

Historical
Fiction

Best Friends in Business

by Frederica Brown
illustrated by Caroline Romanet



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PAIRED
READ

Madam C. J. Walker

STRATEGIES & SKILLS

Comprehension

Strategy: Visualize

Skill: Cause and Effect

Vocabulary Strategy

Idioms

Vocabulary

amazement, bravery,
disappear, donated, leader,
nervous, refused,
temporary

Content Standards

Social Studies

History

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**The total word count is based on words in the running text and headings only. Numerals and words in captions, labels, diagrams, charts, and sidebars are not included.



Education

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A



Essential Question

How can one person change the way you think?

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CHAPTER 1

A Bad Haircut

“My hair looks awful!” wailed Megan. “I can’t believe that I have to go to school with it looking like this!”

“It’s not that bad,” said her mom. “And it’s only temporary. Your hair will grow back soon.”

Megan stared at her reflection in the mirror. “It’s too short!” she said. “It makes my ears stick out!”

Amina, Megan’s best friend, was very sympathetic. “Honestly, Megan, you look fine,” she said. “Remember, it’s what’s on the inside that counts.”

Megan frowned. “I don’t want to go to school,” she said. “All the other kids will laugh at me.”

“Why don’t you wear a hat?” her mother suggested.

“Nobody wears hats to school, Mom,” said Megan. “It’s 1975!”

“I know!” said Amina. “You could wear a scarf!”

“What kind of a scarf?” asked Megan, starting to think about it.

“I made a really groovy one, remember?” said Amina. “It goes over your hair. You could wear that. Or, I could make you another one, and I’ll wear mine.”

“Well, I don’t know,” said Megan, doubtfully.

“Wait till you see it again,” said Amina. “I’ll run home and get it now.”



Amina went home and got her scarf. It had been very simple to make. Amina had just cut two triangles out of different fabrics and sewed them together, attaching thin pieces of fabric to each end of the triangle to serve as ties. She'd also used a bright patterned fabric that she liked.

“Here, try it on,” she said, handing the scarf to Megan. Megan tied the scarf over her hair and looked at herself in the mirror. It really did look good.

“Wow, your scarf has made my bad haircut disappear,” said Megan, laughing. She was feeling a lot better now.

“Let’s make another one for you,” said Amina. “I brought some fabric we can use.”



Getting Creative

As the girls measured and cut out the triangles for the headscarf, they talked about fashion and hair. Amina remembered that she had seen a movie on TV that had impressed her. It was about Madam C.J. Walker.

“I’ve never heard of her,” said Megan.

“She was the first African-American woman to become a millionaire by her own efforts,” explained Amina.

“That’s pretty cool,” Megan said.

“She’s pretty inspiring. She started her business because she had a scalp condition that was causing her to lose her own hair,” Amina explained. “She tried all sorts of things to treat it. Then she realized that she could create a product that people would buy. Lots of people had scalp problems in those days.”

“There’s a saying, *If life gives you lemons, make lemonade*. That’s what Madam Walker did! She turned a problem into a success story,” said Megan. “You know, talking about Madam Walker has given me an idea. She was a businesswoman and an entrepreneur. Maybe we could be businesswomen, too! We could make more of these scarves and sell them at school. What do you think?”

“That’s a great idea!” said Amina. “We would need to get some more fabric.”

“I can ask my mother if she has any extra fabric,” said Megan, and she jumped up to ask.

As luck would have it, Megan’s mom did have some fabric they could use. In fact, she had a room full of it. “Mom used to sew all her own clothes as a hobby,” explained Megan. “But she doesn’t have much time to sew these days.”



The girls looked through the different fabrics. Some were patterned, some were shiny, some were dark.

“Blue is one of my favorite colors,” said Amina, feeling a blue fabric between her fingers. “I like this one.”

“Me, too,” said Megan. “Let’s choose a nice contrasting color for the other side. How about this yellow patterned one?”

“Yes, I like that idea,” said Amina. “Come on, I can’t wait to get started.”

Megan’s mom donated even more fabric to the girls’ business. She measured out 30 yards of it! She also allowed them to set up production in her sewing room.

Now the girls could use her sewing machine, pins, threads, and tape measure. They got to work, determined to make as many scarves as they could. Amina got some sewing chalk and marked out the pattern on the fabric so that they didn’t waste a scrap.

