

★ Hedy and Her Amazing Invention

Jan Wahl

Morgana Wallace, Illustrator

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Jan Wahl distills the eventful life of Hollywood actress and inventor Hedy Lamarr in this grade school biography. It is illuminating and illustrated and is sure to be inspiring for young scientists with its message that “Hedy wanted to be more than just a pretty girl.”

Wahl met Hedy several times; his enthusiasm and affection for her inquisitive, multi-faceted personality is evident. Born in 1914 in Vienna, Hedwig Kiesler had an intense curiosity about how things worked and a natural talent for acting, but she was bored repeating the same lines each night on stage. Later, fleeing a stifling marriage and rising anti-Semitism, the actress escaped to America, where she began a film career as Hedy Lamarr, “the World’s Most Beautiful Woman,” during Hollywood’s Golden Age.

Wahl focuses on Hedy’s continued need for more intellectual stimulation and off-camera experiments, which led to the development of frequency-hopping technology (better known as spread spectrum technology) in 1941. The book explains this invention in elegant but simple terms, including how it is a vital part of contemporary essentials like cell phones, laptop computers, and GPS.

Intricate paper collages from Morgana Wallace are wonderful and detailed. Their rich palette and variety of paper art techniques, textures, and materials make Hedy’s story even more appealing. Wallace conveys engaging portraits of Hedy as a ruddy-cheeked youngster imagining how the gears in a pocket watch work; as a coolly glamorous, jewel-bedecked film star; and as a thoughtful inventor surrounded by books in her home study.

The book is a luminous tribute to a remarkable woman who carved out an independent and creative life of her own design.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (January/February 2019)

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