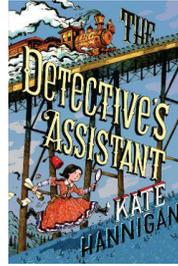


*Detective's Assistant*  
By Kate Hannigan



*Grade Levels: 3-6*  
*Reading Level: 5.5*

*Synopsis:*

What do you do when everyone in your family has died and your last living relative wants nothing to do with you? Cornie (Cornelia, AKA Nell) Warne is delivered without warning on her Aunt Kate's door, and has to talk fast before her aunt sends her away to an orphanage. Kate allows Nell to stay temporarily, in her boarding house in Chicago, and while she tries to prove herself indispensable to Kate we discover quite a bit about each of the characters.

In this galloping story we find out much about family and history in 1859 America. Nell learns that her outspoken and vinegar-tongued aunt is the first female detective hired by the newly formed Pinkerton Detective Agency and jumping Jehoshaphat, she finds herself sleuthing along with her aunt in her cases.

Sandwiched in between Kate and Nell's adventures are the letters that Nell receives from her friend Jemma, an African American child in Canada, whose parents are involved in the underground railroads. Nell and Jemma use a series of interesting ciphers to let us know what is going on.

The icing on the cake comes when Kate and Nell are hired to protect a disguised President-Elect Abraham Lincoln from an assassination plot as he travels through Baltimore on his way to Washington for the inauguration. Nell finds out about her family, and what really happened to her father as we are welcomed into this world of who-done-it and why.

This engaging bit of historical fiction is based loosely on the real-life adventures of Kate Warne and the author's notes at the end of the book explain a lot. While Nell is fictional we learn much about life in pre-civil war America.

*Author Website:*

[www.katesbooks.com](http://www.katesbooks.com) (which has a great discussion guide)

*Curricular Connections:*

- English/Language Arts
- Social Studies

*Lesson Ideas:*

- Smithsonian has a great website with information about the assassination plot was it real? You can be a detective and draw your own conclusion, unfortunately these websites have no mention of Kate Warne.

<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/the-unsuccessful-plot-to-kill-abraham-lincoln-2013956/?no-ist>

<http://teaching.msa.maryland.gov/000001/000000/000015/html/t15.html>

- There are many Underground Railroad web sites and lesson plans. Here is a rather extensive one from Scholastic:  
[http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/bhistory/underground\\_railroad/](http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/bhistory/underground_railroad/)
- Female jobs outside the home at the time were limited to factory work and being a secretary (although most of the office staff was male). What would it have taken for a woman to talk herself into a job like that? What would have been the risks? This following is a website that has a picture of a person who might be Kate:  
<http://www.pimall.com/nais/pivintage/katewarne.html>  
Take a look and decide what you think!

*Common Core Standards:*

CCSS ELA: Literature-Grade 5

- RL2 Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text.
- RL3 Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., how characters interact).
- RL4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative language such as metaphors and similes.
- RL6 Describe how a narrator's or speaker's point of view influences how events are described.
- RL10 By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poetry, at the high end of the grades 4-5 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

*Suggested Companion Titles:*

Girl Detectives:

- *Nick and Tesla's High-Voltage Danger Lab : a mystery with electromagnets, burglar alarms, and other gadgets you can build yourself* by Bob Pflugfelder
- *From the Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* by E.L. Konigsburg

*Professional Reviews:*

- *Booklist* starred (May 1, 2015)
- *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books* starred, 07/01/15)
- *Horn Book Guide* (Fall 2015)
- *Kirkus Reviews* (February 1, 2015)
- *Publishers Weekly* (February 9, 2015)
- *School Library Journal* (February 1, 2015)