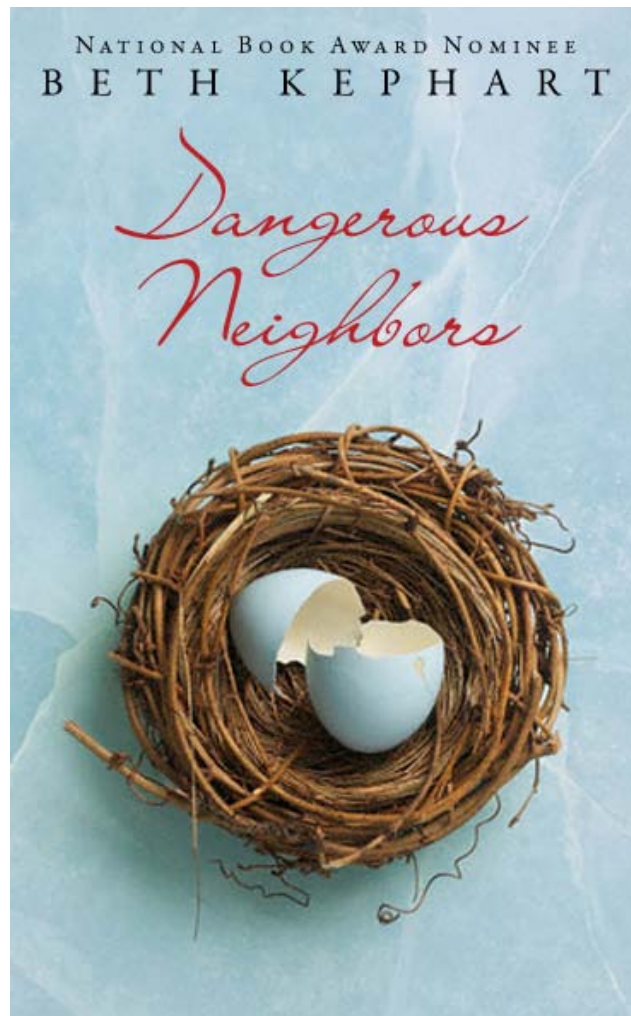


# *Dangerous Neighbors*

## *The Teacher's Guide*



Prepared by Beth Kephart



## *About the Author*

Beth Kephart is the author of twelve books, including the National Book Award finalist, *A Slant of Sun*; the BookSense pick, *Ghosts in the Garden*; the autobiography of Philadelphia's Schuylkill River, *Flow*; the 2010 Spring IndieBound Pick *The Heart Is Not a Size*; the 2010 Autumn Indiebound Pick *Dangerous Neighbors*; and the critically acclaimed novels for young adults, *Undercover*, *House of Dance*, and *Nothing but Ghosts*. She is a winner of the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts fiction grant, a National Endowment for the Arts grant, a Leeway grant, a Pew Fellowships in the Arts grant, and the Speakeasy Poetry Prize, among other honors. Kephart's essays are frequently anthologized, and she has judged numerous competitions.

Kephart is also the author of *Seeing Past Z: Nurturing the Imagination in a Fast-Forward World* (W.W. Norton), the critically acclaimed memoir of her years spent teaching writing and the imagination to the young. A popular lecturer and workshop leader, she currently teaches creative nonfiction at the University of Pennsylvania and served as the inaugural readergirlz author-in-residence.

Kephart is the strategic writing partner in the boutique marketing communications firm, Fusion. She is a magna cum laude, Phi Beta Kappa graduate of the University of Pennsylvania.

Kephart writes of the writing life and process, and reports on books she loves, on her blog, [www.bethkephart.blogspot.com](http://www.bethkephart.blogspot.com).

All photos by Beth Kephart. Thanks to Stacey Swigart at Please Touch Museum, Memorial Hall.



## *Dangerous Neighbors*

It is 1876, the year of the Centennial in Philadelphia. Katherine has lost her twin sister Anna in a tragic skating accident. One wickedly hot September day, Katherine sets out for the exhibition grounds to cut short the haunted life she no longer wants to live. Filled with vivid detail that artfully brings the past to life, National Book Award nominee Beth Kephart's *Dangerous Neighbors* is a timeless and finely crafted novel about betrayal and guilt, hope and despair, love, loss, and new beginnings.

