

# ***Beneath the Streets of Boston: Building America's First Subway***

by Joe McKendry

David R. Godine, Publisher

## **A Reading and Discussion Guide**

Prepared by Cynthia Grabke  
Thayer Public Library, Braintree, MA

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### **SUMMARY:**

In the late 1800's, shoppers, business people, and workers overcrowded Boston's streets. They commuted by walking, electric and horse drawn trolleys, carriages, and ferry boats. To combat this problem, the Boston Transit Commission was established and recommended the building of four interconnected subway and elevated railway lines that would connect Boston's busiest business districts with Cambridge and East Boston. Although some residents welcomed the idea as a solution to traffic congestion, some people feared traveling underground.

Construction on the country's first subway line began in 1895. Innovative construction methods were borrowed from earlier European subway projects. This technological feat was accomplished with only manpower and steam power. When the four lines were completed in 1918, the subway system made travel to and from Boston faster, cheaper and more dependable. 95% of the original system is still in use today.

### **DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES:**

1. The original subway was about 6 ½ miles long from South Boston to Harvard Square. How long would it take to walk that distance at 3 mph? How long would it take to ride a horse at 5 mph? Compare this to the subway speed, which is about 18 mph.
2. Compare the four methods of construction used in building the first subway (cut and cover tunnels, underwater tunnels, deep-bored tunnels and the elevated railway). Consider the safety and efficiency of each method, and the preservation of existing structures that construction had to work around. Which method of construction was the best one used?
3. Imagine you were working on a ten-hour shift on the Boston Harbor tunnel crew (either 7 a.m. to 6 p.m., or 7 p.m. to 6 a.m.) What would your daily schedule be like?

4. How does the author use illustration in this book to invoke the historical time period of the late 1800's and early 1900's?
5. What types of transportation are available in your community? What are the benefits and drawbacks of each type?
6. If you were building a subway in your community, where would it go? How many lines would you have? Where would you make stops?

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

A graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design, Joe McKendry is a commercial and architectural artist. His work has been published in national newspapers and magazines. Beneath the Streets of Boston is his first Children's book.

The author's website is: <http://joemckendry.com>

### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

Building Big: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/buildingbig>

How Stuff Works: <http://www.howstuffworks.com>

Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority: <http://www.mbta.com>

*City Trains: Moving Through America* by Roger B. Yepsen (MacMillan, 1993)

*Paris Underground* by Tamara Hovey (Orchard Books, 1991)

*A Subway for New York* by David Weitzman (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005)

*Subway: The Story of Tunnels, Tubes and Tracks* by Larry Dane Brimmer (Boyd's Mills Press, 2004)

*Tunnels, Tracks and Trains: Building a Subway* by Joan Hewett (Dutton, 1995)



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