

# Young Writers Workshop

*History Inspires Stories*

June 14 – 18, 2021

**STATE HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY OF IOWA**

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IOWA DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

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Each student's object of inspiration precedes their fiction story.

A brief introduction about each object is provided.

## **Introduction: History Inspires Stories**

Stephanie Hemphill

Stories transport us to worlds, lives and experiences outside ourselves. They entertain us, surprise us, delight us, move us, and expand our thoughts and ideas. They help us to understand ourselves and others. They connect us, and they can change us. We step inside characters and worlds we might otherwise never access. We might never imagine on our own. Stories inspire us to create new worlds on the page and sometimes new directions in our lives.

History is at heart a diverse collection of narratives of the past. The State Historical Museum collects and curates stories of Iowa's past through artifacts and exhibits. Every object on display reveals a historical narrative about the origin of the object or the time and place from which it came, or often, about all three.

There is no history without stories, and there are no stories without history. But some fiction is more obviously linked to the past or inspired by the past. Historical fiction intentionally transports readers to a past time and place. It's a delicate balance of research and creativity. While it often includes real people and events, the genre allows for the creation of a wholly unique story, asking only that the writer capture details of the time period as accurately as possible.

The stories in this anthology are largely, but not exclusively, historical fiction. They are all inspired by an object from the State Historical Museum. No fictional world or setting exists in a vacuum. All require the same careful, specific details and research to place readers definitively inside the story, especially when locations change.

The young authors were inspired in delightful creative directions. Even when the objects are the same, the stories greatly differ. They each transport us to worlds, lives and experiences outside our own.

## Elias Bethards



Object Information: Uniform coat from Adam Larrabee. Worn during the War of 1812.

## **Soldiers Journal**

By Elias Bethards

### **Soldiers journal, 12/8/1812**

Private James Bralyn, reporting for the third artillery. I know it sounds like I'm telling a thumper, but I've been trapped in a cave. It's frightening sure, but panicking would be like Tomson's colt, completely unnecessary. We've gotten out of worse, in fact, just a few days ago we held back thirty Indians, no lie. We have food for about a month, some fresh drinking water, and loads of candles. I'm sure that someone will find us by then, we're practically legendary. We just fought in Canada, and I'd say we made quite the impression. We blew three regiments to the ground. When they talk about the battle of Fort Erie, they'll talk about us. The way we got trapped in this cave was an unfortunate artillery misfire. The mouth caved in, and here we are. I'm really not that worried. I'm keeping this journal because if I die, I want people to know my story. I may have to keep a death count—a dark thought. Private James Bralyn, that's all for now.

### **Soldiers journal, 13/8/1812**

Private James Bralyn, reporting for the third artillery. Yesterday I said that I wanted people to know my story, and I suppose my story should start at the beginning. I was your average brown-haired, wide-eyed American boy, eager to fight for my country. When I left to fight the war, I realized that I had changed my mind and wanted to go home. I can't do that, it's called deserting and they kill you for it. My mind was once again changed when I met my best friend Michael Harrison. I'm not the most decisive person. I'm originally from Iowa and Mike is from Missouri. We're still trapped in the cave, Michael, Eric, Cally, Marls, Joseph, Bryan, Calen, Kel, around eleven others that I don't know, and me. Oh, and the Lieutenant, I hate him. We counted out our rations. We have just enough food for our ten people to live sustainably for a month, same with water. I'm not looking forward to eating nothing but salted pork for a month, but hey, why not. Private James Bralyn, that's all for now.

### **Soldiers journal, 14/8/1812**

Private James Bralyn, reporting for the third artillery. Scurvy, Michael was worried that we might all die of scurvy. I believe it's a disease you get if you don't eat your vegetables. It sounds like a tale told to scare stubborn children, but I digress. I heard somewhere that scurvy takes three months to set in. If it does, then we'll already be dead anyway.

### **Soldiers journal, 16/8/1812**

Private James Bralyn, reporting for the third artillery. Some strange things are happening round here. I'm not actually sure of the date. There's hardly any light in this cave. Marly Kipper tried to take extra rations, personally I hate the salted beef and that weird tasting water, but hey, you get what you get. Anyway, Marls tried to take extra food and the Lieutenant Chicagoed him. He was crying for an hour and had a limp for the rest of the day. We've been trying to shift the boulders away from the cave mouth, but our attempts weren't exactly lally-coolers. Private James Bralyn, that's all for now.

### **Soldiers journal, 20/8/1812**

James Bralyn, I've had no time to write. Death count: Fourteen. Me and six others remain. Joseph is dead. He went to investigate the caves yesterday and didn't come back. We found his body full of Indian arrows. We found them, and we fought them. They fought savagely, and killed ten of our nineteen. It may seem strange, but fighting again was a relief, something I was used to. Considering the Indians somehow found their way into this cave there must've been a way out, too bad the whole tunnel collapsed in our battle. There was one roast chicken at their camp, three of our ten died fighting over it. The lieutenant got to eat it. I hate him.

### **Soldiers journal, 31/8/1812**

James Bralyn, I'm scared and I'm hungry. Death count: fifteen. Just me and five others. It's been a while since I've written, and in that time my perspective seems to have changed. Cally tried to sneak an extra portion, just like Marls, and the lieutenant killed him. It's the scariest thing I've ever seen in all my twenty two years. I think everyone is restless. They're all shining around, pacing up and down the cavern. I have to be careful not to let them see what I'm writing. The lieutenant beat James for talking bad about him, if he finds my journal, if anyone finds my journal, I'm dead.

### **Soldiers journal,**

I don't know what day it is. I'm very hungry. Death count: fifteen still. We are almost out of food, and I think the lieutenant is taking extra for himself. He seems not to be as hungry as the rest of us, but trying to stop him would really be waking snakes. The lieutenant beat me. My trousers are ripped and one of the buttons of my coat disappeared. He is quick to anger, and so am I. I have to control myself, so I don't hit back.

### **Soldiers journal,**

We are out of water, we tried drinking our own... well you know, but it only made us more thirsty. We are going to die, there is no chance for survival, I am sure of it. Our food supply is almost entirely depleted. Goodbye. That is all.

