

Aesock is a time-traveling, sockology-spouting, sock-laden creature with supreme static cling. This sticky condition has resulted in his impromptu collection of millions of odd socks from all over the globe, from the past and the future.

Join Aesock, Benjamin, and Olivia as they journey back in time in Aesock's magical laundry hamper to return these socks to some of the world's most famous historical figures. Along the way, kids will learn history and will learn also to believe in themselves, their dreams, and their quests.



CHAPTER 1

The Failure



Tension grew as the class hovered around the table. Seven-year-old Benjamin Barber prepared for the big moment.

“Now, Benjamin will produce light,” said his teacher, Mr. Perkins. “There are three items here: a flashlight battery, a copper wire, and a small light bulb. Benjamin will connect the battery to the light bulb with the wire. Then the battery will give the light bulb its power.”

Benjamin felt as if he were on stage. He held the thin wire.

He leaned toward the battery. The class held its collective breath. Benjamin touched the wire to the top of the battery and...

Nothing happened.

He tapped the bulb to check the connection. He touched the wire to the battery again.

Still, nothing happened. Nothing at all. Sarah Solomon, class genius, yawned.

“Let me take a look, Benjamin,” said Mr. Perkins. “It looks like it should work.”

Mr. Perkins surveyed the project. First, he checked the bulb and the battery. Then he looked at the wire.

“It appears either the battery died or the bulb isn’t working. I’m sorry,” he said.

“It worked this morning,” Benjamin muttered. He wished he didn’t feel so on stage. He felt like a failure. His project had bombed. He was a dud. A zero.

“You did your best. You can try again later,” said Mr. Perkins.

The bell rang. School was over. No way was Benjamin going to show his face on the playground this afternoon. He’d just hide out in the bathroom. Maybe forever.

Eventually he started home. The walk was long. Benjamin's shoulders slumped and his head drooped. He couldn't believe how dumb he'd looked in front of his classmates.

"I'm so stupid," Benjamin said. He swung at a low branch with his book bag. The bag connected and almost knocked a squirrel off the limb. Leaves flew everywhere. The critter squealed and scrambled to a higher branch.

Benjamin lugged his book bag up the steps of his house. He plodded through the house and headed into the basement. His bag hit the cement with a thud.

"I'm a failure," Benjamin said.

He leaned against the washing machine and then slid to the cool floor. Benjamin pulled out a book. He looked at the man on the cover. After several seconds, he shook his head. "They laughed at me," he said. He felt totally alone. "I give up!" said Benjamin.

“Excuse me,” a mysterious voice said. Benjamin froze. Who was that?

“Do you really want to give up?” the voice asked.

Benjamin dropped his book. He pressed flat against the cool metal of the washer. His head pounded.

“Whaaaaat?” Benjamin’s voice shook and cracked.

“Do you really want to give up?” repeated the voice.

Where was that voice? It sounded like it was coming from a big pile of clothes at the base of the laundry chute. That was impossible. Was it the TV upstairs? No! The sound was definitely coming from the basement. Benjamin suddenly shook his head. Talk about feeling dumb. He almost fell for it!

“Olivia, stop it!” Benjamin snapped.

“That’s not funny.” His sister loved to tease.

“Who is Olivia?” asked the voice.

“I mean it!” Benjamin demanded

crossly. He got up and stomped toward the

clothes pile. “I know you’re in there, and I’m going to get you! I’m sick of your jokes.” Benjamin began digging through the clothes pile.

“Sick of whose jokes?” asked Olivia.

Benjamin straightened up. He swallowed hard and looked at an odd sock he was holding. Olivia was standing at the top of the stairs and nowhere *near* the pile of laundry! So whose voice had he heard?

CHAPTER 5

The Captain's Ship



It looked like a large wicker basket. But this was not your ordinary basket.

“What is that?” asked Olivia.

“That is my ship,” said Aesock.

Olivia walked around the ornate wicker structure. She shook her head in amazement.

Benjamin examined the entire vessel in detail. “Wow!” he exclaimed. The ship contained a captain’s wheel, a sail, and a mast hung with socks. Along the outside dangled a mishmash of items. They included a sleeping bag, an umbrella, an anchor, a telescope, a map, some odd socks, and a clock.

“It looks like a giant picnic basket,”
said Benjamin.

