Meet Madam C.J. Walker

by Erin Horner
1. Who is Madam C.J. Walker? Why is she famous?

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2. Do you think that an invention can make someone rich? Why or why not?

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3. Do you think it was harder to be a woman or a man in the 1800s? Explain your answer.

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Do you like to make things? One day you may make something that makes you a lot of money! Sarah Breedlove did just that! She made hair-care products for women. This is her story.

Sarah was born on December 23, 1867. Sarah was African American. Her parents used to be slaves.
When she was seven, Sarah became an orphan. Both of her parents had died. Sarah lived with her older sister. She worked in a cotton field each day to make money.

Sarah got married when she was fourteen. She was a young wife. She soon became a young mother too. Sadly, Sarah's husband died when she was just twenty. Sarah and her daughter were all alone. She needed to be near family. Her brothers lived in St. Louis. They were barbers. Sarah moved there.
Sarah worked hard in St. Louis. She washed clothes all day long. This job did not pay her very well. Sometimes she only made $1.50 per day. Sarah saved her money. She wanted to help her daughter go to school. She did just that.

After a while, Sarah noticed a problem with her hair. It was falling out! She wanted to fix it. She tried many things to make her hair grow. Nothing worked. Finally, Sarah made her own product. Sarah mixed oils and herbs together. She made her own cream. She put it on her scalp. It worked! Her hair started to grow.
In 1905, Sarah got married again. Her husband's name was Charles Joseph Walker. Sarah changed her name after the wedding. She became Madam C.J. Walker.

Madam Walker invented many hair-care products. She made creams and shampoos. She knew that many black women had problems with their hair. She wanted to help them. She started selling her products. She sold her products door-to-door.
Many women loved them! Madam Walker soon opened a factory in Indiana. The factory made a lot of products for Madam Walker's clients.

Madam Walker hired other women to help sell her products. These ladies were known as "Walker Agents." They went door-to-door and sold the hair-care supplies.

Draw a picture of a "Walker Agent."
After a while, Madam Walker opened beauty salons. She opened beauty schools too. Madam Walker's business boomed! She made a lot of money. Madam Walker used some of her money to help other people. She wanted other women, especially black women, to have better lives.

Madam C.J. Walker died on May 25, 1919. She did many great things in her life. Her hair-care creations helped her build a business. Her business helped many other women build a better life.
Answer the following questions **AFTER** you have completed this book.

1. Madam Walker used to place ads in the paper to advertise her hair products. What do you think those ads looked like? Draw a picture of one.

2. Madam Walker endured many hardships in her life. Which of the following do you think was the most difficult? Rank the following events from 1-4, with 1 being the event that you think was hardest for Madam Walker.

   - _____ being an orphan at seven
   - _____ moving to St. Louis
   - _____ being a widow at twenty
   - _____ starting her company
   - _____ losing her hair

3. What do you think would have happened if Madam Walker had simply let her hair fall out and never tried to create her own hair-care product? How do you think her life may have been different? Explain your answer.

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4. If I could create something and sell it, I would make a __________________ because __________________________

5. Pretend that you are one of "Walkers Agents." Try to persuade a woman to buy some of Madam Walker's hair-care products. What should she purchase? Why should she buy it? Give specific reasons as to why she should buy something from you.

6. How do you think Madam Walker felt when she noticed that her hair was falling out? Why do you think she couldn't find a product to make it grow back? Write a journal entry from her point of view about those tough times.
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