### **Soldiers journal,**

Thank god, we found a stream of fresh water deep in the cave. We are no longer thirsty, but instead of our thirst, more hunger. Someone is coming, they cannot see my journal.

### **Soldiers journal,**

We are out of food. Death count: sixteen. Four others left. Have you ever seen a wolf eat? Bryan killed Michael over a slice of beef. I am so very hungry, it's all I can think about. I am horrified at myself. I considered eating Michael. Just a small bite.

### **Soldiers journal**

I am hungry. I want to hurt the lieutenant. It's not fair. He took extra food. I think the lieutenant wants to eat me. I think he would kill me. I should kill him first. This is a good plan. I will do it.

Yes.

### **Soldiers journal**

Death count: eighteen. Two by my hand. Someone stole my journal, along with my secret stash of food, I raided the lieutenant's bag once he was dead, he had extra food. I thought Kel stole it, everything went black and next thing I remember, Kel was dead and my fists were bloody. What is happening to me? I am so Hungry. My food is gone. I found my journal though.

### **Soldiers journal**

I found food—worms and bugs. Death count: nineteen. My clothes are torn to shreds. I am still hungry. There are not many of us left. Bryan tried to kill me, I tore him apart. I considered eating him, so I smashed my hand with a rock.

### **Soldiers journal**

Everyone is after me. They all want to kill me. I cannot sleep, they will kill me in my sleep. They will hurt me. My stomach hurts me, so I hurt it. That doesn't help, it doesn't stop the pain. My

book is so important to me. I will protect it, everyone wants to take it. I think I hear footsteps, I must go.

### **Soldiers journal**

I was set free. Death count Twenty: only me left. A man with two delicious cows heard me screaming in my cave. He dug me out. Calen offered me a truce but Calen is a liar. Everyone is a liar, so I killed him, and I enjoyed it. I tried to be grateful to the man who set me free. But I was so hungry, so very hungry. His cows were good, I ate them raw. But I was still hungry. He tried to run, but he was not fast enough.

I am not hungry any more.



# Hadley Harvey



Object Information: Portrait of Colonel Cyrus Bussey by Reuben LeGrand Johnston, 1891.

## Reuben's Window

By Hadley Harvey

I watched as Reuben gently stroked the canvas with the oil paint. It was a spitting image of the human standing beyond the canvas. It had been two days, and the portrait was almost finished. Cyrus stood in front of a window, the light hitting his face just right. The blue and green past the window more intriguing than the human beside it. I could only imagine how the moment, if captured exactly as seen color and all, would look on a wall. The oils being slapped on the canvas were not enough. I cringed, and my heart shattered as Reuben sighed and painted dark green where the window should be. When I asked him why he makes the backgrounds he paints so blank, and he answered a portrait isn't about the scenery just the person. People like it that way, they don't want anything to take their spotlight. He held out his brush to the side without moving his eyes off the canvas. I quickly grabbed the brush, ran to a bin of oil, dipped the brush in, took it out and wiped off the excess oil with a cloth. I then returned the brush to Reuben. It was hard work being Reuben's apprentice, running around, cleaning brushes, getting paints. I enjoyed it though. It showed me what being a real painter is like. It would only be a day now before all the details were put into place.

After the day was gone Cyrus left the room and walked up the stairs of the two story house. Reuben and I headed out too leaving the art supplies and canvas in the living room. I grabbed a cloth and covered the painting when it was dry then left the household. Reuben walked down the street alone to his grand estate. He made a living doing what he loved, but that living was fading with the new invention of the camera. I don't think he wanted to spend his life painting portraits. I walked behind him towards the place I called home. I was only a 12 year old boy, not old enough to live on my own and I had no parents, so Reuben let me stay at his house. Reuben was a kind man, always looked out for me ever since I first asked for a job painting. I was the one that came up with the whole apprentice idea. He had a nice house with turquoise wallpaper, dark wood furniture, regal carpet patterns, and slight gold accents which was standard for a house in the 1890s. He had a particular tea set with gold designs that I've always wanted to paint. I occupied a room in the attic, just above a giant window on the first floor. Of all the things in the house the window was the best. It reminded me of the window at Cyrus Bussey's estate, but this one was better. It was located in the kitchen and Reuben had a real love for this window. Almost every morning he would sit and watch the birds, the bugs, and everything else outside that intrigued him, that sparked some sort of inspiration never to be used. He educated me on all the different things dancing behind the window during breakfast and all the different colors he would use if he painted the scenery.

The next day I walked back to Cyrus Bussey's estate. When we went inside Cyrus was already in the living room looking out the window. The sun was shining on his face and when he turned around he smiled. I handed Reuben the paints and brushes and put a cloth next to his chair. He began to paint finishing the details, the mouth line, the texture of the beard and mustache, the shine in its eyes and the glimmer of the sword. By midnight the painting was done. Cyrus walked over and looked at Reuben's creation. I saw a slight frown. I think he wanted the window in the picture. He looked as if he was going to say something but quickly decided not to. He grabbed some money and placed it into the hands of Reuben. Reuben thanked him, and I started cleaning up the paints. By the time we finished cleaning up Cyrus had the painting put into a gold frame. As I stared at the painting one last time I wondered who was this person? The face that I saw on the canvas wasn't Cyrus. The Cyrus I saw was smiling, this painting was on the verge of tears. His glass eyes shined with salt water. His hand was by his side not reaching into the coat. His window was near shining light on his face creating a deep shadow. This painting did not match Cyrus Bussey. It was his face but not his personality. Reuben always got it right but this one was different for some reason. This portrait was a new character in itself trapped in dark green behind gold lacing its edges. The person on the canvas reminded me of Reuben. If only it had a window to bring in some light.

I went to bed that night imagining what Reuben could really paint. Why not just paint for fun? that thought crossed my mind, but I then realized he can't afford to miss a job. The next day I grabbed some money I hid in my mattress amongst the fluff. Extra cash Reuben gave me over the years. I went down a floor to Reuben's door from the attic and knocked. As he answered the door I noticed he looked sad, lonely, unfulfilled in life. I held out the money and asked him to paint a portrait. At first he was hesitant, but then he agreed. I went downstairs and moved the kitchen table out of the way then I got out his paints. I then grabbed the canvas and easel and faced it towards the window. He sat down on the stool and looked at me.

