



# Doors of Opportunity

**ALEXANDER DIDN'T HESITATE TO OPEN DOORS. HE EVEN AUTOMATED ONE.**



# A letter from the publisher



Dear Reader,

This playful book-series is a publication of AlligatorZone®, where students meet startups, an impact initiative as well as a community of life-long learners who explore the world through the eyes of the entrepreneurial problem-solver.

AlligatorZone® is proud to present this series of stories and related playful explorations designed to surface the delightful conversationalist that lurks within each of us, and to shine a light on our charismatic side, while we explore the world of future careers, and perhaps find a calling, sooner than later. This activity book can be enjoyed by students of ages ten through the teens. In fact, any life-long learner will enjoy this booklet.

If you choose to read this book aloud, enunciate like your favorite TV newscaster, actor or YouTuber. If you post it online outside of AlligatorZone, tag @alligatorzone or even #alligatorzone. If reading aloud, slow down so that audiences of all backgrounds may understand you clearly. This exercise fine-tunes our personality, making people pause and listen when we speak. That's because the knowledge in this book series will appeal to most people, and this exercise powers up style with substance.

These stories and explorations will make you look at the world through the eyes of an entrepreneur and observe opportunities to solve problems everywhere around you. Included with this story, is a set of questions to jog your thinking, and an activity for you to go on a journey of discovery, somewhat like an investigative journalist. After you read this book, you can continue learning about more lessons drawn from this book through additional programs offered by AlligatorZone online.

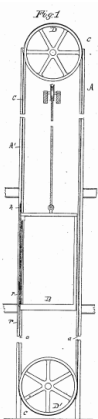
**LIFE-LESSONS:** With this exploration-book and program, readers will understand, among other things, that

- opportunities to improve things and make a difference exist all around us
- industries require a variety of skills
- there is something to learn even from the most mundane things around us
- the world is an encyclopedia, when we don't hesitate to ask questions
- with practice, one can learn to ask the right questions and solve problems
- persistent efforts can accumulate to grand outcomes despite humble beginnings
- your voice matters
- even learning to think like an innovator makes one a standout leader
- mindfulness is possible in everyday activities
- understanding a company and its leaders makes us better consumers and investors
- those who make a difference do it regardless of their circumstances, and
- curiosity, listening and observation are super-powers that we all have and can use everyday

Enjoy more advanced explorations and collaborative learning that we bring to you by extending stories from this book to an online environment as a member of AlligatorZone. Visit [AlligatorZone.org](https://AlligatorZone.org) for more.

Have fun with this story and exploration.

Ramesh Sambasivan  
Instructional Designer  
AlligatorZone® Academy  
June 07, 2020



# Doors of Opportunity.

*(To be read aloud to an audience at home, in school, or online)*



In the early 1800's, Michael Miles and Mary Pompy were raising a family in Pickaway County of Ohio. Around 1837, they had a son, Alexander. This is the fascinating story of Alexander, who started his life as a barber, but along the way found investment opportunities that made him among the wealthiest people in the State of Minnesota.

Alexander was not only an extremely talented barber, but also a resourceful inventor and investor. He started setting up tony salons in upscale hotels, and made quite a name for himself. He also had a knack of solving problems. Alexander even obtained a patent for a hair care product that he developed.

One of his barber shops in a hotel was right by the elevator. In the early days of the elevator, the outside doors could be opened even when the elevator carriage was not waiting on a floor. That meant, anyone could open an elevator door and accidentally fall down the shaft through which an elevator carriage moves. It is said that Alexander's daughter almost fell down the shaft of the elevator. Alexander came up with a solution to improve how the elevator doors got locked as soon as the carriage left a floor, and the elevator door could not accidentally be opened by anyone waiting for the elevator until the carriage had stopped at their floor. Alexander Miles was granted a patent for his improved design of the automated elevator door, on October 11, 1887. He was not the first to invent the automated elevator doors, but he improved them to make them safer. Alexander's concept is still used in the design of modern elevators to keep people safe.