“Conjuring sharp, meticulously detailed images of fair exhibitions (‘The wonders of the world slide past. Parisian corsets cavorting on their pedestals. Vases on lacquered shelves. Folding beds. Walls of cutlery. The sweetest assortment of sugar-colored pills, all set to sail on a yacht’), Kephart evokes a tantalizing portrait of love, remorse, and redemption.” — *Publishers Weekly* Starred Review

“... a tender, quiet work of historical fiction...exquisitely crafted...as lovely in its imagery as it is tragic...”  
— *Kirkus*

“Readers will find themselves immersed in the 1800s, captivated by Kephart’s writing, and rooting for Katherine the whole way.” — Mandy King, The Boulder Book Store, Indiebound Autumn 2010 List

ISBN: 978-1-60684-080-1/U.S.\$16.99/Egmont USA. For more information, visit [egmontusa.com](http://egmontusa.com).



## *Building the Centennial*

Conversations regarding a Centennial Exhibition in the United States began in 1866, as concerned citizens began to look toward the 100th year of the nation's independence. Philadelphia—famously Quaker (and therefore reputedly tolerant), home to the signing of the Declaration, and easily accessible—suggested itself as a natural site for the celebration from the start, though there were, of course, immediate dissenters.

In March 1870, Daniel Morrell of Pennsylvania presented a bill in the House of Congress, seeking provisions for the proposed exhibition. One full year later, following numerous amendments, the bill received Congressional approval with an Act calling for “an International Exhibition of Arts, Manufactures, and Products of the Soil and Mine, in the city of Philadelphia, and State of Pennsylvania, in the year of 1876....”

Money, then, had to be raised—\$3.5 million at first—which the organizers pursued by means of stock subscriptions and the sale of Centennial medals. It wasn't an easy time to be seeking funding. Other contemporary schemes promised better returns, for one thing, and in 1873, the country was beset by a financial panic—the front end of an international depression that would ultimately last six years. Still, the organizers—financiers and civic leaders—came through. On July 4, 1875, the Lansdowne estate, on the west bank of the Schuylkill River, was officially consecrated as Centennial territory.

Some 285 acres and 250 buildings constituted the Exhibition. More than 30,000 exhibitors were on hand. Nearly 10 million visitors passed through the entrance gates between May 10th and November

10th. The Main Exhibition Building of the Centennial alone covered 21.47 acres and accommodated exhibitors from 30 nations. In Machinery Hall, exhibits on printing, papermaking, pneumatic engineering, sewing, weaving, mining, and transportation were powered by the famous Corliss engine, which attracted the wonder of many, including the poet Walt Whitman, who was known to sit at its feet. In Agricultural Hall, meanwhile, vegetable and textile products cohabited with tobacco curing equipment and farm management theory, while the world's sculpture, paintings, ceramic decorations, and the like were on display in Memorial Hall. In Horticultural Hall, the last of the five main buildings, lemon trees grew alongside india rubber trees, among hothouses and conservancies.

Opening day may have been wet and gray, but among the throngs stood President Ulysses S. Grant; the Emperor and Empress of Brazil; the members of the U.S. Cabinet and Supreme Court; members of the Senate, House, Army, and Navy; proud Philadelphians; curious travelers; and legions more. In his speech, General Joseph R. Hawley, President of the Centennial Commission, made this plea:

“It has been the fervent hope of the Commission that, during this festival year, the people from all States and sections, of all creeds and churches, all parties and classes, burying all resentments, would come up together to this birthplace of our liberties, to study the evidence of our resources; to measure the progress of an hundred years, and to examine to our profit the wonderful products of other lands; but especially to join hands in perfect fraternity, and promise the God of our fathers that a new century shall surpass the old in the true glories of civilization. And furthermore, that from the association here of welcome visitors from all nations, there may result not alone great benefits to invention, manufactures, agriculture, trade and commerce, but also stronger international friendships and more lasting peace.”