“What’s with all the socks?” asked
Olivia.

“Oh,” said Aesock sheepishly, “they
like me.”

“Socks like you?” asked Olivia.

“Yes. Very much,” said Aesock.

“Why?” asked Olivia.

“We will discuss that another time,”
said Aesock. “Now, come aboard.”

Aesock climbed into the basket. Then
he helped Olivia and Benjamin.

“See that little pink and blue bag?”
asked Aesock. “It contains a safety line for
each of you. Put it on and secure yourself to
the ship.”

Olivia and Benjamin did as they were
told. First, Olivia tied the rope around her
own waist. Then she helped her brother.
Once the tethers were in place, the children
secured themselves to the ship.

“Now put on your helmets,” instructed Aesock.

Benjamin reached into the bottom of the basket and picked out a helmet. It fit perfectly. Then he handed one to Olivia. She slipped it on.

“Is everyone ready?” Aesock asked.

“Yes!” they exclaimed.

“One more thing,” said Aesock. “Touch this sock on my cape and repeat after me: All things are possible to those who believe.”

Olivia and Benjamin eagerly held the sock and repeated Aesock’s words. Abruptly, the basket began to tremble.

“Hold on,” commanded Aesock.

Olivia and Benjamin clutched the railing. The basket struggled to rise.

“Secure yourselves. The next move will be a fast one,” Aesock said with a grin.

The sail on the hamper strained as heavy winds whipped through the basement. Suddenly, the basket lifted off the ground

and catapulted toward the brick wall.

Benjamin stared in horror.

“Get down, Benjamin!” Olivia hollered.

Benjamin dropped in the basket and covered his head. The wall was upon them!

“We’re going to die!” he yelled.

CHAPTER 6

High Flying



Then, without a hair harmed, the trio was soaring through the evening sky.

“What h-happened?” stuttered Olivia.

“Magic,” whispered Aesock. He gave them a thumbs up.

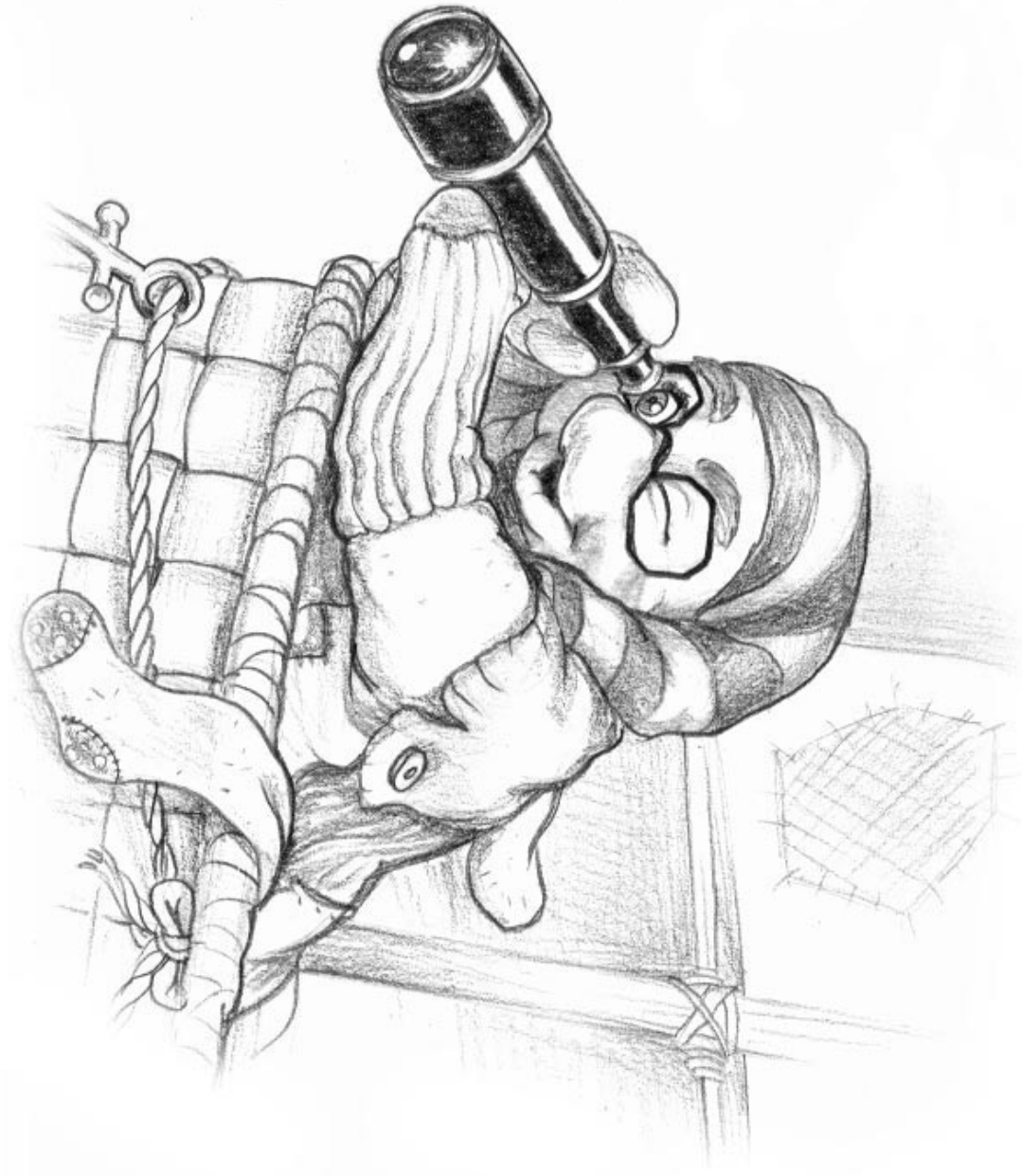
As the travelers zoomed into the twilight, the houses below became smaller and smaller. Benjamin leaned over the side of the basket and almost tumbled out.

