

# Classroom Space



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## Who was called “The Lady Edison?”

It was rare enough to be a woman inventor in the 1800s, but combine that with only an elementary school education, and starting a career of inventing as a child, and it becomes obvious how Margaret Knight eventually would be referred to as “The Lady Edison.” Born in 1838 in Maine, Mattie was raised with her two older brothers by her mother. While Mattie did not have much time with her father before he died, she did develop his interest and ability in using tools and making things. While many girls keep journals when they are young, Mattie’s journal was a bit different. Her journal was filled with sketches and ideas for possible inventions. She loved making toys for her older brothers, as well as useful things like a foot warmer for her mother, and even made and sold specially designed sleds to neighborhood children to help supplement the meager family income.

When Mattie was eleven, her mother and brothers went to work in the textile mill. Since the minimum age to work at the mill was twelve, Mattie was too young, so she spent her days in school, and playing in the mill after school while she waited for her family to finish their 15 hour work days. When she turned twelve, she too went to work in the mill. After witnessing a girl hit in the head with an out of control loom shuttle, Mattie worked on a stop-motion metal shuttle guard device. Since

*(Continued on page 3)*

## Elizabeth Keckley, Confidante to Mary Todd Lincoln

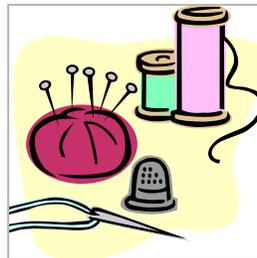
How would a child born a slave in Virginia grow up to become the confidante to Mary Todd Lincoln? Since 2009 is the bicentennial of Abraham Lincoln’s birth, it seems appropriate to introduce the reader to the child born Elizabeth Hobbs.

At her birth, Liz was considered the daughter of literate slave parents, although biologically her father was Armistead Burwell, master of the plantation. Elizabeth’s parents were owned by different masters, lived on separate plantations, and when Elizabeth was very young her father’s master moved leaving Elizabeth and her mother to fend for themselves. Elizabeth’s mother was a house servant serving as a seamstress.

Slaves were expected to start work at a young age, as seen by Elizabeth’s attending the mistress of the plantation by the age of four, and by age five or six, depending on the source, serving as nursemaid to the mistress’s infant child. Her immaturity was severely punished after she tried to pick up the baby, whose cradle had fallen over, with a fireplace shovel. When she turned fourteen Liz was given to her mas-

ter’s son as a wedding gift. While Liz suffered various episodes of abuse as a young slave, it was between age fourteen and twenty-four that she bore the brunt of both physical and sexual abuse, resulting in her one and only child, a son.

Eventually she went back to live with her master’s widow and



family in St. Louis. During her childhood Liz had learned to sew, a skill that led to a large clientele of notable women. With the support of these women, Liz was able to buy her freedom, and move to Washington, D. C.

Her clients were prominent, such as Mrs. Jefferson Davis and Mrs. Robert E. Lee. With the help of one of her clients, Liz was given the opportunity to meet Mary Todd Lincoln, and after proving her skill with a needle, Liz became Mary’s seamstress. But Mary and Liz were more than employer and employee, they became close friends. Not an easy feat considering Mary Lincoln was

well known for her self-centeredness and unstable temperament, but unlike most Liz could see past all of this. Apparently Liz recognized that Mary’s life as a child was anything but perfect, and that they shared an unhappy childhood. Liz eventually would be in charge of caring for the Lincoln children, and develop into Mary’s confidante. She was there to console Mary against the accusations that Mary was a Southern sympathizer as her siblings lived in the South and her brother even fought for the Confederacy. Liz was there when the Lincoln’s son Willie died, most likely of typhoid. She was there as Mary dealt with the loss of three of her half brothers, who were killed while fighting for the South. And she was there for Mary when her husband was assassinated. Liz even helped Mary move to Chicago and stayed with her a short while, until Mary was unable to continue to pay Liz a wage. After this Liz went back to Washington to open her dress shop.

What happened to Liz’s son? Liz was able to send him to a black school, Wilberton University in Ohio. During the war

*(Continued on page 4)*

### Table of Contents

<i>Elizabeth Keckley, Confidante to Mary Todd Lincoln; The Lady Edison</i>	1
<i>What Do You Know about Dominoes?</i>	2
<i>Literature Connection; Native American Baseball Player Makes History</i>	3
<i>Submarine</i>	4

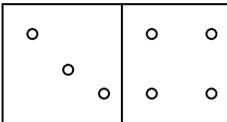
***What Do You Know about Dominoes ?***

Did you know that a set of dominoes was found in the tomb of King Tutankhamen (dated at approximately 1355 B.C.)? Did you know that the first World Domino Tournament, held in Las Vegas in 2005, featured players from more than forty countries? Did you know that the world record for the most dominoes set up and toppled involve 4,002,136 dominoes?

Dominoes may be played differently in various parts of the world, but there is no question that they are popular in many countries. Perhaps they are most popular in Latin American Countries.

