doctors also using her condition to advance their careers?

Bartoletti is sympathetic to Mary Mallon. She questions why Mary's civil rights were ignored. She refers to her as being "kidnapped" (p. 76) and treated as a "prisoner" (p. 75) even though she had not committed a crime. As Bartoletti tells us, "Mary had committed no crime, yet here she was, kidnapped, surrounded by sick people, cut off from the outside world, and forced to submit to medical tests" (p. 76). She also reminds us that the second time Mary was apprehended, she went "without a lawyer, a court hearing, or a jury trial. . ." (p. 93).

Bartoletti is also sympathetic to George Soper. In her Afterword she asks, "Was George Soper a bad guy?" (p. 149), and concludes that he was not. She tells us that although he did try to promote his career, above all he was genuinely interested in promoting the health and well-being of others. He had worked on other public health projects involving New York City's sewage disposal and the ventilation of its subway system and had contributed plans for Chicago's water supply and sewage system.

What Bartoletti condemns is the overreaching power of the New York City Department of Health—its power to make and enforce its own laws, its violation of Constitutional guarantees, and its disrespectful treatment of Mary Mallon. Bartoletti notes that Mary was not the only healthy carrier in New York City. As Mary's lawyer told the court when she had finally been granted a court hearing, there were five other healthy carriers identified in New York City in 1909, but none of them had been quarantined. Was this fair?

By weighing in on the questions of Mary Mallon's treatment, the author shows us how we can think about the choices people made. What was

the right thing to do? What can we learn from these decisions? What can we learn from Mary Mallon's experience that can help us make decisions today? These questions help us think about the relevance of the past for our lives today.

***Fatal Fever* by Gail Jarrow**

Fatal Fever focuses on the story of George Soper. Readers learn that a combination of factors—his father's death from tuberculosis, exciting scientific discoveries about lethal bacteria, and unsanitary conditions in US cities needing immediate remedy—motivated Soper's lifelong interest in fighting disease. As readers follow his detective work, they are also introduced to author Gail Jarrow's work as a present-day historian-detective with her own perspective on the past. To examine these dual detective stories, we begin with George Soper's story.

George Soper, Detective on the Scene

Well before she introduces the Oyster Bay mystery involving Mary Mallon, Gail Jarrow focuses on George Soper's successful career, describing him as a "germ detective," a man whose entire life was affected by infectious disease. She details his earlier work in Galveston, Texas in 1900, where he prevented the outbreak of typhoid and other diseases after a disastrous hurricane, and in Ithaca, New York in 1903, where he investigated the city's water supply and sewage system in order to stop the spread of typhoid. It was because of this successful work that he was later called to Oyster Bay. Jarrow emphasizes Soper's strong reputation.

As in *Terrible Typhoid Mary*, readers follow Soper's detective work. When he reaches Oyster Bay, he examines earlier reports of the typhoid outbreak, interviews residents, checks the water supply for contamination, and investigates the food supply. When none of these turn out to be the source of typhoid contamination, he throws out his early hypotheses.

He then learns that during the summer, the Warrens (the family living in the house where the typhoid outbreak occurred) had changed cooks, and he attempts to track her down. After four months

of investigation, he finds that in seven of the eight households where this cook, Mary Mallon, had worked during the past ten years, someone had developed typhoid. It was a “disturbing pattern” (p. 53). Based on his knowledge of lethal germs, he suspects that Mary is a healthy carrier, but he needs proof. As Jarrow reminds us, “It was possible that her [Mary’s] connection to these cases had been an unfortunate coincidence. After all, typhoid fever was widespread in the New York area” (p. 54). Soper needed to test her body for typhoid bacteria, but first he needed to find her and convince her to cooperate. The chase begins.

Once Mary Mallon was located, taken by force to Willard Parker Hospital, and checked for typhoid, the results confirmed Soper’s suspicions. The samples of her feces were “teeming with typhoid bacteria” (p. 81). He had succeeded in identifying and tracking down Typhoid Mary. It was a compelling case.

Gail Jarrow, Present-Day Historian-Detective

Like Susan Campbell Bartoletti, Gail Jarrow uses historical thinking strategies to make sense of the past and shares the results with her readers. She skillfully builds our understanding of the historical context of the early 1900s—particularly the causes, spread, and treatment of typhoid at that time. She supplies the evidence needed to answer this question: Who brought typhoid under control, and how was it done? She also raises ethical questions about how to deal with people who contract deadly, contagious diseases. Her use of these historical thinking strategies is visible throughout the book.

Explaining the Historical Context. Jarrow establishes the historical context by using a combination of chapters and sidebars. First, she provides basic information about the past within each chapter as she narrates Soper’s detective story. Then, for a topic requiring more in-depth information, she provides a sidebar that comes at the end of the chapter and extends for several pages. A look at a few examples shows how this is done.

In a chapter titled, “Germ Detective,” Jarrow tells us about how typhoid was understood and treated in the early 1900s and the impact of

the disease on the population of the United States. She tells us that in the year 1900, typhoid attacked nearly 400,000 Americans and was fatal for approximately 10–30% of them. At that time, there was no medical treatment or surgical operation that could cure those patients.