“Now we’re really in business!” said Amina, gleefully.



CHAPTER 3

A Sense of Success

The girls worked hard for weeks, until they had a lot of scarves to sell. In the meantime, they wore them themselves. Many other kids and teachers asked where they got their colorful scarves. Amina and Megan couldn't wait to tell them that soon they would be able to buy their own.

They asked their principal if they could set up a stall at lunchtime, explaining their business idea. They also promised to donate a percentage of their sales to the local animal shelter. The principal was happy to encourage the girls, so she agreed.

"That's very enterprising of you two," she said. "Go ahead. I hope you sell a lot of scarves!"

"Thank you, Mrs. Williams," said Megan.

"I was afraid that Mrs. Williams might have refused to let us sell our scarves in school," said Megan as they left the principal's office. "But we're all systems go!"

“Lucky she did, because we’ve made the posters,” said Amina. “There will be ‘No More Bad Hair Days’ for anyone!”

They put up the posters advertising their stall. The poster also advertised a daily demonstration that would show people different ways to tie and wear the scarves. Soon the big day came. The lunch break came closer.

“I’m nervous, are you?” asked Megan.

“No,” said Amina firmly. “We’re going to be a huge success!”



They had set up a table which they stacked with scarves. There was a chair set out for Megan to sit in—she was the model for the demonstration.

A crowd of kids gathered as Amina started to talk in a loud voice, explaining how she was tying the scarf. A few teachers stopped to listen, too. They watched in amazement as Amina showed five different ways of wearing it.

“With a scarf from ‘No More Bad Hair Days,’ you’ll be a fashion leader!” said Amina, ending her sales pitch.

One girl asked if it was difficult to tie the scarves, and Amina offered to show her how to do it herself. The girl sat down in the chair and was soon admiring her new look in the mirror.

The girls sold ten scarves that lunch break.

Oh No!

The girls arrived at their stall next day, looking forward to making more sales. But trouble was looming. The first person to arrive at the counter was a girl in their class called Sarah. She was holding a scarf that she had bought the day before. It looked the worse for wear.

“I want my money back,” said Sarah. “Look at this scarf, it’s a rag! You obviously haven’t made it properly.”

Amina and Megan looked at each other. “Let me have a look,” said Megan, politely. “Gosh, what on earth have you been doing with it?”

Megan smoothed the scarf out. “These look like teeth marks!” she exclaimed. “Have you been letting your dog play with it?”



Sarah looked a little bit embarrassed. “Well, I did try it on my dog, Otto,” she said. “It looked so cute! But he must have chewed it off.”

“You can’t really blame us for your dog chewing up your scarf,” said Megan.

“No, I guess not,” said Sarah.

“I’ll tell you what,” said Megan. “I’ll give you two scarves for the price of one. That way you’ll have a new scarf for yourself, and one for Otto, too.”

“Okay. Thanks,” said Sarah. She chose her scarves and left.

“Wow, Megan, you handled that really well,” said Amina. “That took bravery. I thought Sarah was going to demand her money back, but you managed to sell her another scarf!”

“Thanks,” said Megan, with a grin. “It’s all part of being a saleswoman.”

They had another busy day. By the end of the week, they had almost run out of stock.



Over the weekend, the girls worked out how much money they had made. They had made a lot. So they paid Megan's mother some money for all the fabric she had given them. And as they had promised, they donated a percentage of their profits to the animal shelter.

Amina had the clever idea of donating some scarves to them as well.

"The volunteers who work there can wear them," she said. "It's good advertising for us."

Megan wasn't listening. She was looking at herself in the mirror. "Check this out," she said, turning to Amina. "I think my hair has grown!"

Respond to Reading

Summarize

Summarize the important events in *Best Friends in Business*. Use your Cause and Effect Chart to help you.

Character	
Setting	
Cause	→ Effect
Cause	→ Effect
Cause	→ Effect

Text Evidence

1. How do you know that *Best Friends in Business* is historical fiction? **GENRE**
2. What causes Sarah to complain about her scarf?
CAUSE AND EFFECT
3. What does Amina mean when she says “Now we’re really in business” on page 8? **IDIOMS**
4. Write about the effects of Megan’s bad haircut.
WRITE ABOUT READING

Compare Texts

Read how Madam Walker made a success of her life.