Over the course of the Centennial, people from around the world would bear witness to telegraphs and typewriters, soda pop and sugar popcorn, kindergarten and domestic time savers, new shoe patterns and cotton spinners, railroad switches, and the latest in firearms. Exhibitors would return home, boasting prizes. Children would write diary entries. Others would write poems. The world had been watching, and the world would be changed by the extraordinary Exhibition.

### **Classroom projects:**

*About the book:* The Exhibition overwhelmed many of its visitors, and certainly it overwhelms Katherine. She seeks to lose herself among the bear rugs and root beer; she cannot. How does Katherine's journey to the Centennial save her life? How does it put her at risk? Why does it matter that she meets Laura and takes on responsibility for the baby? What happens when she finally speaks to Bennett? What has she learned about progress—personal and universal—by the end of the book?

*Discuss:* Of the many inventions and novelties put forth at the Exhibition, only some made lasting impressions on the economy and culture. At the Please Touch Museum, a sampling of the most intriguing products of the Exhibition can be found, alongside a 20' x 30' model of the Centennial grounds. Take a tour of the museum, or of the websites of the Museum and the Free Library. Record your impressions. Discuss those aspects of the fair that changed the way Americans think and work.

*Discuss:* The organizers of the Centennial were explicit in their desire to create greater unity and harmony among mankind. Can such exhibitions achieve such glorified aims? Are we more harmonious today, as a globe, than we once were? What public or communal forums can facilitate, in your opinion, deeper intercultural and interpersonal understanding—and peace?

*Create in teams:* Clearly, the Centennial Exhibition required massive coordination on many fronts—from the design and construction of the buildings, to the installation of the exhibitions, to the transportation, housing, and management of the crowds. Create, with your team members, an event of your choosing. Site it, design it, develop a financing scheme, advertise it, and develop standards by which you will judge whether or not your event is a success.

*Write:* Technologies and ideas change the way we see the world and our sense of who we are and what we might achieve. Choose one technology or concept that has shaped your thinking about your future. How did it first enter your world? How did you make it your own? How has it influenced the path that you are on? Write an essay capturing your best memory, and thoughts.

### **Source material:**

Free Library of Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition Digital Collection:

<http://libwww.library.phila.gov/cencol/>

Please Touch Museum: The History of the 1876 Centennial Exhibition

[http://www.pleasetouchmuseum.org/news/press\\_kit/news\\_memhall/1876history/](http://www.pleasetouchmuseum.org/news/press_kit/news_memhall/1876history/)

*Philadelphia's 1876 Centennial Exhibition* (Linda P. Gross and Theresa R. Snyder, Images of America, 2005)

*Designing the Centennial: A History of the 1876 International Exhibition in Philadelphia* (Bruno Giberti, The University Press of Kentucky, 2002)

“1876: The Eagle Screams: Historical Register of the Centennial Exposition” by Lynne Cheney Last (American Heritage.com from *American Heritage Magazine*, April 1974, Volume 25, Issue 3)

[http://www.americanheritage.com/articles/magazine/ah/1974/3/1974\\_3\\_15.shtml](http://www.americanheritage.com/articles/magazine/ah/1974/3/1974_3_15.shtml)



## *Feminists Then and Now*

We have Benjamin Franklin's great-granddaughter, Elizabeth Duane Gillespie, to thank for the Women's Pavilion of the Centennial Exhibition—Gillespie and the cohort of women who, like Katherine's mother in *Dangerous Neighbors*, joined together to ensure that women would be well represented at the fair.

Originally the Women's Committee had been promised space in the Main Exhibition Building and had been organizing feverishly toward that end. But by June 1875, with opening day less than eleven months away, Mrs. Gillespie was notified that the set-aside space was no longer available. If the women wanted to proceed with an exhibition of their work, they would, Mrs. Gillespie was informed, have to raise the funds and erect a stand-alone building of their own.

"I was alone when I read those letters," Mrs. Gillespie wrote later, in a memoir titled *A book of remembrance*, "and it was fortunate that I was, for I have lived many years since and have never forgotten the utter misery of those first moments, for the women of the whole country were working not only from patriotic motives, but with the hope that through this Exhibition their own abilities would be recognized and their works carried beyond needles and thread. I felt disposed to rebel, for my co-workers had the promise through our Philadelphia organization that space in the Main Building would be ours. Sober second thought came to me, and I knew unless we acted wisely the womankind in America would be filled with righteous indignation and their work be nowhere."

