

# The Bobbin Girl

Book by Emily Arnold McCully

Unit study prepared by Wende

## Go Along Books (optional)–

The Story of Inventions by Michael McHugh

The Picture History of Great Inventors by Gillian Clements

Mirette on the High Wire by Emily Arnold McCully

Gulliver's Travels by Jonathan Swift

## Social Studies –

**1830's** – The early to mid-1800s brought many changes for America. After the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 more and more pioneers began moving west of the Mississippi River, bringing an end to the American Frontier.

In the Southwest, a battle was brewing in the then Mexican colony of Texas, where a group of American fighters were forced into the Alamo refusing to surrender. Despite losing the battle, Texas became an independent state in 1836.

In the South, plantation owners became increasingly oppressive; using more enslaved people as the demand for cotton increased, bringing them to resist the harsh treatment they were getting and involving themselves in numerous violent revolts.

As the South was focusing its energies on the cotton and slave trade, the Northeast was pouring its resources into the first factories in the United States. The War of 1812 had left the New England seaports of Boston and Salem at a standstill, and the traders and ship owners had idle money they decided to use to build factories. New England was a good site for factories due to water being a power source, and later coal which came from nearby Pennsylvania. There was also an influx of immigrants from Europe to the New England area from 1820-1860. These immigrants could not compete with the slave labor in the south, so the factory owners hired them as they settled in the cities of New England. The population in the Northeast grew rapidly, and a whole new class of people arose – the factory workers.

If your student uses a timeline, put a picture of a factory or a cotton plantation on 1830, and be sure to mention that this decade followed the Revolutionary War and preceded the Civil War. Many rabbit trails can be taken, to give your child a good glimpse of what the whole country was like at the time The Bobbin Girl takes place.

**Factory Workers** - Factory workers had a hard life, working in dangerous, dirty conditions, often times for 12-15 hours a day. Many of the workers were women, and children as young as eight years old. Wages were very low for everyone, with the women and children receiving as little as \$1 a week, and the men earning as much as \$5 a week. There were many reasons that the women and children chose to work in the factories. Some of the reasons are mentioned in The Bobbin Girl, such as helping supplement the family income, escaping from an abusive home, or earning money for college. Women could escape from factory work by getting married to someone with a good job, but it was harder for the children to escape. Eventually, because of the women and children who were willing to take a stand, laws and regulations were put into place to standardize a ten-hour workday and to improve factory conditions. Be sure to read the *Author's Note* in the back of The Bobbin Girl describing how the story came to be and the real life bobbin girl, Harriet Hanson Robinson. Older children could write a short biographical report on Harriet Hanson Robinson, using info from the *Author's Notes* as well as from this excerpt of her [autobiography](#).

During 1834-1836, these were a couple of the poems written by the female factory workers:

Poem that Concluded Lowell Women Workers' 1834 Petition to the Manufacturers:

Let oppression shrug her shoulders,  
And a haughty tyrant frown,  
And little upstart Ignorance,  
In mockery look down.  
Yet I value not the feeble threats  
Of Tories in disguise,  
While the flag of Independence  
O'er our noble nation flies.

## 1836 Song Lyrics Sung by Protesting Workers at Lowell:

Oh! isn't it a pity, such a pretty girl as I  
Should be sent to the factory to pine away and die?  
Oh! I cannot be a slave, I will not be a slave,  
For I'm so fond of liberty,  
That I cannot be a slave.

Source for poems: [click here](#)

Mill Pictures - [click here](#)

Picture Gallery - [click here](#)

**Industrial Revolution** (Textile Industry) – The invention of many labor saving devices is what led to the manufacturing of textiles, as we know it today. The first improvement was the method used to spin cotton into yarn. The spinning wheel used in most homes of the day was replaced by the Spinning Jenny, invented by James Hargreaves, which greatly reduced the amount of spinning time and also improved the quality of the yarn. Samuel Crompton then improved upon this invention, with a machine called the Mule. After spinning the cotton became so much more cost and time effective, a power loom was invented to increase the productivity in weaving. The economic spinning and weaving of cotton brought on a new demand – cheap cotton. Up until this point in history, most cotton was imported from other countries. Because of the time involved in planting, harvesting, and then separating the seeds from the cotton, there was very little cotton raised in the United States. When Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin, a machine to do this picking of the seeds out of the cotton, United States became one of the greatest cotton-producing countries in the world. These inventions, i.e. the Spinning Jenny, the Mule, the power loom, and the Cotton Gin, along with the invention of steam power, were the foundation of the fabric industry. People in homes could make cloth faster, more cheaply, and in greater amounts than ever before. These new machines were becoming larger and more expensive, so that soon only the rich could buy them. The machines were put into factories, and workers like Rebecca were hired to run them. So the spinning and weaving of cloth had gone from hand to machine, and from home to factory, during a period called the Industrial Revolution. Fill out **inventor trading cards** if desired, and read more about these inventions in:

*The Story of Inventions* by Michael McHugh

## *The Picture History of Great Inventors* by Gillian Clements

**Massachusetts** – If desired, do a brief study of the state of Massachusetts.

Massachusetts is part of what are called the “New England States”, located in the northeastern part of our country. Have student locate Massachusetts on the US map. Your child may be familiar with the state, learning about the Mayflower landing at Plymouth in 1620, the Boston Tea Party, the Midnight Ride of Paul Revere, or maybe the Salem Witch Trials. Well Massachusetts was also among the first states to experience rapid city growth, and today is one of America’s most urbanized and industrialized regions. Massachusetts has been the home to many famous people including John Adams, our second president, and his son, John Quincy Adams, our sixth president. The state flower is the Mayflower, and the state bird is the chickadee. Have your child look at a map of Massachusetts and see if he can locate Lowell, the City of Spindles, in the north by the Merrimack River. Find the capitol, Boston, and nearby Cambridge where Harvard is located.

**Boarding house** - Rebecca’s mother ran a mill-owned boarding house. A boarding house is like a hotel, or a bed and breakfast, where people can rent a room for a certain period of time, daily, weekly, or monthly. Their rent usually includes meals, a bed to sleep in, bathing facilities, and often times a laundry service. The workers at the mill would receive their wages, and have their rent deducted from that wage for their room and board. The author tells us that Mrs. Putney is very generous with her meals and comforts. Discuss with your child what a good boardinghouse keeper would do for her clients, as opposed to a poor boardinghouse keeper.

**Education** – It was very common for girls in the early 1800’s to have to work instead of going to school. The mill girls did however take the educating of themselves seriously, and used every available opportunity to “stretch their minds”. They read great works of literature, geography texts, and even studied math, as they worked or on their breaks. One of the mill girls was saving money for her brother’s tuition to Harvard, the oldest college in the nation. But at that time, Harvard did not accept female students, only males. Judith, Rebecca’s idol, was saving her wages from working at the mill to attend an academy that would take female students. The author has dated The Bobbin Girl at 1836. The very first women’s college ever to open in the country was Mount Holyoke, established at South Hadley in 1837 by American educator Mary Lyon. Mount Holyoke College is still well known today for its high academic standards, and for paving the way in

allowing women to receive a college education. Massachusetts has continued to be very progressive in its thoughts on education, and currently has 106 colleges throughout the state.

### Science –

**Lung Disease** - Ruth, one of the mill girls, had recurring bouts of coughing from a new lung disease called *Byssinosis*, also referred to as Brown Lung Disease. Brown Lung Disease symptoms include wheezing and tightness in the chest as well as a prolonged cough, and are caused by breathing in the wet, cotton lint-filled air. Your lungs are an organ in your chest cavity and part of your respiratory system. The lungs supply the blood with oxygen and rid the blood of carbon dioxide. The separation of oxygen from the air by the lungs is delicate work. For this reason, the air that comes into the lungs should be as clean as possible. Our bodies do have some built in filters that clean the air before it gets to the lungs. Our noses have fine hairs and a thick layer of fluid to catch dust particles. The epiglottis in your throat protects you from letting larger objects, such as food, go down the “wrong pipe” into your lungs, and causes you to cough out the foreign particles. And then there is yet more fluid in the windpipe to trap dust and particles before they get to the lungs. Even with all these natural filters in place, in someplace like a mill with its poor conditions, some of the dust and lint is bound to get through, causing infection and the possibility of permanent lung damage. Today, people working around dust particles often wear a facemask to prevent this from happening. It is good to learn from our past.

