



Deborah Heiligman

Topics

Best Selling and Award Winning Authors, Children and Young Adult Authors, Culture and Society, Historians

Travels From

New York

Bio

Deborah Heiligman is the author of 30 books for children and teens, many of them nonfiction, including *Charles and Emma: The Darwins' Leap of Faith*, a National Book Award Finalist, Printz Honor, an L.A. Times Book Prize Young Adult Literature finalist and the first YALSA Excellence in Nonfiction Award winner. Her 2019 release, *Torpedoed*, is a true account of the attack and sinking of the passenger ship SS *City of Benares*, which evacuated children from England during WWII. It has received three starred reviews from *Booklist*, *Horn Book*, and *Kirkus*, who called it an "exceptionally well-researched and impressively crafted tale of desperation, tragedy, and survival." It has been named a YALSA Award for Excellence in Nonfiction Finalist and a *Kirkus Reviews* Best Books of the Year. Deborah Heiligman has had several critically acclaimed releases, including her picture book, *The Boy Who Loved Math: The Improbable Life of Paul Erdos*, that won the 2014 Cook Prize for best STEM book. It was also an Orbis Pictus honor, a NY Times Notable, a New York Public Library top 100 Books for Reading and Sharing,

and an Anne Izard storytelling award winner. Her first YA novel, *Intentions*, won the Sidney Taylor Award from Association of Jewish Librarians. Her 2017 *Vincent and Theo: The Van Gogh Brothers* was released to critical acclaim, including six starred reviews in publications from *Booklist* to *School Library Journal*. In June 2017, *Vincent and Theo* won the the Boston Globe-Horn Book Award for Nonfiction. It also won a SCWBI Golden Kite Award, a Cybils Senior High Nonfiction Award, and the 2018 Printz and YALSA Awards for excellence in literature for young adults in the ALA Midwinter Awards. Deborah Heiligman grew up in Allentown, Pennsylvania. She graduated from Brown University with an A.B. in Religious Studies. While that might not seem like an obvious major for a children's book author, her studies taught her how to ask questions about difficult topics, and that has become her specialty. Deborah now lives in New York City with her husband, Jonathan Weiner, an author and professor, and their Cairn Terrier, Ketzie. Their two sons live in Brooklyn, a subway ride away. You can follow Deborah on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#). *Author Photo Credit: Matt Peyton*

SPEECHES

Writing to Learn: From Chocolate Chip Cookies to Vincent Van Gogh and Beyond Deborah discusses her journey as a reader and writer from elementary school through now, emphasizing the fact that she writes books about subjects she (initially) knows nothing about. Starting with a question, each book becomes a journey to answer that question - and then many more. Often what she learns changes her life. She will refer to her most popular and award-winning books: *Charles and Emma: The Darwins' Leap of Faith*; *The Boy Who Loved Math: The Improbable Life of Paul Erdos*; *Vincent and Theo: The van Gogh Brothers*; and the forthcoming *Torpedoed: The True Story of the World War II Sinking of the SS City of Benares*.

It's All Story: How to Use the Craft and Elements of Fiction to Create Engaging Nonfiction

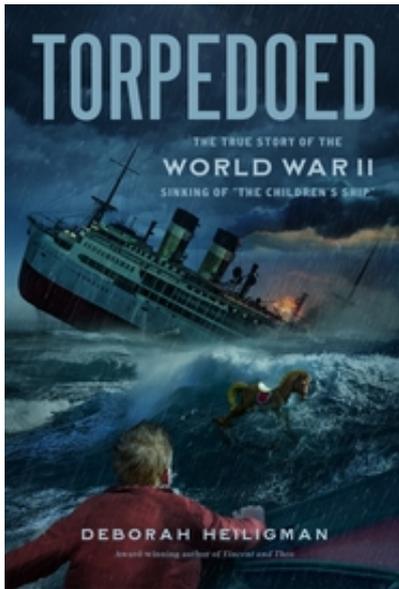
Deborah will show the tricks of the trade: how to use scene, plot, dialogue, character development, and more to create narrative, suspenseful, page-turning nonfiction – without making anything up. Perfect for aspiring nonfiction writers, teachers, and students.

The Art of Brotherhood How Theo and Vincent van Gogh Can teach us by example about love, life, and art.