"Well, are you going to stand by the window?" he said. I shook my head

"Who is going to be your apprentice while you paint if I'm by the window." I said.

He stared at me confusion in his eyes.

I sighed. "I'm paying you to paint the window Reuben." I said.

He chuckled and smiled. He held out his hand, and I placed the paintbrush in his palm. He began to paint, not me, but the window. This would be his best painting yet.

## Sami Kopparapu



Object information: Red felt banner with white felt text, pink felt triangle and black yarn, circa 1984. The New Hope Metropolitan Community Church in Waterloo was formed in 1977 and developed the Rural Outreach Project.

## Me and My Friend Jayna

By Sami Kopparapu

I'm sitting on the floor of the metropolitan community church cutting out letters. It's nice to be here with friends. We're making banners together for our march in a couple days. My banner is going to be red felt with the pink triangle. It will say "Joining our Journeys. Gays and Lesbians sharing together. Rural outreach project April 13-15." Footloose is playing on the radio. I would like to get up and dance but then get back to work. I like to have a party and dance to Footloose. After I dance to Footloose, then I will go to the parade. I will bring the banner to the parade in a few days.

I walk and hold the banner up. I see people sitting and watching us march. We are wearing signs to show our support for the Gays and Lesbian March. As we walk down the street we see the capital building in front of us. I'm showing my support by holding up the signs. The capital building looks like a tower. It's gold, green, and gray. The statue is outside of the building. As we walk towards the capital we feel anxious, excited, and hopeful for the future. We are walking to make change. The government feels anxious, scared, and is not sure what to do. Still we continue on.

I turn to my friend and say, "Hey how are you?"

My friend Jayna Lamping looks at me and replies, "I'm doing good, but it is really hot. I'm also scared."

"Oh, are you scared to go up to the capital building?"

"Yes I am."

"Oh, you don't have to go."

Jayna says, " Well I would like to go and show my support."

Jayna and I continue walking to the capital. I know that she's scared and wants to support us. Jayna is a good friend. She wants Gays and Lesbians to have more rights. She wants equality. That's why we are all here. We want the government to be supportive of us. The protest is our way to show the government that we want support. The flag that I'm holding is made to show people who we are. It's really pretty.

When we get to the capital we are met with resistance. The government doesn't want us there. We are holding up the signs, and it's too crowded. The government feels scared, because they don't want us protesting. We stay anyway. Because protesting is our right. I lift up my flag in pride.

# Connor Leer



Object information: Six pack of canned water from Anheuser-Busch in St. Louis Missouri for the people of Hamburg, Iowa, when that town was inundated by flood waters in spring 2019.

## The Ocean

By Connor Leer

Dear Person I Don't Know,

I am writing to you because, why not. You most likely view water as a gift; a life-bringer. But in 2018 water became a major hazard for everyone. It started off as a normal flood would. At least one million acres of farmland was flooded in nine of the major grain producing states of America. But the water didn't go away, it kept rising. Against all known laws of nature, it kept rising. Many were calling it "The Rapture." And as far as we were all aware, that's what it was. At first we thought it was just the Midwest, and but it wasn't, as the story will tell you. And tell you, it shall.

Apparently the Mississippi and Missouri rivers were just the start. Suddenly, major rivers all over the world started rising along with the oceans. It didn't even rain. The waters were just rising. But that's enough on that. Everything is wet. Understand? Good.

Hi. I have no reason to say my name, considering the world is ending, but there is some stuff you should know about me. Me, being the only able swimmer in my family, was the only one that made it out alive. I was sad when my parents died, but hey, you learn to let things go. What was I gonna do, punch the ocean? I lived in a suburb of Des Moines, that is now destroyed. It's sad and all, but I've moved past it. It might seem weird that neither of my parents could swim, so just ignore that plot hole. One of the things I'm happy for, though, is how the water was rising from below, and I have a boat. I quickly grabbed the keys, and got on. I then crashed into my house. Half an hour later, I had found a few of my friends. Only the good swimmers, though. We then lost one of them. As far as we were aware at the time, he didn't die, but we literally lost him. He fell out of the boat, and got whipped away with the current.

Fast forward to 2021. There were very few traces of the former world left, just floating debris. We've tied up a few houseboats together, and are living over what used to be the Iowa state capitol. Water, despite being abundant, is harmful to drink, considering most of the world's stuff has been marinating in there for two years. The only safe water to drink was this weird canned water from when the floods first happened. We have an entire houseboat dedicated to storing canned water. They're also easy to find, if you know where to look. We primarily eat fish, but also find a few potatoes floating in the abyss. Only one of us knows how to farm, so he planted the potatoes (Because we found a mountain once, and dove down to grab some dirt on the peak) and we now have potatoes. Yay.

We don't know if this will ever go away, and we know it won't in our lifetime, but life is still here, and in much more abundance than before the flood. There's more radiation too, going back to

the fact that everything has been sitting there for two years, including the poisonous and radioactive materials. I've come across a few spots where the water was actually glowing from the radiation, or plankton, I guess, but radiation is cooler. The water isn't the only thing the radiation has affected, though.

New creatures have popped up. These creatures are featuring, but not limited to: Big sharks, big carnivorous catfish, snakes with legs, lizards without legs, and narwhals, but not normal narwhals. Big narwhals. Don't ask me how a bunch of new species mutated from very diluted amounts of radiation in just 2 years. I don't know either. In fact I heard something while out on a fishing trip once. A big, guttural growl. The guys don't believe me, but don't not believe me, like Bigfoot, before they all drowned.

We've heard some radio broadcasts from the radios on the boats, saying something along the lines of, "Get to Mount Elbert! There's land and people!" or something in some language we don't understand. Of course we've tried going there, but fuel is always a problem. We have found piles of gasoline floating on top of the water, but it's almost impossible to harvest, considering we're only teenagers, and manually rowing is, while not impossible, extremely difficult, going back to the fact that we're teenagers.

Not to mention the fish. The fish prey on boats. I understand that that just sounds like plot armor to prevent the story from moving, but it's true. We found others once, on another houseboat island like ours. They were promptly attacked by a group of giant carnivorous bass.