And so the work began, as up and down the city streets women marched, selling subscriptions for stock. Within just two days, 82,000 signatures had been obtained and letters had swept in from across the nation, persuading Congress to lend (but only to lend) \$1.5 million to the women and their cause.

Ultimately, the Women's Pavilion—the first of its kind in exposition history—covered an area of 30,000 square feet and featured seventy-four patented inventions. Designed by H. J. Schwarzmans, also the architect of Memorial Hall, it was later considered one of the most beautiful Centennial buildings, though Gillespie expressed regrets, in her memoirs, at not having hired a woman architect for the job. At the building's north side stood the engine house, where Miss Emma Allison, an engineer, presided over the Baxter portable engine that juiced, among other things, looms, washing machines, and the printing press that weekly produced the *New Century for Women*, which was written and designed entirely by women. Oddities mixed in with the inventions—illustrations constructed entirely out of human hair, for example, a bouquet of wax flowers, a carving, in butter, of Iolanthe, even a whistle made with the tail of a pig.

The odd mix of ideas and achievements was noted at the time, and there were, as Mrs. Gillespie herself recounts in her memoirs, mistakes made. And yet, in November, when the show closed, Mrs. Gillespie was able to write: "Time went on, and in every detail of our work we were prosperous, and even at this late hour we are told that through the efforts made by women in 1876 the women of 1899 are prospering through avenues of labor unknown then to them."

### **Classroom projects:**

*About the book:* In *Dangerous Neighbors*, Katherine and Anna have grown up with a mother who is set on changing the larger landscape about her—the role of women, the respect afforded to them. It's an endeavor that takes her away from the two young women to whom she should be closest: her daughters. How do the twins respond to their mother and her ambitions? What freedom does her benign neglect offer? What heartbreak does it yield? Is the mother a likeable character? Is she sympathetic?

*Discuss:* On July 4, 1876, Susan B. Anthony attempted to read from the Declaration of Rights of the Women of the United States by the National Woman Suffrage Association in the Centennial city; she was thwarted, condemned to promote her ideas through pamphlets and not oration. In *Mary Poppins*, Mrs. Winifred Banks, a 1910 feminist, sings of her sister suffragettes—those "soldiers in petticoats and dauntless crusaders for woman's votes." Women have been fighting to be heard and seen, to be granted equal rights, for many centuries now. How far have women come in that quest? Has true equality arrived, and is it even possible? Is there any avenue of labor unknown to women today?

*Create in teams:* Were you to create an exhibition celebrating the progress and innovations of women since time immemorial, what top ten ideas or innovations would you feature, and why? How would you display, arrange, and describe each featured item in your exhibition?

*Write:* Mrs. Gillespie was given a nearly impossible task—to fund and create a stand-alone building in less than eleven months' time. Write of a moment when you have been asked to do the seemingly impossible and risen to the occasion. What enabled you to reach the goal? What did you learn from the experience?



## *George W. Childs, the Ethical Newsman*

Ulysses S. Grant, the U.S. president who would declare the Exhibition officially open to the gathered throngs on May 10th, spent Centennial Eve at the home of his good friend George W. Childs, a man who, himself, would later be urged to run for presidential office by Republicans and Democrats alike.

Childs would decline that invitation, leaving a legacy of another sort behind. A self-made businessman and philanthropist, a visionary who, together with Anthony Drexel, created one of nation's very first suburban towns (Wayne, PA), a man whose gracious homes frequently hosted the likes of Thomas Edison, Walt Whitman, Andrew Carnegie, and Charles Dickens, Childs was best known, during his lifetime, as the force behind *The Public Ledger*, one of the most remarkable newspapers in the history of the country.

Childs had bought the newspaper (with Drexel's help) on December 3, 1864, at the age of 35. It was a failing proposition at the time, another Philadelphia rag that couldn't seem to keep itself afloat. One week later, under Childs' management, the price of the paper had doubled and advertising rates raised to "profitable figures." New editorial standards had been put into place, too—no excessive graphic details of terrible crime were to be run, no material that couldn't be read out loud at dinner, no facts that had not been vetted, nothing titillating or scandalous for the sake of sales or headlines. You run a news organization to educate and elevate, Childs believed. You don't go digging among the grubs. Paying fair wages for good work, putting in fourteen-hour days himself, Childs turned the *Ledger* around—balanced its books, made a profit, and had newspapers and magazines across the country looking up to the editorial standards to which it held.

