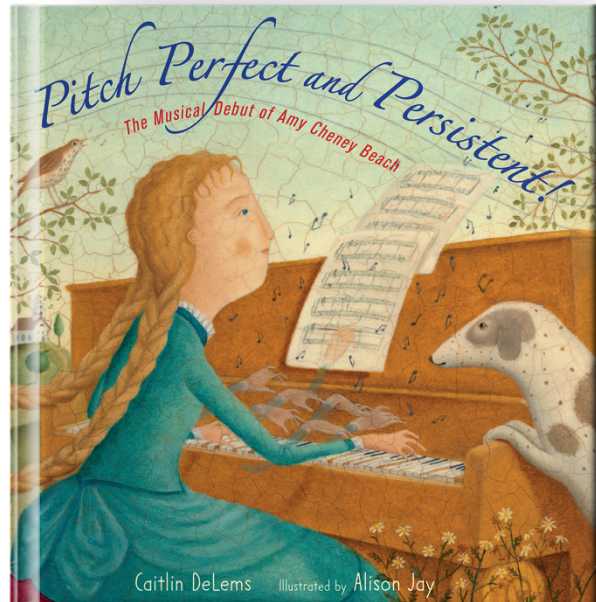


# DISCUSSION GUIDE

*PITCH PERFECT AND PERSISTENT! The Musical Debut of Amy Cheney Beach*

Written by Caitlin DeLems  
Illustrated by Alison Jay

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## ABOUT THE BOOK

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Discover the untold yet inspiring story of Amy Beach, musician extraordinaire and the first successful woman composer in America.

With perfect pitch and fierce persistence, Amy Beach always knew she had to make music. There was just one BIG problem. Her mother believed it was not proper or suitable for a young lady to draw attention to herself, let alone take on a musical career. But give in or give up? Not Amy Beach. She demanded to play the piano. Demanded to have a real teacher. Demanded to perform. Luckily—for the world!—Amy’s persistence paid off. At just sixteen years old, Amy Beach found herself on the stage of Boston’s Music Hall—and the start of a brilliant career. A female composer who paved the way—perfectly!

## PRAISE FOR *PITCH PERFECT AND PERSISTENT*

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★ “A profile of the early life of a 19th-century musical prodigy... carefully chosen details paint a portrait of a remarkable young person.”—*Kirkus Reviews, starred review*

“Paired with Jay’s vibrant illustrations, with a cracked-paint-like texture that pops off the page like paintings of the period, this lively tale will introduce young readers to a new and important

**ASTRA BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS**

  
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historical figure who—in ways such as playing by ear or memory to linking colors with sounds—proves a truly remarkable figure. This charming introduction to Beach’s life and career is explored in further historical detail in the extensive back matter.” —**Booklist**

“The greatest American musician of the late 19th century was . . . a girl? Yes indeed! The extraordinary Amy Cheney Beach comes to vivid life in this fabulous picture-book biography. With charm, humor, and honesty, Caitlin DeLems writes the story that needs to be shared with children and adults alike. Against all odds, the genius of Amy Beach triumphed over the challenges of her time, societal constraints, and prejudice. Why did I have to wait until I was in my twenties to learn about this astonishing musician? Thanks to Caitlin DeLems and artist Alison Jay, youngsters can now discover the amazing Amy Beach and be inspired to follow their dream.” —**JoAnn Falletta, Music Director, Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra**

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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1. Define the word “persistent”. How does Amy demonstrate persistence throughout the book? What other vocabulary is used throughout the book that reveals Amy’s personality?
2. Amy possessed amazing musical abilities, including her perfect pitch. What does it mean when someone has “pitch-perfect” musical abilities? How do you know whether or not you have perfect pitch? Do you think any musicians and singers today have perfect pitch? Do some research online to find out.
3. “Friends and relatives marveled” at Amy’s musical abilities when she was two years old. But mamma was worried about Amy. Why did she not want her to be a musical prodigy?
4. As Amy grew up, she continued to “shock, shake, and boggle the minds of those who met her.” Find some examples in the book that demonstrates this fact.
5. The piano in Amy’s house remained off limits to her until the arrival of someone else at her home. Who allowed her to play the piano, and what happened when she finally did?
6. Who was Amy’s first piano teacher? What happened when Amy performed at her first recital?

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7. Amy's move to Boston was life changing. What did her music teachers call her? And how did her parents continue to respond?
8. Amy's mamma finally changed her mind and allowed Amy to make her debut -- but for what initial reason?
9. What was unusual about Amy's performance at the Boston Music Hall?
10. How do Alison Jay's colorful and unique illustrations help you to understand Amy's story better? How does the artwork give you a broader sense of Amy's story and life?

### CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS + EXTRA CREDIT

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- Amy Cheney Beach was a child prodigy. Define the word "prodigy"? Who are some other famous child prodigies in history?
- Amy's mother strongly discouraged Amy's musical ambitions throughout *PITCH PERFECT AND PERSISTENT!* What was society's attitude towards women when Amy was a child and a teenager? Do you think Amy's mother would have the same attitude if Amy were alive today? Discuss why or why not.
- Find the ["PITCH PERFECT AND PERSISTENT!" Amy Cheney Beach playlist on Spotify](#) and listen to a selection of her songs. How does her music make you feel?
- The text in *PITCH PERFECT AND PERSISTENT!* shares Amy Cheney Beach's childhood, but this was just the beginning of Amy's story! Read the author's note in the back of the book. What else did you learn about Amy from this note?
- Many quotes from Amy Cheney Beach are scattered throughout the book. After finishing the story, go back to find and re-read these quotes. How do Amy's words uncover her character and expand our understanding of her actions and motivations?
- Amy Cheney Beach lived from 1867 – 1944, which was a period of great change in the United States and the World. Create a timeline of these years, noting significant events or changes in the United States and the world in general. Select one major change or

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moment and research it online or by reading books in the library, and then present what you found out to your class.

- Look at the musical glossary in the back of the book. Which words or names are familiar to you? Which words or names are not?
- Who are your favorite musicians today? Look into the background of these musicians. Did they start their musical careers as a child, like Amy did?

### READING LIST

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**THE MUSIC IN GEORGE'S HEAD** *George Gershwin Creates Rhapsody in Blue* by Suzanne Slade, illustrated by Stacy Innerst

**SONG FOR JIMI** *The Story of Guitar Legend Jimi Hendrix* by Charles R. Smith, illustrated by Edel Rodriguez

**NINA** *A Story of Nina Simone* by Tracy N. Todd, illustrated by Christian Robinson

**JONI** *The Lyrical Life of Joni Mitchell* by Selina Alko

**RESPECT** *Aretha Franklin, Queen of Soul* by Carole Boston Weatherford, illustrated by Frank Morrison

**BORN TO SWING** *Lil Hardin Armstrong's Life in Jazz* by Mara Rockliff, illustrated by Michele Wood