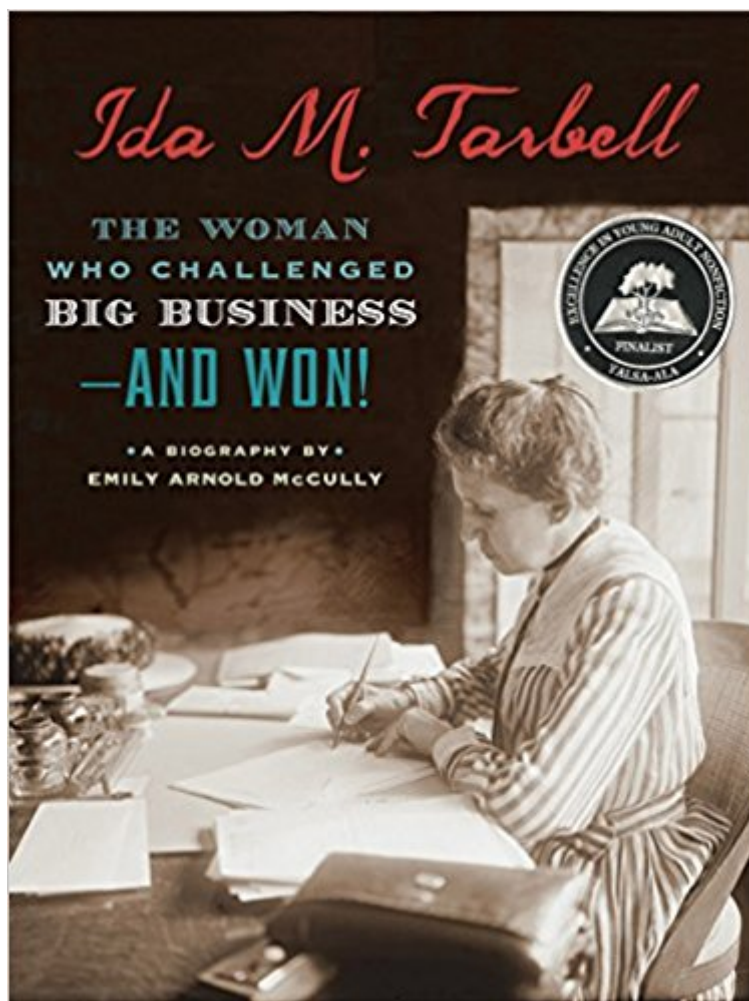


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# Ida M. Tarbell: The Woman Who Challenged Big Business--and Won!



## Synopsis

Born in 1857 and raised in oil country, Ida M. Tarbell was one of the first investigative journalists and probably the most influential in her time. Her series of articles on the Standard Oil Trust, a complicated business empire run by John D. Rockefeller, revealed to readers the underhanded, even illegal practices that had led to Rockefeller's success. Rejecting the term "muckraker" to describe her profession, she went on to achieve remarkable prominence for a woman of her generation as a writer and shaper of public opinion. This biography offers an engrossing portrait of a trailblazer in a man's world who left her mark on the American consciousness. Notes, bibliography, index.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 12 - 17 years

Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

Gr 7 Up — McCully expertly brings to life the story of a unique and determined woman in this well-written and thoroughly researched biography, filled with numerous and pertinent photographs. She places Tarbell's story into historical context, detailing how the country was just discovering the hidden wealth of oil and all the opportunities that came with it and how certain individuals were making shrewd business deals to guarantee large incomes. All of the corruption and secret machinations affected many citizens. Tarbell went where no one had gone before, becoming an investigative reporter for a top magazine. Though women were little respected at the time, she dove

right into a man's world, exposing the somewhat shady side of John D. Rockefeller, head of the powerful Standard Oil Trust. As Tarbell's articles stirred public emotions, she grew more and more famous for her outspokenness and perseverance. Readers will not only get a feel for Tarbell, but they'll also get a sense of the changing world she inhabited. --Carol Hirsche, Provo City Library, UT

