

**The Black Canary**  
**Fantasy Fiction by Jane Louise Curry**  
**Margaret K. McElderry Books**  
**Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing Division**  
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**About the Author:**

Jane Louise Curry was born in Ohio on her great grandfather's farm. It was like a family compound since her grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins all lived nearby. As a child, she was an avid reader, but it wasn't long before she began making up fairy-tale plays and designing sets and costumes for neighborhood performances. She later wrote articles and comic sketches in junior and senior high for the school newspaper. In college, she switched from theater arts to art education and taught art in Los Angeles. Soon, however, she changed her mind once again and majored in English at UCLA. Ms. Curry then studied at the University of London and Stanford University working on a Ph.D. in English.

As a small girl, she had fallen in love with a book called *The Enchanted Castle*. Nineteen years later she discovered the same book in a book shop in London. At that time, she was also working with Girl Guides (equivalent of our Girl Scouts) and was telling them "tales" every night around the campfire. As she sought more stories, it occurred to her that she might write stories for children. She published her first juvenile fiction in 1965 and has written more than 30 novels.

Ms. Curry has received many awards throughout her writing career including Edgar Allen Poe Award and the Distinguished Contribution to the Field of Children's Literature Award. She resides in Palo Alto, California, and London, England.

**Personal Webpage:** <http://www.janelouisecurry.com/>

**Publisher Webpage:** <http://www.simonsays.com/content/index.cfm?sid=183>

**Books:** *The Lotus Cup, What the Dickens, The Big Smith Snatch, The Ice Ghosts Mystery*

### **Annotation:**

James Parrett is a biracial twelve-year-old traveling with his parents to London where his mother will be performing. Most everyone in his family are dedicated musicians but James wants nothing to do with music. While staying at his uncle's home in London, he discovers a portal into London in the 1600s. He finds himself unable to return to the point in time he had left behind and is forced to joining the Children of the Chapel Royal, a group that performs for the queen of England. He soon realizes that he cannot survive and get back to the twenty-first century and his family with understanding making the most of his musical gifts.

The description of *The Black Canary* intrigued me. I thought there would be action and adventure. However, I was soon disappointed. It seemed I had to read far into the book before anything near adventure occurred. The detail of London in the 1600s was boring. I began to skim those parts instead of reading them. I have been to London (not in the 1600s, of course) and feel that it could have been presented without so much unnecessary detail (detail which seemed to have little impact on the story). Also, much of the book was confusing because of the flashbacks and suddenly placing James in another part of London not previously mentioned and possibly not mentioned again. Periodically, it would seem that some action or adventure might occur that would keep you "on the edge of your seat" only to slide back into the uninteresting events and characters.

### **Booktalk:**

If you like to read stories that have a lot of historical detail and time travel, then you will probably enjoy reading *The Black Canary*. This book describes London in the 1600s in great detail. Buildings, streets, musical instruments, and the dress of the period have been thoroughly researched. Twelve-year-old James Parrett, who is the main character, time travels through a portal from contemporary London to London in the 1600s. Through his journeys, he grows to understand the importance of music in his family.

**Theme:** working through the angst of early adolescence, diversity, choices

**Setting:** London, England during the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the 1600s

**Point of View:** Story is told from the point of view of the main character, twelve-year-old James.

### **Characters:**

**James Parrett:** is the main character who is a twelve-year-old boy, who has traveled from Pennsylvania to London, England with his parents. His mother is performing there. He is trying to establish his individuality by staying away from music since his entire family is musicians.

**Reenie Parrett:** mother of James Parrett and renown musician

**Phil Parrett:** father of James

**Grandpa and Gran Parrett:** mother of Phil and grandparents of James; both teach music at the Boston University music department.

**Charles Parrett:** cousin of James; is in Italy while the Parretts stay in his apartment

**Granddad and Grandma Hackaday:** Reenie's parents and James's grandparents

**Thomas Clifton:** child who was captured at the same time as James for the Children of Chapel Royal

**Henry Clifton:** father of Thomas

**Robinson:** one of the two men who captured James and Thomas

**Gowthrop and Buswell:** two servingmen

**Jack Garland:** child who is part of the Children for the Chapel Royal and who told about how well James and Thomas could sing.