“The perfect man,” Childs wrote once, in response to a question from the *New York Herald*, is “one who has a clear conscience, an honest purpose, a bright mind, and a healthy body.” Through the *Ledger*, Childs worked to help keep a city’s conscience clear. “He reflected Philadelphia at its best, and he portrayed and strengthened the higher impulses of its life,” it was written at the time of his death, in 1894. “... Mr. Childs impressed upon his creation the attributes of care, accuracy, responsibility, purity, and public obligation, and those immortelles of a true soul make up the wreath of honor with which we crown him as an editor-journalist.”

In 1902, the owner of *The New York Times*, Adolph Ochs bought the *Ledger* and merged it with the *Philadelphia Times*. Eleven years later, the paper was purchased by Cyrus Curtis. It continued to move through many hands and iterations until it ceased publication altogether in January 1942. But during its glory days, under Childs’ management, the *Ledger* represented what journalism could be—elevating, educating, even, in some cases, inspiring. Though no longer in production, the newspaper continues to speak—preserved on microfilm throughout city libraries and yielding insights and details that remain inspirational today, laying the groundwork for, among many other things, a novel like *Dangerous Neighbors*.

### **Classroom projects:**

*About the book:* *Dangerous Neighbors* is a novel—a made-up story—set against the very real facts of a long-ago event and time. What freedom do authors have when mixing fact and fiction? How can lost eras be made to feel contemporary or relevant? Are there too few or too many “facts” in *Dangerous Neighbors*? Did the author imagine freely enough?

*Discuss:* What is the state of newsmaking today? Who breaks the news, who safeguards its accuracy? Where do you turn for news that you trust?

*Create in teams:* Develop an ideal media vehicle that leverages today’s technologies and respects reading habits and pressures. Create four prototypical stories (e.g., breaking news, feature story, opinion piece), define the standards and expectations of each type, and then produce the first edition. Develop advertising standards as well as three ads that would be well-accommodated by your news forum.

*Write:* Childs described the perfect man as “one who has a clear conscience, an honest purpose, a bright mind, and a healthy body.” How important are those attributes today; are they timeless? How would you describe the perfect person? Write an essay encapsulating your thoughts.

### **Source Material:**

A biographical sketch of George W. Childs can be found in History of Delaware County:

[http://www.delcohistory.org/ashmead/ashmead\\_pg697.htm](http://www.delcohistory.org/ashmead/ashmead_pg697.htm)

The George W. Childs papers are housed at Drexel University:

<http://www.library.drexel.edu/blogs/collections/archives/209>



## *Vanishing Cities*

In *Dangerous Neighbors*, Katherine walks the city bereft, overcome by loneliness, grief, and guilt. She has lost her twin sister and feels herself responsible. She does not believe she can go on.

In the opening scene, Katherine makes her way past Kiralfy's Alhambra Palace on Broad Street and into the Colosseum at Broad and Locust Streets, where the cyclorama "Paris by Night" was on display. Later, she heads toward the 250 buildings of the Centennial grounds and into Operti's Tropical Garden. With the exception of Memorial Hall (now the Please Touch Museum) and a few other lingering treasures on the Centennial grounds, these buildings no longer exist. In so many ways, history vanishes.

### **Classroom Projects:**

*About the book:* Why does Katherine feel responsible for her sister's death, and should she? What do siblings, or friends, owe one another? Is Katherine aware of how rapidly the world is changing? Is she prepared for that change? By the end of the book, there is hope and redemption. What gives Katherine hope?

*Discuss:* What gives a building or a landmark staying power? Who and what determines that which remains and that which vanishes? Which buildings or landmarks are central in your own life, and what do you predict for their future?

