



Grades 1 to 4

Curriculum Guide for  
***Inventor McGregor***

By Kathleen T. Pelley

Illustrated by Michael Chesworth

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**Bank Street Best Book**

**Colorado Book Award Winner**

"Pelley is a native of Scotland, and her text is peppered with colorful expressions... There is a natural lilt to the language that lends it a folkloric quality... This charming tale could be coupled with Uri Shulevitz's *The Treasure* (Farrar, 1979) for a discussion of appreciating what lies directly in front of you."

—School Library Journal

**Summary:** Because he can invent just about anything to make the world a little better and brighter, folks call him, Inventor McGregor. In between his work, he likes to stroll down the winding lane behind his house, where he sings a snippet of a song, paints a picture, twirls a whirl of a fling. One day the President of the Royal Society of Inventors persuades McGregor to leave his daily distractions and come to work for the society in the city. But in his new laboratory, Inventor McGregor, finds it's not so easy to invent, deprived of his usual diversions...

**About the Author:** Kathleen Pelley grew up in Glasgow, Scotland, but owes her passion for stories to her gentle, Irish father, who loved to feed her tales of fairies, leprechauns, and banshees. A former teacher, Kathleen moved to the United States in 1990. As well as writing stories, Kathleen worked for several years recording books on tape for the blind at the Colorado Talking Books Library. She has published: a children's play, stories in *Hopscotch* and *Cricket* magazines, and the picture books **The Giant King**, **Inventor McGregor**, **Magnus Maximus**, **A Marvelous Measurer**, and **Raj, the Bookstore Tiger**. She lives in Greenwood Village, Colorado. Explore more at [www.KathleenTPelley.com](http://www.KathleenTPelley.com).

## Themes

Creativity, inspiration, home, family, Scotland

## Vocabulary

higgledy-piggledy, cheery, shimmy, snippet, fling, reel, strathspey ( a slow dance, like a waltz, from the Scottish word for a river), wheeled (to whirl around very fast), scallywag, dillydallied, helium, laboratory, gizmos, tartan (plaid).

## Story Questions

In what country is the story set?

What clues do the author and illustrator give you?

Why do people call Hector McGregor a “mend-it-man?”

Is there anything you would like McGregor to mend for you?

Why did McGregor liked to go down the winding lane behind his house?

What did he do every night before the shades were drawn?

What made him start inventing things for people?

Which of McGregor’s inventions is your favorite? Explain.

Who was Nigel Withers?

What did he persuade McGregor to do?

Why do you think McGregor’s ideas all dried up when he went to the city?

Why did McGregor paint the laboratory wall?

What did McGregor discover about himself?

## **Discussion Questions**

“Necessity is the mother of inventions.” Discuss.

“Sterility smothers inventions.” Discuss.

What did McGregor like to do in between his inventing? Explain that when people love doing something, it is their PASSION. McGregor had many passions. What are your passions? How do you feel when you are doing them?

Do you think it is important for people to have passions? Why?

Explain that the word, INSPIRE come from a Latin word – inspirare – to breathe life into. What breathed life into McGregor? His passions?

What breathes life into you?

What sucks life out of you?

“Festivity breeds creativity” --Julia Cameron Discuss. How was McGregor “festive?”

How can you be festive?

Why do you think Nigel Withers was able to persuade McGregor to come and work for him in the city?

Have you ever been persuaded to do something that turned out later to be a bad idea? Explain.

Authors choose the names of their characters carefully. Why do you think the author called the main character, Hector McGregor?

Why do you think she called the President of the Royal Society of Inventors, Nigel Withers?

Why do you think she called McGregor’s hen, Hattie?

## **Interviews/Role Play**

Ask students to interview older members of their family: siblings, parents, and/or grandparents. What are their passions? How did they find them? How do they share them with others? Come together as a class to share their answers.

Divide the class into groups of 4-6. Have them interview one another about their passions/talents. In what way do their talents/passions help others, family, classmates, community, world?

## **Language Arts**

**Synonyms:** The author uses synonyms for made or invented. How many can you find? (cobbled, pieced together, concocted.....)