**Plumed Hat/Tom Garland:** Jack Garland's brother; also a player

**Master Niles Giles:** Master of the Children of Chapel Royal

**Mr. Evans:** the Master's partner

**Benjamin Jonson:** poet and staff at the school

**Dick Plumley:** singing man

**Dr. Bull:** calls James the Black Canary; plays the piano

**Mr. Moulton:** teacher who houses James, Thomas, and Jack

**Mrs. Moulton:** wife of Mr. Moulton

**Jack, Nell and Alice:** children of Mr. and Mrs. Moulton

**Walter Bassocke and Launcelot Gedge:** new boys at the school

**Mr. Browne:** teaches James and Thomas

**Signor Bonetti:** the dancing master

**Mr. Porteous:** the French master

**Edmund Tilney:** Mast of the Revels (singing)

**Stephen Parrot:** a “spy” who speaks against the Queen

**Conflict:** Both external (between James and his family) and internal (between James not wanting to be a musician and his natural musical talent). James has grown up in a musical family. His parents and four grandparents are all musicians and they all assume he will pursue music, but he would rather do anything else.

**Conflict Resolution:** After finding a portal to London in the 1600s, James is forced to reexamine his life and his musical gifts. He comes to the conclusion that he loves singing.

**Genre:** Science fiction

**Interest Level:** Grades 5 - 9

**Reading Level:** 6.1

**Read-Aloud Passages:**

Chapter 3: pp. 42 – 45. This passage explains why James no longer makes friends when his family moves to new places and also gives the first incident of James enjoying singing.

Chapter 5: pp. 61 – 65. This passage describes James being pulled out of the icy river in the 1600s; plumed hat and others take him into what James believes is a church.

**If you like Black Canary, you will like:** *The Lotus Cup*, *What the Dickens!* and *The Big Smith Snatch* (all by Jane Louise Curry), *Thirteen Stories That Capture the Agony and Ecstasy of Being Thirteen* by James Howe, *The Agony of Alice* by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor, and *The Chosen* by Celia Thomson

**Curriculum Connections:**

**Subject Area/Activities:**

- 1. Music/Social Studies:** Students will complete a scavenger hunt that increases their knowledge about the people and music of England in the 1600s, and about the diversity. (see scavenger hunt questions and answers key handouts)

**Resources:** handouts, computer with Internet access, answer key

2. **Language Arts:** Use the chapter questions and the vocabulary list to play jeopardy with the students as a review for a Language Arts Test. Use computer/copy paper. Write the number of points that the answer is worth on the top side of the paper that is folded in half. I use 10, 15 and 20 points depending on the difficulty. Write the answer on the inside of the folded paper. Tape the folded papers to the board with lowest points on top rows and highest points on bottom rows. Write numbers starting with 1 above each of the columns of answers. Divide the class into teams. Have the teams appoint a team leader who will decide which one to choose as the game begins and progresses. You, as the teacher, choose what the winning teams receives (prizes, extra credit points, free time, etc.)

Resources: copy paper, chapter questions, vocabulary list, possibly prizes

**Resources:**

**National Music Museum:** <http://www.usd.edu/smm/>

**Founded in 1973 on the campus of The University of South Dakota in Vermillion, the National Music Museum (NMM) & Center for Study of the History of Musical Instruments is one of the great institutions of its kind in the world. Its renowned collections, which include more than 13,500 American, European, and non-Western instruments from virtually all cultures and historical periods, are the most inclusive anywhere. Student would be able to research instruments from *The Black Canary*.**

**Edinburgh University Collection of Historic Musical Instruments:**

<http://www.music.ed.ac.uk/euchmi/>

This is another site that students could use to research instruments from the book. This site is from Edinburgh, United Kingdom

**Tudors in the movies and on television:** <http://tudorhistory.org/movies/>

This site contains movies about Tudor history, some of which are about England in the 1600s.

**The Globe Theatre**

<http://www.twingroves.district96.k12.il.us/renaissance/Globe/GlobeTheatre.html>

The Globe Theatre and Shakespeare are referred to in *The Black Canary*. This site has an abundance of information about the Globe Theatre.