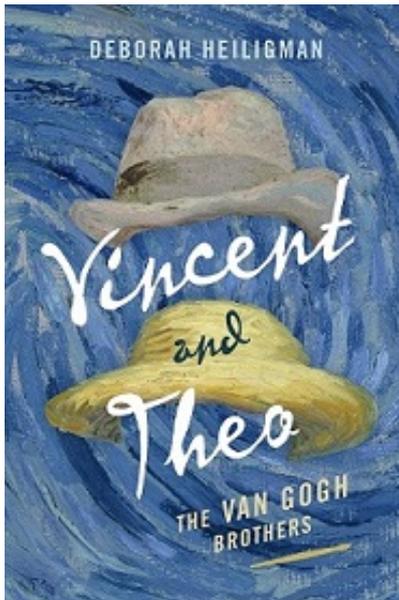
BOOKS

[TORPEDOED](#) The True Story of the World War II Sinking of the SS City of Benares

Henry Holt and Co. (BYR)



Hardcover



Hardcover

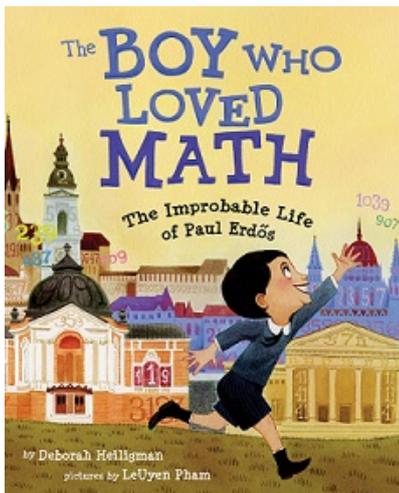
Amid the constant rain of German bombs and the escalating violence of World War II, British parents by the thousands chose to send their children out of the country. In September 1940, passenger liner SS City of Benares set out in a convoy of nineteen ships sailing for Canada. On board were ninety CORB children, chaperones, and crew, along with paying passengers. When the war ships escorting the Benares to safe waters peeled off, a German submarine attacked and torpedoed the Benares. What followed is an amazing example of all that people are capable of—the worst, and the best.

[VINCENT AND THEO](#)The Van Gogh Brothers

Henry Holt and Co. (BYR)

The deep and enduring friendship between Vincent and Theo Van Gogh shaped both brothers' lives. Confidant, champion, sympathizer, friend—Theo supported Vincent as he struggled to find his path in

life. They shared everything, swapping stories of lovers and friends, successes and disappointments, dreams and ambitions. Meticulously researched, drawing on the 658 letters Vincent wrote to Theo during his lifetime, Deborah Heiligman weaves a tale of two lives intertwined and the extraordinary love of the Van Gogh brothers.



Hardcover

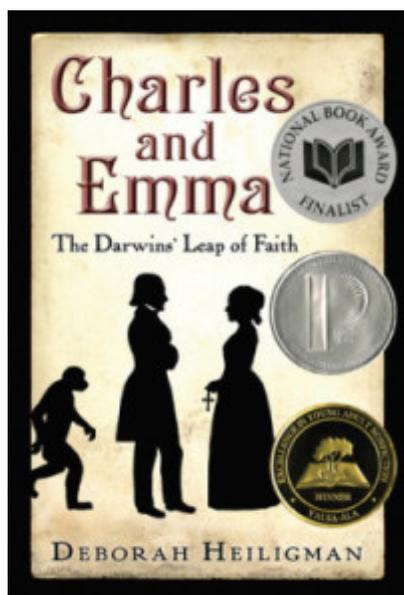
[THE BOY WHO LOVED MATH](#)The Improbable
Life of Paul Erdos

Roaring Brook Press

With a simple, lyrical text and richly layered illustrations, this book is a beautiful introduction to the world of math and a fascinating look at the unique character traits that made "Uncle Paul" a great man.

[CHARLES AND EMMA](#)The Darwins' Leap of
Faith

Square Fish



Deborah Heiligman's biography of Charles Darwin is a thought-provoking account of the man behind evolutionary theory: how his personal life affected his work and vice versa. The end result is an engaging exploration of history, science, and religion for young readers.