Dominoes are small tiles originally made of bone or ivory, with “pips,” or spots, drilled and either painted or filled with ebony. The word domino is believed to have come from 1) the French word for a priest’s black and white winter hood, 2) a hooded masquerade costume, or 3) the Latin word *dominus* meaning “lord master of the house.”

China is usually given credit for inventing the “game” of dominoes, Mah-jongg, with the oldest domino sets dating back to 1120 A.D. Chinese dominoes, however, differ from those found in much of the modern world, and include both red and white pips, with each tile representing one of the twenty-one outcomes of throwing two dice, and often involve a military aspect to the game.

*Dominoes Around the World* by Mary D. Lankford, ISBN 0-688-14051-3 is a great collection of domino games is to the game of sixes is used with  games from eight different countries. One of the *Matador*, a game played in Spain, but very similar Russian Dominoes. In *Matator*, a set of double the goal to connect dominoes so that the ends touching total seven. Tiles whose total is already seven, such as three and four, are called *matadors*, as is the double blank. *Matadors* are wild, and thus may be played at any time, and are usually played crosswise, but if it is played off a blank it may be played end to end or crosswise, as the player wishes. To start, the tiles are shuffled face down. With 2 players, each draws 7 tiles, with 3 players each draws 6 tiles, and with 4 players each draws 5 tiles. The rest are left in the boneyard, or draw pile. If a player cannot play, they must pick one tile and play if possible. The end of a hand occurs when one player plays out all his dominoes or when the game is blocked and no one can play. Points are scored, one per pip, and the one with the fewest points, wins the points of all the others. The game is usually played to 100 or 200 points. Variations can include: 1) drawing until a player can play, instead of having players only draw one tile; 2) playing off all four edges of the first double; 3) using a double nine set, targeting “ten” instead of “seven,” adjusting the *matadors* accordingly; and similarly, 4) using a double twelve set and targeting “thirteen” instead of “seven,” adjusting *matadors* accordingly. Not only is this a fun game, but a great way to practice addition fact families!

(Lady Edison—cont'd from page 1)

Mattie was a girl, she was not able to obtain a patent, but her invention became standard equipment on looms, saving many, many lives, and is used in cotton mills even today.

In 1868 Mattie found a job at a paper bag factory. But the bags at that time were like envelopes, and not easy to fill. Mattie, along with many other inventors, worked independently on making a machine that would make a better paper bag. Mattie was the first to successfully design a machine to make square bottomed paper bags. Charles Annan, an unscrupulous inventor, tried to take the credit, but witnesses were able to discredit him, and Mattie, at the age of 30, finally received her first patent. She went on to found the Eastern Paper Bag Company.

Mattie lived during the industrial revolution and fought her whole life against the idea that a woman's place was in the home, that girls interested in building things were unfeminine, and that girls and women were unable to understand neither the mechanics nor complexity of machinery. While Margaret would eventually be credited with over twenty patents and an estimated ninety original inventions, she never got rich. Her inventions included a dress and skirt shield, a clasp for robes, a numbering machine, a spit, a window and frame sash, a rotary engine, improvements to the automobile combustion engine, a shoe sole cutting machine, and a spinning or sewing machine.

For more information check the following references: *Margaret Knight Girl Inventor* by Marlene Tag Brill, *Women Invent: Two Centuries of Discoveries That Have Shaped Our World* by Susan Casey, *Mothers and Daughters of Invention* by Autumn Stanley, or *Marvelous Mattie: How Margaret E. Knight Became an Inventor* by Emily Arnold McCully.



## The Literature Connection

Since March is Women's History Month, the first two books to be reviewed deal with women. The first book is *Girls Think of Everything: Stories of Ingenious Inventions by Women*, by Catherine Thimmesh, ISBN 0-618-19563-7. This book is ideal for students aged middle school and up. It provides an initial narrative discussing how inventions may develop through meeting a need, by accident, or simply because someone wonders "what if?" It acknowledges the injustices that women suffered throughout much of history, as men and society refused to acknowledge the inventions of women and/or stole them. While the author discusses the discovery of silk by a 14 year old girl in China in 3000 B.C, the women inventors timeline essentially covers the time period from 1715 through 1995, and includes over a hundred women and their inventions. It covers medical, automotive, and technological inventions, as well as much more. It talks about inventors who had to obtain patents in their husband's name since it was illegal to get a patent as a woman; how it took until 1809 for the first woman to get a patent in America; and how in 1974, a 12 year old girl became the youngest female to receive a patent. This is a fascinating and inspiring book, not just for girls



but for any reader, which provides information on contests, inventor organizations, and how to obtain a patent.