“Hang on, Benjamin,” Aesock warned. Olivia giggled. “That would be hard to

explain. Gee, Mom. Gee, Dad,” she said,

“Benjamin fell out of a flying laundry basket while visiting Thomas Edison.”

“That isn’t funny,” said Benjamin. He



studied Aesock's cape, covered entirely in socks. Red socks. Blue socks. Baseball socks. Old socks. New socks. Socks of all sizes, colors, descriptions, and conditions.

As they flew through the evening sky, Olivia asked, "Aesock, where do all those socks come from?"

"Everywhere," said Aesock. "Time travel creates static cling."

"So, you're the one!" Benjamin laughed. "My mom is always talking about you. You're the sock monster that eats socks."

"Oh, goodness!" Aesock chuckled. "I am not a monster, and I do not eat socks."

"Maybe not, but you're the guy," Benjamin said, and giggled.

Home was now out of sight, and the Earth was a speck below. Aesock peered through his telescope.

"What are you looking at, Aesock?" asked Olivia.

"It is not what I am looking at," stated

Aesock. “It is what I am looking *for*. We seek the Black Hole.”

“The what?” Benjamin asked.

“The Black Hole. We must enter the Black Hole to travel back in time. It is a portal.”

“What’s a portal?” asked Olivia.

“A portal is a door or passageway. The Black Hole, or door in the sky, will lead us to the past,” said Aesock.

Benjamin peered eagerly in the same direction as Aesock’s telescope. At first, he couldn’t see anything. Then, suddenly, the Black Hole appeared. Within the darkness, it resembled a whirlpool in the vast ocean of air. Light swirled around the hole, then abruptly disappeared.

“Be advised. There is great danger here for young travelers,” Aesock announced. “Do not attempt to travel into the Black Hole without me.”

Olivia and Benjamin nodded. Benjamin took Olivia’s hand.

As the travelers neared the portal, the Black Hole loomed larger and larger. Once in its grasp, Aesock told them he would not be able to control the ship until they reached the other side.

“Once we enter the Black Hole, it will become quite dark,” said Aesock in a serious tone, “but do not be afraid. Remember, the darkest part of the tunnel is right before the light. Just like life.” Then he smiled.

Benjamin looked nervously at his sister. “Maybe this wasn’t such a good idea,” he whispered.

Olivia squeezed his hand. “It will be all right, Benjamin. I’m scared, too,” she whispered.

CHAPTER 7

The Black Hole



Aesock hooked himself to the mast. Then he locked the captain's steering wheel into position. Finally, he pulled flight goggles over his glasses.

As the tiny ship got closer to the colossal opening, the winds surged. A huge meteor almost as big as the basket raced by within inches of the ship.

