

# Educator's Guide

## **FATAL FEVER**

**TRACKING DOWN  
TYPHOID MARY**

Gail Jarrow

**With  
Common Core  
State Standards  
correlations**

 BOYDS MILLS PRESS

 CALKINS CREEK

**Highlights**

## ABOUT THE BOOK

In the early 1900s, people began to fall ill with a mysterious sickness that spread quickly and eventually killed its victims. While doctors encouraged the normal precautions against contracting disease, this illness did not stop spreading. In fact, the disease became an epidemic in some places.

Baffled health officials rushed to control the outbreaks. The most brilliant medical detectives were hired to stop the infectious killer.

*Fatal Fever: Tracking Down Typhoid Mary* follows the outbreak of typhoid fever and the medical detectives who learned about the disease and developed ways to eradicate it based on their observations. They tracked down the carriers, specifically Mary Mallon, a hardworking Irish cook hired by several of New York's well-to-do families.

Award-winning author Gail Jarrow blends newspaper articles, photographs, and information gleaned from interviews with everyone involved in this well-researched, excitingly told, true story. In a thrilling narrative, Jarrow uses edge-of-your-seat storytelling to bring historical facts to life, from the determined germ detectives who tracked down the source of the illness and saved countless lives, to the woman at the center of the controversy, forever to be known as Typhoid Mary.



**This portrait of Mallon appeared in the *New York American* on June 30, 1909. Two drawings show her spreading deadly germs and being forced into an ambulance.**

This guide is designed to help teachers lead students in a close reading of *Fatal Fever: Tracking Down Typhoid Mary* by Gail Jarro. Connections to the Common Core State Standards are noted with each activity.

**Common Core abbreviations used in this guide:**

**RI—Reading: Informational Text**

**W—Writing**

**SL—Speaking and Listening**

**RH—Literacy in History and Social Studies**

**For the complete Common Core State Standards, visit [corestandards.org/ELA-literacy](http://corestandards.org/ELA-literacy).**

## **BEFORE READING**

Give students time to look through all of the supplementary materials at the back of the text. Ask students to identify how each feature—glossary, timeline, author’s note, bibliography, etc.— helps readers to better understand the information in the main text. Ask which books most benefit from this sort of material.

**[RI.5.4, RI.6.5, W.5.9.B, SL.6.1, SL.6.2, RH.6–8.7]**

Using the timeline as well as the famous typhoid victims pages, have students brainstorm about what they know about the time period when typhoid fever was a crisis. Have students flip through the pictures in the text and describe the times based on what they see in the photographs.

**[RI.6.1, RI.6.5, RI.6.7, SL.6.1, SL.6.2, RH.6–8.7, RH.6–8.9]**

What other kinds of books does *Fatal Fever* resemble? Does it look like a storybook, a comic book, an encyclopedia? How does the appearance of a book help readers understand how to read it?

**[RI.5.5, RI.5.6, RI.6.1, RI.6.3, RI.6.9, SL.1, SL.6.2, RH.6–8.5]**

As a class, read aloud Chapter 1 of the text. Chapter 1 is an introduction to the story of the search for Typhoid Mary. How does Chapter 1 build reader interest in the story? Have students point out different ways this chapter *introduces* readers to the text.

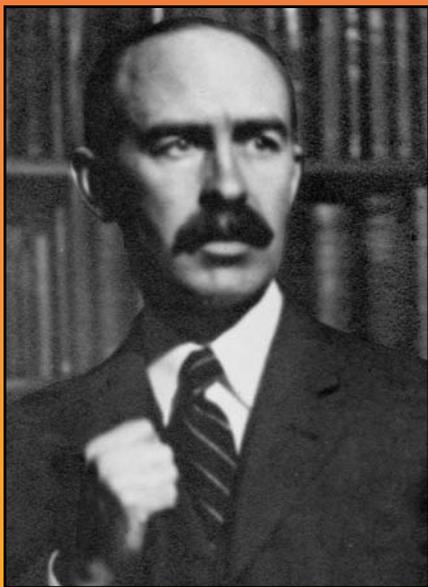
**[RI.6.2, RI.6.3, RI.6.5, SL.1, RH.6–8.5]**