Alexander is not known to have made any money by selling rights to his patents. Instead, as the years went by, he had saved up enough money to start making investments in real estate and began constructing and owning buildings and homes. There was a time when Alexander Miles was known as the wealthiest African American in Minnesota. Alexander was also a prominent member of the business community in Duluth, Minnesota. He even started an insurance company to help bring insurance to African American customers at a fair price. Later, he built many fine homes in the Chicago area. He lived in a fancy home in Chicago on the shores of Lake Michigan with a private stable for his horse carriage.

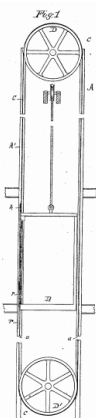
In 1863, when the economy went bad and people started losing jobs, Alexander was still building new homes. That was a miscalculation on his part. He went into debt building the new homes, and eventually lost all his wealth. However, Alexander continued to use his skill as a barber to make a living and survive.

This story holds several life-lessons for us. Alexander never forgot the skill that brought him success. Alexander continued his work as a barber till the end. He took care of his community, always helped those around him and didn't let his material success or his eventual setbacks define him.

Alexander Miles entered the Inventors' Hall of Fame for the improvement of elevator doors, an invention which contributed greatly to our lives, especially in high-rise buildings. Elevators are needed in buildings to make it convenient to people while complying with laws for wheelchair access. With the growth of construction of buildings, the need for elevators increases. Each year, the construction industry spends about \$90 billion in buying, installing and servicing elevators.

Elevators or lifts, are said to have their origins in the 3rd century B.C., when they were hoists powered by animals and humans. As the world made progress, elevators began getting powered by water, steam and then by electricity to pull the carriage up on cables. The technology keeps improving. German engineering company ThyssenKrupp AG now makes the first cable-less elevator called Multi, that goes not only up and down, but also sideways.

Whenever we take an elevator and see the doors staying closed automatically to keep us safe, let's remember that it was a barber's curious mind that made it possible. Curiosity is a superpower that all of us possess.



# Quiz your audience.

*This performance task is mainly for the younger members of AlligatorZone®.  
(Your audience could be a family member, a classmate, a teacher or an observer).*

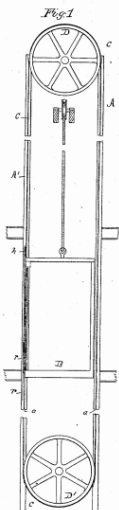


Alexander Miles was the barber who invented a way to make elevator doors safer and entered the National Inventors Hall of Fame. How many years ago did he receive a patent for that invention? (Don't use a calculator)

Why did Alexander Miles feel the need to make the elevator door safer?

His patent did not bring him riches. How then did Alexander Miles become wealthy?

What was the skill that Alexander used all his life to survive his setbacks?



Next?

Continue to the next page for participating in an exploration, as part of the premium AlligatorZone plan or go online to our learning community and share your thoughts.

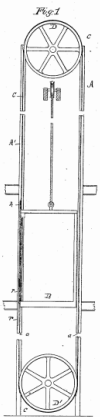


# AlligatorZone® Exploration

*Note down your responses, start or join a discussion in our learners' online community.  
(This performance task is for older students and life-long learners at AlligatorZone.)*



1. We rarely have the time to observe an elevator because we do not want to inconvenience others who might be using it or waiting for it. The next time you ride an elevator, observe the doors from a safe distance, and think of the safety mechanisms that are used for the doors.
2. Elevators usually have a sign posted showing a certificate of safety inspection. Read the certificate when you are riding the elevator, or find out where you can ask to read it.
3. Federal regulations for elevator maintenance are established by Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) with the assistance of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME). Most states and cities have additional standards and codes. Observe which authorities are named on the certificate in your elevator.
4. Observe elevators in older buildings, and listen to the difference in sounds of the underlying technology.
5. Think of how a modern elevator can be made completely safe.
6. Look for the name of the company that has manufactured the elevator and see if they have a website that you can research later.
7. What other forms of transportation are used to move people within buildings?
8. Can elevators be made easier for the differently abled to be used?
9. If an elevator you ride in has a voice that announces each floor, think of all the advantages and disadvantages of that feature.
10. Think of how elevators that get stuck due to a malfunction are recovered. Think of the evacuation procedures that elevators have or need if they stop working. If possible, research it so you know how to be safe in an elevator.
11. Summarize your findings and observations, and post them on AlligatorZone's online learning platform. Share your findings and learn collaboratively with our online community of life-long learners. Visit [AlligatorZone.org](https://alligatorzone.org) for more.



