

MYSTERY ON CONSTITUTION ISLAND

Maggie Felsch & Jenny Phillips



For use with the US Constitution and Government course



MYSTERY
ON
CONSTITUTION
ISLAND

Written by
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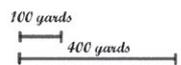
This book accompanies *The Good and the Beautiful*
US Constitution and Government course.

Cover illustration by Dan Burr
Cover design by Phillip Colhouer

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CHAPTER ONE

The Old Box

You could call it a tree house, but the Bailey family called it their loft. Though it was built in a large oak tree, it was also connected to their house through a wooden walkway that stretched from the upstairs deck of the home to the loft entrance. The roof and walls were strong and tight. In the loft is where the four Bailey kids loved to read, draw, and learn about fascinating things with their parents, from the wonders of the microscopic world to the historical timeline of the Holy Bible.

Huge windows on one side of the loft looked out upon the thick branches and fluttering leaves of the spacious oak tree. Twelve-year-old Martha loved the window seat near these windows. When it was breezy, like it often was at their home near the coast of Maine, she would open the window and listen to her favorite sound: the wind swirling the drifts of leaves with a gentle rushing sound like the ocean. She sat there now, absorbed with the book in her hands.

The wall of windows on the other side of the loft was James' favorite place. A porch swing hanging from the ceiling in front of the window was the perfect spot for the nine-year-old boy to cuddle up with a book or, as he was doing now, watch

the sea roll into the bay at the end of their backyard.

“Dad’s late,” James said aloud.

“Do you know why he’s late?” asked Benjamin, the youngest Bailey boy at five years old, who stood near the swing looking out at the bay. Benjamin stroked Daisy’s head. She was the family’s border collie, a loving and faithful friend.

Sixteen-year-old Roger, the oldest child, looked up from the worktable in the middle of the loft and said, “Dad will be home soon. The morning is still young. You’ll see.”

Mom had gone to help a neighbor and wouldn’t be home until lunchtime. So Martha, taking on the role of “temporary mom,” gave Benjamin a reassuring nod and smile and then continued reading.

Their father caught and sold crabs from the sea on his boat, the *Liberty*. Crabbing was at times, they all knew, a dangerous occupation, so the family was always grateful when Dad returned safely from the sea.

About forty-five minutes later, the loft door flew open, and Dad stepped in carrying an old metal box and a small bowl of strawberries. He had a mysterious smile on his face as he set the box carefully down on the worktable.

“Hi, Dad!” said Martha, happy to see that he’d made it home. “What is that?”

“You won’t believe this!” he said, setting the bowl next to the box before sitting down in his chair. “After work I stopped by my brother’s house to help him move a few heavy boxes into his attic. Whew! It was hot up there! As I was about to hurry down the ladder, I noticed this tin box. It was all covered in dust, but it stood out to me! Well, you know Uncle Harry. He’d inherited it after Grandpa Bailey died, but he’d forgotten about it. He said to me, ‘I’m sure glad you found that. Grandpa wanted it to go to his great-grandchildren. Since I don’t have

any children and you do, why don't you take it back to your kids?' So I did!"

The Bailey children all hurried to gather around their father to see the unique old metal box.

"What's in it?" asked wide-eyed little Benjamin.

"Didn't he love to read and write?" asked Martha. "Maybe he wrote us some poetry or left us some of his favorite books. Hopefully he didn't leave us his favorite snack—smoked oysters!" she added with a laugh.

"I'm sure it's something more important than oysters," said James.

"Great-grandpa Bailey loved history," Roger theorized. "If he wanted us to have this box, then maybe it's something like a family time capsule with pictures and stuff."

"He loved pirate stories, too, so I bet it's gold!" said Benjamin. "And maybe even jewels. I've always wanted a ruby. If there's a ruby in it, Dad, may I please have it?"

Dad shook the box. It didn't make a lot of noise. "It doesn't sound like gold or rubies inside. Sorry, Benjamin. Look at this lock, though. It's sealed tight, and there's no key. I suppose we'll have to pry it open."

"I'll go get a crowbar!" said James excitedly. "I've always wanted to break something open with a crowbar!"

"Hold on!" said Dad. "Let's do our history lesson first."

"Oh, Dad, do we have to?" asked Benjamin. "This is the most exciting thing that has ever happened to me."

"Suspense is good for you," said Dad with a laugh. "But we'll keep the lesson short today. Everyone gather around."

The four children sat while Dad took Great-grandpa Bailey's box over to his desk in the corner, and then took something out of a drawer. It was a piece of yellowed, antique-looking paper, burnt around the edges.

