

## Asha and Baz Meet Hedy Lamarr

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*Two students travel through time to learn from a WWII heroine's ingenuity in **Asha and Baz Meet Hedy Lamarr**, an inspiring, educational chapter book.*

In Caroline Fernandez's STEM-inspired chapter book *Asha and Baz Meet Hedy Lamarr*, bright students solve a computer-class challenge by time traveling to meet an actress and inventor.

Asha and Baz are friends who are tasked with figuring out a game-coding problem: how to move a virtual frog across the water without allowing it to fall while logs of varying size drift by at different paces. They turn toward their magical stick, which has guided them in the past. Drawing an illustration of their problem on the ground, they wait.

The stick suggests that they speak to Hedy Lamarr in 1941. Thus, the children are transported to a Hollywood studio lot where they meet radiant, smart Hedy. Together with her pianist friend, George, Hedy explains how they came up with frequency hopping to solve a wartime communication problem, using radio guidance to help the Allies direct their torpedoes at German submarines. George's involvement hints at the value of interdisciplinary thinking, and Asha and Baz are later inspired by this when it comes to presenting their own solution.

Beyond the unexplained magical stick, which is a too-forceful plot device, the children's enthusiasm for discovery is clear. And the book's fun cartoon illustrations depict the stages of their trip well. Though they're at first perplexed about how the actress might help, they're open-minded. Asha even grows defensive when she feels that Hedy has been underestimated by a rude director who regards her as someone whose job it is to "look pretty." But Hedy conveys calm self-awareness, helping to assure Asha that she doesn't need to argue.

Hedy is shown reading news about the war, experimenting in her trailer science lab, helping troubleshoot an electric generator behind the scenes, and planning to sell war bonds. Asha and Baz are impressed with her innovative mindset. They're also eager to learn from her. The children themselves, though, are just sketched in; they're most often limited to listening and watching rather than participating in the scenes in individualized ways. This changes somewhat later in the story, when they return to class and work on applying their new knowledge.

In the end, the story is light, melding elements of adventure, history, and science together in an introductory fashion. It highlights facts about Hedy's and George's lives and shares what became of their patented invention, and it emphasizes looking to the past for role models who persevered despite gender bias. Its admiration for women in the sciences—and their ingenuity—is clear.

*Asha and Baz Meet Hedy Lamarr* is an entertaining, educational chapter book with lessons on teamwork and problem-solving.

KAREN RIGBY (June 2, 2023)

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