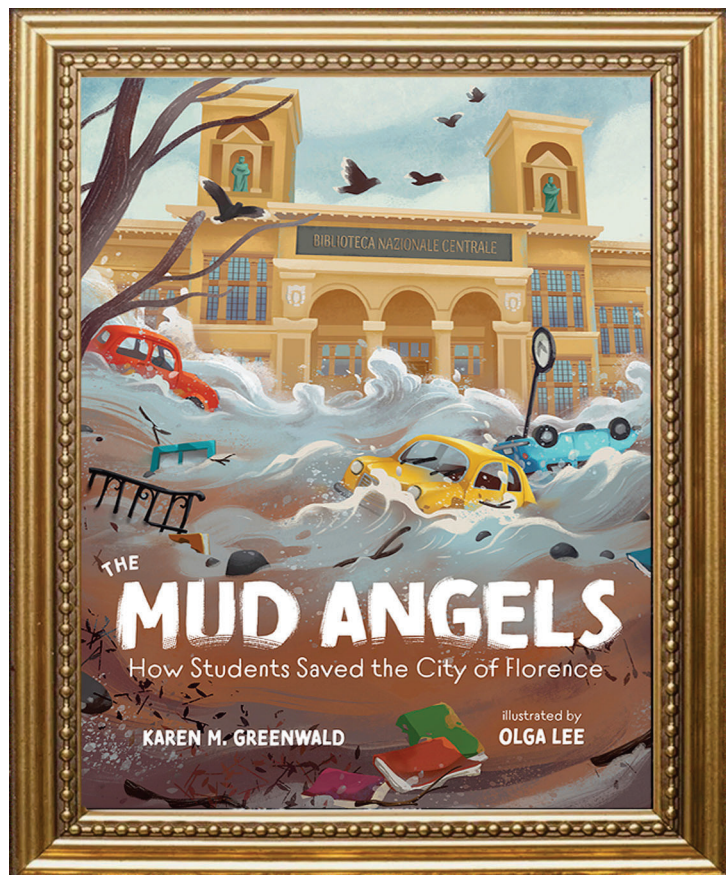


Educator's Guide

The lessons in this guide are designed to use in conjunction with reading *The Mud Angels: How Students Saved the City of Florence*. Lessons may be modified to best suit your students' needs.

THE MUD ANGELS HOW STUDENTS SAVED THE CITY OF FLORENCE



About the Illustrator

[Olga Lee](#) is an illustrator of Korean ethnicity currently based in Moscow, Russia. After studying animation at MAX, The Mutt Art and Animation College in Toronto, Canada, she returned to Russia to work as an animator on a feature film while freelancing as an illustrator whenever she could to practice drawing. Eventually she realized she wanted to focus on illustrating full time. Olga takes her inspiration from everyday life and stories. When not illustrating, she loves spending time with her dog and skating.



About the Book

Based on real events, this story shows how a spontaneous group of international students and others worked together to save priceless artifacts after a devastating, surprise flood.

When the Arno River floods the city of Florence, Italy in 1966, it leaves thousands of tons of slimy, smelly mud everywhere. A young girl watches students from around the world, many from the US, help save the town's rare treasures, earning themselves the nickname Gli Angeli del Fango, the Mud Angels.



About the Author

[Karen M. Greenwald](#) is the author of *A Vote for Susanna*, which was a Kansas 2022 Notable Book. It represented Kansas at the Library of

Congress National Book Festival and in the Library of Congress Great Reads from Great Places initiative. She cofounded the #SunWriteFun writing contest, which raises money for kidlit charities and encourages new book donations to under-resourced schools and libraries. Her strategic branding efforts have earned seventeen international awards. Karen shares her Maryland office with a very noisy dog.

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Before Reading

Look at the cover. What do you think is happening? Do you think it's something that happened in the past or is still happening? Why?

Now look at the title. What are angels? Who or what do you think the Mud Angels might be? How does mud relate to what is happening in the picture? Can you infer what happened or may still be happening? How does the illustration give you a sense of time?



Now look at the subtitle: How Students Saved the City of Florence. Have you heard of Florence? Do you know where it is? (Take time to show students Florence on a map of Italy or on a world map. Compare Florence's location to where you live.) Make a prediction as to how students might save a city. Make inferences based on what you see happening in the cover illustration.

Now take a “walk” through the pages of the book. Who do you think are the Mud Angels? What do you think they did to be considered angels?

Take time to research a bit about Florence. How old is the city? What is the city's history? What significant items are kept there?



