

Mr. Eads' Bridge

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CHAPTER EIGHT

History Lessons

Becky turned slowly to face the time beetle hovering in front of her. "Okay, I'll admit this has been interesting, but I'm ready to go home now. One question: Why did you send me back in time?"

The time beetle flashed green and blue before settling into a wavering violet glow. *We want to teach. We want you to learn. Did you learn?*

"Of course I did. But now I have even more questions than before. What happened with the bridge? How did —"

You have questions, the time beetle hummed. You want to learn more. You are happy. We are happy.

"But where did you come from? Who —"

Becky winced as the time beetle lit up with a bright green flash of light. When the spots cleared, she found herself standing beside the leg of the stainless steel Arch once again.

"I'm back in my jeans and T-shirt. Those time beetles take care of the details, I'll give them that."

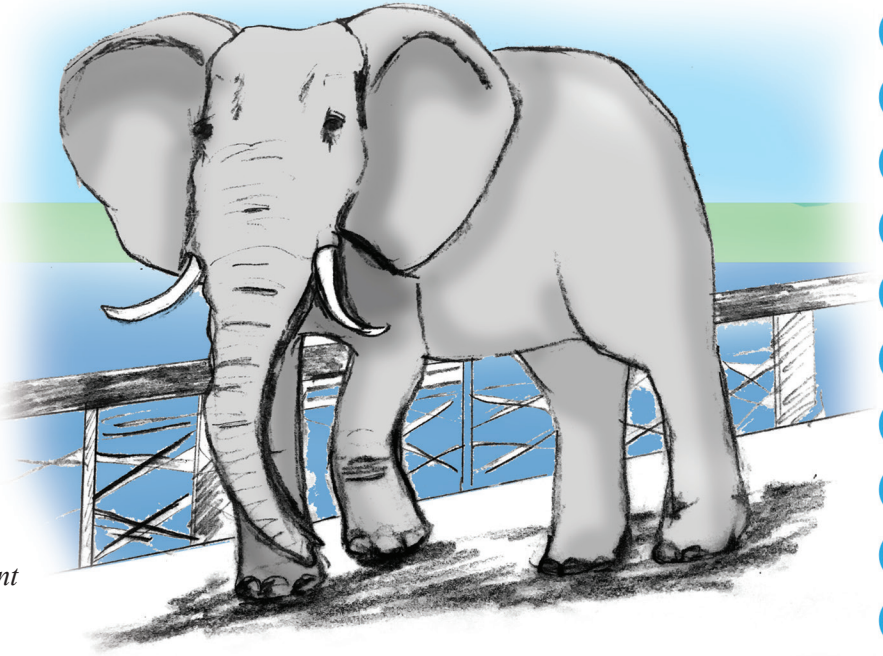
She turned to find her classmates still gathering to go into the museum. "Either they are awfully slow at following Mr. Brown's directions, or I've been returned to the exact time I left." Heaving a sigh of relief, she sprinted across the concrete to rejoin the group.

"Mr. Brown?" Becky said as they walked toward the museum entrance. "Do you know much about Mr. Eads and the Eads bridge?"

"It just so happens I do. Fascinating history. Most people have forgotten how important the Eads Bridge was to St. Louis. They walked an elephant across the bridge as a publicity stunt when it opened."

"Did it ever achieve its goal to win railroad traffic away from Chicago?"

"Sadly, no. The bridge was wonderfully designed and engineered but poorly financed. Its owners went bankrupt a year after it was completed and, within four years, sold it for twenty cents on the dollar. It never attracted the rail travel because most of that business remained under the control of Chicago businessmen."



Becky felt her shoulders sag. "What a shame. It had so much promise."

"It's the only bridge that was eventually named after its builder," said Mr. Brown. "And despite its initial financial failure, it remained an iconic symbol of St. Louis for nearly a century. Today it's the oldest bridge still spanning the Mississippi."

"It's still being used, isn't it?"

"Even though regular trains started being built too large for the lower deck to accommodate, today the St. Louis Metro Link light rail uses the bridge for service to and from Illinois. The upper deck has been updated and refurbished with four lanes for auto traffic. Tests in the 1940s revealed that the bridge could withstand almost twice the weight originally estimated by Mr. Eads."

Becky sighed. "I'm glad they decided not to tear it down after it went bankrupt."

Mr. Brown laughed. "It's built too deep and too strong to make it economical to tear down. Mr. Eads' bridge is here to stay."

Newspaper Connections:

Use the facts in the chapters to write a newspaper-style story. Write an article describing this story with a strong lead sentence and include the 5 Ws and 1 H: who, what, where, when, why and how.