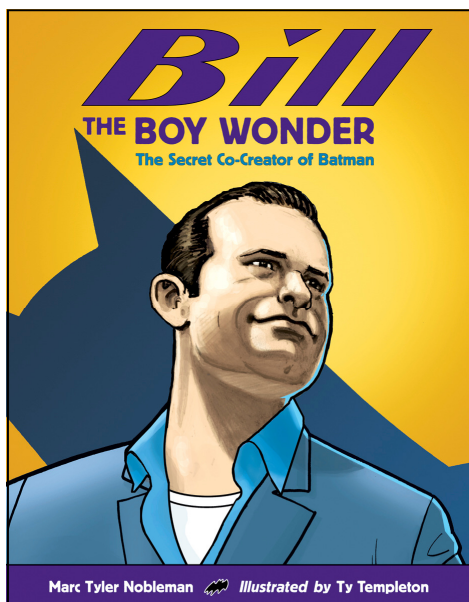


Bill

THE BOY WONDER

The Secret Co-Creator of Batman



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Ages 8 and up

DISCUSSION & ACTIVITY GUIDE

Developed by Charlesbridge and Marc Tyler Nobleman

Illustrations © 2012 by Ty Templeton

Every Batman story is marked with the words “Batman created by Bob Kane.” But that isn’t the whole truth. A struggling writer named Bill Finger was involved from the beginning. Bill helped invent Batman, from concept to costume to character. He dreamed up Batman’s haunting origins and his colorful nemeses. Despite his brilliance, Bill worked in obscurity. It was only after his death that fans went to bat for Bill, calling for acknowledgment that he was co-creator of Batman.

Based on original research, *Bill the Boy Wonder* is the first-ever book about the unsung man behind the Dark Knight.



www.charlesbridge.com/BilltheBoyWonder



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1) Discuss the difference between a hero and a superhero. Can an everyday person be a hero?
- 2) What is your opinion of Bill Finger? Do you think he should have been more assertive and demanded that he be recognized as the co-creator of Batman from the very start? Can you understand why he acted the way he did? What would you have done if you were in his position?
- 3) If he were alive today, how do you think Bill Finger would react to *Bill the Boy Wonder*? What about Bob Kane?
- 4) Author Marc Tyler Nobleman shares with us that in 1989, long after Bill’s death, Bob Kane said: “Bill never received the fame and recognition he deserved. If I could go back . . . Before he died, I would like to say, ‘I’ll put your name on it now. You deserve it.’” Have you ever done something that you wished you could go back in time and do differently?
- 5) What would you do if you found out someone wasn’t getting credit for something they did or helped to do?
- 6) Bob Kane and Bill Finger created the character of Batman more than seventy years ago. Why do you think this superhero is still so famous today?



SOCIAL STUDIES

- 1) *Bill the Boy Wonder* begins at a very fragile time in American history. The United States had fallen into the Great Depression, and people were struggling to find work—Bill’s father was even forced to close his tailor shop. What was the Great Depression? When did it take place? Who was the president during this time, and how did America get past this difficult era?
- 2) At the beginning of *Bill the Boy Wonder*, World War II had just begun in Europe, and the United States was about to join in the fight. On the very first page, we learn that Bill Finger’s real name was Milton, but he changed it because “Milton” was a common Jewish name, and Jews were discriminated against during this time. Why was this? What role did Judaism play in World War II? What else can you find out about the hardships of Jewish people in America during World War II? What about in other countries around the world?
- 3) Many people argue that during times of war and strife, superheroes become more beloved than ever. Why do you think this is? Do you think the timing of Batman’s debut in 1939—the same year World War II broke out in Europe—affected his popularity?



LANGUAGE ARTS

- 1) Who was Edgar Allan Poe? What types of things did he write? Why was it ironic that Bob and Bill would meet in Poe Park, named after Edgar Allan Poe, to brainstorm ideas for Batman?



- 2) What might have happened if Bob Kane had shown his original idea for Batman to Vin Sullivan without getting any input from Bill? Do you think Vin would have liked Bob’s superhero? Would it have been good enough to rival Superman, like Vin requested? Starting from when Bob enters Vin’s office to show his plans, write the scene that might have followed. What would Vin have said? Would he have liked Bob’s original ideas? How would Bob have defended his designs?
- 3) If you were a superhero, what would you be like? What would you look like? Would you have a costume, or several costumes? What would be your secret identity—or maybe you have more than one? Write a description of your superhero-self. Be sure to include drawings or sketches and to create a story about your origin.



SCIENCE



- 1) Bats are one of the most misunderstood mammals and are often feared. Bats are important to the environment, however, and are essential to maintaining healthy ecosystems. Find out more about this mammal and the benefits bats bring to humans and the earth. Where do bats live? What kind of habitat do they prefer? How are they important to human health and well-being? What kind of threats do bats face today, and what sort of conservation efforts are being implemented to ensure their safety? What can you do to help save the bats?



GROUP ACTIVITIES

- 1) Split the class into pairs and ask every student to come up with a name for a superhero. Then, ask each student to share their superhero name with their partner. Partner “A” must design the look of a superhero character based on the name Partner “B” has chosen, and vice versa. Once the students have created their designs, have them share with their partners. Ask each student what they think about the design the partner has produced based on the name he or she created. What parts of the design would they change? What parts would they keep? How closely does the partner’s design match what they imagined when they came up with the name?



- 2) Have students keep a “gimmick book” for a month—just like Bill Finger. Encourage them to keep their eyes open throughout the day for ideas that might inspire a story. Anytime they see or hear something interesting, they should write—or draw—it in their gimmick book. At the end of the month, allow each student to browse through everyone else’s gimmick books, and have them write two short stories: one based on the ideas they jotted down, and one based on observations from another student’s gimmick book. Once everyone in the class has had a chance to read each other’s stories, discuss how everyone’s stories differed—even if they were based on the same original idea.



MEET THE AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR



MARC TYLER NOBLEMAN AUTHOR

Marc Tyler Nobleman is the author of more than seventy books for young people of all ages, including the nonfiction picture book *Boys of Steel: The Creators of Superman*, which received multiple starred reviews and was named an American Library Association Notable Book. Due to discoveries Marc made in his research, *Boys of Steel* also landed on the front page of *USA Today*. His current writing focus is unconventional nonfiction—stories with a high-profile angle of some kind, but a mystery backstory.

Marc became an author both by design and by accident. He left college intending to write screenplays. He did that—he just didn't sell any. In the meantime he worked as a marketing assistant at two book publishers even though he could not have defined "marketing" before starting. The first publisher, Abbeville Press, was looking for someone to write an activity book based on picture books they were publishing. The subject: a rabbit who writes letters to his owner. Although Marc knew nothing about rabbits, he volunteered. And to his surprise, they took him seriously. So Marc was hired along with a partner to write what became his first published book.

Today Marc lives with his family in Maryland. He speaks frequently about writing nonfiction and the stories that he tells at conferences, book fairs, schools, and libraries around the country. He also reveals his research secrets and promotional gambles at noblemania.blogspot.com.

TY TEMPLETON ILLUSTRATOR

Ty Templeton is a Canadian cartoonist who has written and drawn for *Batman*, *Superman*, *Spider-Man*, *The Avengers*, *The Simpsons*, *Star Trek*, *Planet of the Apes*, and countless other comic books. When not writing and drawing, he has also worked as an actor, a musician, a teacher, a comedian, a magician's assistant, and a security guard, if you need to know every job. He is joyfully married to Keiren Smith, with whom he shares four children and three cats.

Visit Ty at tytempletonart.wordpress.com.



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