



Curriculum Guide

by Mike Peterson

*text copyright 2013, Mike Peterson
illustrations copyright 2013, Christopher Baldwin*

Foreword

To mark the 150th Anniversary of the Civil War with a story, the obvious choice would be to send a young person off to experience battle. But we just did that last year to mark the 200th Anniversary of the War of 1812 with “Freehand,” so we decided instead to depict a young girl on the homefront of our bloodiest and most painful war.

It’s not a new idea: Louisa May Alcott wrote about a household of women during the Civil War and we were hardly going to do a better job with the theme than she did.

But setting the story in Elmira allowed us to make the distant war much more immediate for Betsy. Besides pairing the presence of the prisoner of war camp with her experience as the sister of a POW in the South, we had the compassionate response of a very genuine historic figure, John Jones, to contrast with Betsy’s understandable fury.

There is a temptation in children’s historic fiction to make the young protagonist impossibly heroic, and I think that is both a poor way to teach history and a disservice to the people of the era being depicted. There truly were young women like Martha Baxter, models of courage who, though constrained by the society in which they lived, yet resisted the advice of those around them and the disadvantages they faced in order to live as they felt they should.

Their genuine heroism should not be overshadowed by the improbable acts of fictional characters who would never have existed in that era.

But, of course, stories need some sort of dynamic heroism, and it seemed appropriate to show Betsy responding to a complicated situation in a way that was above average but certainly possible. Her actions are admirable, but the story remains on a level such that other young people can identify with her choices rather than be over-awed by them.

And the story remains consistent with the lesson in the true life of John Jones, that often the most heroic choice is simply to do what you know is right, without allowing the possible consequences to change your decision.

That is a style of heroism that can emerge from average boys and girls, both in times of peace and in times of war.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. White", located in the bottom right corner of the page.

Using this guide

All questions and writing prompts are intended for modification and adaptation to your classroom and ability levels. Let them be fun!

The graphic organizers can be used with multiple chapters.

Each chapter includes questions for literal and inferential meaning to guide discussion and measure comprehension.

The prompts in the “In your own words” section can serve to suggest discussion topics, journal entries or writing exercises.

In the News activities are suggested to draw contemporary parallels and to help students develop critical analysis skills. They can be used with the print, on-line or e-edition version of your newspapers.

Quotes from primary documents provide background information and historical references and may also be jumping off points for independent research.

Resources for teachers include websites to support teaching. You can use these as backgrounders on your own or to help create SmartBoard and similar layouts to use as teaching aids.

The standards checklist serves as a document to record the standards met throughout the unit. By noting when you have applied a particular standard, you can track the balance of your emphasis on the many ways in which standards can be applied throughout this story and guide.

Do your kids have any questions or comments?

Come to the blog at <http://www.weeklystorybook.com/comehome> and interact with me!

It's a fun, safe way to talk about the story and the writing process. This site is completely safe -- no comments are posted until I've approved them. (*Kids can identify themselves by first name, last initial and school or whatever you like, though I do enjoy having a name of some sort to respond to!*)

Have a (virtual) author visit in your classroom!

Want a more personal interaction? If you would like to set up a Skype interview, email me at author@teachup.com and we can talk about holding a live on-line presentation for your students.

Please take advantage of these opportunities!

