

Launching Nonfiction Author Studies:  
A focus for teaching the Common Core State Standards with books by

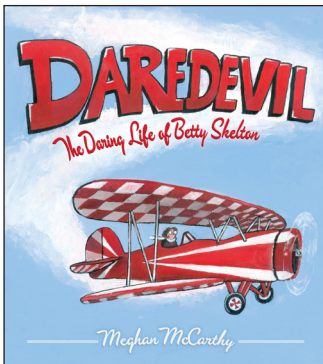
MEGHAN MCCARTHY



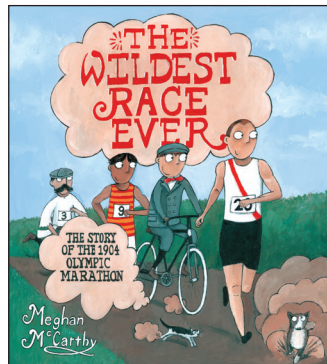
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Books

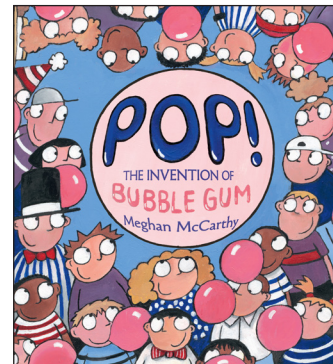
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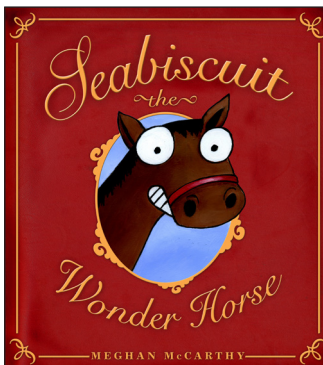
*Daredevil:  
The Daring Life of  
Betty Skelton*



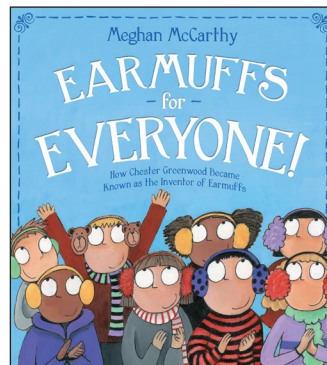
*The Wildest Race Ever:  
The Story of the 1904  
Olympic Marathon*



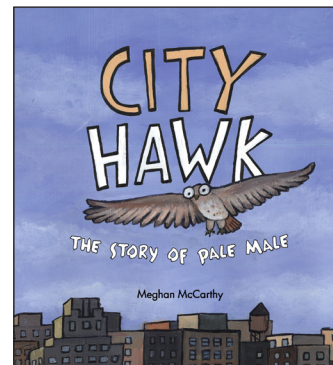
*Pop!:  
The Invention of  
Bubble Gum*



*Seabiscuit  
the Wonder Horse*



*Earmuffs for Everyone!:  
How Chester Greenwood Became  
Known as the Inventor of Earmuffs*



*City Hawk:  
The Story of Pale Male*

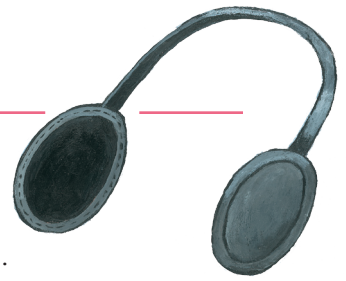
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Background Information

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Introduce younger readers to picture book biographies of daring and inventive people such as “daredevil” Betty Skelton—who broke speed records on the ground, in the air, and in the water—and Walter Diemer, the accountant-turned-experimental-scientist who invented bubble gum. Learn about animals that people have taken to their hearts, such as Pale Male, the red-tailed hawk that built a nest on the side of an apartment building overlooking New York City’s Central Park, and Seabiscuit, the horse who went from being an underdog to being a champion racehorse. Each story is complemented by Meghan McCarthy’s bold, acrylic paintings featuring her trademark “googly-eyed” portraits. These biographies are perfect for supporting content area learning and for introducing the features of biography. Encourage students to discuss the content of these books and share their ideas in writing.

## Activities for Launching Your Author Study



CCSS Connection: The first two activities below deal with asking and answering questions about a text, identifying the main topic and key details that support it, and describing the relationship between a series of events, concepts, or ideas (RI.1–2.1) (RI.1–3.2).

These activities are based on *Daredevil: The Daring Life of Betty Skelton*. At a time when most women did not even consider flying airplanes, driving race cars, or training to go into space, Betty Skelton did just that. *Daredevil* 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.

1. **Imaginary Interview.** 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](https://www.c-span.org/Program/292945-1). See if you can add questions and answers based on what you heard Betty say. Also visit author Meghan McCarthy's website at [Meghan-McCarthy.com](https://www.Meghan-McCarthy.com) to see a video of Betty Skelton, as well as newspaper articles and photographs.

2. **Scrapbooking.** 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, in a race car, in a speedboat, and training with future astronauts. Write a sentence below each picture to describe what is happening. What would Betty want to remember? You can Google pictures of Betty that you can also include in your scrapbook. How does your scrapbook show that Betty was a daredevil?

CCSS Connection: The next two activities provide practice writing informative and explanatory text. These activities provide experience writing to give an opinion, to inform, and to explain a sequence of events (W.1–3.1, 2, 3).

These activities are based on *Seabiscuit*. 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.

3. What is your opinion of Seabiscuit. Was he a hero? Write your thoughts about this horse.

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# 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



## Why Author Studies?

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Beyond seeing the author as a person—a writer with information and a point of view to share—author study (studying several books by one author) provides us with a rich yet manageable way of looking at the decisions an author makes when creating a work of nonfiction. These decisions are about content, word choice, illustration, and original thoughts and interpretations.

Thinking about how an author creates nonfiction raises many questions for young readers and writers to think about: After researching a topic, what information goes into the book? What doesn't? Why? How should the book begin in order to grab the reader's attention? How should it end in order to keep the reader thinking about the topic? What information is best introduced through pictures, photographs, graphs, or tables? What features like sidebars and primary sources would add interest to the page? In what ways are the author's books similar? How are they different? As students engage in author study they think about how an author answered these questions.

Not surprisingly, these same questions are highlighted in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The Standards emphasize reading informational text to determine key ideas and details, an author's point of view, how the author structures and crafts information, how new vocabulary is introduced, and how visual material works together with written text. It's a match! That is, by engaging in author studies students are also meeting many Common Core Standards for reading and understanding informational text.

This guide features books and suggested activities that can be used to jumpstart a nonfiction author study. This will open the door to critical inquiry and focused discussion of informational text. By aligning activities to Common Core State Standards, students learn content while becoming critical consumers of that content. That's powerful instruction.

—Myra Zarnowski, Queens College, CUNY

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