Hardcover, Paperback

REVIEWS: "We have nothing but good feelings about spending quality time with Deb at the Oswego Writing Institute! She really hit a home run with our audiences."

- Christine Walsh, EdD, Co-Director, Oswego Writing Institute, SUNY Oswego

"Deborah came to Houston at the invitation of Syfr Learning for a presentation on the writing process for a STEM conference to about 60 school district administrators. It was like old home week. Almost all the administrators were familiar with her book *Charles and Emma* and had clearly loved it. The inventory available of her new book, *Vincent and Theo*, sold out and her presentation was excellent."

- Richard Erdmann and Christine Drew, Co-Founders, Syfr Learning

"Our community absolutely loved our author event with Deborah Heiligman. She spoke easily and engagingly about her book *Vincent and Theo: The Van Gogh Brothers* and entertained an enthusiastic discussion Q&A after the presentation. The books sold out quickly, and the store took orders for additional sales. Deborah was a pleasure to work with. She clearly connects with her audience, she's extremely knowledgeable and personable, and we would definitely have her here again."

- Monica Friess, Coordinator, Cultural Programming, JCC of the Lehigh Valley

"Deborah is a superb presenter. Salmagundi is a small, historic art club in NYC's Greenwich Village. We invited Deborah to speak at our annual Club library's fund raising dinner. The audience, a mix of artists, art collectors, and friends of the Club were enthralled. Her wonderfully engaging talk (supported by carefully curated visuals) was accessible, informed, and moving. It is a rare thing to find a brilliant writer who can bring you into her research/writing process while revealing her deep connection for and understanding of her subjects--*Vincent and Theo*. A memorable event for us!"

- Barbara A. Genco, MLS, Library Consultant, *Library Journal*/MediaSourceInc.com

Praise for *Torpedoed* *Torpedoed* has garnered three starred reviews from *Booklist*, *Kirkus Reviews*, and *Horn Book*:

“This story of the SS City of Benares, a luxury ocean liner pressed into duty transporting English children to Canada during WWII, is in turns informative, intriguing, horrifying, and inspirational. Ample background information describes the London Blitz and its terrible toll on civilians, justifying why parents made the desperate decision to send their children overseas. Readers are introduced to the kids and their chaperones and share their first few idyllic days at sea, enjoying toys, games, and ample ice cream. Late one night, however, the Benares was torpedoed by a German U-boat. Several passengers died in the initial explosion; due to terrible weather, many lifeboats flipped while being lowered and dumped their occupants into the icy waters. Those who did make it into lifeboats faced hours of relentless freezing temperatures and huge waves, resulting in more deaths. Extensively documented accounts tell of harrowing escapes, incredible heroism, tragic accidents, eventual rescues, and the gruesome aftermath: only 13 children out of 90 survived, and overall the ship lost 258 of its total 406 passengers. The real-time unfolding of events is compelling, and young audiences will relate to these stories about students their own age. An epilogue, bibliography, and chapter notes make this ideal for reports; the powerful story from Printz Honor Book author Heiligman (Vincent and Theo, 2017) will attract additional audiences.”

—*Booklist*, starred review

“Heiligman recounts the little-known World War II maritime disaster of the sinking of the passenger ship City of Benares, which was evacuating children from England to Canada. In 1940, with German air raids reducing many of England’s major cities to smoldering ruins and a threatened invasion looming, thousands of British parents chose to send their children to safety in Canada through a program called the Children’s Overseas Reception Board. On Sept. 13, 1940, the passenger liner departed Liverpool in a convoy bound for Canadian ports. Onboard were 90 CORB children, their chaperones, crew, and paying passengers. Their Royal Navy escort left it on Sept. 17, and that night, unaware of the refugee children aboard, the commander of German submarine U-48 ordered three torpedoes launched at the Benares, the third hitting its target with devastating effect. Heiligman makes the story especially compelling by recounting the backstories and experiences of several of the children and their chaperones. These characters are presumably white; Heiligman takes care to note that the overwhelming majority of the crew were South Asian Muslims whose stories were not collected after the disaster. It’s a customarily masterfully paced and beautifully designed book, with reproductions of archival photographs and documents complemented by original pencil art by Lee that captures the action aboard the Benares and afterward. Expansive backmatter includes interviews conducted with Heiligman’s sources, several by her. An exceptionally well-researched and impressively crafted tale of desperation, tragedy, and survival.”