Table of Contents

Foreward

Using This Guide

POW Camps in the Civil War -- p. 1

John W. Jones -- p. 2

Primary Document: The Underground Railroad in Elmira -- p. 3

Map of places of interest -- p. 4

Knowing newspapers -- p. 5

Adapted Literature Circle Activity -- p.7

Chapter One: The Letter -- p. 8

Chapter Two: The Widow Woman -- p. 10

Chapter Three: News from the South -- p. 12

Chapter Four: Kindness -- p. 14

Chapter Five: Tunnelers-- p. 16

Chapter Six: Counting Eggs -- p.18

Chapter Seven: The Egg Thief -- p. 20

Chapter Eight: A Louisiana Tiger -- p. 22

Chapter Nine: A Decision -- p. 24

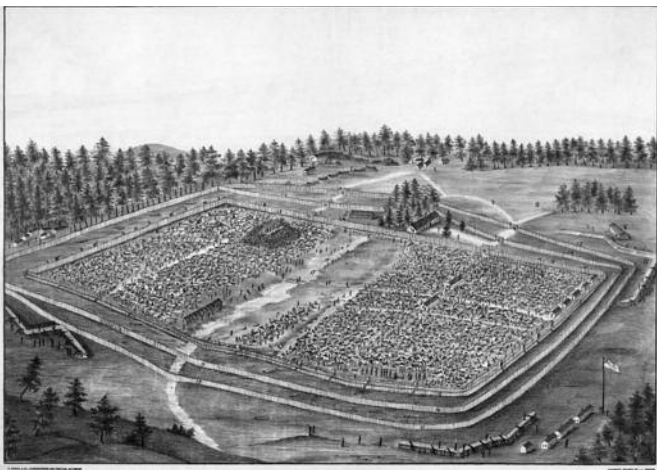
Reproducible Teaching Materials and Core Standards Matrix -- p. 26 *et seq*

POW Camps in the Civil War

There were a number of prisoner of war camps in both the North and South during the Civil War, but the most well-known and infamous are the two at the center our story.

At the start of the war, prisoners were routinely exchanged, but, as the war went on, it was felt that allowing captured soldiers -- particularly those from the South -- to go home and return to their regiments was prolonging the war. In the last years of the war, camps were built to hold captured soldiers until the war ended.

Given the war's strain on resources and supplies, and the state of medicine to begin with in those days, it is not surprising that the death rates in all prison camps were appalling. Neither side was prepared to hold, feed and clothe tens of thousands of men, and the combination of poor nutrition, nearly non-existent medical care and dire sanitary conditions made the spread of disease inevitable.

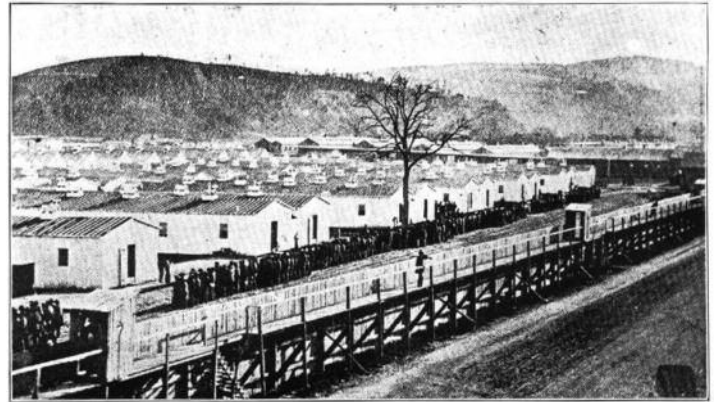


Andersonville, Georgia, opened in February, 1864, and held 45,000 men, of whom nearly 13,000 died before the camp was liberated in May, 1865.

The camp consisted of little more than a stockade fence, with men making their own shelter from whatever they had or could scrounge. When the war ended and the men were released, many of them were skeletal and resembled the prisoners who would be liberated from concentration camps at the end of World War II.

The prison in Elmira (Camp Chemung) opened in July, 1864 and was in use until the end of September, 1865, housing 12,100 prisoners, of whom nearly 3,000 died.

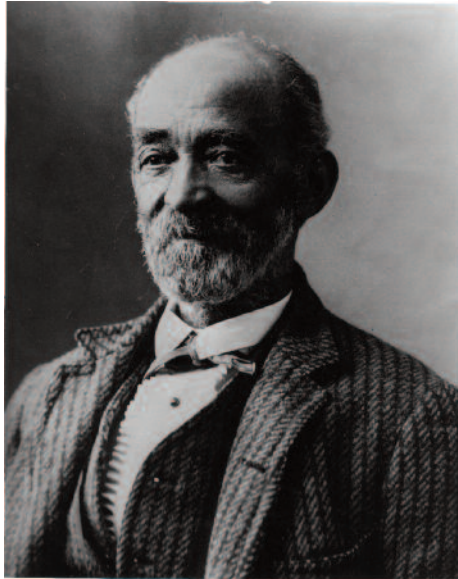
The prison was created from a former Army base, but the number of barracks was not nearly sufficient for the number of prisoners and many ended up in tents, which did not provide adequate shelter in a cold New York winter.



