

# ***Counting on Grace***

**By:** Elizabeth Winthrop

**Publisher:** Random House

**Copyright:** 2006

**Genre:** Historical Fiction

**Summary:** It is 1910 in Vermont, and even though she is below the legal age of 14, Grace Forcier must give up school in order to work in the textile mill. With the help of their teacher, Grace and her friend Arthur Trottier, who must also work in the mill, write a letter to the National Child Labor Committee to alert them to the problem of underage mill workers. Mr. Lewis Hine arrives to photograph the children in the mill. Unwilling to wait for the authorities to enforce the labor laws, Arthur intentionally maims himself in the mill machinery so that he can return to school. The teacher is fired and at the end, Grace has taken her place as a substitute until a permanent replacement can be found. The book ends on a hopeful note.

**BOOKTALK:** (Show some of Lewis Hine's photos of children who were mill workers.) Imagine that you were a kid living in 1910. Now imagine that your family was very poor and everyone, including you, had to work in a textile mill to pay the bills. The textile mill is a very dangerous place. You have to work there 12 hours a day, 6 days a week. Of course, you can't go to school anymore; there's no time. This book, *Counting on Grace*, is a work of historical fiction, but it is based on real events. Grace Forcier and her friend Arthur are the smartest kids in their class, but they have to start working in the mill when they are only 12. At first Grace is excited because she is glad to have a chance to help her family, but then she realizes that she doesn't want to do this for the rest of her life. Arthur hates it so much he does something really drastic. All along, their teacher, Miss Lesley, tries to help them and all other child laborers. Unfortunately, this makes some powerful people very angry. This book is written in the first person in Grace's voice – it is a thick book, but it really flows and you will wish it was longer when you reach the end. And you will have a new appreciation for the fact that kids today get to stay in school and don't have to work 72 hours a week!

## **AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH:**

Elizabeth Winthrop is the author of over 50 books. Writing is in her blood. Her father, brother, uncles, grandfather, and great-grandfather were all successful writers. However, she is the first fiction writer of the group. (Her great-grandfather was Theodore Roosevelt.) Her most beloved books for the upper elementary grades are *The Castle in the Attic* and its sequel *The Battle for the Castle*. For more author information see [www.elizabethwinthrop.com](http://www.elizabethwinthrop.com).

**Other books written by the author:**

*The Battle for the Castle*

*Belinda's Hurricane*

*The Castle in the Attic*

*Dear Mr. President: Franklin Delano Roosevelt*

*Luke's Bully*

*Maggie and the Monster*

*Marathon Miranda*

*Miranda in the Middle*

*The Red-Hot Rattoons*

*Walking Away*

**CHALLENGING WORDS (pronunciation, spelling, defining):**

p. 5 – doff

p. 5 – monsieur

p. 9 – menace

p. 10 – pinafore

p. 12 – Pepe

p. 12 – portly

p. 23 – Mamore

p. 31 – sliver

p. 32 – roving

p. 32 – bobbins

p. 32 – welf/warp

p. 35 – smock

p. 36 – bobbin dolly

p. 37 - dawdles

p. 39 – puny

p. 43 - prissy

p. 45 – peevish

p. 47 – droning

p. 74 – brindle cow

p. 101 – hunkers

p. 113 – lapette

p. 113 – bellows

p. 114 – nubbly

p. 138 – vial

p. 138 – conjured

p. 140 – roving creels

p. 155 – stupefied

p. 169 – scribe

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. Why would a parent ALLOW his/her child to work in the mills?
2. Do you think there are unfair child labor practices happening today?
3. What do you think happened to Arthur? What about Miss Lesley?
4. Is Mamere a good mother?
5. If you were Miss Lesley, would you have invited Mr. Hine to come investigate child labor?
6. Do you think that French Johnny liked his job?
7. What would be the worst part about working at the mill?
8. Who is a hero? Name some of the heroes in the book.

9. Read pages 1-3. Write down what you know about Grace, her family, and the time period during which this story takes place. Explain why this is a great example of how an author shows, rather than tells.
10. On page 162, Grace talks about how she is teaching her mother how to read. She says, of the mother reading books: “She studies over them under the kerosene lamp like she’s figuring out some map to somewhere new.” What does this mean to you?
11. Who is your favorite character? Why?
12. What do you think happened to Grace Forcier after the end of the story?
13. Read “The Story behind the Photograph.” What do you think happened to the real Addie Card?

### **SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES:**

#### **Language Arts:**

1. Explore the photos of Lewis Hine and ask students to select one they find especially compelling. Have each child become one of the people in the image and write about his/her life as that person.

*Indiana’s Academic Standards for English and Language Arts*

**4.3.3** Use knowledge of the situation, setting, and a character’s traits, motivations, and feelings to determine the causes for that character’s actions.

**5.5.1** Write narratives that:

- establish a plot, point of view, setting, and conflict.
- show, rather than tell, the events of the story.

**6.5.1** Write narratives that:

- establish and develop a plot and setting and present a point of view that is appropriate to the stories.
- include sensory details and clear language to develop plot and character.
- use a range of narrative devices, such as dialogue or suspense.

2. This book is a great example of how voice can be so important in the telling of a story. The author writes in Grace’s voice, which allows the reader to see everything from her perspective. Choose a scene from the book and write it in someone else’s voice. See if you can explain the behavior of Arthur, Mamere, Pepe, Miss Lesley, French Johnny, Lewis Hine, or any other character, by telling part of the story from his/her point of view and in his/her voice.

*Indiana’s Academic Standards for English and Language Arts*

**4.5.1** Write narratives that:

- include ideas, observations, or memories of an event or experience.
- provide a context to allow the reader to imagine the world of the event or experience.

