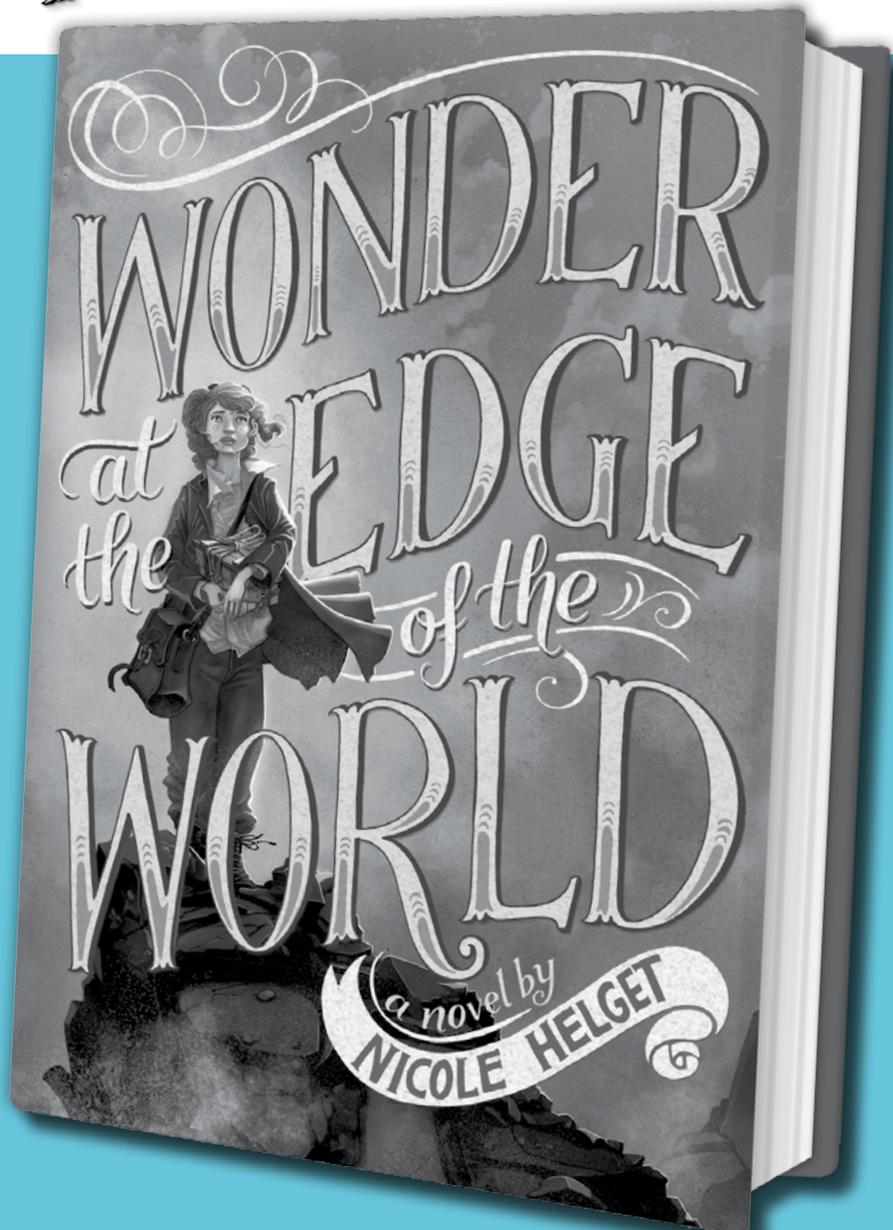


# WONDER *at the* EDGE *of the* WORLD

## Curriculum connections

- ❖ History
- ❖ Geography
- ❖ Science
- ❖ Creative writing

Ages 8–12



By Nicole Helget

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Discuss all the definitions of the word “wonder” and its homophone, “wander.” How is this word a fitting family name for Lu? How do both words reflect the themes of the novel? How does Lu’s full name—Hallelujah Wonder—influence your understanding of her character?

Lu believes that being curious “is a different thing than meddling.” How does Lu’s enormous curiosity affect the action in the story? What are the dangers of being too curious?

This novel is primarily a work of historical fiction, but several magical details do appear. What are some of the fantastical elements of the story? Do they make the story more interesting?

In historical fiction, authors often use real historical settings with imagined characters and events to tell their story. Discuss which parts of the story feel “real” to you and which parts might have been imagined. Are there questions you’d like to ask the author about the research she did for this book? Are you curious about what actually happened and what the author made up?

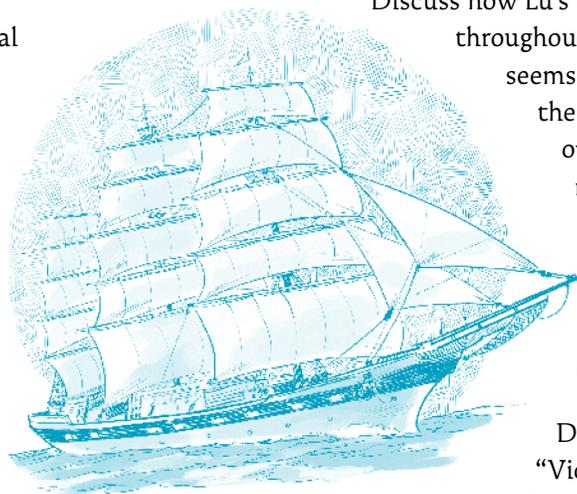
Because the novel is told in the first person point of view, we see everything through Lu’s eyes. Do you like reading books where you are “inside” the main character’s head? What are the advantages of this? Are there disadvantages? How would the story have been different if it were told in the third person?

