



Shoeshine Girl

by Marco Sienna

Illustrated by Lyle Miller



HOUGHTON MIFFLIN

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HOUGHTON MIFFLIN HARCOURT
School Publishers

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Hard Times


Pia Vecchio tiptoed into her brother's room. After making sure he was asleep, she knelt down and carefully removed a scuffed wooden box from under the bed.


"Hey, what are you doing!" Vinny yelled, suddenly waking up. "That's my shoeshine kit. Put it back, Pia."

The elevated train on Third Avenue rumbled through the neighborhood. Pia didn't budge. "You're too sick to work. I'm going in your place," she said. "You know, we need the money."

"Are you nuts?" her brother asked, sitting up in bed. He suddenly noticed that his sister was wearing his clothes. "You're a girl. Girls don't shine shoes."



 Pia takes over for her brother Vinny.

 “Don’t worry about me, Vinny. I’ll be okay. I asked Nick and he said he’d keep an eye on me.”

“Pia, don’t do it,” Vinny **implored**. Before her brother could say another word, Pia was out the door.

On 116th Street, Pia caught the trolley and rode it downtown as far as East 42nd. Then she walked the rest of the way to Times Square. On her way, she passed a long line of men standing outside a Salvation Army center. There were all kinds of men in the line. Some of them looked like they could be bankers or lawyers. But all of them looked worn down.

Pia saw one man at a time step inside the center and then come back out carrying a small box of food.


She had seen breadlines before. But she had never seen one with so many men waiting so **intently** to be fed.

The Great Depression had settled like a permanent shadow over New York City — and the rest of the country as well. Some days, it seemed to Pia that the hard times of the 1930s would never end.


Hustle and Bustle


Her cousin Nick had told her to meet him at the subway entrance in Times Square. When she got there, Nick was nowhere in sight. She heard the loud voices of the newsboys selling the afternoon papers. This would be Pia's first test as a girl in disguise. She crossed her fingers and walked past the boys.




 Pia walks past a breadline.




 Pia meets the two newsboys.

 “Paper here! Get your paper here!” one of the boys shouted, waving a copy of a late edition. “Yankees and Cubs ready for game 3! All of Chicago in an uproar! Read all about it!”

Pia had been to Times Square before, but only for short visits. And never alone. Now, standing by the subway entrance, she felt overwhelmed. Trolleys, buses, cars, taxis, even horse-drawn carts turned the Square into a honking, squealing, roaring mass of non-stop motion.

 **Warily** clutching her shoeshine kit, Pia stood motionless as people whirled past her. Suddenly, a fight broke out between Moxi Malone and Theo Klein, two of the newsboys. They had been arguing over who was the better player — Babe Ruth or Lou Gehrig.

 Moxi, who favored the Babe, shoved the other boy. He lurched backward and smashed against Pia, scattering the contents of her kit across the pavement.

“Watch out!” she yelled. “Can’t you see I’m working!” Theo, the fallen newsboy, picked himself up. “Tough luck,” he said. “Say, who’s your favorite Yankee?” he asked Pia before returning to his papers. “The Babe,” she answered gruffly, gathering the tools of her trade. “He’s my brother’s favorite, too.”


Bully on the Block


“Oh, yeah,” someone said. Pia looked up. A threatening face loomed over her. “Pick up your junk and get out of here,” the newcomer said angrily. “This is my spot. Nobody shines shoes here but me, Mike Finnegan. Got it?”

Pia didn’t like being bullied. She stood up and faced the other shoeshine boy. “It’s a free country. I’ll shine shoes wherever I want,” she said, **confronting** the tough, heavysset boy. Out of the corner of her eye she saw her cousin approaching. “Hey, Mike, leave . . . leave him alone!” Nick shouted.

“Stay out of this, Nick. This punk here was muscling in on my territory. You know I don’t stand for that.”



 Pia stands up for herself against a bully.

 “This ‘punk’ is my cousin. He works for me. He’s just starting out. Give him a break, okay?”


“Sure, Nick. So long as he keeps his nose clean.”


The Argument Continues

The next day was the first of October. By the time Pia got to Times Square, Game 3 was over. From every corner, newsboys broke the biggest story of the day: “Yankees Beat Cubs, 7-5, for Third Straight in World Series Before 51,000 Fans!”

Moxie Malone and Theo Klein were at it again. This time, they were arguing over the Babe’s home run, hit in the fifth inning.




 Pia is hard at work.

 “I tell you, he called the shot,” Moxie insisted, as Pia started working near the subway entrance. “I heard he signaled to the crowd just where he was going to hit the ball. Then, he walloped it right out of the park.”

The other newsboys were doubtful. “Nobody can plan to hit a home run,” Theo said **scornfully**. Pia couldn’t help but add her own two cents to the dispute. “My brother says back in 1926 the Babe told a kid in the hospital he would hit a homer just for him.