**Noise Pollution** – Many workers, past and present, have suffered through high noise levels on the job. Not only is the loud noise of machinery annoying, it is also dangerous both physically and mentally. Rebecca’s ears rang from the loud noise in the mill, and sometimes even in her dreams! The workers during this time period didn’t think of protecting their ears with earplugs, and they often developed a condition called “tinnitus”, a ringing in the ears. The intensity of sound is measured in decibels, with a casual conversation being at about 60 db and a rocket’s take off at about 180 db. For most people, the pain threshold is at approximately 120 db; with deafness resulting at 150 db, Damage can occur at lower levels of exposure too, especially if the ears don’t get a chance to recover. In general, the louder the noise, the longer it lasts, the higher it is, and the purer the frequency, the more dangerous and irreparable the damage is. There are many ways to protect yourself against noise pollution including wearing ear plugs, cupping your hands over your

ears, and very important in today's society, listening to music via earphones in a responsible manner.

**Echo** – After the machines were all turned off, Rebecca's words echoed through the vast room. What a difference that made compared to the loud noise that was the norm throughout the factory. Would Rebecca have heard her echo had the machines all still be turned on? What causes an echo? Echoes are repeats of sounds heard when sound waves are reflected instead of being absorbed. They are most common in confined areas, or near mountains. Have your child experiment with making an echo by screaming in the bathroom with the door closed.

### Language Arts –

**Vocabulary** – Make sure child understands vocabulary words and can correctly use them in a sentence. Use **cards to play review games** such as go-fish or concentration.

Ledger – An account book where final business transactions are recorded. *Rebecca had to sign a **ledger** to receive her wages.*

Dowry – The money or property a wife brings to her husband at marriage. *Kezia was working at the mill to save for her **dowry**.*

Marveled – Filled with wonder or surprise. *Rebecca **marveled** at how sure of herself Judith was.*

Torrent – An abundant flow. *Judith spoke an angry **torrent** of words.*

Indifference – Lack of concern. *Judith did not want to accept her wages if **indifference** came with them.*

Parlor – A room in an inn for private conversations. *The girls wrote letters and sewed in the **parlor**.*

Self-reliance - Relying on one's own abilities, resources, or judgment. *Rebecca vowed to be **self-reliant** like Judith.*

Aghast – Struck dumb with horror. *All faces turned to Mrs. Putney, aghast.*

Petition – A formal request. *Judith passed a **petition** from girl to girl.*

Traitor – One who betrays a trust. *The mill owners won't forget **traitors**.*

Fiery – Eager; passionate; *Judith gave a **fiery** speech.*

Pledged – A promise to pay. *Each girl **pledged** five dollars to those without savings.*

**Literary Terms (Antagonist)**– An antagonist is the person or thing opposing the protagonist or hero of the story. When this is a person, he is often called the villain. Can your child pick out the antagonist in The Bobbin Girl? It was the nasty Mr. Capshaw, the overseer of the mill.

**Signature** – A signature is a binding contract indicating that you understand and/or accept the document of which you are signing. Rebecca had to sign the ledger saying that she received her wages, *Rebecca Putney, Bobbin Girl*. Have your child practice signing his name, having fun applying a title of his choice after his name.

**Metaphors** – A metaphor is a literary device used to compare two things in which no comparison words (such as *like* or *as*) are used. Metaphors help a reader get a better mental picture of what is being discussed. The spindles and looms were described as being “relentless monsters with lives of their own!” Have your child close his eyes and imagine what “relentless monsters with lives of their own” may look like and have him describe the mill in his own words. Another metaphor the author used was when Rebecca went home for lunch and she barely had time to “wolf down” the huge meal her mother had prepared. Can your child envision how a wolf eats, quickly, taking big bites, hurrying to finish before another wolf gets to the food? That is the image the author is conveying about the way Rebecca had to eat in order to be back at the mill in time.

**Comparing Works** – The author of The Bobbin Girl, Emily Arnold McCully, also wrote Mirette on the High Wire. Check out the book from the library. Compare and contrast the two books. While they both take place in the 1800's, the setting of The Bobbin Girl is Lowell, Massachusetts and the setting of Mirette on the High

Wire is Paris, France. Both stories have a young girl as a main character, and both of the girls have mothers who run a boardinghouse. Can your child find any other similarities or differences? A Venn Diagram may help you itemize your findings.

**Classics (Gulliver's Travels)** - Rebecca had a copy of *Gulliver's Travels*, originally published in 1726, tucked in the wall at the mill to read when she could sneak a chance. Is your child familiar with Jonathan Swift's classic fantasy about an English sailor who is shipwrecked on the shores of Lilliput? A classic is a timeless piece of work that was just as enjoyable to read in 1836 as it is now. If your child isn't old enough to read it to himself, it may make a good read aloud this week. Or, if desired, there are many animated versions available.