During Reading

Throughout the story, listen for examples of alliteration. *Definition of alliteration: repetition of the same letter or sound at the beginning of closely connected or adjacent words. (the repetition of the same letter or sound in adjacent or closely connected words in a sentence or phrase) and onomatopoeia (sound words like crash and bang).

At the bottom of page 3, notice the line “Safely.” Why do you think this word is set apart? The author is foreshadowing the fact that the books may not be safe at the library. How do libraries keep books safe? Why are libraries important? What are some things from which libraries cannot protect books? Based on what you’ve noticed in the pictures, can you predict what might happen?

While reading pages 5-6, consider how the author uses personification (a literary device where human characteristics are given to nonhuman things) to describe the river. What does the river do that is humanlike? On page 9, consider the line “the river rolled back to bed.” How does this line have two meanings—figurative and literal.

Also on page 9, predict what you think was left behind to “destroy Florence’s delicate famous treasures?” How could it be “worse” than the flood itself? Discuss the word delicate and what it means. What are Florence’s treasures and why are they so delicate?



Reading Comprehension

On pages 10-11, discuss how mud causes damage. Does it affect some things worse than others? List a few items (a car, a statue, a library book, a rug) and talk about how you'd clean mud off each one. Are some things easier to clean than others?

On pages 12-13, discuss the ways people come to help the city. Have you ever witnessed people coming together to help during an emergency? Allow students to share different examples. If you lived in Florence during the time of the Arno Flood, what could you have done to help?

On page 15, why does the father think it's too dangerous for the young narrator to try and save the book? Why would the mud contain "chemicals, rubble and germs?"

On pages 18-19, describe what's happening in the picture. What do you think the people are doing? How does an assembly line make the work efficient? Why are the students beginning their work in the basement? How can they all work together if they do not share a common language? Brainstorm ways you can communicate with someone who does not share your language.

On pages 20-21, why are the volunteers hanging the pages like laundry? What are they hoping to do?

On pages 24-25, the author says that many months have passed. Why does saving the books take so long? Look at the picture and describe ways the task might have changed over the months since the flood (the addition of soldiers, supplies being delivered, the mud drying out, etc.). How might these changes help or hurt the clean-up and recovery efforts?

After Reading

Do you think the books can ever be the same as before the flood? Why do you feel that way? In what ways did the Mud Angels help? How might things be different if there had not been any Mud Angels?

What are other things that might need saving if a city floods?

What do you know about floods? What causes them and why do they happen? Is there a way to predict floods? How do cities protect themselves from floods?

Sometimes being described as an *angel* means you have very good behavior. In this story, it means something else. How would you define angel as it's used in this story? Can you think of a time when you acted like an angel and protected someone or something?



Descriptive Writing

How does good writing show rather than tell?



Ask students to divide a piece of paper in half. On one side, draw a picture of a flood. (You may want to do this before introducing or reading *The Mud Angels*.)

Next read pages 5-6 to them. Notice how the author never uses the word flood to describe the action. Why do you think she chose to do that? How do we know it's a flood without her using the word flood? Good writing shows us the action without *telling* us what happened. This allows readers to create a picture in their own minds.

Read the words on the two pages one more time. As you read, ask students to use the second half of their paper to draw the action they hear happening. Afterward, have students compare their two drawings with a partner or in small groups. What is different about each image?

Now assign students (or have them choose their own) different weather phenomena such as blizzards, droughts, thunderstorms, heatwaves, hurricanes, fog, deep freezes, or hailstorms.

Have each student write a paragraph describing the weather without using its name.

Students can share their work with peers. During sharing time, the other students may want to sketch (and guess!) what they hear.

Adverbs All Around

Adverbs are words that describe verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs. In English, many adverbs end with the suffix “ly.” The author of *The Mud Angels* uses several adverbs to describe how the flood affected the city.

Have students write a paragraph describing cleaning up a mess. Possible ideas may include washing hands, bathing a dirty dog or picking up an unkempt room.

After completing a first draft, ask students to revise and strengthen their writing by adding adverbs. EXAMPLE: “I rinse my hands,” becomes “I **carefully** rinse my hands.”

Hyphenated Adjectives

Turn to the opening page of the story. Notice that the author uses three hyphenated adjectives: “hand-printed”, “older-than-old”, and “one-of-a-kind”. Why do these adjectives get hyphens and how do authors know when to use them?

Hyphens are used for adjectives when they come before a noun and act as a single idea.

