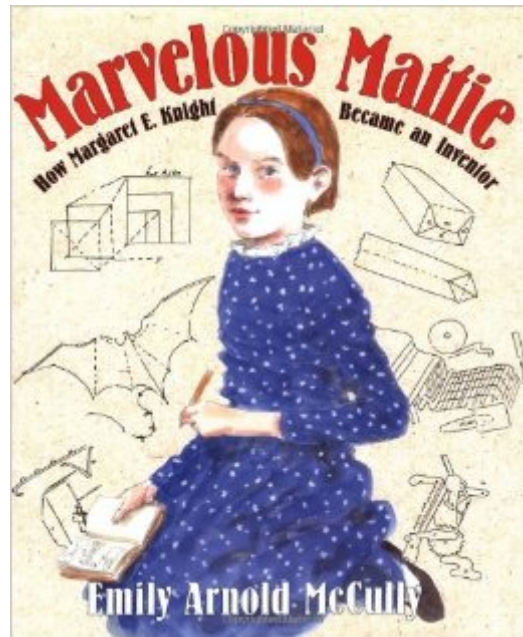


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# Marvelous Mattie: How Margaret E. Knight Became An Inventor



## Synopsis

With her sketchbook labeled My Inventions and her father's toolbox, Mattie could make almost anything — toys, sleds, and a foot warmer. When she was just twelve years old, Mattie designed a metal guard to prevent shuttles from shooting off textile looms and injuring workers. As an adult, Mattie invented the machine that makes the square-bottom paper bags we still use today. However, in court, a man claimed the invention was his, stating that she "could not possibly understand the mechanical complexities." Marvelous Mattie proved him wrong, and over the course of her life earned the title of "the Lady Edison." With charming pen-and-ink and watercolor illustrations, this introduction to one of the most prolific female inventors will leave readers inspired. *Marvelous Mattie* is a 2007 Bank Street - Best Children's Book of the Year.

## Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars — See all reviews (14 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #95,567 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #28 in Books > Children's Books > Science, Nature & How It Works > Inventions & Inventors #54 in Books > Children's Books > Biographies > United States #68 in Books > Children's Books > Education & Reference > History > United States > 1800s

Age Range: 7 - 11 years

Grade Level: 2 - 6

## Customer Reviews

I checked out *Escape of Oney Judge and Mirette on the High Wire* a few weeks ago from the library. Loved them so much I researched the author's other books and found this one. My four-year old was fascinated today, wanted to read it twice and talked about inventing all day long. We had learned about inventors a few weeks ago and I had pointed out that a poster I had ordered, with

thirty or so inventors, had no women! So to read this true, wonderful story about a woman inventor I think really inspired and excited my daughter. I have ordered all of this author's books and am so glad to find someone who is researching true stories of American woman heroes and writing lovely picture books about them. The illustrations are just precious, with the inventions running along the bottom of the page. FABULOUS.

Emily Arnold McCully's *Marvelous Mattie: How Margaret E. Knight Became An Inventor* is based on the true story of a female inventor around the turn of the century, but reads like fiction and thus is featured here. Mattie loves to make things at an early age and loves to invent whenever a challenge comes up - but she lives during a time when women are believed to be unable to understand mechanical concepts. Her battle for recognition brought her all the way to the patent office and makes for a lively story of one girl's determination to succeed against all gender odds.

What I enjoyed most about this book was the information on Margaret Knight and the things she invented, including a machine that made paper bags. The author and illustrator sets her story well: the reader can see and feel the times and the environment Knight lived in, and can perhaps feel the forces that drove this inventor to create the labor-saving and life-saving devices she created. Well worth reading for the information.

This non-fiction book sites a wonderful example of how a young girl can be successful in an arena that was dominated by men during her time. It also shows children the importance of recording work they do and documenting failures as well as successes. As a teacher, I stressed the need for my students to record their findings, illustrate their work and write down their thoughts on what to do next. It is a great "read aloud" book for elementary science classes.

*Marvelous Mattie* is the story of Margaret Knight, who was the first woman to be issued a U.S. patent for her invention of the flat-bottomed paper bag machine. And it was issued in 1871, a period when women's roles were narrow and prescribed. Born into a poor family, Mattie was always curious as to how things worked. Sketching away in her notebook, she designed and built kites that flew higher and sleds that slid faster. She even made her mother a foot warmer. At the age of twelve, Mattie went to work in a mill. After a young girl was practically killed in front of her eyes, she realized how dangerous it was and invented a safety device that saved workers from injury and death. Later, she went to work in a paper bag factory. She saw that the quality of the bags was poor (they didn't

stand upright so the grocer had to use one hand to hold them open and they often split when filled with bulky items). So Mattie went to work on a design for a better bag. For two years she worked on her idea, sketching away and making paper bag cut-outs of her machine. She finally built a prototype out of wood. Just as she was getting ready to apply for a patent she heard that someone had stolen her idea. She went to court to prove it was her design, and she eventually won. *Marvelous Mattie* is a good read aloud book for a first, second or third grader. The watercolor-and-ink drawings are a nice fit with the Industrial Age time period. Plus, an added bonus is that the book features some of her actual drawings from the paper bag patent. A book like this will open up kids' eyes to all the inventions surrounding them on a day to day basis. Have them examine a paper bag closely so they can see everything that went into the design. Mattie's invention is still used today in making paper bags.

You've probably never heard of Margaret E. Knight before. And yet you are intimately familiar with something she invented, a device used every day. Mattie invented a machine to make paper bags that would stand up on their own. What, you were hoping for something a little more exciting? More... worthwhile, perhaps? You want to know what the heck kinda invention is THAT? It's a USEFUL invention, is what it is, and it had the potential to make people rich... which is probably why a man tried to steal it from her before it could be patented, assuming everybody would believe him when he said a woman couldn't possibly understand the complexity of the machine. She was, in fact, the first woman awarded a US patent, and she invented several other things that the book doesn't really touch on. The book is well-enough written, and the story is a simple and fairly useful one. If nothing else, you can read it during Women's History Month and move off the treadmill of the same three or four tired old names.

I just happened by this yesterday at my local library book sale and it caught my eye. I am so please I brought it home. My children and I love Emily Arnold McCully's `Mirette and Bellini' books and this story was a hit as well. *Marvelous Mattie* is the story of Margaret Knight, a clever girl who isn't afraid to show the world that she's smart. She creates wonderful toys for her older brothers and then goes on to create a useful safety device when she works in a textile mill. As a young woman she works hard and finally invents a machine to make flat bottomed paper bags. My description doesn't do the story justice. I encourage you to pick this up from your local library and read it to your children or students. It's a wonderful true-story of girl power.

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