**The Story of Africa (BBC World Service)**

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/africa/features/storyofafrica/>

This is a BBC website that gives the history of Africa. Can be used to research the history of the Africans that immigrated to England.

**Britain Express:** <http://www.britainexpress.com/History/index.htm>

This site covers English history and culture, from the earliest prehistoric monuments like Stonehenge, to Roman Britain, Anglo-Saxon England, Medieval Britain, the Tudors, Stuarts, Georgian Britain, and the Victorian period.

**Activities:**

1. Activity is a word search using vocabulary words from the book. This is an individual activity (see attached for word search and key).

**Standards:**

English/6<sup>th</sup> grade: 6.1.4  
English/7<sup>th</sup> grade: 7.1.3  
English/8<sup>th</sup> grade: 8.1.3

2. Students may work in pairs on a presentation for the class. If not specifically stated, the presentation may be a power point, poster with written document, diorama, or other method approved by the teacher. Students may choose from the following:

- Research methods for advertising plays, concerts, etc. in England in the 1600s and develop advertisements.
- Research clothing style in England in the 1600s and present findings to class (using poster board, sketches, or making an article of clothing).
- Present a skit that may have been presented in the 1600s (must be at least 5 min.)
- Be a tour guide. Choose from the 1600s or contemporary England and give the class a tour of London.
- Compare and contrast health and healthcare in England in the 1600s and today and present to class.
- Research the rights the citizens of England have today compared with the 1600s and present to class.

**Standards:**

English/6<sup>th</sup> grade: 6.5.1, 6.5.2, 6.5.3, 6.6.1, 6.4.5, 6.4.4, 6.4.7, 6.4.8, 6.4.9, 6.4.10, 6.6.3, 6.6.4, 6.6.5  
English/7<sup>th</sup> grade: 7.4.5, 7.4.7, 7.4.8, 7.4.9, 7.4.10, 7.5.7, 7.5.3, 7.6.10, 7.6.5, 7.6.8, 7.6.9  
English/8<sup>th</sup> grade: 8.4.2, 8.4.3, 8.4.10, 8.4.4, 8.4.5, 8.4.6, 8.4.7, 8.4.8, 8.4.9, 8.5.3, 8.6.1, 8.6.4, 8.6.5, 8.6.6, 8.6.7  
Health/6<sup>th</sup> grade: 6.1.8

Health/7<sup>th</sup> grade: 7.1.7, 7.1.9  
Health/8<sup>th</sup> grade: 8.1.7, 8.1.8, 8.1.9  
Social Studies: 6.2.1, 6.2.3, 6.2.6, 6.5.7  
Social Studies: none for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade

### **Chapter Discussion Questions:**

#### **Pre-reading:**

What do you think the title *The Black Canary* means?

What do you know about London, England?

What changes do you think may have occurred between London in the 1600s and London today?

Do you believe in time travel? Why or why not?

Think of a time that your parents pressured you into doing something that you did not want to do. Describe how you felt when they were pressuring you and how you felt after doing what they asked you to do.

Have you ever wanted to escape to another world? If so, what would it be like?

#### **During reading:**

##### **Chapter 1:**

Read the excerpt below. Is this an example of foreshadowing? Why or why not? (pp. 9, 10)

“The shape was more a stirring in the air than a shine or gleam, but James imagination shied away at the thought. *A reflection*. That was it. Or a *shadow on the white-painted concrete blocks . . .*”

Why do you think the author used references to Alice in Wonderland (p. 11 & p. 15)?

##### **Chapter 2:**

As James enters the new world, he describes it as still and empty and that there were times at home when he would give anything for stillness and a little peaceful emptiness. Why does he feel this way? (p. 19)

The author writes, “. . . he lived in three different countries—Black, White, and a mixed-up In-Between . . .” (p. 21) Who is “mixed up In-Between” and why is this person described this way?