**American Authors (Ralph Waldo Emerson)** – Judith went to a lecture given by Mr. Emerson about Self Reliance. The Mr. Emerson of whom Judith speaks is Ralph Waldo Emerson, an American poet, essayist, and lecturer. After graduating from Harvard College in 1821, Emerson became a Unitarian minister. However, after his wife's death in 1831, he began doubting his faith and turned to Transcendentalism, a philosophy based on metaphysical idealism developed by Plato. In its simplest terms, transcendentalism can be explained as having faith in one's own intellect or instinct as opposed to a faith in God. He formed the Transcendental Club in 1836 in Boston, Massachusetts, giving many lectures and publishing various works including the essay entitled "Self Reliance". With your older children you may want to research and discuss how Transcendentalism differs from your own religion, and obtain some of the writings of Emerson to reflect on, many of which are available free from the [Gutenberg Project](#).

**Public Speaking (Liberty Rhetoric)** – Rhetoric is the persuasive use of words in speech or writing, especially effective in public speaking. In the years during the Revolutionary War, Americans began a tradition of using "Liberty Rhetoric", speaking out about the relationship between the state and the citizen. Your children may be familiar with such "Liberty Rhetoric" as "Give me liberty or give me death!" or "Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness!" After the war, many special interest groups such as immigrants, Abolitionists, and factory workers used "Liberty Rhetoric" as a bargaining point, to make a public connection between the rights gained by the Revolutionaries and lost by some groups of people. Many women used "Liberty Rhetoric" as a method of persuasion long before they had the right to vote. In The Bobbin Girl, Judith used much "Liberty Rhetoric" in her



speeches after the reduction of wages was announced at the mill. Some of Judith's persuasive rhetoric included "We will not be factory slaves!" and "Our grandfathers fought for independence in the Revolution!" "Never will the daughters of free men be factory slaves!" was another cry. Can your child pick out any more? Can he think of any other liberty rhetoric he has heard in the past? A fun activity would be to have your child plan a speech, including "Liberty Rhetoric", to convince the audience to stop a purported oppression. If he doesn't want to look at a larger cause, such as slavery, war, or unfair labor, maybe persuading for a later bedtime, more sweets, less schoolwork, etc. may get your child excited about this public speech assignment. Another fun game, if you happen to be doing this unit during an election year, is to watch the speeches and try to be the first to yell out "Rhetoric!" every time you hear a politician use that method of persuasion. Be prepared for a loud evening.

### Math –

**Telling time** – The girls working at the mill had their days ruled by bells. The wake up bell was at 4:30 am, and everyone had to be at her places in the mill by 5:30 am. Dinner bell rang at noon, when the girls could go home to eat, only to return no more than ½ hour later. The workday ended at 7:00 pm, and then the girls could go their own ways until the 10:00 curfew. Review how to tell time with your youngest students, using prepared worksheet.

**# Sign** – Rebecca worked in Spinning Room #2. Introduce your child to the number symbol, also called the pound symbol. Have him be on the lookout for it, on the telephone, in the grocery store, etc.

**Money** – Judith earned \$1.75 week, half of which she deposited in the savings bank. How much is half of \$1.75? If your child isn't familiar with division yet, have him count out \$1.75 in nickels and then separate them into two equal piles. He'll find that \$1.75 is an odd number and can't be divided in half. Have him try the same thing with \$2.00 in nickels. Practice skip counting by fives.

**Percent** – The owners of the mill wanted to lower the wages of the workers by fifteen percent. Have older children practice figuring percentages. A percent is part of a whole, the whole being 100%. How much would Judith be making after the wage reduction?  $1.75 \times .85 = 1.49$  a week. How about a younger girl like Rebecca

who may make as little as \$1.00 a week?  $1.00 \times .85 = .85$  a week. Practice figuring percentages as long as interest warrants.

## Art –

**Watercolors** – The artwork in The Bobbin Girl was done using watercolors on watercolor paper with pastel highlights. Have your child paint a picture with watercolors, and try to mix the colors to resemble those in the story. The author especially uses a lot of blues, greens, and oranges.

**Faces** – Emily Arnold McCully has taken great care to show a lot of emotion in the faces of her characters. Examine the look of marvel on Rebecca's face on page 6, the look of shock on page 8, and the look of concern on page 15. Page through the whole story, identifying each emotion shown on the various faces. Have your child try to emulate each of those looks while looking in a mirror. Then have him try his hands at drawing pictures of faces showing various emotions.