- use concrete sensory details.

**5.5.1** Write narratives that:

- establish a plot, point of view, setting, and conflict.
- show, rather than tell, the events of the story.

**6.5.1** Write narratives that:

- establish and develop a plot and setting and present a point of view that is appropriate to the stories.
- include sensory details and clear language to develop plot and character.
- use a range of narrative devices, such as dialogue or suspense.

3. Grace assigns names and genders to all her machines. This is called personification. Give a name and gender to a machine in your home and explain why the name and gender are appropriate.

*Indiana's Academic Standards for English and Language Arts*

**4.3.5** Define figurative language, such as similes, metaphors, hyperbole, or personification, and identify its use in literary works.

**5.3.5** Describe the function and effect of common literary devices, such as imagery, metaphor, and symbolism.

**6.3.7** Explain the effects of common literary devices, such as symbolism, imagery, or metaphor, in a variety of fictional and nonfictional texts.

4. Foreshadowing played a role in this story. For example, the reader knew what was going to happen to Pepe and what was going to happen to Arthur. How did you know?

*Indiana's Academic Standards for English and Language Arts*

**4.2.3** Draw conclusions or make and confirm predictions about text by using prior knowledge and ideas presented in the text itself, including illustrations, titles, topic sentences, important words, foreshadowing clues (clues that indicate what might happen next), and direct quotations.

### **Mathematics:**

1. Grace uses math to figure out how much the family owes to the store. Bring to school a grocery store ad from the newspaper. Choose 10 items you would like to eat and figure the total for those items.

*Indiana's Academic Standards for Mathematics*

**4.2.1** Understand and use standard algorithms\* for addition and subtraction.

**4.2.2** Represent as multiplication any situation involving repeated addition.

**4.2.9** Add and subtract decimals (to hundredths), using objects or pictures.

**5.2.1** Solve problems involving multiplication and division of any whole numbers.

**6.2.1** Add and subtract positive and negative integers.

**6.2.2** Multiply and divide positive and negative integers.

2. Grace figures out how many times she doffs in a day by multiplication of large numbers. How many minutes does it take you to get to school each morning? If

there are 180 school days in the year, how many minutes do you spend getting to school each school year?

*Indiana's Academic Standards for Mathematics*

**4.2.1** Understand and use standard algorithms\* for addition and subtraction.

**4.2.2** Represent as multiplication any situation involving repeated addition.

**5.2.1** Solve problems involving multiplication and division of any whole numbers.

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**6.2.2** Multiply and divide positive and negative integers.

**Science:**

1. When Grace's mother tells her about her sister Claire on page 41, she says, "You don't count on keeping your children till they turn ten. No point. My mother lost four." What was so different in 1910 that many children didn't survive to age 10? Do research to provide specific examples of what has changed over the past 100 years with regard to health care.

*Indiana's Academic Standards for Science*

**4.4.11** Explain that there are some diseases that human beings can only catch once. Explain that there are many diseases that can be prevented by vaccinations, so that people do not catch them even once.

**5.1.5** Explain that technology extends the ability of people to make positive and/or negative changes in the world.

**6.1.9** Explain how technologies can influence all living things.

**Social Studies:**

1. Do research on child labor, using print and digital resources listed in the back of the book. Write a short skit with characters representing all points of view: child laborer, child's parents, child's teacher, factory overseer, factory owner, and member of the National Child Labor Committee. Your skit should explain why some people thought child labor was a good idea and why some thought it was not a good idea.

*Indiana's Academic Standards for Social Studies*

**6.1.14** Describe the origins, developments and innovations of the Industrial Revolution and explain the changes it brought about. (Individuals, Society and Culture)

2. Use family photographs to compare clothing, hair, and setting. What can we learn from the photos? Write a paragraph about each.

3. Grace demonstrates with her limited knowledge of reading and math that it can change her parents' economic status when she checks what the store owner is charging them. Think about how schooling impacts child labor, family economics, and a child's ability to achieve more than generations before.

*Indiana's Academic Standards for Social Studies*

**4.4.2** Define productivity and provide examples of how productivity has changed in Indiana during the past 100 years.

**5.4.5** Explain how education and training, specialization and investment in capital resources increase productivity.

**6.1.14** Describe the origins, developments and innovations of the Industrial Revolution and explain the changes it brought about.

4. Study the concept of mill towns. Indiana students should study the development of Gary, Indiana.

*Indiana's Academic Standards for Social Studies*

**4.1.12** Describe the transformation of Indiana through immigration and through developments in agriculture, industry and transportation.

**Lifeskills:** Caring, Courage, Responsibility, Effort

**RELATED INTERNET SITES:**

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

[www.historyplace.com/unitedstates/childlabor](http://www.historyplace.com/unitedstates/childlabor)

[www.kentlaw.edu/ilhs/hine.hum](http://www.kentlaw.edu/ilhs/hine.hum)

[www.archives.gov/education/lessons/hine-photos](http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/hine-photos)

[www.loc.gov/rr/print/coll/207-b.html](http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/coll/207-b.html)

[www.archives.gov/exhibit\\_hall/picturing\\_the\\_century/portfolios/port\\_hine.html](http://www.archives.gov/exhibit_hall/picturing_the_century/portfolios/port_hine.html)

[www.geh.org/fm/lwhprint/htmlsrc2/index.html](http://www.geh.org/fm/lwhprint/htmlsrc2/index.html)

There is a great article about the original Lewis Hine photograph of Addie in the Jay/June 2006 issue of Social Education.

*Compiled by Mary Beth Whitman*