I understand this may seem dark, but it could be worse. It is now 2023. If I've survived this long, I can survive longer. We're trying to find a way to get over to the supposed camp in the Rocky Mountains, and even if there are no people there, it'll still supposed to be dry land.

Our legs are aching, our backs are breaking, and still we are stuck here, working, in this endless, eternal abyss.

This is a new era in the history of Earth. It started off with fish, and it's ending with fish. If this truly is the end of the human race, then I hope that other species will come along, ones better adapted to the subaquatic world. If they find this note, which I will be sealing in a tube to drift away in the waters below, then I know my existence will not be in vain. To whoever reads this, my coordinates are: 41.5907525, -93.6093792.

Provided you understand English.



## Elle Leon



Object information: Sand Painting (Sand Art) by Andrew Clemens (1857-1894) in natural colors like those found in the ravine north of Pikes Peak near McGregor, Iowa. The George Washington bottle is believed to have been made by Clemens for his mother, Margaretha Clemens (1828-1912). He worked on this bottle off and on for about 18 months.

## Sands of Memory

By Elle Leon

The rising sun looks over the Mississippi River as a steamboat floats down. I pick my way through the grasses until I come to the layered rock face. I need the sand that lays below it. Collecting the red and yellow is easy enough, but the colors that make the art special are harder to find. Blues and greens and purples. Pure black and white. Shades of gray. They're essential to my designs. It is hard to tell if a grain is black or gray, so I check it against my waistcoat's fabric. For the white, I hold it up to the stiff collar of my shirt. When they match, I scoop handfuls for later.

Once home, I pull the jars from my bag and begin to sort. After three days of work, neat piles of fine sand sit in wooden bowls. Because they cover the table's surface, I must sit on the ground to select a design. I have stores and stores of them, all sketched with a rough charcoal piece. But, they are only random designs. Not made for her. I must come up with something new. Something for my mother. Mother would hate random designs. Couldn't display them along with the family portraits. She wouldn't be able to show the art off to the friends she invites over while Father works. Mother seems lost now that both of my brothers have found wives and started their own households. They rarely visit. And Father is so busy with work. She must be bored.

Over the winter, I visit the general store every time they get new reams of paper. I run through thousands of ideas until I remember the stories she'd told me when I was a child, before I had fallen ill.

She told me of the farm she grew up on, the fields of grain and corn that rolled in the wind, the summer day she spotted a twisting cone in the sky, and the flowers she always picked for her mother. How every day she returned home from running in the fields with a flush and fist full of dainty pink roses.

Though her childhood is far away, the farm is not. Yet, I'd never visited. It is owned by another family now, and I never think much of it. Maybe Mother does. Maybe the stories she told me were laced with longing.

If I could work through the night, I would. Unfortunately, the sun sets my day. It's the only light strong enough to point out stray grains. So, I settle inside for a quiet supper with Mother, and occasionally Father. And in the morning I meet the sun as it rises over the treetops.

For months, I work. Sometimes this girl from town—Clara—sits beside me. She realizes fairly quickly that I can't respond to her questions. I would, if I could. She seems nice. But, I need my eyes for the art and my hands for the pouring. So, we sit in the lean-to, the bustle of her dress hanging over the stool, watching the pattern form layer by layer. She tires and leaves by tea most days. Her company is welcome because it's comforting to look over and see her

appreciation for the details that I spend so much time perfecting. Only, she stopped visiting a couple of weeks ago. I imagine her mother is one of the ladies my mother hosts in the mornings, for my mother stopped having her parties at about the same time. She spends the mornings gazing through the windows instead. Maybe if she invites the ladies back, Clara will return too. So, for now, I carry on. I push my wooden tool in the bottle, manipulating the baby blue, silver, and clover green grains to make a hoof here and a smoke trail there.

Finally, I pour in veins of red, white, and yellow to the lip of the bottle. And, the most nerve-wracking part: tamping the sand down and praying that the bottle doesn't collapse under the pressure. But it is a necessity. If I don't do it, my months of work would be lost in a single shake, bump, or tap. But if it works, I can flip it over and see the design upright for the first time. And my mother can remember the flowers she picked for her mother and know I was giving them to her too. If it doesn't work, and the bottle shatters, I still want to present her with something to show my mother that she and her memories are not forgotten. Living wildflowers will wilt within a week. But, if it holds, she can have a memory preserved forever, secretly hidden in the art.

I finish before the day is done and, for the first time in over a year, head back home with the sun beating down on me, bottle in hand.

Mother's face lights up as she studies the bottle. It sends a little flutter through my chest when she smiles at the image of George Washington atop his frightened horse. I am especially proud of its likeness to the painting that hangs above the dining table. She looks at the other side. The steamboat the color of ash and iron resembles those that stop at our town so often. The other two panels represent American features and pull together the identity of our state and country. I gently tap on the glass with my nail, pointing out the delicate strand of wild roses across the top. And tears burst from her eyes as she pulls me into a tight hug.

## Caroline Peters



Object Information: Uniform coat from Adam Larrabee. Worn during the War of 1812.

## Heist!

By Caroline Peters

What do you think of when you think of a magic item? An invisibility cloak? Or a wand that you can use to cast spells? Well... not exactly. Right now I'm looking right at one. It's a uniform from The War of 1812. It enhances your physical abilities, making you stronger and faster. Of course, it's 200 years old, so I'm not surprised that it's not going anywhere. Right now it's being kept under close guard at the Des Moines History Museum.

It must be incredibly dangerous in the wrong hands.

Which is why me and my team are taking it, just for a little while. One main thing that we do to keep the world safe from magic is when we find out that magic items are going to be stolen, we take them until they are no longer going to be a threat. We already have an invisibility ring, except we only use the magic in emergencies.

Anyway, we worked as a team to sew a duplicate uniform coat (which resulted in me stabbing myself with the needle a lot when sewing on the buttons). We did a some research on the uniform and discovered that it was originally owned by Captain Adam Larrabee who got shot in battle and lived! I suspect that this won't go smoothly because, let's face it, very few things do.

"Ella, Ollie, are you guys ready to go?" asks Kay, her arms slightly scratched from hiding in the bushes.

"Yeah I think we're all good," I respond. "Ollie, do you have the duplicate?"