The sidebar that follows this chapter is titled “Typhoid Fever,” and it tells readers that typhoid existed as early as prehistoric times, but that it was not until the 1880s and 1890s that doctors and scientists accepted the idea of germ theory—that is, they understood that a microorganism caused typhoid. This was a major advancement in medical knowledge that contributed to Soper’s thinking.

A chapter titled “A Threat to the City,” describes how Soper realized that Mary Mallon was a healthy carrier. Soper found evidence that Mary Mallon had spread typhoid over a 10-year period.

A corresponding sidebar titled “The Healthy Carriers” provides additional historical background about carriers. During the Spanish-American War when soldiers were infected with typhoid, doctors first began to suspect that a seemingly healthy person could be spreading the disease among them. This theory was later confirmed by the work of Robert Koch, a German bacteriologist who studied the spread of typhoid in several German villages. This sidebar goes beyond defining *healthy carrier* to explain how knowledge of this condition developed.

In a third chapter, “Island Exile,” Jarrow describes Mary Mallon’s forced exile to North Brother Island. The author argues that Mary Mallon did not receive the same treatment as other healthy carriers even though she probably sickened fewer people than they did.

The corresponding sidebar, titled “Mary Wasn’t the Only One,” compares her treatment to other carriers. Beginning with the statement that “She probably wasn’t the most dangerous carrier” (p. 130), Jarrow tells us about four other healthy carriers identified by the New York City Department of Health and explains that none of them had been exiled. This sidebar ends with a startling fact: In the year of Mary’s death, there were approximately 400 known healthy typhoid carriers in New York City, yet none of them had been held captive.

Jarrow's use of chapters followed by sidebars is a useful technique. In the chapters, she keeps the story of Soper's detective work moving quickly, telling us the most basic and essential information. In the sidebars, in contrast, she slows down to provide more detailed background information, helping us understand the historical context in which Soper was working.

Examining the Evidence. Gail Jarrow uses two interesting approaches to deal with historical evidence. The first is to raise questions about typhoid and then find the evidence to answer them. The second approach is to raise questions that show the vastly different perspectives of Mary Mallon and George Soper.

The evidence Gail Jarrow includes in *Fatal Fever* corresponds to the questions she raises about the past. In her author's note, Jarrow reveals how her interest in biology and history led to her interest in disease—especially diseases that were once widespread but now are under control. She wondered, “Who brought these diseases under control, and how did they do it?” (p. 157).

Her curiosity about typhoid stemmed from her knowledge of a major outbreak of the disease in her hometown of Ithaca, New York. As she pursued her interest in typhoid, she realized that George Soper was involved in halting the typhoid epidemics in Ithaca and later in New York City. She writes, “When I realized that one man, George Soper, played a key role in both events, I was hooked on the typhoid story” (p. 157).

Because of her interest in Soper as a successful problem solver, Jarrow presents a great deal of evidence of his exemplary work, showing him as a highly respected man of agency and achievement. Readers learn that he “had rescued Galveston” after a severe hurricane in 1900 (p. 34). Later, when a respected bacteriologist learned that Soper would be in charge of the cleanup in Ithaca, he called him “a man of practical experience and energy, combined with scientific knowledge. . .” (p. 35). Jarrow explains how, upon arriving in Ithaca, Soper worked tirelessly. He talked with health officials, examined the water system, recommended a water filtration system, hired people to clean and disinfect sewage systems,

and more. Not only did the residents of Ithaca respect and follow Soper's advice, the New York State Commissioner of Health referred to the cost for Soper's services as “cheap at any price” (p. 42). And when the owners of the house in Oyster Bay wanted to find out the cause of the typhoid outbreak, they hired “first-rate expert” (p. 46) George Soper.

Jarrow presents a tale of accomplishment and achievement in order to answer her questions. Yet since Jarrow's questions and her focus do not entirely match Bartoletti's, the result is that the two narratives are somewhat different. Jarrow, for example, is the only author to deal with Soper's work in Galveston and Ithaca.

In addition to gathering evidence to answer her own questions, Jarrow uses questions to highlight the different perspectives of Mary Mallon and George Soper and to suggest what they might be thinking. As the police and the health department pursue Mary, Jarrow raises these questions from Mary's point of view: “Why were they persecuting her? She didn't have typhoid and never had. Why didn't they believe her?” (p. 77). When Mary is taken to the hospital for tests, Jarrow suggests what Mary might have been thinking: “How could she give typhoid fever to someone when she wasn't sick herself—and never had been?” (p. 78). And when George Soper arrives at the hospital, Mary might have thought, “What did Dr. George Soper want with her now?” (p. 84). From these questions, readers see Mary's confusion, her anger, and her disbelief. George Soper, in turn, has every expectation that he can convince her to cooperate by answering this simple, direct question: “Would Mary tell him when she'd had typhoid, where she'd worked, and who else might have gotten the fever from her?” (p. 85). These questions help us understand how Mallon and Soper see the same situation very differently.