—*Kirkus*, starred review

“Nonfiction maestro Heiligman (Charles and Emma, rev. 1/09; Vincent and Theo, rev. 3/17) here tells a riveting wartime story. As World War II brings intense bombing to England, some parents choose to send their children across the ocean, ostensibly to greater safety, but all ships crossing the Atlantic are at risk of attack by German submarines. On September 17, 1940, the unthinkable happens. The SS City of Benares—carrying two hundred passengers, half of them children—is torpedoed in the North Atlantic and

begins to sink, leaving the pajama-clad passengers little time to scramble onto lifeboats in the dead of night. Heiligman navigates the chaos of those crucial minutes by skillfully juggling various points of view, heightening the narrative tension. As word of the disaster reaches the nearest ship, those in the water—in lifeboats, on rafts, clinging to debris—struggle to survive; many perish in the night from exposure to the cold temperature and stormy weather. Help eventually arrives, but in a gut-punch of a surprise twist, one lifeboat is left behind, extending the rescue drama by eight days and several more chapters. Heiligman builds and maintains suspense while remaining scrupulously faithful to the historical record, eschewing quotation marks, for example, for anything that's not a primary-source document. Black-and-white photographs and illustrations are incorporated throughout; the front and back matter include an author's note, a personnel list ("Shipmates"), a bibliography, source notes, and an index."

—*Horn Book*, starred review

Praise for *Vincent and Theo: The Van Gogh Brothers* *Vincent and Theo* has garnered six starred reviews from *School Library Journal*, *Publisher's Weekly*, *Booklist*, *Kirkus Reviews*, *Horn Book*, and *The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*:

"Central to understanding the artist Vincent van Gogh was his relationship with his younger brother Theo, recorded for posterity in the nearly 700 surviving letters they wrote to each other. Here, Heiligman delivers an exquisitely told, heartfelt portrayal of that deep emotional and intellectual bond...a breathtaking achievement that will leave teens eager to learn more."

—*School Library Journal*, starred review

"As teenagers, the Van Gogh brothers, Vincent and Theo, pledged to 'be companions in the search for meaning in life and meaning in art.' In this intensive exploration of their turbulent lives, Heiligman focuses on their complex relationship and anchoring mutual bond. Writing in present tense, she follows them from their childhood closeness as two of six children of a Protestant pastor in the heavily Catholic Dutch village of Zundert into their contrasting adulthoods in France: painter Vincent's life was precarious and erratic, while art dealer Theo's was more stable and decorous, if often lonely. Heiligman tells the brothers' story in short chapters, sometimes just scenes, and occasionally offers what she calls 'croquis' (sketches) to give a better sense of 'someone whose whole being cannot be captured on paper in one steady view. Like Theo.' She also recounts, in exhaustive detail, Vincent's frequent cycles of descent into mental illness and subsequent rebounds, as well as the way the brothers alternately clashed with and clung to each other."

—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

"Vincent van Gogh is perhaps one of the best-known artists today, but it's likely he wouldn't be nearly as famous had it not been for his brother Theo, an art dealer who supported his troubled brother and championed his paintings until his own untimely death, only months after Vincent's. While each brother had a pivotal career in his own right, Heiligman plumbs their correspondence, both to each other and beyond, and zeroes in on their relationship, which was fraught with a brotherly combination of competition, frustration, and, ultimately, adoration. Structured as a sort of gallery of key moments in the brothers' lives, the book covers their childhood and the influence of their tight-knit family...In fittingly painterly language, Heiligman offers vivid descriptions of Vincent's artwork and life, which grow more

detailed and colorful as Vincent's own artistic style becomes richer and more refined, particularly during the intense, almost manic flurry of work he produced in his last few years. This illuminating glimpse into the van Goghs' turbulent life and historical period will add compelling depth to readers' understanding of the iconic painter. Art-loving teens will be captivated."