It may help if you take the hyphenated words apart and see if they can stand on their own. A hand-printed book makes sense, but a hand book and a printed book both have different meanings so hand-printed must go together. One book and a book make sense, but of book and kind book do not, so we must say one-of-a-kind book. In each of the three examples on this page, the adjectives act as a single idea and thus must be hyphenated.



Present students with the following adjective phrases. First have them identify the adjectives. Then, have them determine which ones need hyphens.

A well-known actor (needs a hyphen)

The beautiful little doll (no hyphen needed as both adjectives can stand independently)

My seven year old brother (two hyphens needed as seven-year-old all stands together)

A much needed haircut (needs a hyphen)

The dirty old car (no hyphen needed)

Reinforce that hyphens are only needed when they come before the noun. Demonstrate the difference in these two sentences:

Our **much-needed** vacation could not arrive soon enough.

The vacation was **much needed** and could not arrive soon enough.

*Note that all numbers from 21-39 and all fractions (one-half, one-third, etc.) are always hyphenated.



Verbs In Action

The following active verbs are all used in *The Mud Angels* to describe the movement of the water:

- Heave (heaved)
- Leap (leapt)
- Swirl (swirling)
- Whirl (whirling)
- Race (racing)
- Slam (slammed)
- Shatter (shattering)
- Splinter (splintering)
- Rise (rising)
- Fill (filling)
- Soak (soaking)
- Roll (rolled)



Choose one (or more) of the following activities to explore how active verbs strengthen writing:

1. Divide a piece of paper into four or eight squares. Write one of the verbs in each square and illustrate how the water would look doing this action.
2. Divide a paper into thirds. Choose one of the active verbs from the list above. In each column, pair the verb with a different noun. (Use water-or a form of it- for the first column.) Illustrate each sentence. (E.g. “The river leapt,” “The dancer leapt,” “My heart leapt.”) You may choose to add more details to each sentence.
3. Think about other water sources (Possible ideas include a waterfall, leaky faucet, garden hose, tsunami, or shower). Brainstorm 4-6 active verbs that describe the water flow. For a fun class challenge, have students read their active verbs out loud without sharing their water source. Classmates can guess the water source.

4. Play charades. Write each water verb on a piece of paper. Divide students into teams and allow students to take turns acting out the different words. Are some easier to guess than others? Are there non-water related actions that help make them guessable? (For example: rolling around on the ground might help your team guess the word quickly.) If needed, you can add these other active verbs found in the story that are used to describe how people or objects move through the water:

- Bobble (bobbled)
- Shiver
- Wade
- Plunge (plunged)

Onomatopoeia

The author uses onomatopoeia to describe the flow of the river. Choose one (or more) of the following activities to teach your students about this literary device.

1. Pick a word and illustrate it in a way that shows its meaning.
2. Brainstorm a list of onomatopoeic words that describe mud. (You might want to think about things like walking in mud, falling in mud or making mud pies.)
3. Write a poem about a rainy day. Use onomatopoeia at least three times.

Vocabulary

Conservation is a word with multiple meanings, such as the “prevention of wasteful use of a resource.” Another meaning is “preservation and repair of archaeological, historical and cultural sites, and artifacts.” Which meaning fits the conservation happening in this story? (The second.) Can you think of a way the first definition of conservation could be used in relation to this story?

Write a sentence about the Mud Angels that uses the first meaning of conservation. (e.g. The conservation of trees may help prevent future floods.)

Essay Writing

The Mud Angels were heroes for helping save many of Florence’s treasured books. Use this story as inspiration for writing about other heroes. Write an essay (or paragraph or sentence for younger students) about what it means to be a hero. What criteria must a hero possess? What actions must a hero perform?



Research Report

Research people in your own community (school, city, state, country) who you would classify as heroes. To write *The Mud Angels*, author Karen M. Greenwald interviewed several of the actual Mud Angels themselves. Reach out to someone you find heroic and ask to interview them. You may want to ask details about what they did, why they did what they did and how they feel about what happened. Afterward, turn your interview into an essay (or perhaps even a picture book).



Speech/Debate

As a class, discuss the fact that many Mud Angels were not from Italy. Why do you think people from other countries cared so much and worked so hard to preserve the books? Do you think books, paintings and other forms of art can belong to one person or nation? What sorts of things belong to the world? Choose one (or more) of the following activities to help students expand on the topic:

Prepare a short speech to deliver in class about a book you feel is worth defending and protecting. Be sure to give reasons why you think this book is important.

Have students choose different countries and select an item in that country they would be willing to defend or protect -e.g. the Great Pyramids in Egypt or the *Mona Lisa* in France. Students should first research items (both natural and manmade) in their chosen countries and then prepare a short speech explaining the item they chose and why they chose it.



