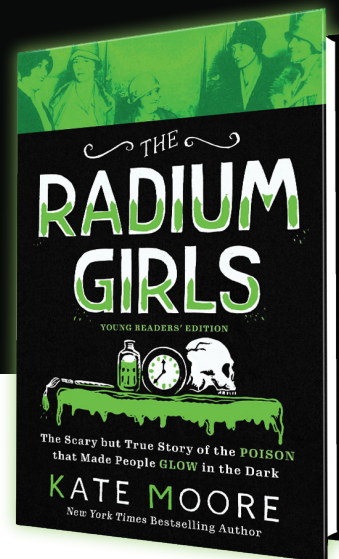


THE RADIUM GIRLS

YOUNG READERS' EDITION

BY KATE MOORE

EDUCATOR GUIDE



Discussion Questions & Activities for Grades 6, 7 & 8

Prepared by We Love Children's Books

About the Book

Explore the unbelievable true story of America's glowing girls and their fight for justice in the young readers edition of the *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestseller *The Radium Girls*. This enthralling new edition includes all-new material, including a glossary, timeline, and dozens of bonus photos.

Amid the excitement of the early twentieth century, hundreds of young women spend their days hard at work painting watch dials with glow-in-the-dark radium paint. The painters consider themselves lucky—until they start suffering from a mysterious illness. As the corporations try to cover up a shocking secret, these shining girls suddenly find themselves at the center of a deadly scandal.

The Radium Girls adapted for young readers tells the unbelievable true story of these incredible women, whose determination to fight back saved countless lives.

About the Author

KATE MOORE is the *Sunday Times*-bestselling author of more than fifteen books across the genres of gift, humor, biography, history and children's brand publishing. While writing *The Radium Girls*, Kate's research took her all over America—to Newark and Orange, New Jersey; to New York and Washington, DC; and to Chicago and Ottawa, Illinois. She lives in London, England with her husband.



Photo © Duncan Moore

Reviews

"A fine, moving, important work for young readers."

—*Kirkus Reviews*, STARRED review

"Moore's personal, captivating prose [renders] this shining piece of history unforgettable."

—*Booklist*, STARRED review

"An impeccably written young readers' edition of an excellent work of history."

—*School Library Journal*

"[A] lesson in corporate greed, bystander ignorance, and the power of perseverance that will inspire and educate all young revolutionaries."

—*The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*

"This thrilling young readers' edition is an essential purchase for all middle school and high school libraries."

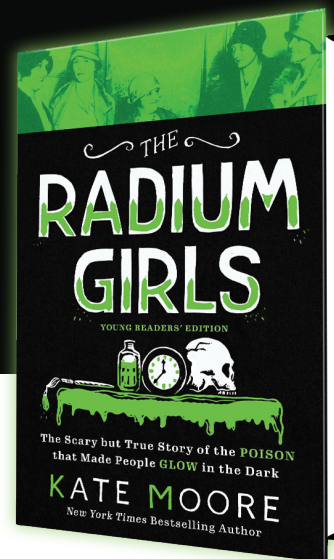
—*Youth Services Book Review*

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Pre-Reading Questions and Activities

The workers in this book were all poisoned by radiation coming from the element radium. What do students know about radiation? About radium? Team with a science teacher if possible to provide background on these topics.

What does it mean to be an “activist”? Have any students or their families ever been part of a protest or campaigned to make a change in the world, big or small? How did it make them feel?

Read the Author’s Note for *The Radium Girls*. Discuss what it says about the book students are about to read. What themes and messages do students think the author plans on addressing?

On her website, the author describes *The Radium Girls* as a work of “narrative nonfiction.” What do students think this means?

Vocabulary

The Radium Girls includes a glossary that defines the many topic-specific words and concepts that appear in the text. Before reading the book, review the glossary entries with students to prepare them for unfamiliar words and concepts they will encounter. How is this glossary different from a dictionary? How is it the same? Encourage students to refer to the glossary when they see an unfamiliar word—and not be afraid to turn to the dictionary either! How does seeing the word in context improve their understanding of its meaning?