"Yep! We're ready," he says.

"Maybe we should go over the checklist again," Kay mumbles. Her hazel eyes drift down to the paper list she's clutching in her hands.

"We've already gone over it twice! We don't need to do it again!" Ollie complains.

"Fine, fine. Let's go. But if we forget something it's your fault!"

"Stop arguing. Let's go," I say.

Ollie pulls his custom laptop that he tinkered with himself out of his backpack and pulls up the security system. I still don't know how that works. He pauses the footage on the cameras and turns off the security system. He looks up at us. "You have five minutes to get in there and get out. Of course, I'm staying here because I'm not the most athletic person in the world."

We run in, past the main desk and the massive staircase to the exhibit containing the magical item. We run through the blue hall. Kay's a lot faster than me, so when she stops I nearly crash into her.

“Uh, was this part of the plan?” she asks, pointing at the empty glass case with a gaping hole in the center

“Well, what do you think?” I say while staring at the hole.

“No need for sarcasm, Ella. We should just go back.”

“Fine. But only because we shouldn’t stick around for too long. The cameras will be back on before we know it.”

So we head right back out to where Ollie is sitting across the street.

“Where is it? Oh no. Did something go wrong? Were the buttons on our fake uneven?” Kay and I share a silent look.

“No, it was already taken when we got there. I think we have a pretty big problem on our hands.” I tell him.

“Well thank goodness it’s summer. I wouldn’t be able to deal with the stress of this and homework,” he responds, sounding more calm than I thought he would.

“Umm, why exactly aren’t you freaking out? Usually this sort of thing really freaks you out.” Kay asks him before I have the chance to.

“When the item’s magical energy is released, it can be sensed when you have a strong connection and then you can hone in on the signal. I can track the uniform.”

“Yeah, but didn’t you say you need some strong connection for its magical energy to be released? What does it mean to have its magical energy released? Am I the only person who doesn’t understand?” I ask.

He sighs. “A magical item releases magical energy when it’s used, and I assume that this person is going to be using it. Also, I have good WiFi at my house. Never underestimate the power of good WiFi.”

“To the dark abyss known as Ollie’s basement!” laughs Kay.

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We’ve been waiting for this stupid magic signal for ages. Kay’s almost fallen asleep on the couch in the corner of the basement, and Ollie’s sitting down in one of those spinning chairs in front of a two monitor setup. Our parents are probably going to question what we’re doing, considering the fact that we’re not at Kay’s house for the sleepover we claimed was going on.

“Kay, try to stay awake. Ther-“ A loud beeping sound coming from Ollie’s PC cuts me off before I can finish.

“Yes! Guess what? We’re going on a walk!” Ollie says, pointing a finger at the glowing red dot on the screen.

“Yes, but don’t we need a plan?” Kay asks nervously.

“We don’t know what to expect, so we can’t formulate a foolproof plan,” I inform her. And once we pack our bags, we get out of Ollie’s house and run down the street to the lair of the villain.

Who would’ve known that a crazy villain lived in our neighborhood? Not me, that’s for sure.

When we make it to the house I grab the doorknob and pull to see if I can get in. It surprised me to see that the door was unlocked. I wonder what kind of supervillain leaves their door unlocked. Huh.

When we enter the house I see a person wearing the uniform and their back facing me. When they turn around I see the genuine shock in their eyes and I know that this wasn’t meant to be a trap. They run deeper into the house and we chase after them, Ollie really far behind. When we finally caught up with the man, he was busy typing away at the computer.

“Give it back or else!” I yell.

“Or else what, little girl?” Aw man. I hadn’t thought that far ahead.

But before I can respond he pulls a giant lever and this weird light thing just poofs into existence. The man jumps in and completely vanishes.

“Come on! We need to chase after him!” says Kay. We all agree and then jump into the unknown.

When we break through the weird glowing thing, we find ourselves in a forest just outside a battlefield. There is blood everywhere and I start to run out, ready to help everyone.

“What are you doing? Ollie asks, grabbing my arm. “You can’t do that. Can’t you see we’re in the past. You don’t want to completely screw up our present, do you?”

“Oh.” I don’t like this. People are getting hurt in front of my very eyes and I can’t do anything?

A figure catches my eye and I realize that it’s the guy who stole the uniform. I run after him, light flashing and I find us in a bush, Ollie panting and probably wondering why we’re doing so much running today. Now we’re in the middle of the national capital, British soldiers burning government buildings, almost certainly from a long time ago. It seems like a similar time period to the battlefield, but I can’t wait around to find out. I keep chasing after the man, leaving my team behind in the process. I find myself falling into water, and I don’t know what’s going on. It takes all my energy just to stay afloat and I don’t know if I’ll make it, or if I’m going to die alone in the past.

Just when I start to lose all hope, I feel someone grab onto my arm.

“Come on Ollie! Help me get her on the boat!” Kay and Ollie! Thank goodness too. I pull myself up onto the boat and I know there’s something I need to say.

“I’m sorry I left you guys behind. I just wanted to take him down, and I-“

A loud explosion cuts me off and I can see Kay nearly fall off the boat out of the corner of my eye.

“What was that?” Kay yelps.

“We’re in the middle of The War of 1812. We’re at Fort McHenry. It lived through twenty-five hours of bombardment by the British navy. It’s the inspiration for the Star-Spangled Banner.” I never thought that this would actually help me.

“Ok, since he has the powers from the uniform, we’re going to need to find a way to distract him. Maybe we make him think he won? Then we defeat him and turn him in? Do you think we should use our magic ring to make this easier?” Ollie offers.

“That’s... actually pretty smart. Ella, you’re the bait. You turn yourself in and then when Ollie sees an opening, I sneak up behind him using the invisibility ring.” Kay responds.

“Yes, but why am I the bait?”

“Because,” she responds.

“Ok, that’s fair. Let’s do this!”

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“Mister, umm, whatever your name is. I’ve come to surrender!” I say when I get onto the boat where he set up camp, my legs shaking. “I’m not going to attack you anymore. You’re welcome.”

“Good. Now, what to do now?”

