



The Secret Subway

Shana Corey , Red Nose Studio (Illustrations)

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From an acclaimed author and a *New York Times* Best Illustrated artist comes the fascinating, little-known—and true!—story of New York City’s first subway.

New York City in the 1860s was a mess: crowded, disgusting, filled with garbage. You see, way back in 1860, there were no subways, just cobblestone streets. That is, until Alfred Ely Beach had the idea for a fan-powered train that would travel underground. On February 26, 1870, after fifty-eight days of drilling and painting and plastering, Beach unveiled his masterpiece—and throngs of visitors took turns swooshing down the track.

The Secret Subway will wow readers, just as Beach’s underground train wowed riders over a century ago.

The Secret Subway Details

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Author : Shana Corey , Red Nose Studio (Illustrations)

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From Reader Review The Secret Subway for online ebook

Scott Fillner says

Really enjoyed this story and the amazing artwork as well. Some of the pages had art which combined some amazing illustrations and posed figurines. The nonfiction narrative story was great. I enjoyed the author's note at the end, which has sparked an interest in finding out more about Mr. Beach.

Judith says

I love this book. This is a great book to teach research skills to young kids. I loved the art work, bibliography, and historical notes in the back of the book.

Damera Blincoe says

This is a great book if you have young children that are interested in New York subways.

Lata says

Interesting bit of history of an early attempt to transport people underground at NYC. Though it didn't generate sufficient interest or funding, it was a (forgotten) prototype of sorts for the later New York City subway.

Side note: the illustrations are by Red Nose Studio, which also illustrated a short story on Tor.com, "The Freedom of Navid Leahy".

Barbara says

I adore nonfiction stories that unearth forgotten secrets from history, and in the talented hands of Shana Corey, this one is particularly fascinating. The book focuses on the dream of Alfred Ely Beach, a New Yorker, who, way back in the 1860s, hatched the idea of an underground train that would allow for more efficient travel beneath the city's crowded streets. Through a bit of trickery, engineering, and innovation, he pulled off the marvelous feat of building a track and train that were powered by a fan, all underground. But this being New York, his train ran into a political roadblock that kept it from ever actually becoming used on a daily basis. Back matter explains more background information about this forerunner of today's subway system and the pneumatic tube system on which Beach's train depended. The story is worth reading, providing a glimpse of early New York City, and the illustrations, which are "hand-built three-dimensional sets shot with a digital camera," are accompanied by pen-and-ink line art, are quite impressive and capture the flavor of the times and the city's citizens. Next time readers happen to ride a subway in a city or airport, they might give thanks to Beach for his imaginative solution to a problem. Were it not for this idea, just imagine how congested those places might be. Curious readers will find additional resources to learn even more in the book's back matter.

N says

I loved this book. I love this trend wherein people reveal really cool things people did in history in picture books. People you may never have heard of or projects you'd never know about. It's really neat. Was that a thing when I was a kid? If it was, I surely didn't read any of those books. I feel like I'm learning so much reading these simple picture books and I just wonder how much more of a knowledge base our kids can have today (and not just because of the internet!) I mean, I know I'm not going to remember the names of all of these great inventors later, but I'll remember the stories and be able to find the names. I've also used my newfound knowledge from picture books (like *Six Dots: A Story of Young Louis Braille*) in adult conversations. So cool!

Kimberly Karalius says

THIS BOOK IS SO EPIC! I can't even! I love discovering little quirky chunks of history and this book is all about that. Excuse me while I geek out

Tasha says

This amazing nonfiction picture book takes a look at New York in the 1860s and the lack of options for transportation on the crowded and dirty streets. Everyone knew that something needed to be done, but no one could agree on exactly what that was. Then Alfred Ely Beach had an idea to build a railroad powered by forced air. Beach knew though that he couldn't propose to create a railroad under the streets, so instead he proposed that he'd build a tube to carry mail. Even Boss Tweed agreed with the plan. So Beach set to work creating a railroad to carry people and not mail. But it was not going to be as easy as just building the machine. He still had Boss Tweed and above ground politics to deal with!

Corey writes with great energy in this picture book. While nonfiction and historical, the book is fascinating and one immediately roots for Beach as he begins to plan and then dig under New York City. The slow digging under the earth is tantalizingly told. Then the rush of opening and the speed of the train are offered with a breathless tone and fast pace. The ending is sad but also hopeful, since everyone knows that air-driven trains are not the way subways were designed. There is a feeling of remembrance at the end, of one man's amazing dream that led to other opportunities to tunnel under New York City.

It is always a joy to see work by Red Nose Studios. The book opens with a look at how the illustrations are done with figures made from wire and foam and then polymer clay for the faces. There is such attention to detail throughout with the gorgeous tube-shaped subway car appearing like magic. Done with serious flair for the dramatic and a great sense of style, this picture book's illustrations are noteworthy and wonderful.

A great pick for fans of machines and inventions, this is also a book just right for dreamers of all sorts. Appropriate for ages 6-9.

Martha says

Who knew the first New York subway was designed and built by Alfred Ely Beach. In the 1860s we're introduced to a filthy New York City, filled with garbage in the street. After much THINKING and planning Alfred Ely Beach came up with the idea of an underground train run by pneumatic power to move people through the city comfortably. After inventing the concept of using a large fan to power a train, digging a tunnel and designing an elegant train waiting room, his genius idea became a reality and amazed the public! Unfortunately crooked politics skewered his invention, Mob Boss Tweed shut the subway down. Told in a dramatic spare narrative text, the author clearly explains the concept and process of creating a subway in a fascinating way. The multi media illustrations of clay figures animating the story line, created by Red Nose Studio, takes this story to the next level of excellence.

Brittany says

Cool story of a cool historical thing, cool illustrations, cool book.

Jenny says

This was a fascinating look at Alfred Ely Beach's creation of New York City's first subway. In order to get permission to build it, he said it was just going to use pneumatic tubes to carry mail; however, he built a tunnel with a working subway. Not surprisingly, politics and power interfered and Beach wasn't able to extend his subway and it soon was abandoned.

While I quite enjoyed the text, I was not a fan of the illustrations.

Kristina Jean Lareau says

The story of Alfred Ely Beach's secret subway is a piece of NYC history.

While this story is fascinating, it is quite wordy and did not hold my interest as I wished it would. The mixed media illustrations are incredible. My favorite spread is the second with a blue backgrounds and Victorian character silhouettes. I think that the clay figures are sculpted beautifully, that picturebook is the wrong media for this story. I feel as though it would work better as a stop motion short film.

Kaethe says

Forgotten engineering, steampunk pneumatic tubes, political machinations: I love stories of grand efforts that get overlooked by history, and trains, so this would be a winner. But then, the art: the puppets, the sets, the costumes! And excellent back matter! Sadly my local library, like many, wraps the dust jacket in a milar/paper cover which is then taped down, so I couldn't enjoy the bonus material on the art, but I get it's really cool. I'm only sorry it isn't also a short film, because that would be awesome!

Library copy

Earl says

The story of New York's first subway is told with stunning claymation. We hear about the congestion in the streets and how one person proposed a clever solution that was met with a lot of obstacles that proved to be more impenetrable than rock but still paved the way into what was possible. The dustjacket folds out to reveal the creative process to create the amazing illustrations.

Laura Harrison says

This is an exquisite non-fiction picture book. It may end up being one of my all time favorites, in fact. Exciting, fascinating text with remarkable, detailed artwork by Red Nose Studio that you have to see to believe. So much to explore and study, The Secret Subway demands to be read over and over.