**\*Starred Review\*** Born before the Civil War, Ida M. Tarbell had the intelligence, drive, and personality to carve out a career for herself in a man's world, writing hard-hitting articles for McClure's Magazine and becoming a pioneer in the field of investigative journalism. Having grown up in a Pennsylvania community that rose with the oil boom and suffered as a result of price fixing and other underhanded tactics, Tarbell understood the social costs of unsavory business practices. After a thorough investigation, she wrote a series of articles on the rise of Standard Oil and their devious methods of stifling competition. Her writing swayed public opinion and prompted public officials to act. In her first book for young adults, Caldecott medalist McCully shows a fine ability to organize material and present it in a lively, readable way. She deals head-on with the thorny topic of Tarbell's opposition to women's suffrage, perhaps one reason this intriguing, historically significant woman has been overlooked by other biographers for young people. McCully also places information about Tarbell within the broader context of her upbringing as well as the social norms and political forces that informed her choices. Illustrated with many period photos, this informative title brings Tarbell and her times into sharper focus for readers today. Grades 7-10. --Carolyn Phelan

An important person in American history. Most people don't understand that without the muckrakers, capitalism would run wild.

While I had hoped for a scholarly treatment of Tarbell's success in her journalistic assault on Standard Oil, I thought this book was better suited for a high school audience. Allowing that may have been the author's intended audience I can have no complaint other than my disappointment. No disrespect toward Emily McCully is intended.

Reading Emily McCully's delightful biography of Ida Tarbell is an example of an extremely fortuitous circumstance. Had I realized that it was designed for a "young adult" audience, I might have passed on it; but as it turns out, this very factor enhanced my reading pleasure immensely. The format of

the book, with its "open", slightly larger typeface and copious illustrations make it visually pleasing, but it is by no means lacking in depth and substance. The subtitle, "The Woman Who Challenged Big Business - and Won" is absolutely apropos and is of course what makes it clear that this is an extremely timely narrative despite the fact that present-day circumstances suggest that much of what Tarbell accomplished has been undone. Indeed, I was tempted to start this review with the statement, "It's STILL about the oil, stupid!" The Koch brothers may have replaced the Rockefellers as the major players whose vast oil fortune has become the main purchaser of political advantage, but the scenario is none-the-less eerily familiar. Besides being very timely, McCully's biography is also detailed, sensitive and exceptionally engaging. Since the advance reading copy I received lacks the source notes and Bibliography as well as the photo credits that will enhance the published edition, I am unable to comment on these, but given the overall quality of the material as presented, I have no doubt that the book will be of great value to the serious student as well as enjoyable to the casual reader as I found it.

Ida Minerva Tarbell lived through the Civil War and died during World War II. She saw the rise of the rail road, the beginnings of the oil/petroleum era and the industrial revolution, the end of slavery, the start of women's rights, experienced several financial depressions, and saw and the rise of the first big American millionaire, John D. Rockefeller. The fast-growing wealth from American industrialists also created a fast-growing underclass of poor factory workers who were easily exploited. She had doting parents who wanted the best for their daughter, yet she was raised in a strict Methodist family that went against her science-prone mind. Author Emily Arnold McCully wrote this narrative for young readers aged twelve and up, but this is interesting reading for anyone interested in biographical history. McCully weaves Tarbell's life with the political and industrial events at the time, which help explain how this woman who grew up in a modest family was able to push herself to new limits that had to be opened to her. This is an easy-to-read book since it's directed toward young readers. And because Tarbell is not very well known to most people, this made for interesting reading. McCully doesn't spend too much time on any one chapter. The earlier chapters go through her first two decades rather quickly, but laying a base knowledge of her young life to understand how she developed as the first big female muckraker. There are many photographs and illustrations evenly distributed throughout the book. Thee photos help what is lacking in the narrative: bringing Ida Tarbell to life. Because the writing style is very simplistic, the transitional paragraphs are short and sweet and can be used in ELL classes..

Ida Minerva Tarbell should be better remembered as one of the best investigative reporters ever in American history. This book isn't just for young readers but older ones like myself as well. The writing is clear and concise with illustrations and photographs of Ida, her family, and places important to her. Ida preferred to study science and become a journalist. McClure's magazine made her one of the most important figures of her time. Ida was one of those rare women ahead of her time. She was highly intelligent and personable. Ida Tarbell might be one of the most honorable, respectable, dignified, and graceful. Ida was and is a role model for women of her time or anytime. Despite her feelings and position about suffrage, women's right to vote was necessary but not the end to a means. Ida lived her life on her own terms. She never married nor had children. She dedicated her life to making the world a better place and she did it. Her groundbreaking articles on Standard Oil and John D. Rockefeller's business practices.

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