"I want to go home," Benjamin howled.

"We are protected." Aesock smiled knowingly. "The winds will take us where they want. We will not fight the current. We will use it instead."

And with those words the ship was sucked into the Black Hole. The basket swirled in large circles. The winds howled and the basket pitched. There was total

darkness. Then the lightning began. It was the worst storm Benjamin had ever seen. The basket careened and lunged as the circles became tighter and tighter. Several times asteroids passed within a few feet. Suddenly, the basket tipped sideways. A terrifying scream cut through the howling wind and darkness.

Olivia's hand slipped from Benjamin's. "Aesock, Benjamin, help me!" Olivia shrieked.

She had fallen overboard! Benjamin stretched his arms out, but couldn't reach her. Her eyes filled with terror as she clutched the safety line still fastened to the side of the ship.

"Don't let go," shouted Benjamin. As the winds pummeled the out-of-control craft, Olivia held on with all her might. "Please! Help me!" she yelled again.

Lightning flashed. In the midst of the storm, the otherwise stalwart vessel seemed small and helpless and so did Benjamin. Is

Olivia going to die? he thought. As he watched his sister's body twist in the wind like a rag doll, he remembered their last fight. It was over a stupid game. This couldn't be! He had to do something.

“Help!” screamed Benjamin. “Help her, Aesock! Please!”

“I will save you, Olivia,” Aesock yelled. “Hold on!” He grabbed the mast with one hand and reached over the side of the basket with the other. Once. Twice. Three times he had her within his grasp. But, each time Olivia's small hand was ripped from his by the violent twisting and tossing of the out-of-control ship.

Benjamin could see Olivia's face filled with fright. As she struggled mightily to hold the safety line in the ferocious tempest, the rope strained against her weight. It was all that separated her from certain death! Benjamin knew she could not hold on much longer. Would Aesock reach her in time?

“Benjamin, hold my rope to steady me,”

instructed Aesock over the howling winds. “I must let go of the mast so I can grab Olivia with both hands.”

Benjamin followed instructions and quickly moved into position. This was his chance to help his sister. He wasn’t strong enough to pull her to safety, but if he could help Aesock...

Suddenly, the knot around Olivia’s waist unraveled. “Aesock, I’m falling!” she screamed. If she let go of the rope, she would certainly plummet to her death in the Black Hole!

“No!” Benjamin screamed. “Don’t let go!”

Aesock lunged over the side of the basket and grabbed her. But now he was about to fall out of the basket!

“Pull, Benjamin!” Aesock screamed over the howling winds. “Pull!”

Benjamin pulled as hard as he could. But Aesock and Olivia were too heavy.

“I can’t, Aesock,” Benjamin wailed.



“Yes...you...can,” replied Aesock steadfastly. “Believe!”

Benjamin took a deep breath, closed his eyes, and pulled again with all his might. From deep down inside he found a strength he didn't know was there. Slowly, Aesock lifted Olivia into the basket. She crumbled to the floor.

Then, just as Aesock predicted, all was still. The winds grew calm. The darkness disappeared. The ship righted itself. And there was light at the end of the tunnel.

“We made it,” Olivia said with relief. The Black Hole was behind them.

Benjamin promptly collapsed in the bottom of the basket with his sister. His stomach churned. All he had wanted to do was visit Thomas Edison. This was crazy.

“I think I'm going to throw up,” Benjamin moaned.

Aesock instructed Benjamin to stand. Benjamin looked over the side of the basket.

He felt better when he saw the treetops.

“We’re almost there,” said Aesock.

A small wooden building stood below. From their vantage point in the sky, the travelers could see farmhouses in the distance. This was no city.

“Where are we, Aesock?” asked Olivia.

“It looks like the woods.”

“This can’t be Mr. Edison’s factory,” said Benjamin.

“Did I say we were going to a factory?” Aesock asked.

The door to the small wooden building opened. Children of various ages poured into the yard.

One boy walked alone with his head down. He kicked a rock with his foot.

“He looks like I did this afternoon,” said Benjamin.

“I thought we were going to visit Thomas Edison,” said Olivia.

“We are,” said Aesock.

Aesock pointed to the gloomy

youngster walking with his head down.

*Benjamin looked at his sister in
astonishment.*