

**Title:** Snowflake Bentley  
**Author:** Jacqueline Briggs Martin  
**Grade Level:** 4<sup>th</sup> Grade



### **SUMMARY**

Anyone who has enjoyed the beauty and magic of snowfall knows how hard it is to capture the flakes as they land on your hands, your tongue, or your eyelashes. Imagine being the first person to capture these rapidly-melting beauties on film. Jacqueline Briggs Martin tells the story of Wilson Bentley, his obsession with snow, and how he managed to photograph snowflakes at a time when camera technology was just developing. Families will enjoy the simple charm of this story, along with the woodcut and watercolor illustrations. Wilson Bentley is an example of how passion and study can lead to a lifetime of joy and fulfillment.

### **QUESTIONS TO TALK ABOUT WHILE READING**

#### **VOCABULARY**

It's important to make sure that your child has an understanding of key words in the book. Talking about words while reading is a great way for your child to learn new words.

In this book, you might talk about these words:

- cut the dark (pg. 1)
- snowbelt (pg. 2)
- encyclopedias (pg. 5)
- foolishness (pg. 11)
- negatives (pg. 12)
- etching (pg. 15)
- quantities (pg. 18)

You might use questions like:

*In the book, what does foolishness mean? What other words did the author use to help you gain a deeper understanding of this word? How is this word different than its synonyms?*

#### **KEY IDEAS and THEMES**

In addition to words, it's important to talk about key ideas and themes and how they develop over the course of the book. Here are some examples to get you started:

1. Before reading the book, flip through the pages and draw your family's attention to the structure of the book. Discuss the reasons Jacqueline Briggs Martin might have chosen these horizontal and vertical structures. As you read the book, point out reasons why Ms. Martin might have chosen to display text in this way.
2. Persistence is the quality that allows someone to continue doing something even though it is difficult or opposed by someone. Wilson Bentley is an example of



persistence. Discuss the difficulties he faced and his responses to them. As a family, share a time when you have had to be persistent and strategies that have worked for you.

3. Bentley grew up on a farm in rural Vermont. Find parts of the book that illustrate the effects this had on Bentley's life. Talk about how his life might have been different had he lived in a city.
4. Cartoons have given us the idea that the work of a scientist is when one is surrounded by bubbling test tubes, maniacal eyes protected by goggles, and a shock of unruly white hair signalling an impending explosion. After reading the book, skim and scan the text together looking for behaviours that illustrate the work of a scientist. Have a conversation about scientific study and what it looks like. Compare cartoon science and that of real practice.
5. Talk about the role of reading in Bentley's life. Skim the text and find all of the times the story references reading. Talk with your child about his/her passions. Talk about what role reading plays. Set goals for additional reading.
6. Bentley said snowflakes were his gift to the world. Talk about what he meant. Discuss why we still care about this today.

### EXTRA ACTIVITIES

1. Visit your local library or order from an on-line company a copy of Wilson Bentley's book, *Snow Crystals*. Enjoy the beautiful photographs together.
2. Discovery often fuels other discoveries! Wilson Bentley introduced the world to his study of snow, but it didn't stop there. Listen to the on-line Radiolab podcast, "Crystal Bliss," to learn where continued discovery has taken us. Hint: Bentley's conclusions are not scientifically accurate. Simply search "Radiolab Crystal Bliss." Fascinating.