The next day he did just that, and you know what, the kid got better when he heard what the Babe had done.”

 “That’s hooey,” said Theo. “My uncle told me the Babe never even went see the kid. All the Babe did was send him a signed baseball.”


“What do you know? There’s nobody like the Babe,” said Moxie. “Nobody.”

Hard Work

Pia started polishing another customer's shoe. While she worked, she thought about her brother Vinny. The doctor said he'd be better in no time. But he only seemed to get worse.

Later that afternoon, her cousin Nick showed up. He took her over to the Hotel Astor, a grand hotel. Then he showed her some other spots in the area where business was usually good.

The Yankees went on to win the World Series that fall, and Pia went on to hone her skills as a shoeshine "boy."

 Pia shows how the Babe hit a big home run.






 Nick takes Pia to Grand Central Terminal.

Shoe Shine Heaven


By the end of the month, Pia had made nearly fifty dollars. She kept it hidden under her bed. Nick was impressed with his cousin's work. So he decided it was time to take her to Grand Central Terminal. This was one of the world's famous railroad stations. "It's where the best shine boys work," he told her.

On a brilliant Saturday morning, Pia stepped inside Grand Central for the first time in her life. Cascades of sunlight poured through high windows. The marble floor of the main concourse, or floor, echoed with the rapid footsteps of commuters.

 Pia was so swept away by the beauty of the terminal that she almost forgot why she had come there. But her cousin was all business and soon assigned her a place to work.

For the first hour, Pia kept her mind on shining shoes. But then she heard a loud hubbub coming up the stairs from the lower level. She looked over her shoulder and saw people gathering around one man. Flashbulbs popped while reporters elbowed their way through the crowd.




 Pia is about to meet Babe Ruth.

Meeting the Babe

“Who’s the big shot over there?” Pia asked her latest customer.

“The Babe. Babe Ruth. Who else would attract a crowd like that?”

Pia’s jaw dropped. She knew an opportunity like this might never come again. “Sorry, mister, but I have to go,” she said to the customer. She ran across the concourse. When she got as close as she could to the famous ball player, she shouted, “Hey, Babe! My brother is really sick. Could you come over and say hello? Please Babe? You’re his hero, Babe.”

 The Babe heard her. “Listen, kid,” he said. “I can’t go today. But, I’d be happy to sign a baseball for him.” Pia didn’t have one. But someone in the crowd did, because the next thing she knew the Babe caught one coming his way. He grabbed a pen and signed the ball. Then he tossed it to Pia, with a big grin.

“Give it to your brother, kid.”

“Yes sir,” Pia said. “Thanks, Babe.”

That night over dinner, Pia could barely keep from blurting out what had happened. But when she reached for another slice of bread, her father noticed the polish on her fingers.

“Where did you get those stains?” he asked.



 The Babe tosses Pia a ball for her brother.

Uncovered, at Last


Pia gulped. Maybe it was time to spill the beans. Her father shook his head while she told her story.


“My daughter, a shoeshine boy! Are you nuts, Pia?”

“I only wanted to help,” she said. She left the table and quickly returned, showing her parents the money she had earned. Then she put the baseball on the table. “And this is for you, Vinny,” she said.

Vinny’s face lit up when he saw Babe Ruth’s autograph. For a moment, he even seemed well again.



 Pia surprises her brother.

 Pia's father leaned forward in his chair. His anger was gone. "I still don't like what you did. You should have talked with us first. You know that, right?"

Pia just nodded her head.

"We can use the money. . . . Tell you what. I have a friend with his own shoeshine stand. I'll talk to him and see if he'll take you both on. But only after school, once Vinny is all better."

Pia smiled in relief. "Thanks, Papa. But I'll only work there if I don't have to dress up as a boy."

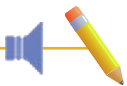
"Imagine that," Vinny added. "My sister — New York's first shoeshine girl!"

Responding



TARGET SKILL Cause and Effect In the story, Pia's actions often resulted in positive consequences. Copy the chart below and write down Pia's actions and the effects that resulted from them.

Cause	Effect
Pia disguises herself.	She is able to shine shoes and earn some money.
?	?



Write About It

Text to Text Think about a character from another book or story. What effects did this character have on the other characters? Write a paragraph describing those effects.



TARGET VOCABULARY

confronting

contempt

exasperated

implored

intently

occupying

scornfully

strident

subsided

warily



TARGET SKILL

Cause and Effect Tell how events are related and how one event causes another.



TARGET STRATEGY

Analyze/Evaluate Think carefully about the text and form an opinion about it.



GENRE Historical Fiction is a story whose characters and events are set in a real period of history.

Level: S

DRA: 40

Genre:

Historical Fiction

Strategy:

Analyze/Evaluate

Skill:

Cause and Effect

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