Define primary and secondary sources and have students find examples of both within the text. Which parts of *Fatal Fever* are primary sources? Which parts of *Fatal Fever* are secondary sources? **[RI.6.3, RI.6.5, SL.6.1, SL.6.2, RH.6–8.1, RH.6–8.9]**

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### Quick Questions to Check Reading Comprehension

Explain Soper's process for figuring out a disease and creating a plan to fight it as he did during his time in Ithaca. How did Soper learn all he could about the disease and use that information to come up with a plan for fighting it? **[RI.6.1, RI.6.3, SL.6.1]**



**George Soper (1870–1948)**

- What about George Soper's background made him the perfect candidate for figuring out how to fight the typhoid outbreak? **[RI.6.1, RI.6.3, SL.6.1]**
- Why were water filtration systems so effective at reducing typhoid fever rates? **[RI.6.1, RI.6.2, RI.6.3, SL.6.1]**
- Why was George Soper so intent on finding Mary Mallon? **[RI.5.1, RI.5.3, RI.5.6, RI.6.3, SL.6.1]**
- Why did the health department choose Dr. Josephine Baker to retrieve specimens from Mary Mallon as opposed to any of the other inspectors? **[RI.6.1, RI.6.2, SL.6.1]**
- How did Baker finally manage to find Mary Mallon and take her to the hospital for tests? **[RI.6.1, SL.6.1]**
- Why was Mary Mallon so insistent that nothing was wrong with her? **[RI.5.6, RI.6.1, RI.6.3, SL.6.1]**
- Mary showed no symptoms of typhoid fever, so why was she considered so dangerous to others? **[RI.6.1, RI.6.3, SL.6.1]**
- Was life better for Mary Mallon once she was moved to North Brother Island? **[RI.6.1, SL.6.1]**
- Why did Mary go back to being a cook after she was freed from the health department, having agreed she would not return to service? **[RI.6.1, SL.6.1]**
- How did Mary Mallon feel about the name she was given by the newspapers? **[RI.5.3, RI.6.1, SL.6.1]**

## ***In-depth Questions for Thinking about the Text***

Is this story told linearly? If not, how is it told? Why do you think the author organized the story in this order?

**[RI.6.2, RI.6.3, RH.6–8.5, SL.6.1]**

This story reads like a narrative rather than an informational book. Does that make the information more interesting than a straightforward nonfiction text? Does the storytelling make the facts more or less believable? **[RI.6.2, RI.6.3, RH.6–8.5, SL.6.1]**

How did the normal hygiene practices of early 1900s help to spread typhoid fever, rather than stop it? List the ways hygiene has changed in the years since the typhoid fever outbreak. Does reading this story affect how you think of your own hygiene?

**[RI.6.1, RI.6.2, SL.6.1, SL.6.4, RH.6–8.2]**

Look at the picture on page 74. Imagine what it must have been like to take a horse-drawn ambulance ride. How did the lack of technology of the time affect how people dealt with typhoid? How has medical treatment changed since then?

**[RI.6.1, RI.6.2, RI.6.7, SL.6.1, RH.6–8.1]**

A purposeful mistake is included in the text on page 83: “I have been in fact a peep show for Evrey [sic] body,” she complained.” Why was this mistake included in the text? What does [sic] mean? What does the inclusion of this mistake tell you about the credibility of this author and book?

**[RI.6.1, RI.6.2, RI.6.8, W.6.8, SL.6.1, RH.6–8.6, RH.6–8.9]**

Do you think Mary Mallon was treated unfairly? Was her confinement necessary for the good of the public? Cite specific places in the text that support your answer. **[RI.6.1, RI.6.2, SL.6.1]**

What facts did you learn about the past while reading the text? After students put forward an idea, have them find textual evidence in the book that supports the idea. **[RI.6.1, RI.6.2, RI.6.7, SL.6.1]**

## ***Post-Reading Questions and Activities***

Is *Fatal Fever* a well-researched story? How can you tell? Discuss the term “credibility” and its importance when analyzing texts, especially texts that teach readers about history. How does this author show readers that the information included is credible?

