

## **JOURNEY TO THE BOTTOMLESS PIT: THE STORY OF STEPHEN BISHOP & MAMMOTH CAVE**

**Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Award Nominee 2007 Grades 6-8**

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**Journey to the Bottomless Pit: The Story of Stephen Bishop and Mammoth Cave**  
by Elizabeth (Betsy) Mitchell. Penguin Group (USA) (Viking), 2004. 128 p.

### **Summary**

This is a true story about a 17-year-old Kentucky slave named Stephen Bishop. His master, Frank Gorin, owned Mammoth Cave and needed someone to guide the tourists. Stephen was excited to be chosen for this job, but he was also worried. Under the leadership of his master, Stephen learned every trail, passageway and story that his master told him. As time passed, Stephen became more and more comfortable with Mammoth Cave and explored the cave in his spare time. He discovered many hidden treasures in the cave, such as blind cavefish, huge beautiful caverns, Gorin's Dome, Winding Way, Bacon Chamber, and a way to cross the "Bottomless Pit"! Because of his discovery of these new attractions, Stephen and the Mammoth Cave were becoming famous. Frank decided to sell the cave, the inn, and all of his slaves to Dr. John Croghan. Dr. Croghan wanted to write a book about the cave and needed Stephen to draw an up-to-date map to accompany it. Stephen was pleased to do so and was taken to his master's home, Locust Grove. It was here that he met the love of his life, Charlotte, and had a baby boy named Thomas. At the age of 36, Stephen Bishop died. He was the greatest tour guide of Mammoth Cave and a devoted family man. The straightforward text is based on the accounts of visitors who came to Mammoth Cave and were led through the tour by Stephen Bishop. The full-page sketches enhance the scenes described. *Journey to the Bottomless Pit* is an inspiring story of a brave and determined young man, who made a noteworthy contribution to the world, despite being enslaved.

### **Awards**

100 Titles for Reading and Sharing (New York Public Library)

### **Author's Biography**

Elizabeth Mitchell, also known as Betsy Mitchell, grew up in Omaha, Nebraska and received a degree in journalism at the University of Nebraska/Omaha. Before moving to New York, Mitchell worked as a reporter for the *Omaha World-Herald*. In New York, she had various jobs associated with editing, before becoming an award winning Editor-in-Chief of Del Rey Books in 2002. Del Rey Books is a publisher of science fiction for adults. In 2004, she wrote and published *Journey to the Bottomless Pit: The Story of Stephen Bishop and Mammoth Cave*. She first became interested in Mammoth Cave when her grandparents took her to see the cave. Years later, when she took her son to see Mammoth Cave, she noticed an article about a tour guide named Stephen Bishop on a brochure. She found his story to be intriguing and decided to research the life of this incredible person. [www.nesfa.org/boskone/b41/mitchell.html](http://www.nesfa.org/boskone/b41/mitchell.html)

### **Illustrator's Biography**

Kelynn Z. Alder is of Mexican American heritage. She grew up in a family that traveled a lot and lived in several countries. With her widespread traveling, she appreciated and became captivated with people's cultures. She received her undergraduate education from Parsons School of Design in New York and Paris, and Northern Arizona University. She also has a master's degree from the School of Visual Arts. She has received numerous awards for her portraits. She is married to Peter Viccelio, and they have two children, Lucas and Maya Chole. They live on the north shore of Long Island with their two Bernese Mountain dogs. Currently, Alder is focusing on figurative work in addition to capturing the spirit of the outdoor market places of Latin American communities.

[www.kelynnalder.com](http://www.kelynnalder.com)

[www.nsalamerica.org/swimmer](http://www.nsalamerica.org/swimmer)

### **Related Titles**

#### **Caves**

*Mammoth Cave: The World's Largest Cave System* by Brad Burnham.

*Mammoth Cave National Park* by Mike Graf.

*Mammoth Cave and the Kentucky Cave Region* by Bob and Judi Thompson.

*Caves* by Isaac Nadeau.

#### **African American History**

*Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt* by Deborah Hopkinson.

*Jump Ship to Freedom* by James and Christopher Collier.

*Sarny: A Life Remembered* by Gary Paulsen.

*Hang a Thousand Trees with Ribbons: The Story of Phyllis Wheatley* by Ann Rinaldi.

See **History Now: American History Online**

[http://www.historynow.org/12\\_2004/lp4c.html](http://www.historynow.org/12_2004/lp4c.html)

Lists books for teaching African American History.

