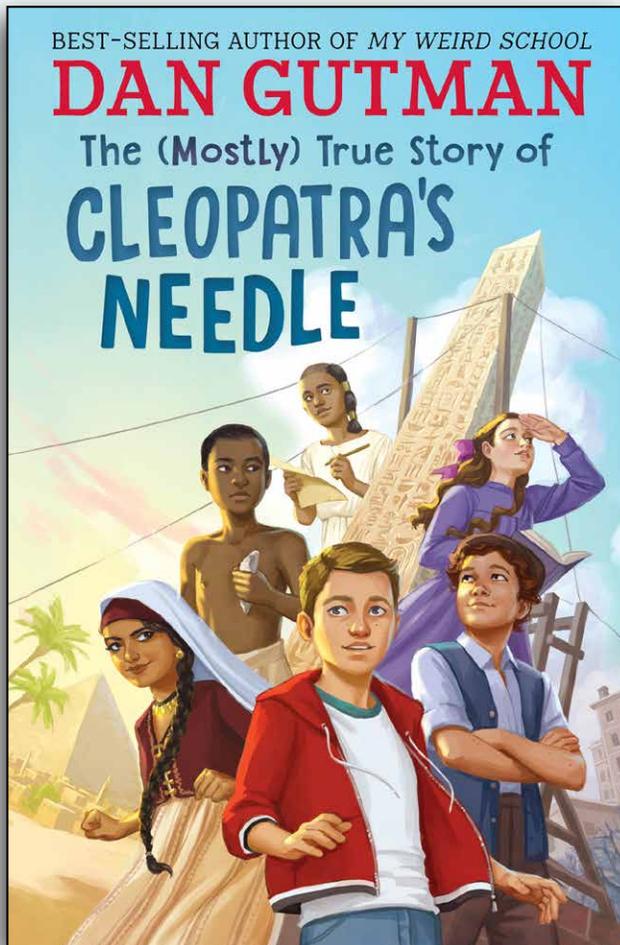


HOLIDAY HOUSE

EDUCATOR'S GUIDE



The (Mostly) True Story of Cleopatra's Needle

by Dan Gutman

A Junior Library Guild Gold Standard Selection

ABOUT THE BOOK

From the author of the My Weird School books, an adventure story that spans centuries and continents.

In Central Park, New York, stands Cleopatra's Needle. But what do you know about it? Did you know that thousands of people worked in 1461 BCE to build it? Then hundreds more moved it and erected it in Alexandria, where it stood for three thousand years? So how did a monolith weighing over two hundred tons get moved all the way to New York City—and in the nineteenth century, no less?

In this historical fiction account by best-selling author Dan Gutman, five kids who watched the Needle at each phase of its history recount the daring story of how something that seemed to be impossible—and that nearly ended in disaster—finally succeeded against all odds.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Explain the title of the novel. What part of the book is true, and what part is fiction? Discuss why Gutman felt he needed a story to get readers interested in Cleopatra's Needle. How does the mom get her son interested in Cleopatra's Needle through story? At what point does he want to know more? What is the mom's element of surprise at the end of the book?
- What is the purpose of the introduction? Define obelisk. How does the obelisk get the name Cleopatra's Needle? Discuss the significance of the structure. Why is it important to know how and why it was built, and how it got to the United States?



- Discuss the structure of the novel. How many narrators are in the novel? What is unique about each narrator? Which narrator would you most want to meet and why? Discuss how telling the story through diary entries helps establish the timeframe for when the obelisk was built through to its arrival in the United States.
- Part 1 is told through the diary entries of Zosar Zuberi, a boy in Aswan, Egypt. What is his fate now that he is nine years old? Describe the job of a stone cutter. Discuss why Zosar’s dad is so important. Explain what Zosar means when he says, “When we started, I was a boy. Now I feel like an old man” (p. 19). Calculate how old Zosar is by the time the obelisk is finished. Discuss Zosar’s idea for moving the obelisk.
- Think about the diary entries of Lateef Jabari in Part 2. What are Lateef’s aspirations? Why does his mother discard his drawings? How does this reveal her view of artists? Who is Omari? Discuss Lateef’s mother’s reaction when Omari comes to her home looking for Lateef. Why is she convinced Lateef is in trouble? Discuss Lateef’s important role in the carving of the obelisk.
- Panya Hassan gets a diary for her fourteenth birthday. Why does Panya’s father think a diary is the perfect gift for her? Explain why Panya doesn’t trust the American men she sees in Alexandria. Discuss the difference between a rumor and the truth. Point out the rumors Panya hears about the obelisk being stolen by the Americans. What happens when she learns the truth?
- How does Thomas Brighton get on board *The Dessoug*, the ship that sails Cleopatra’s Needle to America? At first, he is chained and treated like a prisoner. At what point does he become important to Commander Henry Gorringer? Why does Thomas think that he and the commander are a little alike? Explain the phrase “dodged a bullet” (p. 129). What is the bullet the ship dodged? Discuss why Thomas turns down a job working for the commander in New York.
- Rebecca Watson is a girl inventor in New York City. Explain what she means when she says, “I have obelisk fever” (p. 136). In what ways is Cleopatra’s Needle becoming a “Broadway star”? How does Rebecca come to meet Commander Gorringer? Describe the “turntable” that Rebecca invents. What does the commander learn from Rebecca’s invention?
- What is an engineer? Name all of the engineering efforts to build and transport Cleopatra’s Needle from its beginnings in Ancient Egypt to its final home in Central Park in New York City.

Guide created by Pat Scales, retired school librarian and independent consultant, Greenville, South Carolina.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

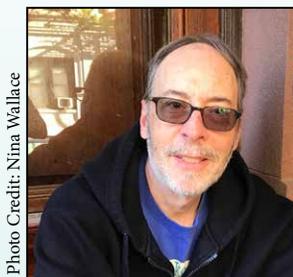


Photo Credit: Nima Wallace

Dan Gutman grew up in New Jersey loving sports, which inspired him as an adult to write his baseball card book series, that begins with *Honus & Me*, which was nominated for eleven state awards and adapted for television. Other titles of his include the My Weird School series, *The Homework Machine*, The Genius Files series, *The Kid Who Ran for President*, and Holiday House’s own *Houdini and Me* and *The (Mostly) True Story of Cleopatra’s Needle*. He lives with his wife in New York City. Learn more at DanGutman.com.



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