“Like a slow, soft muffled rustle” and “like ripples in the moonlight” are what types of figures of speech? (p. 22-23)

### **Chapter 3:**

Why did James stop going to his friends’ houses? What conclusion can you draw about James’s family as he describes the families of his friends? (p. 41)

What happens in this chapter that let’s us know that James does care about music? (pp. 44, 45)

### **Chapter 4:**

Is James having dreams or is what’s happening to him real? Support your conclusion with details from the book. (pp. 49 – 60)

What can you predict from what is happening at the end of this chapter?

### **Chapter 5:**

Why does James think he is dead? (p. 63)

What may be the reason the author names a person “Plumed Hat?”

### **Chapter 6:**

Do you think “Plumed Hat” will have a role later in the story? Why or why not?

### **Chapter 7:**

What do you think would happen if James “walked in on himself?” How would the story change? (p. 82)

### **Chapter 8:**

What does James mean when he surprisingly says “He was invisible?” (p. 82)

### **Chapter 9:**

Today children are sometimes taken from their families. How is this different from James and Thomas being “claimed” for Her Majesty’s Chapel Royal? (p. 110)

What does Thomas mean when he says, “My father is a gentleman?” (p. 111)

### **Chapter 10:**

Describe the differences between the school in this book and the school you attend. Give at least three examples. (pp. 140 – 143)

### **Chapter 11:**

Analyze James's thoughts about himself on pages 147 – 149. What struggles does he talk about? What does he mean that at home he "swings from visible to invisible like a pendulum?" Support your answer with details from the book.

### **Chapter 12:**

Explain the irony when James asks Mr. Jonson if the King's black African trumpeter is a slave and Mr. Jonson replies, "This is a kingdom of free men, and any slave whose foot touches English earth is in the instant free." (p. 163)

Why do you think Jack Garland has offered to stay in the same house as James? (p. 170)

### **Chapter 13:**

James has discovered that Jack sneaks out during the night. Do you think that Jack sneaks out to do things that are against the law? Why or why not? (p. 179)

### **Chapter 14:**

There are no female players in the Queen's Royal Chapel? Why? (p. 189)

What makes James even more suspicious of Jack Garland? (p. 196)

### **Chapter 15:**

James listens to the rehearsals and states that the boys are amazing, "every baby, bully, good guy, and sneak of the lot." Does this statement show that James is beginning to think differently about music? Why or why not? (p. 202)

Why does James believe that the future where he belongs is slipping away? (p. 206)

### **Chapter 16:**

Using the context of this sentence, determine what the word "flitted" means. "Up the narrow way to the left, a small figure flitted through the moonlight between the house shadows, and then turned out of sight." (p. 211)

James has a chance to go to the Clerk's Well and forgets because he is so wrapped up in what is going on with Jack and his brother. Do you think Jack is so immersed in this new world that he will not want to return to the old? Why or why not? (p. 220)

**Chapter 17:**

Jack tells James that his brother has “put his head in a lion’s mouth.” What does he mean by this? (p. 232)

How does Jack know so much? (p. 233)

**Chapter 18:**

How does Jack get his brother to believe him? Why does he have James talk to his brother? (pp. 258 – 259)

**Chapter 19:**

What happens to make James understand how his mother feels when performing? How does this affect him? (pp. 232 – 233)

**Chapter 20:**

In this chapter, James returns to the “future.” What does he mean when he says it is both the easiest and hardest thing he has had to do?

**Chapter 21:**

Returning to his future, James describes it as “a world with French toast and pitchers of orange juice, and thin-crust pizza, and bread that wasn’t heavy as a stone, and . . . “How would you describe your world using descriptions of food and drink.

**Chapter 22:**

Give two – three examples that show how James has changed how he feels toward his family. (pp. 266 – 279)

**Post-reading:**

One of the themes is “choices.” Describe a time when you had to make an important choice. How did you feel both before and after making the choice?

What did you learn about the classes of people in Elizabethan England?

Although there is a Queen of England today, what are some of the differences between the authority of royalty in the 1600s and today?