“I don’t know. I thought you would already know.” I glance up at Ollie at the top of the ship and he nods in whatever direction Kay is at. The man trips and falls over. It’s Kay! She reappears and tosses the invisibility ring at me. I slip it on my finger and grab some rope. I tie the rope around his hands and take the ring off again.

“Ok, so that plan actually worked. What are we supposed to do now?” Ollie asks.

“I dunno. Maybe just turn him in?” Kay answers.

“I mean of course, but how are we going to go back home?”

“His weird tablet thing can get us back. I think. You can probably figure that out, right Ollie?” I say to him.

Ollie grins. “You guys ready to go home?”



## Henry Seltz



Object information: Necklace made from small blue and black faceted beads, yellow glass beads and a few round brass beads and red glass beads. Strung with cotton string. Attributed to the Meskwaki Nation.

## A Necklace That Gives & Takes

By Henry Seltz

07/15/1910

Today I woke up feeling tired to find the sun rising past the fields, and I hear the birds start singing the morning joy as I get dressed for the day. I then walk downstairs to help my father with work on the farm. My mother passed away a few years ago and it's just been me and my father ever since. Before she passed, she had given me a necklace that she had always worn for luck. It was a beaded necklace with turquoise, gold and black beads. I believe that is when her luck ran dry.

This necklace has only been in my family since my mother was a child. It has given my family and our farm luck over the years. But there was a problem with the necklace. Another family claimed that the necklace had been in their family for more than a century, until it was stolen. I doubt that's true due to the fact my mother had made this necklace herself, and she said that she had never met the family until she married my father. This family is from the same tribe as mine, the Meskwakenuk tribe. Our tribe is in the Iowa county of Tama, where we bought a settlement for our people to live.

I have noticed that the necklace does bring good luck wherever I go. And it shows when I go out to check on our corn crops and apple trees around the fall. When I go to check on them they shine brightly while the sun faces them. When we sell them everyone says that they are the best apples and corn they've ever had.

I still have a constant fear of losing the necklace my mother gave me. When she gave me her necklace things around her started to change. Our family farm's crops were dying out. Our apples were going bad. And it was getting worse. I was only at the age of five when this all happened. Every day got worse for her. Until one fateful day, she was starting to get sick and my father wouldn't let me see her.

I kept asking, "When can I see mother again?"

But he always said, "Soon my son," as he tried to hold back a tear. I would only get a glimpse of my mother whenever the doctor came by to check on her. Now I understand why he didn't let me see her, because he didn't want me to get sick as well.

Whenever I see or think of that other family, I keep asking myself why would they want this necklace of luck, if it's just going to kill them when they take it off?

## Anika Shetye



Object information: Presentation sword given to Colonel Cyrus Bussey, brass colored with ornately molded decorations on scabbard and two-tone blade.

## Sword Travels

By Anika Shetye

I'm frantically looking through boxes from our move to Chicago. Where is it? I'm trying to find my stupid computer, but my parents put it in the wrong place. Is it in the artifacts box? My mom likes to collect things from around the country, and this did not make the moving process easy. There were at least four boxes dedicated to just artifacts she found. Useless artifacts that is. I open box one and inside are seven objects carefully packaged in bubble wrap. My mom doesn't let me touch any of these, so my curiosity gets the better of me, and I look through them. Nothing that interests me is in there though. I open box two which is much bigger than the first box. The first thing I see is the brass sword. Immediately I close the box and run down the steps. I can't believe she kept this. I have to get out of here before I-

I open my eyes. I'm outside, but it isn't Chicago. I jump realizing where I am. This place looks much different than the last time I visited but that's beside the point. I need to find the sword again to go home. Last time I just had to go to the Capitol building, but I don't recognize any of the land here. I wonder if I'm in the same time period. I start to stress out. What if I'm in a different place? How do I get home? I see lots of trees and far away a couple of buildings. I look down at my dull colored dress covering every inch of my body. The bodice of the dress goes into an uncomfortable full length skirt.

After an hour I walk into a store that sells men's hats and ask the clerk, "Where am I?"

The clerk looks me up and down in judgement and says, "You're in Des Moines."

My eyes widen. "That's way too far from the capitol of Iowa City." The owner laughs and points me to an article in the newspaper dated in April of 1880 saying that they're building a new capitol building. I rush out of the store and start sprinting through the streets getting harsh looks. Why am I in Des Moines? It'll take me ages to find where the sword is.

I run out of breath and make my way back to the spot where I time traveled. I see the handbag that I purchased on my last trip. Finally, something that hasn't changed about this trip. It's getting late, so I better rest and regain my strength, and look for the sword in the morning.

Midnight falls over the city. There's nothing to do except sleep right now, but after today I don't think I can. I'm using my bag as a pillow, but it's too lumpy. After minutes of shifting around trying to find a pleasant position to sleep, I give up and decide to look up at the stars. I'm starting to think about my family and feel homesick.

When using the sword to time travel, what feels like weeks to you in one era, is just a second in another. I only have a couple of days though to find the sword or I'll be stuck here forever. I

barely escaped those agents last time, and if they find out I'm here, I'll be erased from existence. I shiver thinking about this terrible fate.

I decide to close my eyes for a while and think about some good memories like visiting my aunt. I think it's been about three years since we last saw her. Also three years since I came back here. Or since I first time traveled with the sword. I don't think she knew the dangers of it, or well the powers it had, when my aunt gifted it to me on my sixteenth birthday. My mom, of course, was reluctant of letting me keep a sword. But even she thought it was too beautiful and interesting to just give it back. It's inscribed with an old soldier, floral patterns, drums, flags, and a snake that winds around the handle. It was her most prized possession, and she was very proud of it. I guess I shouldn't be surprised my mom kept it after all these years. But after what happened me, I didn't think she'd put me in danger. Maybe my mom didn't really believe me, or maybe she just thought that if I didn't know it was there I wouldn't touch it. Anger rushes through me. It's her fault I'm here. I go to sleep not wanting to think about any of this anymore. I'm just so tired and lonely. I want to get out of here.

The next day, I feel the warmth of the sun on my face and smile. Today is the day I'm going home. I don't know what I'm going to do once I'm there, but it's better than not existing.