Lu has great admiration for her scientist father and feels compelled to carry on his work. Do you think that Captain Wonder was a great man? An honest man? What clues are given in the story that might lead you to doubt his goodness and likability? Does Lu ever doubt him? In what ways does his character contribute to the story despite being dead?

Discuss the differences between the two Wonder sisters. Does Lu seem more like a modern girl because she doesn’t feel bound by what her society thinks girls should do? Why does Lu feel a great responsibility to carry on the family

name (usually a son’s duty, in her time) while Priss seems happy to cook, clean, and care for the family?

Lu calls Eustace a “true friend” and sometimes feels that she’s not being a good friend in return. Discuss the ways they are different. Are these differences because they are of different genders, races, or personalities? Which character would you rather be friends with? What do you think it means to be a true friend?



Discuss how Lu’s understanding of slavery changes throughout the book. In the beginning she seems bored by the subject and angry at the abolitionists for “riling up the slave owners.” What are some events and realizations that cause her to have a different view? Why do you think slavery was an issue that caused strong emotions on both sides, emotions that eventually led to the Civil War?

Do you agree or disagree with Lu that “Violence doesn’t seem like a very scientific solution” to the problem of slavery? Is it a good solution to any other problem? Why or why not?

When the town is burning down, Lu asks “Do you ever wonder what you’d save from your house if it was on fire and you only had one minute to grab your most important possessions?” What would you save? Why? Is this an easy choice or did you have to think about it?

“There’s no such thing as magic,” Lu tells Eustace. “Everything is science. One thing about science is that you have to accept limitations. Just because you can’t understand how something works right now doesn’t mean that it won’t be explained someday.” Do you agree with Lu? Can everything be explained? What are some things in our modern time that can’t be explained scientifically?

Eustace believes that the Medicine Head is black magic. Does Lu agree with him? Are there some things about the Head’s magic that she does enjoy? What do you think? Would you want a magic object to show you visions and give you immortality? Why would you want to live forever?

## ACTIVITIES

### Creative Writing

Lu says: “When I was small, I thought both my mother and father were always exactly right, especially Father. Now that I’m older, I know that parents aren’t always exactly right.” Write an essay telling why you agree or disagree with Lu about this. Give examples of ways your parents have been right or wrong.

### Research and Report

Read about and write a report on the whaling industry. Are whales hunted today? How are things different from Lu’s time in the early nineteenth century?

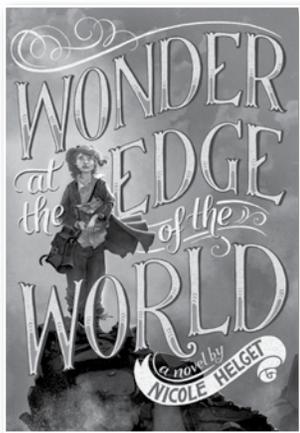
Write a profile of a famous scientist from the early nineteenth century. How did scientific inquiries differ from how they are conducted today?

In the author’s note, Nicole Helget says that the character of Captain Wonder was based on real-life explorer, Charles Wilkes. Research and write a report about him—did he really discover Antarctica? Did he have a family?

### Geography Extension

As a class, retrace the travel route of Lu and Eustace. Then investigate how your class would have to travel and how long it would take to get to Antarctica.

## about the book



### WONDER AT THE EDGE OF THE WORLD

HC 978-0-316-24510-4

Also available in  
downloadable audio and  
eBook formats

Hallelujah Wonder wants to become one of the first female scientists of the nineteenth century. She knows every specimen and rare artifact that her explorer father hid deep in a cave before he died, and she feels a great responsibility to protect the objects (particularly a mesmerizing and dangerous one called the Medicine Head) from a wicked Navy captain who would use it for evil. Now she and her friend Eustace, a runaway slave, must set out on a sweeping adventure by land and by sea to the only place where no one will ever find the cursed relic.

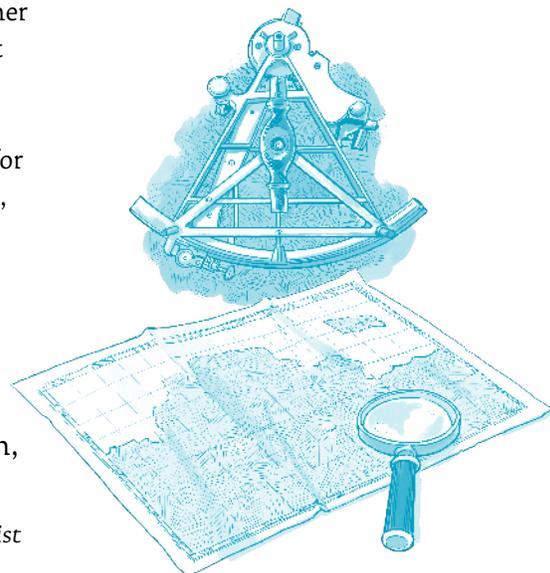
★ “With Hallelujah at the helm, Wonder is full-blown adventure tinged with mysticism, intelligence, and the spirit of discovery.”

—Booklist

## about the author



Nicole Helget grew up on a farm, but she has always been enamored with sea life, ocean travel, and the pioneer spirit. She wrote *Wonder at the Edge of the World* because of her desire to create a great America adventure book for girls. She is the author of three adult novels, *The Turtle Catcher*, *The Summer of Ordinary Ways*, and *Stillwater*, and she has coauthored a middle grade novel, *Horse Camp*. She lives in Minnesota.



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