Post-Reading Questions and Activities

Reading Comprehension: Points to Discuss

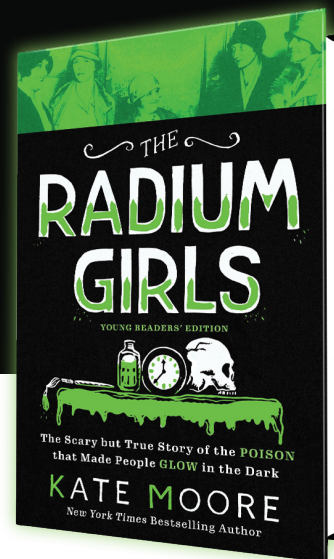
- Who were “the radium girls”? Why were they called that?
- Where were the factories in this book located?
- How did the radium girls feel about their jobs and the companies that employed them at the beginning of the book? How about at the end?
- Why were young women the ideal radium dial painters?
- What did “Lip, Dip and Paint” mean?
- What sorts of fun did the dial painters have with the radium when they thought it was safe?
- What common ailments did the radium girls experience as the radiation poisoned them? Why did doctors not always connect these ailments as being caused by a similar source?
- What sort of medical doctors first noticed a series of similar conditions in their patients?
- Were there any other diseases or conditions that doctors thought were similar to the ones suffered by the radium girls?
- What precautions were taken by the dial painters? What precautions were taken by lab workers?
- How was radium viewed by the general public at first? How did that change in the course of the events described in this book?

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- Can you name one of the individuals who helped the radium girls in their fight for justice?
- What happened in 1917 that helped the companies making radium dials to make huge profits?
- What happened in 1929 that caused the girls to value their jobs so highly, and the communities to support the companies that made radium dials?
- What tactics did the Radium Dial Company and the Radium Luminous Materials Corporation use against the lawsuits brought against them?
- What did Dr. Frederick Flinn do to help stop the radium girls from getting treated fairly?
- What was the “List of the Doomed”?
- Did the companies know how dangerous the radium paint was to their workers?
- How did the dial painters react to the increased demands made on them during World War I?
- Why did the state of Illinois erect a statue to the radium girls?

For More Information...

This book includes tools to help readers locate critical information in the text quickly, and to help readers find more information and resources about this topic. As a class, review the following sections: Table of Contents, Author’s Note, List of Key Characters, Timeline of Events, Glossary, Notes, Selected Bibliography, Index, Acknowledgements and About the Author. What information do each of these sections contain? Why are they included? How do they work together to enhance the reader’s experience with this book?

Bringing History to Life

Kate Moore has said that she chose to write this book as a “readable, chronological, narrative account” to make the story more accessible to readers, and that she wanted “to give [the radium girls] a voice, to make the story about them, and not simply about their place in history.” Discuss with students what it was like to read nonfiction in this way. With this approach, do the girls come to life differently than in a textbook? Does learning about them as people and not just historical facts let students apply the lessons of the radium girls’ fight for justice to their own lives more easily?

Cast of Characters

Come together as a class and review the List of Key Characters. Discuss how the author creates a complete picture of these individuals quickly and efficiently. Select one of the dial painters and, as a class, create an outline of their personality using the following categories: physical description, what she says, what she does, and what others say about her. Using this exercise as a guide, have each student select another key figure from the story and create a similar personality outline, citing specifics from the text to support each statement. Come together as a class to share students’ final work. Why do students think the author took such care to communicate what these people were like? How does it affect the reader’s experience with the text?

Lessons Learned

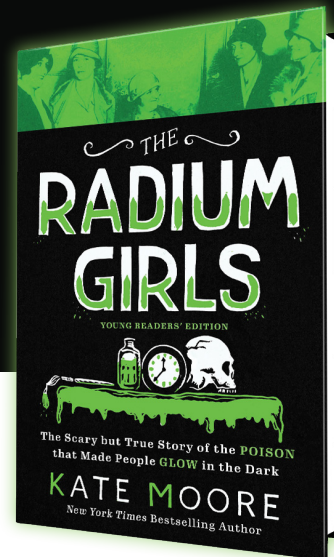
As they read the book, ask students to pause now and then to consider the main points of *The Radium Girls* and the ideas it addresses. Come together as a class and make a list of the themes students have identified. Discuss how the author

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tells the reader about each theme over the course of the book. What is the relationship of this theme to the people and events in the book? Have students cite specific evidence from the text to support their analysis. Is this theme relevant to students' lives?