I dust off my clothes to make myself presentable, and make my way to the capitol. I'm trying to think of other places where the sword may be, but nothing comes to mind. Maybe I could ask someone, but I don't want people to start talking and draw attention to myself. I reach the construction site of what is supposed to be the capitol, and it feels weird to see a historic place being built. Back when my family lived in Iowa, we would see the capitol building while driving to work. I walk around the site trying to get an idea of where the sword could be but I can't see anything past the finished limestone wall.

I see a pair of workers' clothing and change in a secluded area so I can get into the building. I tuck my hair into the hat and slip into a group of men walking to another area of the building to work on. I get away from the group and look inside. After some time of looking for the sword I start to panic. What if it's not here and I'm just wasting time? I sit down on the limestone and think about what happens if I find it. It's been a long time since I last time traveled, and I'm trying to figure out where I place the sword to get home. The sword is unpredictable so you don't know when it will transport you somewhere. I get back on my feet, not wanting to waste time, and I try to find the sword again. As I'm looking, I can hear some commotion outside. Curious, I walk out to see a group of people huddling around a person holding the sword.

"What is it?" a worker asks.

"It's a sword," another says. "I read about one in a book."

"I'm taking it home and selling it."

"No way, that's mine."

They're all fighting each other, and they don't see me crawl on the floor and take it from them. I start sprinting out to an open spot. I'm out of breath when I get back to the area and I lay down for a while. I get up and I stab the sword into the ground. A glowing beam shoots out into the sky and sucks me in.

The beam spits me out when I'm back home. I'm upstairs in the attic and I come rushing down the steps to see my mom. I'm so happy I'm home I'm not even mad at her anymore.

I look all over the house, but I can't find her anywhere.

When I walk into the kitchen I see the sword glowing on the floor, beams shooting everywhere. "MOM!" I yell out. But it's too late.

She's gone.

## Julian Thomas



Object Information: Wooden toy train set, 4 pieces, painted red; pieces fit together like a puzzle. Purchased from the Works Progress Administration Arts Project, a New Deal Program in the 1930s.



## The Little Red Train

Julian Thomas

So it all started on a small steam train in Boone, Iowa. This train is owned by a very kind conductor who drives the train. One day when he got off the train after a long day of work he went to his office. In his office he keeps a wheelless toy train on his desk that he rarely uses. Now the only time he uses the train is when he looks at it. Each day he tries to remember the story his grandpa told him when he was young about this particular train. All the conductor remembers of what his grandpa told him was,

“Special.”

Now since his grandpa doesn't have a phone, because his grandpa thinks that phones are just a waste of energy. He would have to drive a total of seven hours to go talk to his grandpa. But he doesn't want to do that.

So one day something unexpected happened. The conductor remembered some of the story his grandpa told him. But he couldn't get all of the details. All he could possibly remember was 1935, war, special, and dad. Nothing else. So from that day forward he just goes into his office and just looks at it over and over. One day he decided that he was going to get the full story of this toy train from his grandpa. And he knew that it would be a seven hour drive. But they didn't have planes back then. And the nearest train station away from his grandpa's house was at least three hours away.

“What am I thinking? Going to drive seven hours away just to hear a story?” He picked up the toy train. Looked at it, and set it back down. And left the building.

When the conductor went to bed, he laid in his bed thinking about the toy train. He then remembered something that his grandpa told him:

“If you're ever going on a dangerous path. Take this train and it will show you the way.”

But that wasn't the full thing.

The next day when the conductor arrived at the depot, or his work, the station was full of people!

“What!” the conductor said. Jack, the brake's man, ran up to the conductor.

“We have a problem!” said Jack.

“Well, what is it?” said the conductor.

“Well, you see, there is a bunch of fallen trees in the way of the tracks.”

“What?!” said the conductor.

“I know,” said Jack. “And we can’t get three quarters of the trains through the fallen trees. One quarter can successfully go around since the fallen trees did not fully cover the tracks. But sadly I’m afraid that your train can not get through.”

“Oh no, this is bad,” said the conductor with his face white as snow. His hands were shaking like an earthquake. “Jack!” the conductor snapped.

“What?” Jack replied.

“I need you to get some axes and some men. One hundred of them at least.”

“Yes Sir,” Jack said. “But wait, we already have fifty men coming to clear the way, and they’ll be here in like an hour!” Jack complained.

“It doesn’t matter. Give them a head start,” the conductor replied. The conductor then ran to his office to go contact someone. But as he made his way into his office he noticed the little red wheelless train setting there motionless on the desk. He stared at for about five minutes in silence. He then closed his eyes and tried to think of what to do next. The silence was then interrupted by the ringing of phone. The conductor reached over his desk to grab the phone.

“Yes?”

“Hello? Is this someone at the Boon Iowa Train Depot?”

“Yes why?”

“Well we got the news about the fallen trees on the tracks in your area. The problem is that there are a total of four passenger trains heading your way.”

“Four trains!?”

The conductor hung up and ran out of his office to go look at the train schedule. The arriving side of the schedule said Greenwich, Des Moines, Okoboji, and Greely arriving at 12:45 am o'clock.

“Today couldn’t get any worse,” the conductor said. The conductor looked at his watch. It was 9:53 am. “What am going to do?” the conductor complained.

Then the conductor remembered. The little red toy train! The conductor then ran to his office, shoving anybody who got into his way out of the way. He then bolted into his office knocking everything off his desk. He grabbed the little red toy train and said

“I need some help.”

The conductor then felt a breeze of cool air brush through his hair.

“Sir!” Jack said out of nowhere.

“What is it, Jack?” said the conductor.

“The trees, they’re... they’re... Gone!?” Jack said confusingly.

## Nia Weis



Object Information: Portrait of Colonel Cyrus Bussey by Reuben LeGrand Johnston, 1891.

## Dreams were Made for Granting

By Nia Weis

“Here I lie, awaiting death. I’ve hung onto life for as long as I can remember, but this time I welcome death, as if death were an old friend. As my wife Ellen leaves the room, my last breath rolls out, and I think to myself. Did I, Cyrus Bussey, really fulfill a good life?”

The feeling of standing stiff in my general’s suit once again gives me a slight tinge of joy. My wife, Ellen, had run down to the market earlier to fetch us some fresh food for our supper tonight.

“Please stand straighter Sir.”