**Alliteration and Onomatopoeia:** The author uses these tools throughout the book. How many can you find?

**Favorite Words:** The author uses many words that are fun to say, like, higgledy piggledy, and whirled and whooshed and wheeched. Can you pick out some of your favorite words to say? Make up a sentence using each.

## **Social Studies**

**Map Studies:** Show a map of Great Britain. Point out four separate countries of England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland where the book is set.

**Research:** Have the children work in groups to find out 3 different facts about Scotland, and come together as a class to discuss their findings.

**Biographies:** Scotland is a small country but is famous for a large number of inventors. Have the children research who invented the following: television (John Logie Baird), telephone (Alexander Graham Bell), raincoat (Charles Macintosh), inflatable tire (John Boyd Dunlop), and the steam engine (James Watt).

**Language:** Many Scots speak a language called Gaelic, but everyone speaks English. However the English is a little different from American English – vocabulary, spelling, grammar, pronunciation – explain the word dialect.

Some examples of Scots English:

Plaster – band-aid	chips – French fries
Rubbish – trash	crisps – potato chips
Boot – trunk	skelf - splinter
Bonnet – hood	girn – complain

Have students think of some American dialect and how it can differ from state to state.

**Culture:** Scotland is famous for castles, the Loch Ness Monster, bagpipes, the Highland Fling, heather, haggis, tartan, kilts, Auld Lang Syne (song sung on New Year’s Eve), golf, Robbie Burns (poet) Sean Connery (actor), and for dancing.

### **Creative Writing**

**News Article:** After introducing students to samples of newspaper articles, have them write a news article about Angus the postman and the barking bag. They should decide on the name of the newspaper like, *The Scottish Herald*. A suggested headline might be, *McGregor’s Barking Bag Tames Scoundrel Scottie?* They should illustrate the article, and include interview with witnesses like the Scottie’s owner and Angus himself.

Write another news report about McGregor after he returns home and begins to invent one more incredible invention after another. Using the heading, *Inventor McGregor Invents Again?*, consider who he invents the jellybean eraser, tartan grass, glow in the dark books, peppermint pencils for.

**Letter Writing:** Write a letter from Mrs. McIver to her husband at sea about the helping hands that McGregor has invented for her. Write your letter to McGregor asking him to invent something for you.

**Diary Writing:** Write a diary entry from McGregor about his “inventing day” – describe some inventions that he thought of that day – who were they for? Draw them.

## **The Arts**

**Design:** Design an invention for one of the following: your teacher, your best friend, your mom or dad, a brother or sister, a grandparent, a nosy neighbor, a noisy neighbor, your mailman, your basketball coach, a policeman, a shy child, a pet, or a friend who cannot swim.

Make a detailed drawing.

Give your invention a name.

Label all its parts.

Make a display of your class “inventions” around the classroom.

**Art:** Hector McGregor painted a picture of his family across the laboratory wall, because they inspired him. Paint a picture of who or what inspires you (family, friends, music, art, nature, pets etc.). Make it as bright and colorful as you can. Join them all together and make a frieze around the classroom with the heading WHAT INSPIRES US.

**Dance:** The Scottish people love to dance. When they have a party, they often have Scottish country dancing, called a ceilidh (kay –lee) a Gaelic word for dance/party. Research various dances popular in other countries: America (square dancing) Ireland (different dance from Scotland), England, India, etc. If possible have a special dancing display where pupils can model dances from other countries. You may find examples of Scottish dances e.g. “the dashing white sergeant” at the library and might teach the class one Scottish dance. Explain how a reel is very fast and a strathspey is more like a waltz.

**Inspiration:** Explain the word MUSE – from the Greek myth – any of the nine goddesses, one for each of the different arts or science. Introduce some Greek myths. Follow up with a discussion of the importance of “THE MUSE” to ancient Greeks.

**Suggested Reading**

**So You Want to be an Inventor** by Judith St. George

**The Kid Who Invented the Popsicle** by Don Wuffson

**Mistakes that Worked** by Charlotte Jones

**Now and Ben: The Modern Inventions of Benjamin Franklin** by Gene Barretta

**Marvelous Mattie** by Emily Arnold McCully

**Hooray for Inventors** by Marcia Williams

**The Picture History of Great Inventors** by Gillian Clements