

The Mystery of Blackbeard the Pirate

Carole Marsh

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The city of Bath, North Carolina was once home port for the famous pirate Blackbeard. Bath capitalizes on this fact annually with a summer pageant to lure tourists. This story, updated and retitled since it was originally published in 1979 as “The Missing Head Mystery,” relates the adventures of four youngsters who try to help save the pageant by finding a missing theatre prop-Blackbeard’s head.

“It has blackety-black stiff hair all over and a long, wiry, tangled beard,” reads the description. “The eyes are black and have an evil look. And the face has smoke marks from where he would tuck burning candles in his beard to look scary.”

Without this important piece of the pageant, the play might not make enough money to pay the actors and keep the show alive throughout the season. Someone is certainly sabotaging the pageant, and also leaving clues for the children. These clues provide a tour of many of the historical buildings around town, which are well described for the reader. A map of the town shows the location of these buildings, along with photos of the children taken by the author. Unfortunately, these photos do little to enhance the story, as they depict the children huddled over a clue, walking through tall grass to the cemetery, ascending a spiral staircase, or in the front of an historic church.

Extra sections follow the text of the story, providing readers with information about the author and about Blackbeard, a glossary of pirate terms, a scavenger hunt (to see how well the book was read), instructions for writing a mystery, and a form to send in for a chance to be a character in another Carole Marsh Mystery. A separate teacher’s guide is also available.

Marsh, a native of Atlanta, Georgia, is a professional writer and photographer and well known in children’s literature publishing. She was the recipient of the 2002 Teacher’s Choice Award from Learning Magazine and her company, Gallopade International, was deemed by Publishers Weekly the fastest-growing small press in December 2000.

This book is the fourth in a series of twelve mysteries that are based in various American historical locations. Teaching guides are available for each title, making them possible selections of supplemental reading for the upper elementary American history classroom.

LINDA COOLEY (November / December 2003)

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