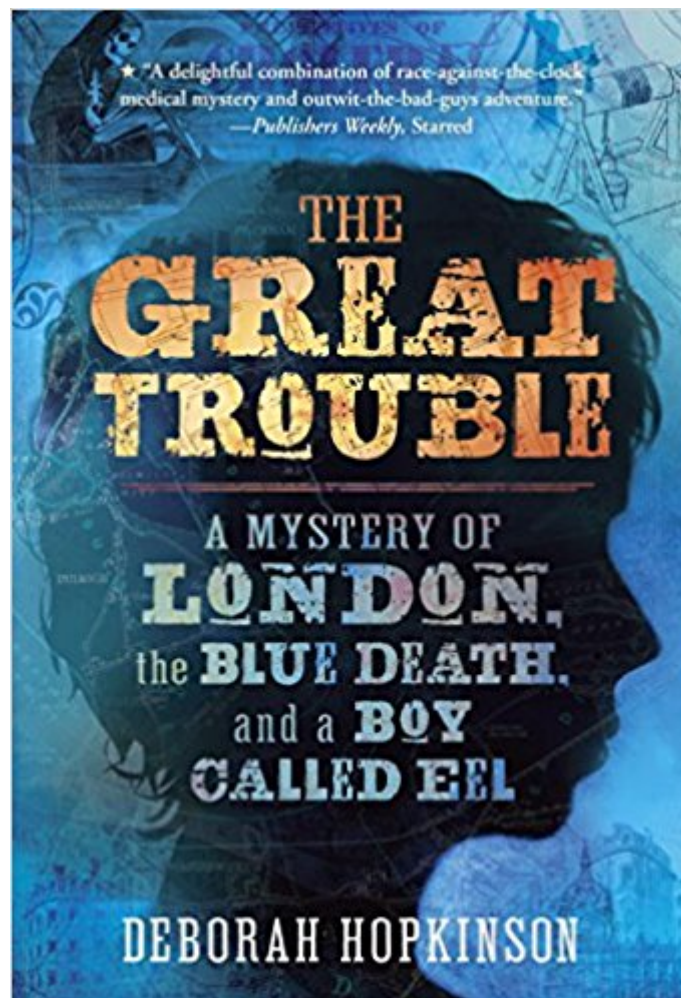




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# The Great Trouble: A Mystery Of London, The Blue Death, And A Boy Called Eel



## Synopsis

“A delightful combination of race-against-the-clock medical mystery and outwit-the-bad-guys adventure.” —Publishers Weekly, Starred  
Eel has troubles of his own: As an orphan and a “mudlark,” he spends his days in the filthy River Thames, searching for bits of things to sell. He’s being hunted by Fisheye Bill Tyler, and a nastier man never walked the streets of London. And he’s got a secret that costs him four precious shillings a week to keep safe. But even for Eel, things aren’t so bad until that fateful August day in 1854—the day the deadly cholera (“blue death”) comes to Broad Street. Everyone believes that cholera is spread through poisonous air. But one man, Dr. John Snow, has a different theory. As the epidemic surges, it’s up to Eel and his best friend, Florrie, to gather evidence to prove Dr. Snow’s theory before the entire neighborhood is wiped out. “Hopkinson illuminates a pivotal chapter in the history of public health. . . . Accessible . . . and entertaining.” —School Library Journal, Starred  
“For [readers] who love suspense, drama, and mystery.” —TIME for Kids  
From the Hardcover edition.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 10 - 12 years

Grade Level: 5 and up

## Customer Reviews

Equal parts medical mystery, historical novel, and survival story about the 1854 London cholera outbreak, this introduces Eel, a boy trying to make ends meet on Broad Street. When he visits one of his regular employers, he learns the man has fallen ill. Eel enlists the help of Dr. Snow, and together they work to solve the mystery of what exactly is causing the spread of cholera and how they can prevent it. Steeped in rich fact and detailed explanations about laboratory research, Hopkinson's book uses a fictional story to teach readers about science, medicine, and history—and works in a few real-life characters, too. Eel serves as a peek into the lower class of London society and offers readers a way to observe—and, hopefully, ask questions about—the scientific method. An author's note provides readers with a look at the real story behind the novel, making this a great choice for introducing readers to science and history. Grades 5-8. --Sarah Bean Thompson --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Starred Review, Publishers Weekly, September 2, 2013:"Hopkinson adeptly recreates the crowded, infested streets of London, but it's her distinct, layered characters and turbulent, yet believable plot that make this a captivating read."Starred Review, School Library Journal, October 2013:"Although detailing a dire period in history, Eel tells his story in a matter-of-fact and accessible manner, making his story palatable and entertaining."From the Hardcover edition.