Create in teams: In *Forgotten Architecture*, Thomas Keels looks back on lost Philadelphia structures, providing a poignant sense of then and now. Imagine your community 135 years from now—the same

interval in time between the present day and the Centennial. What will exist? What will vanish? Write a guide to this future community. Include maps and detailed descriptions of landmark buildings. What will be said then about buildings in existence today?

*Write:* People, places, things: some remain and some vanish. Write an essay about one thing that has vanished from your own life. Why did it matter? How was it lost? How do you keep its memory alive?


**Source Material:**


*Forgotten Architecture: Lost Architecture of the Quaker City* (Thomas Keel, Temple University Press, 2007)


<http://phillyhistory.org/PhotoArchive/>

Panoramas (including the Colosseum): [http://newman.baruch.cuny.edu/digital/2003/panorama/new\\_001.htm](http://newman.baruch.cuny.edu/digital/2003/panorama/new_001.htm)

proving property and paying all expenses. 7129

 CAME TO PREMISES OF 232 QUEEN street, a black Mule. Owner can have him by proving property and paying expenses. 21\*1012

 FOUND—A DOG, WITH OWNER'S name on collar. Inquire 404 Chestnut. 21\*

 LOST—ON THE 5TH OF AUGUST, A light brindle Bull Terrier Stot, with tail and ears cropped, with a split in one ear. \$3 reward and no questions asked. Return to S. W. corner Twenty-fourth and Hare streets. 11\*

LOST—ON 7TH INST., AT MAIN EX-

## *Animal Rescue*

On Monday, September 11, 1876, the *Ledger* was continuing its reportage on the fire that had broken out on the previous Saturday in shantytown, across the street from the Main Exhibition Building. This is the same fire that features so strongly in *Dangerous Neighbors*.

“On Saturday afternoon an extensive fire occurred on Elm avenue, between Belmont avenue and Forty-second street, immediately opposite the Main Exhibition Building, by which about twenty-five of the temporary wooden structures that had been erected there were destroyed in a very short time, the fire clearing away nearly the whole space from the Trans-Continental Hotel to the Ross House, near Forty-second street, and through from Elm avenue to Columbia avenue,” the story began.

Detail by detail, the reporter reveals the damage done, and the order in which the fatal acts occurred. Deep into article, we get this:

“About the same time that the fire spread from Murphy’s saloon, where it originated, to Crawford’s on the east, it also communicated to the buildings on the west and south, the first building burned being Allen’s animal show, where a number of snakes, an educated pig and two sea cows were on exhibition. The latter were very valuable animals, and were owned by a Captain Ease, who had been in treaty with the Zoological Society for their sale for exhibition in the Zoological Garden.

“The animal show building with its contents was soon totally destroyed....”

When I read this account of the fire, I knew that I had to find a way to incorporate the loss of these strange and sacred animals into *Dangerous Neighbors*. Fortunately, I had William, who ultimately emerges as Katherine's friend and who rescues lost animals for a living—a real occupation, one learns when reading *Ledger* classifieds promising a finder's fee for a lost "light brindle Bull Terrier" or "an old terrier dog, large tusks in lower jaw, bine curly hair on back and yellow legs." To William, who embodies a certain kind of courage in the book, I gave the responsibility of braving the fire on behalf of whatever animals could be set free. The sea cows, sadly, were not save-able, in real life, or in the imagination.

### **Classroom projects:**

*About the book:* When does Katherine first notice William, and what is it about him that she likes? Why does she feel the need, later on, to fight off his friendliness? What about William ultimately endears him to Katherine? What do you imagine their relationship will be, as they step forward, beyond the confines of *Dangerous Neighbors*?

*Discuss:* Of all the progress that has been made since the Centennial, fire continues to rage out of control. Many cities, buildings, and families have been defined and redefined by fire and by other inhuman disasters such as hurricanes and floods. How does a society prepare for the unforeseen? What is a society's responsibility in the aftermath of disaster?

*Create in teams:* Classifieds represent a very special kind of reflection on a time and place. Research the classifieds in your own newspapers and magazines. What are the trends? What are the signals? What are the needs and secret yearnings and gaps and realities of today's society? Develop a series of classified ads that represent the needs and longings for the members of your team.

*Write:* Remember a time when you have faced the unpredicted or unknown. How did you respond? How do you define courage? Write an essay that captures your thoughts.