Stage a debate and ask students to defend each side of the argument. Debate ideas could include: Should art be owned? What makes art valuable? Do citizens have an obligation to protect art?

Listen to episodes of Smash, Boom, Best <https://www.smashboom.org/>. It's a debate podcast for kids featuring quirky and unusual debate topics and challenges. Afterward, set up a Smash, Boom, Best debate for your students. Your debate topics could be Libraries vs. Museums or Flood vs. Mud.

Geography

Make a map of Italy. Research and add the following details:

- Capital city (Rome)
- Florence (and any other major cities)
- The Arno River (and any other major rivers)
- Bordering nations
- Bodies of water



History

As a class, research important events in Florence's long history. Work together to create a timeline of Florence's past.

Environmental Geography

Floods have wreaked havoc all over the planet. Research one of the world's deadliest floods using this list as a starting point: <https://www.history.com/news/worlds-most-catastrophic-floods-in-photos> Prepare a presentation that shares the following information:

- Where the flood occurred
- When the flood occurred
- What caused the flood
- The damage that occurred
- What people did to recover from the flood



Cultural Differences

Many of the Mud Angels were students from countries other than Italy and spoke different languages. Expand your knowledge of the world and other cultures by doing one (or more) of the following activities:



- Learn about a different country and write a report or create a poster to share your learning with others. Consider having a celebration day where students get to share their learning about their new country. Students could also share a dish, game or song important to that country.
- Learn a few words and phrases in Italian (or another language).
- Even if you don't speak a common language, try to communicate with someone who has a different native tongue. (Even waving hello and smiling is a form of communication.)
- Join Global Penfriends (<https://www.globalpenfriends.com/>) and start corresponding with a pen pal in another country.

Help A Library

Interview a librarian and ask what other things besides floods harm libraries. Then brainstorm ways you can help protect your library. Possible ideas include teaching younger children how to safely handle and store books, setting up a system for tracking down lost books, or advocating against book bans.



Construct A Flood-Proof City

Supplies:

- Aluminum pan (or another shallow pan or bin), one per group
- Aluminum foil
- Soil
- Cups, water bottles or watering can
- Various STEM building materials

Put students in pairs or small groups. Give each group an aluminum pan or shallow plastic bin and some aluminum foil.



Instruct groups to make a river bed using the foil. The river should flow across the length of the pan but may twist and turn as much as the group sees fit.

Once the riverbed is in place, have students fill the remainder of the pan with soil so that it reaches the banks of the riverbed.

Using STEM materials, build a city around your river. (You may choose to assign students a certain number of buildings or to include items like a bridge or a park.)

Fill the river with water. (Note: Have students document what the city looks like with photographs or drawings.)

Continue to add water to the river until it floods. Students should take note of where the flood travels and what damage occurs.

Allow time (possibly more than a day) for the water to recede or evaporate.

Have students brainstorm ways they can protect their city from a future flood. Ideas might include elevating building foundations, bordering the banks with a wall or adding vegetation. Allow students to tinker with their model cities to make them more flood-proof.

Repeat the flood demonstration as it was done earlier. Again, students should note the before and after effects of the flood.

	Illustration of the city before flood	Illustration of the city after flood
First model		
After flood improvements		

Code A Path To The Library

Use the game board, pieces and direction cards (Up, Down, Left, Right) to get the Mud Angels to the library so they can save books. (Worksheets 1a and 1b).

Construct A “Sponge” Park For Florence

Watch the following video on how to flood-proof a city:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G8TwnzErV8>

Discuss some of the reasons why cities are flooding more frequently than in the past. (Some ideas may include global warming, unpredictable rain patterns and cities built largely of non-absorbent concrete.)

Make a list of some of the ideas mentioned in the video that allow cities to prepare for floods. (Some ideas include green roofs, large, wooded areas, lowered playgrounds that can double as reservoirs, and linked ponds.)

Pretend you have been hired to build a large “sponge” park in Florence. Come up with at least five features that will help absorb water in case of a flood.

Design a poster or build a model of your design. Be prepared to explain your unique park features and how they’ll help stop other potential floods.



Make Art Out Of Mud

Ask students what they know about mud. Teach (or remind) them that clay is a form of mud that is found deeper underground. It's lighter in color than traditional topsoil mud and contains high levels of silica and alumina.

Clay is a great medium for creating art. Have students use it to create a sculpture.

