



The Book of Potentially Catastrophic Science: 50 Experiments for Daring Young Scientists (Irresponsible Science)

By Sean Connolly

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It's never been more important to engage a child's scientific curiosity, and Sean Connolly knows just how to do it?with lively, hands-on, seemingly "dangerous" experiments that pop, ooze, crash, and teach! Now, the author of *The Book of Totally Irresponsible Science*, takes it one step further: He leads kids through the history of science, and then creates amazing yet simple experiments that demonstrate key scientific principles.

Tame fire just like a Neanderthal with the Fahrenheit 451 experiment. Round up all your friends and track the spread of "disease" using body glitter with an experiment inspired by Edward Jenner, the vaccination pioneer who's credited with saving more lives than any other person in history. Rediscover the wheel and axle with the ancient Sumerians, and perform an astounding experiment demonstrating the theory of angular momentum. Build a simple telescope?just like Galileo's?and find the four moons he discovered orbiting Jupiter (an act that helped land him in prison). Take a less potentially catastrophic approach to electricity than Ben Franklin did with the Lightning Mouth experiment. Re-create the Hadron Collider in a microwave with marshmallows, calculator, and a ruler?it won't jeopardize Earth with a simulated Big Bang, but will demonstrate the speed of light. And it's tasty!

By letting kids stand on the shoulders of Aristotle, Newton, Einstein, the Wright brothers, Marie Curie, Darwin, Watson and Crick, and more, *The Book of Potentially Catastrophic Science* is an uncommonly engaging guide to science, and the great stories of the men and women behind the science.



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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

Gr 5-10—Perhaps picking up on a trend started by Conn and Hal Iggulden's *The Dangerous Book for Boys* (Collins, 2007), this volume features a sensational title and lurid, retro cover art that might suggest a shallow and gimmicky package, once cracked. It's not. Instead, the content is solid and compelling. The premise is that all of humankind's greatest milestones in science and engineering have entailed risks and courage on the part of the innovators. Starting with Stone Age tools and ending with a Hadron Collider, each chapter details a historic leap forward in scientific understanding and explains what the potential downsides of those discoveries were. Potential catastrophic consequences include persecution for heresy, the very real risks of self-injury or death in the process of discovery, and the reality that almost every beneficial scientific discovery can also be tapped to create efficient means for humans to kill one another. As such, it's an illuminating survey. Unfortunately, kids who see the cover urging them to "try these experiments at home" and listing them as "smashing atoms, making gunpowder, firing rockets, and raising the dead," might be a little disappointed when the actual "experiments" turn out to be tamer—and sometimes lamer—analogs of demonstrations of the concepts put forth in each chapter. *Jeffrey Hastings, Highlander Way Middle School, Howell, MI*

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From [Booklist](#)

From the author of *The Book of Totally Irresponsible Science* (2008), this volume approaches science historically, spotlighting certain periods, processes, individuals, discoveries, and inventions. Each of the 34 chapters includes a discussion and one or two related activities, such as making a Stone Age tool, creating an earthquake in Jell-O, building a parachute for an egg drop, and extracting a banana's DNA. Safety concerns are addressed for each project, and adult help will be necessary to complete some of the experiments successfully. Though the photos and cartoon-style drawings work well, several elements of the book's design are off-putting: the use of pistachio-green and purplish-gray background colors on the pages, the occasional graph-paper-like squares underlying the text, and the small black squares running up the pages' outer margins. While there is no back matter, not even an index, Connolly's writing is engaging, and the historical approach works well, offering kids a quick introduction to science history and the opportunity to explore certain ideas along the way. Grades 5-8. --Carolyn Phelan

Review

Winner of the 2011 AAAS & Subaru Award for Excellence in Science Books in the Hands-On Category

"This book stands out from the crowd of guides to science experiments that can be performed at home. Whereas many such works present a hodgepodge of standard experiments, Connolly builds this one around the theme of major scientific and technological breakthroughs that have occurred over the past 2-plus million years of human history?arranged from the first stone tools crafted by *Homo erectus* to the Large Hadron Collider now being used to accelerate particles to speeds approaching that of light. Each of the 34 chapters comprises descriptions of an advance and its context, the science behind it, and one or more experiments that demonstrate underlying principles. These are presented in a breezy and engaging style. Although calling the discoveries potentially catastrophic is sure to intrigue a certain kind of young experimenter, the author's

explanations note both the benefits and the drawbacks of the advances. Parents will appreciate the "catastrophic meter" reading for each experiment, which indicates the hazards involved and the appropriate level of adult supervision. The experiments and their ties to the science are consistently creative: One can spool DNA onto a skewer after isolating it from a half-eaten banana. A handmade oven works because of some of the principles behind a laser beam. The speed of light can be estimated using a microwave oven, marshmallows, and a ruler. Even adults who have survived many science fairs will find themselves tempted to try some of Connolly's experiments."

"A lot of mankind's greatest advances have been just a smidge away from disaster. The Wright Brothers' flying machine, Ben Franklin's fiddling with lightning, Enrico Fermi's chain reaction. In the book, Connolly explains these discoveries and applies the concepts to scaled-back (and kid-safe) experiments that use common household items. Each experiment gets rated on a "catastrophe meter," so adults can judge the danger quotient and how much help they need to offer."

"Budding scientists can learn about principles such as air resistance, condensation and the electromagnetic spectrum. But they learn because Connolly has them making a parachute that safely delivers eggs, crushing a can through sudden condensation or projecting an image of the bones in their hand on a wall. It's all done in an engaging, fun manner."

Users Review

From reader reviews:

George Oneal:

Here thing why this specific The Book of Potentially Catastrophic Science: 50 Experiments for Daring Young Scientists (Irresponsible Science) are different and trusted to be yours. First of all reading a book is good however it depends in the content from it which is the content is as scrumptious as food or not. The Book of Potentially Catastrophic Science: 50 Experiments for Daring Young Scientists (Irresponsible Science) giving you information deeper and different ways, you can find any publication out there but there is no e-book that similar with The Book of Potentially Catastrophic Science: 50 Experiments for Daring Young Scientists (Irresponsible Science). It gives you thrill examining journey, its open up your current eyes about the thing in which happened in the world which is perhaps can be happened around you. You can actually bring everywhere like in area, café, or even in your technique home by train. When you are having difficulties in bringing the imprinted book maybe the form of The Book of Potentially Catastrophic Science: 50 Experiments for Daring Young Scientists (Irresponsible Science) in e-book can be your option.

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