I came across this book when planning a class on famous scientists in history. The author has definitely put in a lot of time researching the time period, Jon Snow and the life of London mudlarks. The story has the potential to be deeply sad when you consider the life of our young protagonist, Eel, but we also get to see grit and determination of a young boy who has no one to look after him and who makes his way in the world. When Eel is recruited by Jon Snow to trace the roots of the epidemic he gives the reader a first row seat to the scientific thought and method in 1854. This would be a disturbing read for most elementary aged children and I would recommend it only for older middle schoolers. Many secondary characters die in pain as the Cholera epidemic spreads in London. There are many vicious characters waiting to take advantage of the children and violence lurks around every corner. For a deeper understanding of life in London at the time I would highly recommend The Ghost map by Steven Johnson for a wonderful explanation of the masses of workers who kept London 'clean'. The Ghost Map: The Story of London's Most Terrifying Epidemic--and How It Changed Science, Cities, and the Modern World The book would rate five stars if not for a slow start and the plodding nature of the text before we finally get to the heart of

the story when Cholera breaks out. Hopkinson's intent may have been to humanize the victims by letting the reader get to know them but the story drags in these pages. However, if you persist and read on it takes off running once Jon Snow enters the picture.

London 1854 is not a kind city for an orphan. Eel lives in a world where children live day to day in the filthy streets, sleeping under bridges, and begging, working, stealing for food. Eel has a steady job as an errand runner and a second job taking care of animals for Dr. John Snow a prominent London physician. Eel has it a bit better than other twelve-year-olds, but unfortunately he loses the errand job due to a thief and liar who has a grudge against him and the job with Dr. Snow does not pay him as much as he needs to make live. Back on the streets, with a bad man from his past looking for him would seem like the worst thing that could happen. But Eel has a secret. This secret is costing him money each week that he does not have due to the boy that caused him to lose his job. His desperate attempt to make money forces him to make decisions that would terrify grown men, let alone a young boy. With all of this going on, Eel goes to see a friend of his only to find the father of the family dying from "the blue death" which was cholera. The common theory is that this disease is spread by poisonous air, but Dr. Snow has a different theory. When he enlists Eel to help him investigate and support his theory. Working against the clock amid the death knocking at almost every door in the neighborhood, Eel faces friends and foes to help the Doctor. This just might be the best thing that has ever happened to him. This book was written for children 10 years and up. I am way past 10 and was thoroughly engrossed in this story. There was history, mystery, science, intrigue and relationships to wonder and worry about. The story is based on real people and the actual cholera epidemic in London. I loved the way Hopkinson wrapped the true events in a great story that adds depth to the story to keep the reader's interest high. As a bonus, at the end of the novel, she has biographical information on each of the characters that were based upon real people, including pictures of them. She also tells the reader about the books available for more information on the Broad Street cholera epidemic and the efforts of Dr. John Snow to stop the Blue Death from spreading. I would recommend this book to adults and children that are interested in history and mysteries. It would be a great read-along for a classroom or with your child if it seems too long for him or her to read alone. The story will keep their interest. If you don't have any children to share this great book with, read it yourself. You won't be disappointed. Copyright © 2015 Laura Hartman

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An outstanding read!! As an elementary language arts teacher, I am always looking for works of historical fiction that will help pull my students into non-fiction, and Ms. Hopkinson's book is just the ticket! Part of the beauty of this book is the additional information she includes about some of the historical figures she includes in her book, and the setting and historical background of the novel. The main character, Eel, is one of those characters you miss as you close the book and pause for a time to reflect on such a great piece of writing. Some of my students have jumped onto the Internet after reading this to research what life was like living in the mid 19th century in London, and how children were treated in that time period. I will not dwell too much on the plot of this novel, but suffice it to say that this story grabs you from the start, and is a fast paced story with lots of twists and turns. Enjoy!

Hopkinson did a nice job of bringing the world of 1854 London to life: the sights, the smells, the bustle... the reader really gets a sense of what it was like to be there. I like that the book focuses on how the traditional view of disease was slowly beginning to change and the role that this particular epidemic played in the change. Rather than just focusing on the people who suffered from the disease the book also looks at Dr. John Snow as he endeavors to prove what really caused the outbreak. It's a fantastic real life story, and I'm glad Hopkinson decided to tell it. Too few people know about this important moment in our history. The team of teachers I work with has created a cross-disciplinary unit about epidemics. As such, we're always on the lookout for good historical fiction that can help us explore the impact of diseases on the way people live and think. We use Laurie Halse Anderson's *Fever 1793*, Patricia Reilly Giff's *Nory Ryan's Song*, and Caroline Cooney's *Code Orange*. This is an excellent addition to our collection.

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