Working as a Dial Painter

This book gives students a very detailed look at what it was like to be a dial painter—their working conditions and the lives they lived. Come together as a class and discuss. How did the girls feel about their jobs? Their lives? About the companies that employed them? Have students write an informative essay detailing what it was like to work as a dial painter during the boom times at these facilities. Remind students to cite specifics from the text to support their statements. Alternatively, have students write a story from the point of view of a dial painter, describing her everyday life and work.

Never Quit

The radium girls in New Jersey and Illinois encountered a staggering number of obstacles, but never quit in their fight for justice. Break the class into small groups and have each group discuss obstacles the girls encountered—from public ignorance, to legal maneuvering, and even their own deteriorating health. How did they overcome each of these obstacles? Did anyone help them? Which obstacles did students find most demoralizing and why? Come together as a class and share their insights. What lessons and inspiration can students learn from this?

Making a Difference

In New Jersey and in Illinois, the radium girls got sick from their working conditions, and many died. When the companies they worked for refused to take responsibility and help them, the girls banded together and sought justice. Their hard-won victory resulted in changes to laws protecting workers. They fought for what was right, and made a difference for themselves and for everyone in our country. What young people are in the news now for their activism? What problems are they trying to fix?

In the News

In the course of their efforts to get justice, the radium girls attracted the attention of the press who wrote sympathetic articles about them. Break students into small groups, and have them research newspaper articles about the radium girls. The notes in the back of the book give some publications and dates that students can use to get started. Then have each student put on their reporter's cap and write their own human interest story about these girls, and the response by the United States Radium Corporation or the Radium Dial Company. Using the computer, publish a newspaper article dedicated to the radium girls for the whole school to read.

Facts

The Radium Girls is carefully researched and based on well-established facts. There is a section at the back of the book that lists credits for all the photos and there are notes that indicate the source for the quotes and references in each chapter. Why did the author include the documentation on the quotes? How does having this documentation affect the reader's attitude toward the book?

Foreshadowing: The Shape of Things to Come

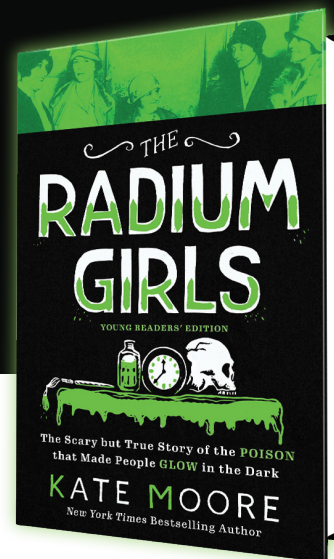
Discuss the concept of foreshadowing with the class. How can it help the reader predict important events that will

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happen later in the book? Break the class into pairs or small groups and assign each one a section of *The Radium Girls* to review in order to find examples of foreshadowing. Have them be on the lookout for hints of events to come, as well as explicit warnings or discussions of dangers not yet understood. Come together as a class and discuss their findings. How does knowing what will happen, or having a hint, affect the reader's experience and comprehension? Do students like this technique or not?

Workplace Safety

The Radium Girls provides a historical context for laws that protect workers from unsafe conditions, and shows how these brave women helped create the modern view of job safety. Break students into small groups and have them review and discuss the book to identify the progress the radium girls and their allies made in advancing workplace safety laws and holding employers responsible for decisions they made that endangered their employees. Come together as a class for students to share their insights.

Postscript

Instruct students not to read the postscript when they read *The Radium Girls*. Come together as a class and read the postscript together. When one first reads the postscript, it sounds like a summary of the experiences of the radium girls which students have just read. However, it actually details abuses by a company in the 1970s. Were students surprised that the same abuses were taking place again? Why do students think the author included this information?

Change the World

The radium girls were subjected to deadly working conditions by the companies they trusted, were poisoned by radium and, even as they were dying, fought for justice. As Kate Moore said, "...perhaps one day, like these young women, you too will lend your voice to a cause in order to fight for what you believe in." Have students write a personal opinion paper describing how this story makes them feel about the power of a small group of people—or an individual—to change the world. Break them into pairs to review each other's work and revise their papers based on peer feedback before submitting a final version.

Internet Resources

<http://theradiumgirls.com/>

This website is intended as a companion site to the original version of this book. Here you can read more about the women, listen to interviews with the author, read reviews, and find answers to some frequently asked questions.