**Weaving** – Make or buy a handloom to show your children how to weave.

**Photography** – The world's first photograph was taken by Joseph Nicéphore Niépce in 1826 with a camera obscura. Him and his partner, Louis Daguerre, continued working on improvements for this process to make photographs with sharper, clearer images. After Niépce's death in 1833, Daguerre continued on his own and devised a photographic process that made high-quality images in 1839. The recording of history would never be the same.

In the late 1800's and early 1900's there was a man named Lewis Hine who believed that a picture really was worth a thousand words. Once a schoolteacher, he decided to set out around the country to photograph the many injustices, especially those of child workers. He witnessed children as young as three years old working for long hours, often under dangerous conditions, in the factories, mines, and fields around the country. His photo essays, along with his commitment to exposing the gross violations of the child labor laws put into effect in the mid to late 1800's, greatly contributed to the passing of the Fair Labor Standards Act which was declared Constitutional in 1941.

Have children do a picture study of the most famous of Hine's photographs, called "The Glimpse". Have younger children narrate and older children write an essay about what they see. How old is the girl? Does she look happy about being at the factory? What do you think she might be looking at? What is behind her? Can you find a picture of that kind of machine in The Bobbin Girl? How does the photograph make you feel?

### Character –

Compassion – Rebecca told Ruth "I'm so sorry" when she saw how sick she was. Rebecca had no need to apologize, as she had done nothing wrong, but she was showing Ruth how badly she felt for her and having compassion for her. Compassion is the act of feeling someone else's pain and also wanting to help eliminate the cause. The Bible speaks of having compassion in many verses.

Romans 12:15: *Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.*

Galatians 6:2,10: *Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.*

1 Peter 3:8: *Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, [be] pitiful, be courteous*

Stories you could read to emphasize compassion are Moses in the Bulrushes (Exodus 2:1-10), The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) or Lion and the Mouse (Aesop).

Courage - It took a lot of courage for Rebecca to follow her heart and "turn out" of the mill. Courage is the quality of mind or spirit that enables one to face difficulty, danger, pain, etc., with firmness and without fear. It is to act on one's beliefs in spite of criticism. While Rebecca had the "courage of self-reliance", many people believe that courage comes from God. The Bible speaks of this courage in:

Psalm 28:7: *The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in him, and I am helped: therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise him.*

Psalm 56:11: *In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me.*

Isaiah 43:2: *Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.*

Jeremiah 32:27: *Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me?*

Romans 8:31: *What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?*

2 Timothy 1:7 - *For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.*

Hebrews 13:6 - *The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me*

Stories to read to demonstrate courageous acts include the story of Esther and/or Daniel in the Bible, or Jack and the Beanstalk.

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Print vocabulary cards on cardstock and cut out to play games and review words.

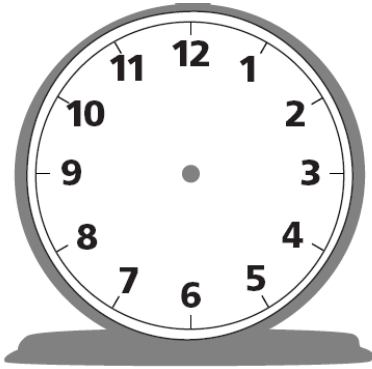
Ledger	Dowry	Marveled	Pledged
An account book where final business transactions are recorded	The money or property a wife brings to her husband at marriage	Filled with wonder or surprise	A promise to pay
Torrent	Indifference	Parlor	Fiery
An abundant flow	Lack of concern	A room in an inn for private conversations	Eager; passionate;
Self-reliance	Aghast	Petition	Traitor
Relying on one's own abilities, resources, or judgment	Struck dumb with horror	A formal request	One who betrays a trust





# Rebecca's Schedule

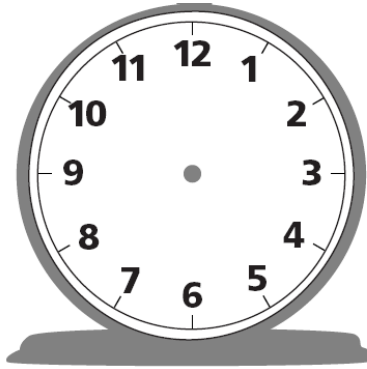
Rebecca had a very busy schedule. Draw the hands on the clocks, indicating the correct time, and then write the time in numeric form.