**Language/Vocabulary:**

**Tantalizing** (p. 7): intriguing

**Baffled** (p. 11): confused

**Dappled** (p. 12): marked with different colored spots

**Hoarded** (p. 20): hidden

**Scuttled** (p.22): scampered

**Flat** (p. 26): same as an apartment in the U.S.

**Fiendish** (p. 42): wickedly or cruelly

**Lute** (p. 54): a stringed musical instrument

**Blackamoor** (p. 62): dark-skinned person; possibly African

**Unshod** (p. 62): not wearing shoes

**Breeches** (p. 82): pants or trousers

**Knave** (p. 101): mischievous or dishonest person

**Privy/comfort station** (p. 128): outhouse or toilet

**Descant** (p. 134): to sing a particular part of music

**Garrett** (p. 178): the part of the house just under the roof

**Players:** (throughout): actors

**Mandolins** (p. 202): stringed musical instrument

**Sedition** (p. 239): rebellion against a government

**Indiana Academic Standards:**

**Social Studies/6<sup>th</sup> grade: 6.1.10, 6.1.11, 6.1.18, 6.1.20, 6.5.7**

**Social Studies/7<sup>th</sup> grade: 7.1.20, 7.5.8, 7.5.9**

**Social Studies/8<sup>th</sup> grade: 8.1.18, 8.1.29, 8.2.2**

**Language Arts/6<sup>th</sup> grade: 6.3.2, 6.3.3, 6.3.5, 6.3.6, 6.3.7, 6.3.9**

**Language Arts/7<sup>th</sup> grade: 7.1.2, 7.3.2, 7.3.3, 7.3.4, 7.3.7**

**Language Arts/8<sup>th</sup> grade: 8.3.3, 8.3.5, 8.3.6, 8.3.7**

**Music/6<sup>th</sup> grade: 6.6.3, 6.6.5, 6.9.2, 6.9.5**

**Music/7<sup>th</sup> grade: 7.6.3, 7.6.4, 7.9.2, 7.9.4**

**Music/8<sup>th</sup> grade: 8.6.3, 8.6.4, 8.8.5, 8.9.2**

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# The Black Canary Word Search

S T S C Y M W F G N U J K W N  
D A H E U L Z V X G I Y S V I  
E N D O H S K L J H H C Y G L  
S T E O A C D A P P L E D X O  
C A V P H R E K J N I V K S D  
A L A Q K S D E M Z P P C E N  
N I N Q N E N E R P V U T T A  
T Z K G L H H U D B T U Y N M  
R I N O I T I D E T L P D G C  
J N X A O X O H L H F E A E B  
J G H S I D N E I F L R B Z Y  
C Z Y K A N D U M F R G X R B  
Y O S D K I A Q F E V P X A X  
Z G U D V K N A T Y O V V N P  
P X J F S B B T N Z V S Y A E

BAFFLED  
DESCANT  
GARRETT  
LUTE  
TANTALIZING

BREECHES  
EDITION  
HOARDED  
MANDOLIN  
UNSHOD

DAPPLED  
FIENDISH  
KNAVE  
SCUTTLED

*14 of 14 words were placed into the puzzle.*

[Solution](#)

# The Black Canary Vocabulary Word Search Solution

+ S + + + + D + E + + + + N D  
H + E + + E + S V + + T + I E  
+ O + H L + C + A + + A + L S  
+ + A F C U + + N + + N + O C  
+ + F R T E + + K + + T + D A  
+ A + T D + E + + + + A + N N  
B + L + + E + R + + + L + A T  
+ E + + + + D + B + G I + M +  
D H S I D N E I F A + Z + + +  
D A P P L E D D R + E I + + +  
N O I T I D E R O T + N + + +  
+ + + + + E + U H + G + + +  
+ + + + + T + L + + S + + + +  
+ + + + T + + + + + N + + +  
+ + + + + + + + + + + U + +

(Over,Down,Direction)

BAFFLED(1,7,NE)  
BREECHES(9,8,NW)  
DAPPLED(1,10,E)  
DESCANT(15,1,S)  
EDITION(7,11,W)  
FIENDISH(9,9,W)  
GARRETT(11,8,SW)  
HOARDED(1,2,SE)  
KNAVE(9,5,N)  
LUTE(8,13,NE)  
MANDOLIN(14,8,N)  
SCUTTLED(8,2,SW)  
TANTALIZING(12,2,S)  
UNSHOD(13,15,NW)