The second book, *Remember the Ladies: 100 Great American Women*, authored and illustrated by Cheryl Harness, ISBN 0-06-443869-4, provides a chronological presentation of notable females from Virginia Dare, the first baby born to an English colonist in what would become known as America through Ruth J. Simmons, the first black woman to

serve as president over Smith College. The notable list includes Native Americans, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, as well as Caucasian American women. Occupations include doctors, scientists, politicians, writers, soldiers, suffragists, social activists, educators, athletes, actresses, musicians, inventors, and more. At the end is a summary of the 100 women, a glossary for important vocabulary, a list of a few historic sites and organizations related to women, and some recommendations for additional readings. A great book for students in middle school or higher.

*Henry's Freedom Box: A True Story from the Underground Railroad*, by Ellen Levine, ISBN 978-0-545-05740-0, is an elementary level book about one of the most famous run-

(Continued on page 4)

## Native American Baseball Player Makes History

Joba Chamberlain was the second highest drafted Native American in baseball history, drafted 41st in the first round by the New York Yankees in 2006. This would be impressive for anyone, but given Joba's history it could very well be described as miraculous.

Joba, born Justin, is Winnebago Indian, from Lincoln, Nebraska. His parents separated when he was one. When he was two he went to live with his father, Harlan, who had polio as a child, suffered from hearing loss in one ear, paralysis in his left arm and leg, and a sunken shoulder, and eventually would be put into a scooter due to post polio syndrome. But this did not stop Harlan from having Joba, from the age of five, practice pitching day after day for hours. Adolescence was not kind to Joba. He was shorter and much heavier than his peers, and did not make the JV team.

Harlan encouraged him to take a detour and be in school musicals. He also made sure Joba understood and embraced his Native American culture. Eventually Joba got to play on the varsity team as a senior, but still did not get picked by the University of Nebraska, and had to get a job for the Parks Department to help with family bills. In 2004, a new Huskers' coach was desperate for pitchers and spied Joba at a baseball camp throwing 84 mph pitches. Joba eventually helped take the Huskers to the College World Series. In 2007, ESPN featured Joba on their cover as the "Next" most likely sports star. In time Joba was drafted by the Yankees and makes a leap, thanks to his 100mph pitches, from farm team to bull pen in record time. Joba is scheduled as a starter for New York Yankees for the 2009 season.



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### In This Issue...

Elizabeth Keckley; Margaret Knight; Dominoes; Literature Connection; Joba Chamberlain

#### Who built the submarine on which Jules Vernes based the Nautilus?

Narciso Monturiol, a Catalonian physicist and inventor, is sometimes credited with building the first submarine. While this is not true, in 1856 he did build one of the most sophisticated submarines of its time, the "Ictineo," to assist Spanish Coral divers in their dangerous work. Later he offered to sell it to the Confederacy to break the Union Blockade, but was turned down. Jules Verne based his submarine the Nautilus in *20,000 Leagues under the Sea* on it.

*(Keckley—Cont'd from page 1)*

George, who appeared white, was able to enlist in a white Union regiment, and died in action in 1861, at the age of 22.

Mary Lincoln and Elizabeth Keckley did not have an easy relationship. On one hand Mary shared many cherished family secrets with Liz. She even gave her the cloak and clothes that Mary wore the night Lincoln was assassinated, along with other family memorabilia. But when Liz wrote (or some sources imply collaborated with someone to write) a book, *Behind the Scenes: Thirty Years a Slave, Four Years in the White House*, with heavy emphasis on Mary Todd Lincoln's life during the years in the White House, the Lincoln family, including Mary, became very angry. Supposedly Liz wrote the book in hopes of giving some of the proceeds to Mary who was in desperate need of money, but the

eldest Lincoln son had the book removed from publication.

Elizabeth was an important member of the Lincoln household, but she is worthy of note for other reasons as well. She was socially active and founded the Contraband Relief Organization to help emancipated slaves. She started a school for young black girls to teach them sewing and etiquette. She was a sewing instructor at Wilberforce University, and represented the University at the 1893 World's Exhibition in Chicago. A quilt she made from pieces of Mary Lincoln's dresses can be seen at the Kent State Museum, go to [http://www.quilters-world.com/webbonuses/pdfs/elizabeth\\_keckley\\_mary.pdf](http://www.quilters-world.com/webbonuses/pdfs/elizabeth_keckley_mary.pdf).

Unfortunately, her life ended much as it began, as she died in 2007, a resident of the National Home for Destitute Colored Women and Children in Washington, D.C.

*(Lit. Connection—Cont'd from page 3)*  
away slaves of the Underground Railroad. Henry Brown was separated from his family at a young age, given away to his master's son, and grew up to marry and have a family of his own. Unfortunately his wife and children were sold, and he never saw them again. In time Henry decided he must take the risk of running away. With the help of a white abolitionist, Henry devised a plan. He would mail himself to freedom and friends of the abolitionist. Henry was then nailed into a wooden box, loaded on a train, and rode from Virginia to Philadelphia, 350 miles and twenty-seven hours to freedom, earning his middle name of "Box." This Caldecott Honor Book has wonderful illustrations, a powerful true story, and a very informative author's note at the end of the book.