Elmira has been called "The Andersonville of the North," but there was so much blame and finger-pointing after the war that it is hard to sort out the bad feelings from the actual history. Certainly, it would be surprising if many prisoners from either side had good things to say about their confinement.

And, while there was some corruption in distribution of supplies and a reluctance to treat prisoners on one side any better than prisoners were being treated by the other side, it appears that the main cause of death and misery in these prisons was bureaucracy and incompetence rather than malice.

For the purposes of our story, it is enough to say that life in these camps was miserable and that a man in either place was in very real danger of losing his life as well as his health. Betsy's concern for her brother rightfully goes well beyond simply missing him.



John W. Jones 1817-1900

John W. Jones was born into slavery in Virginia and, together with two brothers, walked to freedom and found himself in Elmira, New York, an important link on the Underground Railroad. He became a “conductor” on this trail to freedom, not simply assisting individual fugitives but entire groups, putting 20 or 30 escaped slaves on boxcars that would take them to Canada and freedom.

Jones took classes at a local girls’ school where he learned to read and write, and became sexton at First Baptist Church.

When the prisoner of war camp opened, Jones took on the job of arranging for the burial of dead prisoners, which turned out to be a larger number than anticipated. He became famous for the care with which he treated these soldiers who had fought for the continuation of slavery, many of whom deeply and openly resented the fact that the guards at Camp Chemung included the US Colored Troops 20th Division. *(Note: Jones’s brother-in-law, Stephen Swails, was a member of the famed 54th Massachusetts regiment -- the one in the film “Glory” -- and is believed to have been the first African-American to receive an officer’s commission in the US Army.)*

Union soldiers who died at Andersonville were buried in mass trenches, but Elmira’s dead were buried in individual graves, in coffins, in what is now Woodlawn National Cemetery. Jones not only accurately recorded the location of each Confederate grave, but placed a bottle around the neck of each soldier containing a slip of paper with his name and regiment, to make certain they could be identified later if necessary.

Following the war, some Southern families came north seeking the bodies of their deceased relatives, but, seeing the dignity of the setting in which they were buried, most chose to leave them there among their comrades.

Though his role in “I Will Come Home” is fictional, Jones was well-respected in Elmira in his own time and is remembered there today as a leading figure in the region’s history.



The Confederate burial grounds at Woodlawn National Cemetery. Headstones were erected later, using the records kept by John W. Jones.

Primary document: The Underground Railroad in Elmira

(This letter comes from the Siebert Collection of the Ohio Historical Society, by way of the Chemung County Historical Society. In September, 1896, Susan Crane of Elmira wrote to W.H. Siebert, in answer to his questions about the Underground Railroad. She said John Jones was too ill to write, but had memories of the things Siebert asked about.)

1st: Elmira, NY, was a station between Philadelphia, Williamsport and Harrisburg, Pa., and St. Catherines ¹.

2nd: John W. Jones, a former slave, was the “keeper” between 1845 and 1860.

3rd: As regards the method of operation I could only learn that Quakers in Pa. and Md. would write Mr. Jones of some horse or horses that were missing & ask him to look out for them. Mr. William Still of Phila. would often communicate with Mr. Jones, whose house usually sheltered the runaway slaves here.

4th. Mr. Jones ran away & settled in Elmira in 1844, having belonged to a good family in Virginia. The following year he succeeded in aiding two younger brothers to join him. ² In the Summer (July) of 1845 there were seventeen runaway slaves in & about the small village of Elmira. Five were at work in the town & twelve were scattered on farms over the hills or “up the river road.” ³

One hot day the twelve were known to be cutting hay on two adjoining farms. These men were the latest comers and were closely watched by their friends and kept out of sight as far as possible. However, they were known to be here by proslavery men, they couldn't be hidden.