Not yet a premium member of AlligatorZone®.  
Visit our website <https://alligatorzone.org>



# Tips for a Parent, Teacher or a Mentor

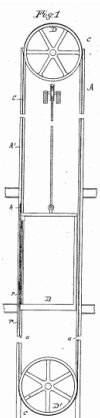
(For mentors and coaches using AlligatorZone's Premium Plans)



Here are time-tested tips for mentors who may want to steer the learning at home or in class.

- 1) **Keep it simple.** If the suggested activity calls for going to a specific location, try slipping the field activity into a routine trip to a store or a mall, and make it an ‘oh-by-the-way-let-us-stop-and-look’ kind of detour on an errand, rather than making a special trip for it. The idea is to remove any semblance of pressure to perform and focus purely on the joy of learning something new in a shared experience for a student and the teacher.
- 2) **Go Improv.** Avoid planning and scheduling in advance. Our goal with the activities is to help children make learning a life-long pursuit and a hobby, not a checklist item that will result in angst until it is completed and cleared.
  - Where an activity involves having a conversation with a stranger at a facility or a manager, consider making it a walk-in experience.
  - This improv-like approach, we believe, teaches the child to be comfortable with uncertain outcomes (“Sorry, the manager is out sick.”) and improvise. They learn to play the hand they are dealt in the project (just like in life). They learn to find alternative sources of information and piece things together.
  - We believe it helps them learn how to focus on things they can control and not worry about things beyond their control.
  - We believe that it teaches them to find insights amid chaos and stay focused on the task at hand despite distractions.
- 4) **Learning, not shopping.** We strive to design activities that do not require making purchases. We strive not to make field activities specific to any particular brand. Use on-site observation to complete the learning with your student. Do not make a purchase for this purpose.
- 5) **Feel free to make a script, if it helps.** If you prefer to schedule a meeting in advance with a store manager or supervisor, prepare a script and encourage your student to be a part of the initial phone request while you stay on the call. Let the student own the process. In our recent summer workshop under the coach’s supervision and guidance we had the 11-year old student conduct a market research. He told us later that it was the first time he had left a voice message and his first time on a business call. The sense of accomplishment and the confidence gained, were priceless.
- 6) **Let the child lead the conversation.** If the student is not yet ready to speak and start a discussion on topics in our activities, try making it a 3-way conversation and keep it casual, referring decision-making to the child (“What do you think?” or “Does that sound reasonable?”) so everyone knows that the student is in charge of the discussion. After the first few times we often see kids lead and handle conversations with aplomb. Let there be no pressure on the student to produce a certain result. Let there be no pressure to use big words or business jargon. If a store owner or employee uses industry parlance or acronyms, seek clarification so the child knows there are no dumb questions.
- 7) **Going off-script is perfectly fine.** Allow the students to find alternative sources of information *under your supervision*, and let them piece things together for their learning. They might find something on TV or Netflix, Youtube, Pinterest or TikTok (if they already use those sites and apps) and be able to connect the dots to fresh insights for improved findings.

Last, but not the least, no matter what, keep it light-hearted and make it a spontaneous and shared experience for both, you and the student.





# Sources

*(These are the publicly available sources used to compile this story)*

## Sources:

Please visit AlligatorZone's online learning community to see links to the sources used to pull this story together.

You can also enjoy a curated collection of links to news reports, articles and videos for a deeper and wider understanding of the subject of the story.

