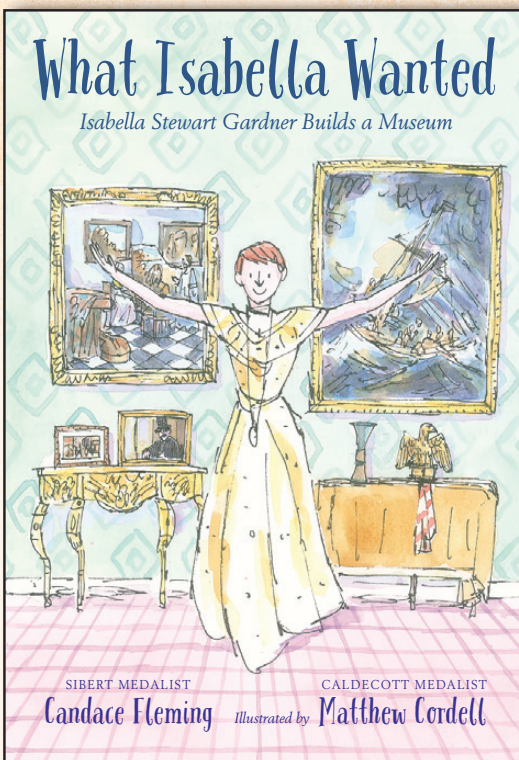


# HOLIDAY HOUSE EDUCATOR'S GUIDE



## *What Isabella Wanted: Isabella Stewart Gardner Builds a Museum*

by **Candace Fleming**,  
illustrated **Matthew Cordell**

### ABOUT THE BOOK

From multiple award-winning author **Candace Fleming** and Caldecott Medalist **Matthew Cordell** comes the true story of a woman who always did things her own way with inimitable personality and drive.

For years, the indomitable Isabella Stewart Gardner searched the world for magnificent artwork and filled her home with a truly unique collection, with the aim of turning it into a museum, which she established in 1903. Her exhibits were not organized historically, stylistically, or by artist. Instead, they were arranged based on the connections Isabella felt toward the art, a connection she hoped to encourage in her visitors.

For years, her museum delighted generations of Bostonians and visitors with the collections arranged exactly as she wanted. But in 1990, a spectacular burglary occurred when two thieves disguised as police officers stole thirteen paintings, valued at \$500 million, including a Rembrandt and a Vermeer. They have yet to be recovered, though a \$10 million reward is still being offered for their safe return.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What is a mansion? Study the illustration of the house on the first page. Why is it called a mansion? Take a close look at the next double-page spread. What does the courtyard reveal about Isabella Stewart Gardner's house? What is significant about the illustration of the stairs? What do you think the "picture frames" are waiting for?
- Study the title page. Why do you think Isabella's arms are outstretched? Point out other times in the book that Isabella spreads her arms wide. What do these illustrations reveal about Isabella's mission?
- Discuss the meaning of "brash" and "extravagant." Take information from the text and the illustrations and explain Isabella's "brash" and "extravagant" behaviors. Describe the faces of the people who are watching Isabella on p. 7. Which characters seem the most astonished by what they see? Which character is showing the most disapproval?
- Take a look at the illustration on p. 6. Debate whether it is a portrait or a mirror. How might it be both? What is Isabella's opinion of Boston society?





- Look at the illustration of Isabella on the ship (pp. 8–9). Where is she pointing? How do the illustration and the text work together to reveal her destination? Explain how Isabella’s pointed finger leads the reader to the next page of her adventure. What is Isabella seeking on her journey? How do you know that she has found what she is looking for? Explain how this further reveals her “extravagant” ways.
- What is the role of an art buyer? How do they help Isabella acquire unique pieces of art? Discuss the difference in “wrong” and “illegal” practices. Some of the art that Isabella purchased had to be smuggled to Isabella’s Boston mansion. How does this suggest that she is engaged in something wrong and illegal?
- At what point does Isabella decide to build a museum? The text reveals how involved Isabella was in planning and building the museum. How do the illustrations show how much she supervised the project? In which illustration is she complaining? There is no text on the page that shows the completed museum. Take a close look at the illustration of Isabella. What might she be thinking?
- Why does Isabella call her treasures her “glories”? How do her “glories” include more than works of art? Why should art be displayed properly? How does Isabella take great care with the displays of her art? Discuss why she gets angry when people touch her art objects.
- Isabella opened her museum/home for many years to the public, and when she died, she left the museum and the art to the people of Boston. In 1990, thieves stole some of the art. Study the illustrations of the break-in. Describe the disguise of the two thieves. What is body language? How do the facial expressions and the body language of the men suggest that they are thieves? Why are they so interested in Isabella’s art? In what ways do the police, private detectives, and the FBI try to solve the theft? The crime remains unsolved. Why do you think the empty frames are left hanging?

Read about Isabella Stewart Gardner at the end of the book. Why might she be considered an “art thief”? Take a virtual visit of the museum ([gardnermuseum.org](http://gardnermuseum.org)). How does it reflect Isabella’s personality and passion?

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

## ABOUT THE CREATORS



photo credit: Scott Fleming

**Candace Fleming** is the author of more than thirty distinguished books for children, including *Honeybee: The Busy Life of Apis Mellifera*, winner of the Sibert Medal for most distinguished informational book, and *Cubs in the Tub: The True Story of the Bronx Zoo’s First Woman Zookeeper*. Her book *The Rise and Fall of Charles Lindbergh* received the YALSA Award for Excellence in Nonfiction. She lives in Chicago.



**Matthew Cordell** is the Caldecott Medal-winning author and illustrator of *Wolf in the Snow* and *Hello Neighbor! The Kind and Caring World of Mister Rogers*, and the illustrator of numerous highly acclaimed children’s books including Philip C. Stead’s *Follow That Frog*. Matthew’s books have also been named a *Washington Post* Best Book and a *New York Times* Notable Children’s Book. He lives near Chicago with his wife, author Julie Halpern, and their two children.