Madam C. J. Walker

(B. 1867, D. 1919)

Madam C.J. Walker was a very successful businesswoman. It is believed that she was the first African American woman millionaire in the United States.

Madam Walker worked very hard to achieve her success. She was born Sarah Breedlove. Both her parents were farmworkers who had been slaves before slavery was abolished. They both died when she was only seven. Sarah married very young, but her husband died only a few years later. Sarah then moved to St. Louis, where her brothers had set themselves up as barbers, cutting hair. She worked for them and raised her daughter.

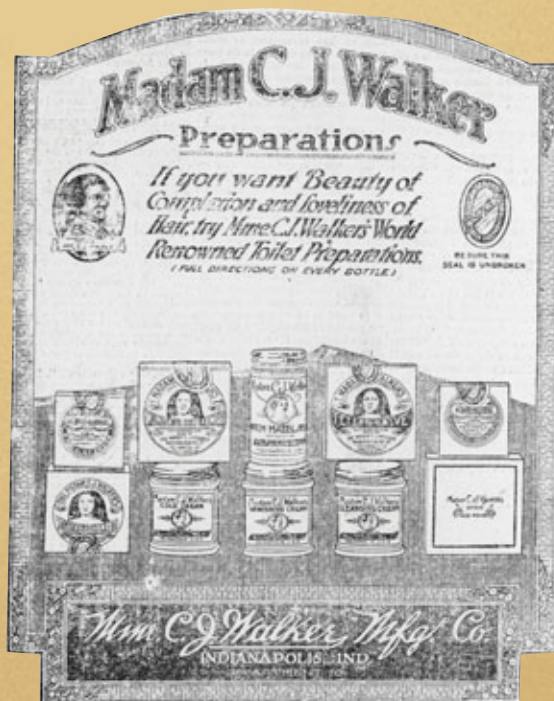


Madam C. J. Walker

During the 1890s, Sarah suffered from a scalp problem that caused her to lose most of her hair. She tried all sorts of remedies and treatments. Through these experiments, she came into contact with Annie Malone, a St. Louis businesswoman who sold a range of hair products. Sarah became a sales agent for her.

Then she changed her name to Madam C.J. Walker, and started her own business selling hair products. She spent more than a year traveling across the South, selling her products from door to door. She wanted everyone to know about her products. It worked and the products began to sell. Eventually, she was successful enough to build her own factory, of which she was extremely proud. She also built a beauty salon, and two beauty training schools.

Madam Walker advertised her products very effectively.



Madam Walker encouraged the people who worked for her to be informed about civil rights issues. She also gave generously to organizations who worked to further rights and opportunities for African Americans. In 1917, she was part of a delegation that went to the White House to voice their concerns about government policies that affected African Americans.

She worked very hard to achieve her business success and she always encouraged others to do the same.



Madam Walker was very proud of the success she had earned.



Make Connections

What are some of the qualities that make Madam C.J. Walker an inspiration? **ESSENTIAL QUESTION**

Megan and Amina were inspired by Madam Walker. Is there a person you find inspiring in your life?

How do they inspire you? **TEXT TO SELF**

Focus on Genre

Historical Fiction Historical fiction tells a story that is set in the past. The settings are realistic and drawn from history, and may contain historical persons, but the main characters are usually made up.

Read and Find *Best Friends in Business* tells a story that is set in 1975. The author used the historical figure of Madam C.J. Walker in this story, as well as realistic details of American life in the 1970s.

Your Turn

Choose a time in history and research some facts about that period. Then write your own story set during this time period, using the facts you have researched. Try to have your characters do things that people in that time would have done.

Thinkmark

Setting

In what time in history did *Best Friends in Business* take place?

Sequence of Events

What happened in this story?

What happened *first, then, next* and *finally*?

Plot

What was the problem that Megan faced? How did she solve it?

What was the end result?

Conclusions

After reading *Best Friends in Business*, what conclusions can you draw about the different ways someone can change how you think about something?

Leadership

GR Q • Benchmark 40 • Lexile [t/k]

Grade 3 • Unit 3 Week 2

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