Wake up bell goes off  
at Four Thirty A.M.

\_\_\_\_\_

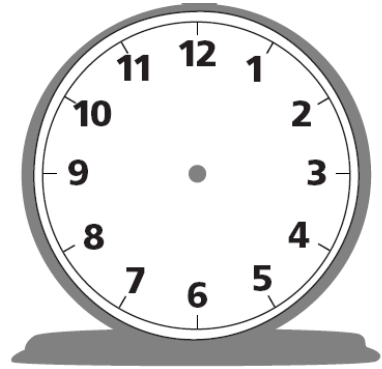
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Be at mill by  
Five Thirty A.M.

\_\_\_\_\_

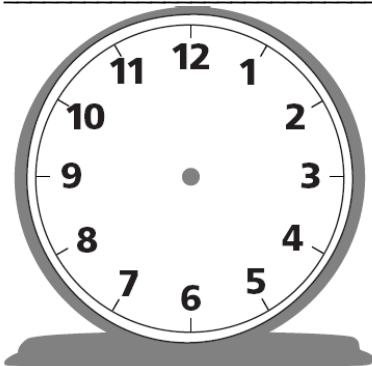
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Dinner bell rang at  
Noon

\_\_\_\_\_

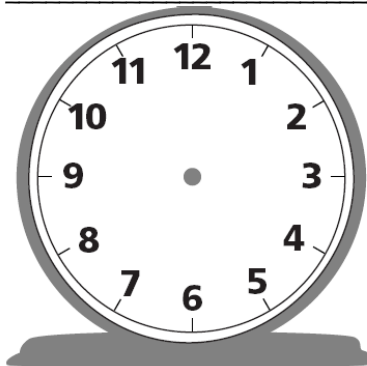
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Back at mill by half an  
hour after noon.

\_\_\_\_\_

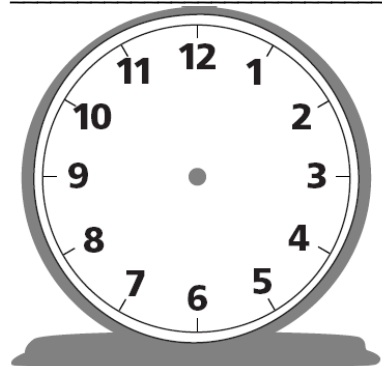
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Workday ended at  
Seven o'clock P.M.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



Curfew at  
Ten o'clock P.M.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How many hours did Rebecca work each day? \_\_\_\_\_

When do you wake up? \_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_

When do you eat lunch? \_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_

When do you go to bed? \_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_



Inventors Trading Cards:

Cut out each trading card; fill in information, draw or paste image in empty box, fold on dotted line, glue in place.

<p>Invented By: _____</p> <p>Year Invented: _____</p> <p>What Does This Invention Do?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Who Would Use This Invention?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>How Has This Invention Changed?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<div style="border: 2px solid black; height: 150px; width: 100%;"></div> <p>Invention: _____</p>
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# Massachusetts

state bird:

state flower:

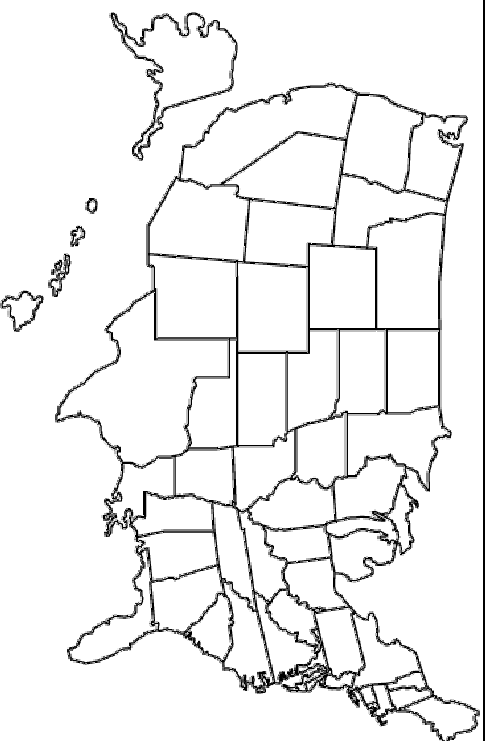


# Massachusetts

Where in the  
United States  
is...



Locate and color in the state.



Cut out book as one piece on solid lines. Fold on dotted lines.  
Cut out map on solid lines and glue under shutters.