



The Storied Life of Millie Benson

Teacher Guide

Millie Benson – A SHORT BIOGRAPHY



Raised in rural Iowa, the daughter of a local doctor, Mildred grew up as something of a tomboy. She's been heard to reminisce about the freedom afforded her in the wide-open spaces—and more innocent times— of her childhood, for she was able to roam around the fields and woods at will. Always interested in writing, she published her first story in *St. Nicholas*, a children's magazine, when she was still a child herself. As an adult she participated in all kinds of sports, becoming especially proficient at diving, swimming and golf. She also became an experienced aviator, and maintained her pilot's license until well into her old age.

Mildred studied journalism at the University of Iowa, and became the program's first female graduate. While she wrote over a hundred children's books in her lifetime, the regular bread-and-butter of her professional life has been journalism; she has worked for several decades on the *Toledo Blade* newspaper as a regular columnist until retiring in 2001. In 1994 the University of Iowa, Mildred's *alma mater*, hosted a Nancy Drew® Conference in her honor.

An excerpt from:<http://www.stratemeyer.net/stratemeyer/ghostwriters/benson/mildred.htm>

Activities

Pre-viewing questions and possible research topics:

What was life like for women in 1905, the year Mildred was born?

- *Discuss the changes that have taken place in America for women since 1905.*

Did most women work outside the home in 1905?

When were women given the right to vote?

How have opportunities for women in sports changed?

Post viewing questions:

Was Mildred Benson ahead of her time?

How was Mildred's view of Nancy different from her employer's view?

Why do you think Nancy Drew was so popular with young girls especially in the 1930's and 40's?

What were some of Mildred's accomplishments later in life?

Does Millie Benson's life encourage you to reach for your dreams?

Timeline

- 1905 Mildred Augustine was born July 10 in Ladora, Iowa
- 1919 Published her first short story
- 1925 Graduated from University of Iowa
- 1927 Mildred earned her Masters degree from University of Iowa. She became the first woman at that institution to earn a master's degree in journalism.
- 1928 Mildred Augustine married Asa A. Wirt
- 1929 The first Nancy Drew books were published with Millie as Carolyn Keene
- 1936 Daughter Peggy was born
- 1945 Began work as a reporter for the Toledo Times
- 1950 After being widowed, Mildred Wirt married George A. Benson
- 1962 Millie earned her pilot's license
- 1970's Millie began working at the Toledo Blade
- 1993 Inducted into the Ohio Women's Hall of Fame
- 1994 The University of Iowa, Mildred's alma mater, hosted a Nancy Drew® Conference in her honor
- 2002 Mildred Wirt Benson died in May in Toledo, Ohio. She was still employed as a writer for *The Blade* newspaper

Timeline activity

Create a timeline of your life on poster board. Include the things you've accomplished so far and then invent others you'd like to accomplish in the next 75 years. Include pictures and illustrations and share these with your classmates.

Create your own Mystery

Back in the 1930's and 40's Mildred was given a story outline, which she would use to write her Nancy Drew mysteries.

Use the following story outline to write your own mystery involving Super Sleuth Nancy Drew:

The Case of the Missing Guitar Case

Nancy's friends, Tonya and Tyler, are members of a band called, "Moss Covered Mansion". Tonya and Tyler are taking a train to New York to perform in a concert and Nancy is traveling with them. There is a mysterious stranger at the train station who follows them on the train. Nancy notices that he's carrying a guitar case that looks just like Tonya's. A woman named Mrs. Jeffrey bumps into Tonya on the train and makes a rude remark about guitar players. A loud teenager named Stanley Sherwood sees "The Moss Covered Mansion" on board, asks for their autograph and makes a comment about how he's always wanted a guitar like Tonya's. Later at the concert hall, Tyler opens the guitar case but he doesn't find Tonya's guitar...

You decide:

What does Tyler find in the guitar case?

How did it get there and how does Nancy solve the mystery?

Bibliography

Books written by Mildred Benson as Carolyn Keene

Old Clock (1930)	Hollow Oak (1935)	Jewel Box (1943)
Hidden Staircase (1930)	Ivory Charm (1936)	Missing Map (1942)
Bungalow Mystery (1930)	Whispering Statue (1937)	Old Attic (1944)
Lilac Inn (1930)	Haunted Bridge (1938)	Crumbling Wall (1945)
Shadow Ranch (1930)	Tapping Heels (1939)	Tolling Bell (1946)
Red Gate Farm (1931)	Brass-Bound Trunk (1940)	Old Album (1947)
Clue in the Diary (1932)	Moss-Covered Mansion (1941)	Blackwood Hall (1948)
Broken Locket (1934)	Velvet Mask (1953)	

Relevant National Standards

English

- Read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions of human experience.
- Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
- Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.
- Apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts.
- Employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

Social Studies

- Distinguish between past, present, and future time.
- Interpret data presented in time lines and create time lines by designating appropriate equidistant intervals of time and recording events according to the temporal order in which they occurred.
- How the United States changed from the end of World War I to the eve of the Great Depression
The student understands social tensions and their consequences in the postwar era.
- Analyze how the emergence of the 'New Woman' challenged Victorian values. [Examine the influence of ideas]
- The student understands how a modern capitalist economy emerged in the 1920s.
- The student understands how new cultural movements reflected and changed American society.
- Analyze the involvement of minorities and women in the New Deal and its impact upon them. [Assess the importance of the individual in history]
- The causes of the Great Depression and how it affected American society
- Analyze the effects of World War II on gender roles and the American family. [Compare and contrast differing sets of ideas]