On this July morning, Lewis Langdon, one of the earliest and most earnest anti-slavery men in this region, was called into the office of a judge, known to be in sympathy with the south. The judge told Mr. Landon in great haste & with excitement that there were two slaveholders and an officer from the South, with warrants for those 12 men.

The judge said that the men must be warned, but extorted a promise that he should not be known as the informant, a promise carefully kept until after the judge died.

My father's partner, S.G. Andrews, who was familiar with the shortest road over the hill, started with the fastest horse in the town, to the farms where the colored men were at work. He arrived but fifteen minutes before the masters and officers - but it was early enough to give the men time to fly to the woods & hide and all were saved. Later several of them returned & settled here. ...

... There were sometimes eighteen or twenty men, women and children. They would be hidden & fed & clothed & sometimes put in a freight car, by the aid of a friendly conductor ⁴ & sent forward to Canada. ...

... About eight years ago I was impressed with the importance of saving or making some record of Mr. Jones' story - and for this purpose brought him and Mr. Clemens ⁵ together.

But the story was so interesting & so touched Mr. Clemens that he took no notes and was unwilling to make any use of it, because he said it should only be told in Mr. Jones language.

Since that time, he has greatly failed and I doubt the story is ever told now. ⁶ ...

1. Ontario

2. I found conflicting stories about whether the three Jones brothers arrived together or the other two came later.

3. An expression -- in other words, “out there some place”

4. That is, an actual conductor who worked for the actual railway company.

5. Yes, that “Mr. Clemens.” Mark Twain lived in Elmira and he and John Jones are now buried in the same cemetery.

6. Jones died about three years after this was written.





Map with places of interest in
"I Will Come Home"

Knowing newspapers

Front page

Typically the front page covers the most important news. The decision of what to put on Page One is made during meetings. The most important news is located above the fold in broadsheet newspapers (papers that are folded horizontally). The front page of a newspaper contains information such as the name of the paper, its year of origin, the date and often an index.

Classified Advertisements

These ads are within the classified section and are listed by categories (classifications) such as homes for sales, automobiles, help wanted, lost and found, etc. They are brief and contain information such as telephone numbers, cost, salary, etc.

Editorial Page

An editorial page usually contains an editorial, other opinion pieces, letters from readers and an editorial cartoon.

Editorial

Editorials are written using fact and opinion. They represent the view of an editorial board rather than one person and provide commentary and opinion on issues, debates and events. Editorials appear on the editorial page, but, unlike columns, do not give the writer's name, because they represent the entire newspaper and not just one person.

Editorial/Political Cartoons — Editorial or Political cartoons are graphic illustrations that provide commentary on an issue through the use of elements such as symbols.

Web Site Resource

<http://nieonline.com/aaec/cftc.cfm>

This site offers lesson plans for using editorial and political cartoons as teaching tools.

Display/Retail Advertisements

These are ads for goods and services. They are located throughout the newspaper. These advertisements contain pertinent information such as telephone numbers, store hours, sale prices and location of the business or organization. Ads may contain graphic illustrations and/or photographs. They vary in size and shape.

Sports Section

Usually the sports stories found in this section are written using descriptive language and literary styles such as simile, metaphors, etc.

Opinion Columns

Opinion columns are written by individuals and may not represent the views of the editorial board. The opinions expressed in the columns are those of the individual column writer.

Feature Writing

Feature articles are written pieces that are not considered hard news. They may be timely if written as a review or highlighting an upcoming event or production but they are usually stories that do not contain “breaking news.” Features stories are often human interest articles and sometimes are strictly informational and process oriented. For example, a story about home improvements may include a how-to section.

Headlines

Headlines tell what the story is about. They use big letters and just a few words so readers can decide quickly if they are interested in the stories and want to read them.