Here is a list of famous sculptures to help familiarize students with the art form:
<https://mymodernmet.com/famous-sculptures-art-history/>

And here is a list of famous monuments:
<https://www.architecturaldigest.com/gallery/memorial-architecture-slideshow>

Have students pretend they have been assigned to create a sculpture that commemorates the Arno Flood. Ask them to brainstorm and sketch several ideas that they may want to create.

Next, using a slab of clay, let them design a model of the monument.

CHALLENGE: Students must present their models to the rest of the class or a panel of judges—other teachers, parent volunteers perhaps—and explain why they think their monument will best memorialize the flood.

What Is Art?

The Mud Angels worked in cold, waist-deep, smelly, muddy water for hours on end because they believed the books they were saving were important artistic pieces of the past. Choose one (or more) of the following projects to help answer the question:

1. Start a book museum. Collect book art (covers, interior spreads, end pages, etc.) that you believe should be considered works of art. Put the art on display. Include notes about who created the art, when and why.



2. Using the mediums of your choice, create an alternative book cover for one of your favorite books.
3. Make books by hand. There are several ways to make and bind your own books. Explore different ways to do so. A simple way is to staple folded pages together. For a more elaborate process, learn how to do glued or tied book binding.
4. Create a Museum of Unconventional Art. As a class, brainstorm a list of things that are conventionally considered art. Ideas may include things like paintings, photographs, sculptures, movies, songs. Next create a second list of things that SHOULD be considered art. It may help to spend a day collecting examples you see or to have discussions about what constitutes art. Some ideas could be t-shirt designs, album covers, comics, doodles, or package designs. Afterward, have each student contribute an item to a Museum of Unconventional Art. Each contribution should include a description of what the item is, who created it and what makes it a meaningful contribution.

Make A Commemorative Poster

Learn about the art of posters and printmaking. Study examples of commemorative posters. Here are a few to begin your study:

Austin City Limits artists: <https://shop.actv.com/collections/posters>

National Parks: <https://mynaturebookadventures.com/collections/national-parks-commemorative-poster-collection>

Minnesota State Fair: <https://www.mnstatefair.org/commemorative-art/gallery/>

Sketch a design for a poster that commemorates the Arno Flood.

You may design your poster in any way you'd like, but you may want to consider printmaking. Printmaking is a way to make the same design repeatedly.

***Note: This project is for older students and requires adult supervision.** For younger students, consider printmaking using sponges or potatoes or allow students to make posters using alternative art supplies like markers and crayons.

Materials:

- Erasers (basic pink erasers work just fine)
- Pencil
- Block cutting tools (like linoleum cutters)
- Ink pads

Directions:

Use a pencil to draw a design on your eraser. Try to keep it simple and use basic shapes. Trace over your design a few times.

Use block cutting tools to cut around the shapes of your design leaving a raised edge.

Place your stamp on an ink pad and test your design.

Recarve areas as needed.



Play Assembly Line

The Mud Angels used an assembly line to rescue books from the mud. You can use an assembly line to work cooperatively in this game.

Version 1:

Divide students into teams. You'll need at least two teams, but can break up into more teams if you'd like. Try to keep an even number of students on each team.

Have each team line up with at least 2-3 feet in between each student.

At the front of the line, place a variety of PE items (a jump rope, different sized balls, a cone, foam yoga block, etc.). Teams should have identical items and you may want to use a hula hoop to corral items.

Add a second hula hoop at the end of each line. This will be each team's drop zone. When all the items are transferred from one hula hoop to the other, the team's task is complete.

Challenge students to race to transport their items one at a time from one end of the assembly line to the other. To add difficulty, add one (or more) of these conditions:

- Students may only use one hand to touch and transfer items.
- Students may not speak while passing items.
- Students must face forward and pass items overhead or behind their back.
- Students may only use their feet to pass items.
- Students must pass items while simultaneously bouncing a ball.

If items touch the ground at any point, they must go back to the beginning of the assembly line.



Version 2:

Divide students into two teams as in the first version.

Have one team line up in assembly line format with students spaced 2-3 feet apart. Have the second team stay together as a group near their start line.

Set two identical piles at the starting line of each group. The piles should be large in quantity (around 25-50 items depending on the size of your groups). The piles could contain items like foam blocks or balls but should be items that are safe to carry while running.

Instruct the assembly line team to pass the items from person to person. The finish line should be close to the last person in line.

The other team should run items from start to finish as individuals.

Make sure both teams start at the same time. The game ends when one team finishes.

Play two rounds so both teams get a chance to be in the assembly line and in the free-for-all.

Discuss which team students preferred playing on and why.