“Okay,” Dad said, returning to the table with the paper. “I want you all to imagine you’re Pilgrims on the *Mayflower*. You used to live in England where the British government passed a law called the Act of Uniformity, which made it illegal not to attend the official Church of England services.”

Martha raised her hand. “What if you wanted to attend a different church?”

“Well,” said Dad, “you would have been fined. The fines got more and more expensive, and if you didn’t pay up, you could lose your home and land.”

“That isn’t fair!” piped up Benjamin. “The government can’t tell people what church to go to.”

“That’s true for you, Benjamin, but that’s not how it used to be in England. The Pilgrim Separatists began meeting secretly in the village of Scrooby, England. They were so persecuted that they fled to Holland. But life was not good for them there, either, and they were worried that their children were becoming too worldly and not following their faith. So they came to the New World on the *Mayflower*, and once they arrived, something significant happened right before they got off the ship.”

“What?” asked little Benjamin, all excited now.

Dad pulled a pen from his shirt pocket and handed it to Roger. “I want you to sign this paper, Roger. We are pretending it is the Mayflower Compact.”

“What’s a compact?” asked James.

“It’s an agreement,” his father explained. “The Mayflower Compact was written and signed by the Pilgrims when they arrived in New Plymouth in 1620. There was something unique about this agreement. Throughout the history of England, the people didn’t have much say in their government. The Mayflower Compact changed that for the Pilgrims. Now they

had a say in how things were governed. In fact, the Mayflower Compact is regarded as a key document in American history because it shows the determination of a group of people to live under a law based on the consent of the people—a people setting up their own rules for their government. It was the first of many similar compacts, or agreements, to be made by colonists who would come to the New World. The compact was signed by forty-one adult male passengers before they disembarked from the ship, becoming the first example of written laws in the New World.”

“Eventually, there were thirteen colonies,” said Martha. “What colony did the Pilgrims live in?”

Dad pointed to a map of the colonies on the wall. “The colony they lived in eventually became known as Massachusetts.”

“That’s not far from Maine!” James said excitedly.

“Right! They landed not too far from here,” Dad answered. “Now, let’s fast forward to the mid-1700s, a hundred years or so after the Pilgrims landed in the New World. Roger, you have been reading a wonderful book on the US government, so I’m going to have you help me teach. What were the thirteen British colonies, and how were they politically connected?”

Roger rattled off the names of the colonies: “Virginia, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Maryland, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia.” Then, feeling encouraged by the attentive eyes of his brothers and sister, who looked impressed, Roger continued, “In the middle of the 1700s, the American colonists were British subjects. That means they were under the rule of Britain’s king, King George III. They were also ruled by the Magna Carta, which was a document signed in 1215—some five hundred years earlier.

The Magna Carta said that nobody, including the king, was above the law, and the same rights the document gave to British citizens applied to colonists living in America. Even though they were under British rule, Great Britain was literally thousands of miles away from the American colonies, and each colony had established its own written laws. They had their own legislators—you know, the people who write the laws.”

“Excellent, Roger. Thank you,” Dad said. “Colonists in America handled their own affairs, colony by colony, for nearly 150 years. Merchants and shippers had to pay some taxes to Britain, but for the most part, each colony had formed its own government and written its own laws. But things changed. In 1765, Britain was struggling financially, and King George needed money. Roger, do you know why?”

The children all turned their attention to Roger again.

“Yes, I think so,” said Roger. “England and France fought in the Seven Years’ War, which lasted seven years, just like the name says. Part of that included the long French and Indian War, which was fought in North America over who would get control of Canada and the Great Lakes region. Britain lost that war, and they ended up in deep debt because of it.”

“Thank you, Roger, that was perfect. Okay, kids! Let’s review,” said Dad. He picked up the basket of strawberries. “If you get the question right, you get a strawberry from Uncle Harry’s garden—if you can catch it,” he added with a wink. “All right, Benjamin, youngest first. Who ruled the colonists in the thirteen colonies?”

Benjamin beamed as he shouted, rather loudly, “Great Britain!”

“Correct!” Dad threw a strawberry to Benjamin, who caught it with both hands and quickly popped it into his mouth.

MYSTERY ON CONSTITUTION ISLAND

*"It is a call for action. Read the Constitution.
Know it. Preserve it. With love, Grandpa Bailey"*

Learning about the US Constitution becomes an exciting adventure when the Bailey family sets out to explore a private island in search of answers to mysterious riddles left by their late grandfather. A maritime mistake sparks a chain of events, bringing to light a valuable artifact and an unexpected threat. An accompaniment to *The Good and the Beautiful US Government and Constitution* course, this fact-filled adventure story provides the perfect setting for parents and children to come together and learn more about the foundation and significance of the US Constitution.

 ORIGINAL PUBLICATION


The Good AND THE Beautiful
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