—*Booklist*, starred review

"As she did in *Charles and Emma* (2009), her biography of the Darwins, Heiligman renders a nuanced portrait of the complex, devoted, and enduring relationship between the Van Gogh brothers. Though *Vincent and Theo* unmistakably looked like brothers, they could not have been more opposite in habits and temperament; still, they pledged to each other as teenagers "to keep the bond between them strong and intimate." Heiligman explains: "They will be more than brothers, more than friends. They will be companions in the search for meaning in life and meaning in art....And they will, when needed, carry each other's parcels." She reveals their unfailing devotion to this pledge by drawing on the hundreds of letters they exchanged in their tragically short lifetimes, quoting extensively and adeptly integrating them into the narrative. She frames the story of their relationship as a series of gallery exhibits (introducing each with a black-and-white reproduction of a representative piece) and varies her writing style to reflect Vincent's work in different media such as sketching, drawing, and painting. Some depictions are vivid and richly textured, like Vincent's oil paintings, while others are lean and sharp, like his sketches and drawings."

—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

"Heiligman again examines the impact of a family member on her main subject, this time unpacking the friendship between artist Vincent van Gogh and his brother Theo. After vividly setting the stage with brief sections that introduce Vincent and Theo near the end of their lives, Heiligman takes readers back to their beginnings. We learn of other siblings and of supportive parents; we gain a sense of their childhoods in their father's parsonage. Structured as a walk through an art museum, the book proceeds through the years, each section a gallery...The layout, which incorporates sketches, subheads, and a generous use of white space, is a calming counterpoint to the turbulent narrative. Documenting the author's research involving visits to sites, along with academic and primary sources, the extensive back matter includes a list of significant people, a timeline, a bibliography, thorough citations, and an author's note. The result is a unique and riveting exploration of art, artists, and brotherly love."

—*Horn Book*, starred review

"Sunflowers. Stars. A severed ear. Teen readers can be expected to reach for this title armed with basic information about Vincent Van Gogh's life, but those who have read material focused solely on the painter will view him in a new light as Heiligman reintroduces him in relation to his younger brother, Theo...Heiligman's sensitive intertwining of the brother's stories takes nothing away from the passionate tale of Vincent, the starving, suffering, mad genius artist. Readers, however, may unexpectedly find themselves in empathy with reliable Theo—emotionally guarded, frustrated at work, late in finding true love, quiet patron of loudly lauded Impressionists, husband and father who died miserably and alone. Notes, timeline, index, bibliography are appended for students conducting research, but this title is a treasure for readers who want to immerse in a roiling domestic drama and who don't back away from a good cry."

—*The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, starred review

Praise for *Charles and Emma: The Darwins' Leap of Faith* “The unlikely, and happy marriage of Charles Darwin and Emma Wedgwood comes to life in Heiligman's intelligent and fast-moving book. Emma, a devout Christian but a sympathetic editor, helped make the arguments in ‘On the Origin of Species’ airtight. Meanwhile readers can almost effortlessly absorb Darwin's ideas and the culture in which they developed, along with a portrait of Victorian everyday life.” —New York Times Book Review, 2009 Notable Book “With empathy, humor and insight, Heiligman proves the truth of the maxim that behind every great man there is indeed a great woman. There have been many Darwin-themed books published this year (which marks the 200th anniversary of his birth). This is clearly the best.”

—NPR.org

“A delightful book about the question at the heart of the Darwins' marriage.”

—*The New York Times Book Review*

“Heiligman's writing is so good—so rooted in particulars of time, place and Darwin's scientific thought, yet so light and full of drama—that readers will care about Charles and Emma and their love story. The debate between science and religion continues, today, but the relationship of Charles and Emma Darwin demonstrates that science and religion are not incompatible.”

—Bookpage

“This is the ‘wow’ biography on the Darwins - meticulously researched, richly rendered and rewarding every step of the way.”

—*San Francisco Chronicle*

Praise for *The Boy Who Loved Math* “Erdos's unconventional brilliance shines through on every page, and extensive author and illustrator notes (including Pham's explanations of the mathematical concepts she works into each illustration) will delight readers with even a fraction of Erdos's interest in math.”

—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

“An exuberant and admiring portrait introduces the odd, marvelously nerdy, way cool Hungarian-born itinerant mathematical genius.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

“An infinitely creative and entertaining book.”

—*The Horn Book*

“Pair this with Don Brown's *Odd Boy Out* (BCCB 10/04) to compare genius eccentricities, or hand it to middle-grade lovers of math puzzles—opened to the notes.”

—BCCB