### **Classroom Connections**

#### **Science: Caves**

- Use this book as a springboard for the study of caves. Have the students research caves (formation, famous caves, etc.) in the cave.

- See **Scholastic: Lesson Plan on Caves**

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/lessonrepro/lessonplans/theme/caves.htm>

This site includes an excellent curriculum-based lesson plan.

#### **History/Social Studies: Slavery**

- Include this book in a unit on slavery. A timeline is included at the end of the book.

#### **Maps/Geography**

- Show the students the map (located in the back of the book) that Stephen Bishop made in 1842.
- Have students locate the state of Kentucky on a U.S. map and Mammoth Cave on a Kentucky map.

- Compare how maps are written now and do an exercise teaching about how to read and understand maps.

See **Make a Map Lesson Plan**

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/lessonrepro/lessonplans/profbooks/ss971114b.htm>

See **Maps, Globes and Map Skills**

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/fieldtrp/socstu/maps.htm>

### **Biographies**

- Use this book as a part of Black History Month. Have the students research other individuals whose lives were significant during the time of slavery.

**Connections by Elizabeth Dumas, Good Hope Middle School, West Monroe  
Grade 6**

ELA Unit 3: Historical Fiction This title can be utilized in the following activities by student historical research groups interested in the life of and attitudes toward slaves during the decades prior to the Civil War. (This story begins in 1838.)

Activity 3: Resources for Exploration: Fiction and Nonfiction Bibliographies

Activity 4: Determine Influences of Setting on Characters

### **Web Links**

#### **Author, Illustrator**

**New England Science Fiction Association, Inc.: Biography of Mitchell**

[www.nesfa.org/boskone/b41/mitchell.html](http://www.nesfa.org/boskone/b41/mitchell.html)

This site has a biography of Elizabeth Mitchell

**Kelynn Alder**

[www.kelynnalder.com](http://www.kelynnalder.com)

This site includes number fine arts paintings by the illustrator.

**North Shore Animal League of America**

[www.nsalamerica.org/swimmer](http://www.nsalamerica.org/swimmer)

Kelynn Alder pledged to swim to raise money to help Hurricane Katrina dogs.

#### **History/Biography**

**History Now: American History Online** [http://www.historynow.org/12\\_2004/lp4c.html](http://www.historynow.org/12_2004/lp4c.html)

This site has books for teaching African American History.

**ThinkQuest: Slavery in America**

<http://library.thinkquest.org/CR0212661/>

Information about slavery from Africa to freedom.

**Stephen Bishop**

[http://www.coax.net/people/lwf/HRB\\_SB.HTM](http://www.coax.net/people/lwf/HRB_SB.HTM)

Brief article about Stephen Bishop and the Mammoth Cave.

**Stephen Bishop (cave explorer)**

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen\\_Bishop\\_%28cave\\_explorer%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen_Bishop_%28cave_explorer%29)

This website gives a detailed biography of Stephen Bishop's life and accomplishments.

**Unbrokencircle.org**

<http://www.unbrokencircle.org/weblinks.htm>

This website gives information about the Civil War. Click on Teacher Resource and Guides. This section gives information of the Civil War, examples of activities, and sample quizzes for the teacher to use.

**Caves****Cave Lesson Plans**

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/lessonrepro/lessonplans/theme/caves.htm>

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/fieldtrp/socstu/explore.htm>

Lesson plans for teachers to integrate a cave lesson into their classroom for grades 3-8.

**Caves.com**

<http://www.caves.com/>

This website includes various types of caves interesting picture of caves. Simply click on the type of cave to learn about that cave.

**CNN.com – Kentucky: Mammoth Cave Long History**

<http://www.cnn.com/2004/TRAVEL/DESTINATIONS/02/26/mammoth.cave.ap/>

Article about the Mammoth Cave.

**Mammoth Cave National Park**

<http://www.nps.gov/macac/>

This website provides the geology and history of Mammoth Cave.

<http://nps.gov/macac/home.html> for a virtual cave tour of Mammoth Cave.

**Maps****Map Machine**

<http://plasma.nationalgeographic.com/mapmachine>

Type in a region, state, zip code, country, or city to locate the specific map that one is looking for. Type in Mammoth Cave and choose a map.

**Make a Map Lesson Plan**

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/lessonrepro/lessonplans/profbooks/ss971114b.htm>

This site includes various map-making activities for the classroom.

**Maps, Globes and Map Skills**

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/fieldtrp/socstu/maps.htm>

Lesson plan and good links to sites about maps.