**[RI.6.1, RI.6.3, RI.6.8, W.6.8, SL.6.1, RH.6–8.1, RH.6–8.5, RH.6–8.6, RH.6–8.7]**

With which character do you most relate? Why? The author writes about these real people in a way that makes them seem like characters. How does that help to make the story more interesting and exciting? **[RI.6.1, RI.6.3, RI.6.6, SL.6.1, RH.6-8.7]**

### **Group Research Activities**

Group students by their response to the question about which person in the story they most relate to. Have students perform research on their chosen person in order to learn more about him or her. Have students present their findings either as an oral presentation or on a PowerPoint or webpage they can share with the class. **[RI.6.7, RI.6.9, W.6.4, W.6.6, W.6.7, W.6.8, SL.6.1, SL.6.4, SL.6.5, RH.6-8.7]**

*Fatal Fever* is filled with compelling images, headlines, and media from the time period when the events in the book took place. Have students search for other media that could offer insight into the times. Create a class blog where students can post their findings about the current events and people of the time and comment on each other's work.

**[RI.6.7, RI.6.9, W.6.6, W.6.7, W.6.8, SL.6.2, RH.6-8.1]**

Have students work in small groups to make a list of main ideas and themes in the text. Under each main idea, list the key details that support the main idea. **[RI.6.1, RI.6.2, RI.6.3, RI.6.8, W.6.4, SL.6.1]**

Have students debate an idea in the text from the points of view of Sara Josephine Baker, Mary Mallon, and George Soper. Choose three students, each assuming the point of view of one of the three main characters in the book. Pose a question, and allow each student one minute to answer from the point of view of their character. Allow students (in their character personas) to pose questions to each other as well. Some possible questions:

- Should Mary Mallon have been allowed to work as a cook?
- Was North Brother Island the best place to send Mary Mallon?
- Should Mary Mallon have gone with Baker without a fight?

**[RI.6.1, RI.6.3, W.6.9, SL.6.1, SL.6.2, SL.6.4 ]**

## **EXTRA CREDIT**

Have students find and examine one of the books in the Further Reading section of this guide or from the bibliography of *Fatal Fever*. Students should write a short evaluation of the differences in how the authors treat the same subject. This also can work as a group project, with each small group examining one resource and compiling their findings.

**[RI.6.1, RI.6.2, RI.6.3, RI.6.6, RI.6.9, W.6.2, W.6.4, SL.6.1]**

Write a diary entry from someone living through the typhoid outbreak. Write from the point of view of a student at Cornell, a patient in a hospital, or even Mary Mallon or George Soper. Allow volunteers to share their diary entries with the class. After the readings, discuss how the students imagined it felt to live through the ordeal. **[RI.6.1, RI.6.3, W.6.3, W.6.4, SL.6.4]**

## **FURTHER READING**

Explore these websites that provide information on typhoid fever:

*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*

<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/yellowbook/2014/chapter-3-infectious-diseases-related-to-travel/typhoid-and-paratyphoid-fever>

*World Health Organization*

[http://www.who.int/topics/typhoid\\_fever/en/](http://www.who.int/topics/typhoid_fever/en/)

*Encyclopedia Britannica*

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/611776/typhoid-fever>

Explore these books that focus on typhoid fever and Mary Mallon:

*Fever: A Novel* by Mary Beth Keane

*Deadly* by Julie Chibbaro

*Typhoid Mary* by Anthony Bourdain

*Typhoid Mary: Captive to the Public's Health* by Judith Walzer Leavitt

*Fighting for Life* by Josephine Baker

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TYPHOID MARY**  
By Gail Jarrow

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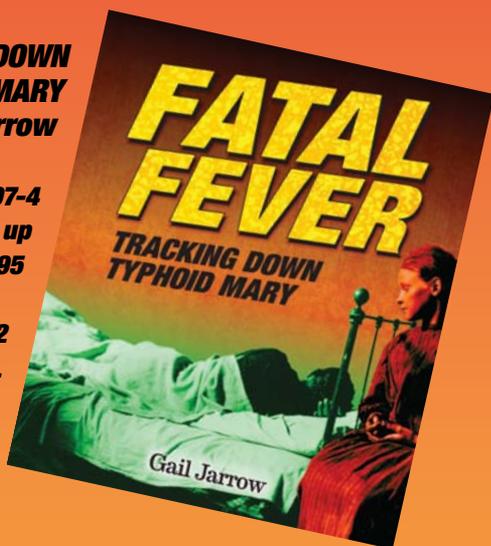
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