Raising Ethical Questions. In her author's note, Jarrow asks us to think about ethical questions. What was the right thing to do? Were New York City health officials right to isolate Mary Mallon or should they have acted differently? Jarrow invites us to pursue this question, stating “I leave it to the reader to decide” (p. 159).

Jarrow then raises additional questions that help readers consider how these same issues are still with us today. In effect, she challenges us to see if there are lessons we can learn from history. Here is what she asks us to think about:

What should health authorities do today when confronted with deadly, contagious diseases with no known cure?

What should the government do to protect us from these diseases?

Is it right to sacrifice the rights of a single person in order to protect the population of a city?

These are persistent questions with no simple solutions. By showing the continuity between problems in the past and those in the present, Jarrow helps us see the past as a resource for us to learn from. Her concluding sentence emphasizes this: “The events of a century ago can guide us as we confront these questions now and in the future” (p. 159). By providing readers with the foundation for thinking about health issues, the author helps readers grow as informed decision makers.

Using History Mysteries in the Classroom

Books like *Terrible Typhoid Mary* and *Fatal Fever* are excellent choices for classroom use. These books read like thrillers while introducing the process of historical thinking. They show that even when using the same historical thinking strategies, authors still provide their unique perspectives on the past. By reading and discussing these books, students also meet the following Common Core Standards:

RH.6-8.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

RH.6-8.5: Describe how a text presents information (e.g., sequentially, comparatively, causally).

Next, we provide some suggestions for using this material with students.

Reading Like a Detective

Examine how the author uses historical thinking concepts by posing questions such as these:

Historical Context: What have you learned about the time in which the events in this story took place? What is familiar to you because it resembles your life? What is unfamiliar? Why does this matter?

Examining Evidence: What kinds of questions does the author raise? How do these questions help you understand the people and events described?

Ethics: Did the people described in the book make good decisions? What do you think would have been the right thing to do? Why?

Using Mentor Texts

Learn about writing history by examining how successful authors do it. For example, look at how each author explains historical context.

Look closely at Gail Jarrow’s use of chapters and sidebars to explain historical context. Then try out this technique by adding an additional sidebar to this book.

Look closely at how Susan Campbell Bartoletti makes now-and-then contrasts. After doing some research, compare the response to typhoid in the 1900s to the response to the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, which began in 2013 and lasted for two years.

Reading Additional History Mysteries

A number of recent history books closely follow investigations of the past to make sense of them for the present. By reading and discussing these books, students can further refine their understanding of historical thinking. One way to do this is to create a data chart where students collect samples of how an author explains historical context, examines the evidence, and raises ethical questions.

Here are some suggested titles to get you started:

Bubonic Panic: When Plague Invaded America
by Gail Jarrow

Forgotten Bones: Uncovering a Slave Cemetery
by Lois Miner Huey

The Many Faces of George Washington: Remaking a Presidential Icon by Carla Killough McClafferty

Maritcha: A Nineteenth-Century American Girl by Tonya Bolden

Searching for Sarah Rector: The Richest Black Girl in America by Tonya Bolden

Secrets of a Civil War Submarine: Solving the Mysteries of the H. L. Hunley by Sally M. Walker

Above all, help students appreciate the mysterious and puzzling nature of history!

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INTO THE CLASSROOM WITH READWRITETHINK

In “Looking for the History in Historical Fiction: An Epidemic for Reading,” students brainstorm what they know about communicable disease and epidemics. They are then introduced to historical fiction and select a historical fiction novel to read from a booklist. They use a set of guiding questions to prompt critical thinking as they read. After they finish the novel, students use nonfiction books and websites to gather facts about the infectious disease, illness, or epidemic discussed in their piece of historical fiction. Students then find examples of both verifiable fact and fiction in the historical fiction novels they read and write a reflection paper. Finally, students complete a project of their choice from a list of possible projects, including literary analysis, plot analysis, research about disease outbreaks, a disease prevention poster, and more.

<http://bit.ly/2dD5jjD>

Tune in to the *Chatting about Books* podcast, Episode 31 on Historical Fiction, to hear about three historical fiction titles. Also listen to a chat with Jenny Moss, the author of *Winnie’s War*. Jenny discusses why she chose this particular time in history, how she created the character Winnie, and how she was able to weave history into her story. They also discuss Winnie’s relationships in the book and how historical fiction can still be pertinent to kids today.

<http://bit.ly/2dCFEwC>

In “Becoming History Detectives Using *Shakespeare’s Secret*,” students use *Shakespeare’s Secret* by Elise Broach as a springboard to explore the controversy regarding the authorship of Shakespeare’s works. The novel makes liberal use of the historical details surrounding William Shakespeare’s life and exposes students to the possibility raised by some theorists that Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, was the true author of the works that have long been attributed to the Bard. Students explore the historical references in the novel and generate questions for further research. As they research these questions, they organize their findings using an online graphic organizer. Then they work in small groups to create and present short dramatic skits that creatively connect the novel with the historical facts.

<http://bit.ly/2enAeEy>

Lisa Storm Fink



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