I raise my arm and draw my sword hoping to encourage Reuben to paint faster. “Do you have a wife?”

The man nods.

“Does your wife encourage you to paint?”

The man nods again.

“I assume you must have children.”

Reuben turns to look at a roughly drawn sketch of a golden retriever. “Yes, my wife wanted four children and I wanted two, so we found a middle ground and had three, You?”

“I never wished to have children.”

Reuben steps back behind his canvas and continues to paint.

“How long do you think this portrait is going to take?”

“You cannot rush art, Art is something that takes time and... care.”

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At the market Ellen had finished buying the ingredients for dinner. A pound of beef, and four beets. Ellen decides to take a detour through the park to get home quicker so she can prepare supper for Cyrus when he got home.

“You get it this time Laura.”

“But I got it last time!”

A broken down ball rolls over to Ellen, Ellen reaches down and picks up the ball.

“Does this belong to you ladies?”

Laura walks over, her short blond hair bouncing on her shoulders. “Yes, ma’am.” Laura takes the ball, as Cora comes up behind her.

“The park is nowhere to be alone. There are too many awful people around these parts. Where are your parents?”

Laura reaches for Cora’s hand. “Let’s go Cora, Mama and Papa will be expecting us home for supper.”

Cora smiles at Ellen as the two little girls continue through the park. Ellen watches the two girls when she notices Laura giving her a nasty smirk. Ellen races to catch up with the girls and yanks Cora back by the hand.

“Let go of me!”

Laura turns around. “My mama will hear about this if you don’t let my sister go this instant!”

People continue to walk by paying no mind to Ellen and the two girls.

“I know you girls are alone.”

Laura shakes her head. “Our Mama and Papa are waiting for us, and we don’t have time to gander with fools like you!”

Ellen slides her basket over her hand and grips onto Laura’s arm, pulling the two girls behind a thick hedge. “I know you two are alone, and the market is a dangerous place to be when you’re this young. Please girls, I’m offering you sanctuary, food and shelter.”

“We aren’t alone!” Laura continues to protest. “Our mother is waiting for us!”

Hoping to have better results, Ellen turns towards the little girl holding tight to Laura’s finger. “Hello, I’m Ellen, could you tell me your name dear and where your mother and father are?”

Cora shakes her head.

“She won’t talk without my approval!”

Ellen gets down on the little girls’ level. “Sweetie, when was the last time you had something to eat?”

Cora shakes her head.

“Here, I’m sure I can find something out of my purse for you if you would just tell me your nam-”

“Cora, and this is my older sister, Laura.”

“Well that’s a start. Cora where do you live?”

Cora shrugs.

And Laura starts up again. "We live down the road with our mama and papa. They're waiting for us right now!"

Ellen turns to Cora. "Cora, is that true?"

Cora shakes her head.

"Our mama and papa are going to call the police soon, because they were expecting us home for supper a couple of minutes ago!"

Ellen turns to Cora once more. "Are you and your sister alone?"

Laura turns away, reaching for Cora's shoulder.

"Mommy and Daddy got sick, and I haven't eaten in six days."

Ellen turns around, digs around in her purse, and pulls out a bag of jelly beans. "Here take some." Carefully Ellen dumps the bag of jelly beans into the girl's hands. The two girls look at each other before shoving the jelly beans in their mouths.

"Thanks," Laura mutters.

"I'm sorry that I don't have any bread. Those jelly beans were the only thing I had on me. But I have plenty more of these jelly beans at home. You just need to accept my help."

Cora turns towards Ellen. "May we come home with you?"

"Of course!" replies Ellen.

"Cora, we're not going home with a stranger!"

Cora turns towards Laura. "We have no choice but to accept this nice lady's help," says Cora

"Fine, but I'm only coming because you're going, and I promised to protect you."

Ellen takes Cora's hand, and Cora takes Laura's.

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"So how much is this painting going to cost?"

Reuben looks the piece up and down, "I didn't know you wanted to keep it."

"Of course I wanted to keep it. I want my grandchildren to look back at this painting and say-" Cyrus grows quiet. "I meant, I want my family and neighbors to see it one day."

Reuben laughs, "You're a very confusing man Mr. Bussey."

Reuben sets his paint brush in a jar filled with murky water and slouches back on his stool.

"Take a minute, and we will get the rest of your portrait painted."

Cyrus nods.

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“Make yourselves at home.”

Laura’s eyes catch a radio. she presses a flashing red button. The radio clicks on and Laura jumps back. Cora walks across the room to a giant jar of Jelly Beans sitting on a big black piano.

“Mrs. Ellen, may I have a pink Jelly Bean?”

“You may.” Ellen pulls the jar of jelly beans off of the piano and hands them to Cora. “Are you girls hungry for any real food?”

The two girls look at each other and nod.

“Does corn beef and beets sound good to you?”

“Yummy!”

Cora jumps up and down with a handful of jelly beans.

“So Laura, did your parents have a radio?”

Laura gives a slight nod.

Ellen turns around to pull the four beets and the pound of beef out of her basket.

“Tell me Laura, what do you want to be when you grow up?”

Laura thinks about this for a second. “A doctor.”

Ellen smiles. “You want to save people?”

Laura nods. “Cora, put those candies down. You’re going to spoil your dinner if you eat anymore,” Laura says.

Cora places the cap back on the jellybeans and slides the jar back on top of the piano.

“Ellen, may we use the bathroom to wash Cora’s face?”

“Of course dear, the bathroom is just down the hall to your right.”

Laura picks Cora up, and pulls her silky blond hair out of her face. Laura makes her way to the bathroom with Cora in hand. The bathroom door locks shut behind the two girls.

“Listen, after this lady feeds us dinner, we’re going to make a run for it.”

“But I like it here, and she has jelly beans!” Cora insists.

“Cora don’t you trust me?”

Cora turns to her sister eyes wide.

**Read The Sequel to find out what happens to the girls.**





Front row, left to right: Henry Seltz, Elias Bethards, Caroline Peters, Anika Shetye, Sammi Kopparapu, Nia Weis

Back row, left to right: Julian Thomas, Connor Leer, Elle Leon, Hadley Harvey, Stephanie Hemphill, Jennifer Cooley, Matt Beyer, Kate Budziak