Inverted Pyramid Writing Style

The inverted pyramid style of writing involves writing the most essential details and information at the top and less important details in later paragraphs. The questions answered are often referred to as the 5 W’s and How — what, who, when, where, why and how.

Obituaries

An obituary is a notice placed by a funeral home to announce someone’s death. Until recently, obituaries were considered news and, at most newspapers, subject to the same rules as any news stories. Each newspaper had its own style (rules) about things like what terms could be used, how many surviving relatives could be listed and whether or not hobbies and interests could be mentioned. Today, many papers consider obituaries a type of ad. Families pay to have obits in the paper, but, in return, they can make them much more personal than in the days when they were “news items.”

e-Edition

An e-Edition or Electronic edition is an exact copy of the newspaper on-line, so that the reader goes page by page as if reading the paper edition, with all the content of the print edition as well as all the advertisements and other elements. E-editions provide readers with the ease of use of a computer without sacrificing any of the newspaper’s content.

Newspaper Background Information

Here are two sites with lesson plans for teaching about and with newspapers.

http://www.frankwbaker.com/messages_and_meanings.htm

http://www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/lesson/lesson139.shtml

Helpful on-line resources

Sites that were helpful to the author and would likely be equally useful for teachers and students reading "I Will Come Home."

First and foremost, the Chemung County Historical Society

without whose generous and enthusiastic assistance this project would have been infinitely more difficult:

<http://www.chemungvalleymuseum.org/>

The Morrisville State College library site on New York in the Civil War

Primary documents including numerous Civil War era letters from New York soldiers and nurses

<http://localhistory.morrisville.edu/sites/>

The Smithsonian's Civil War site

Lots and lots of things to click on, including some specifically for teachers!

<http://civilwar150.si.edu/>

The Blue and Gray Trail

Put together in Georgia as a resource for history tourism, this is a rich site whose timeline materials were particularly helpful

<http://blueandgraytrail.com/>

A Child's Life During the Civil War

This site, by a retired librarian, is a lot of fun and answers the sorts of important questions you won't find answered anywhere else, like what kind of candy did kids have during the Civil War?

<http://www.squidoo.com/civil-war-childs-life>

Essential Civil War Curriculum

A more scholarly, but still fascinating, site, this Virginia Tech website has a variety of essays and papers on Civil War topics. Much of our information on widows of the war came from here.

<http://www.essential.civilwar.vt.edu/>

National Archives Civil War Blog

This is along the lines of "Whoa! Look what I found!" and helps fill in some very odd holes you might not have thought to fill in. Which might just make students pay closer attention in order to find out what you'll come up with next:

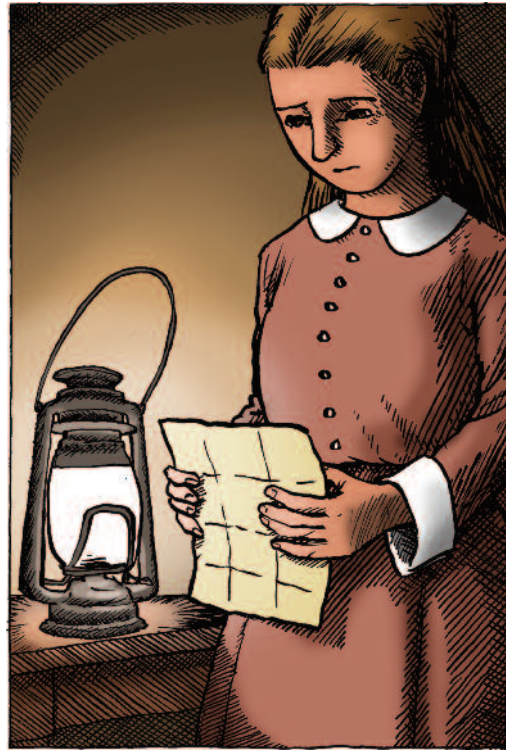
<http://blogs.archives.gov/prologue/?cat=666>

The John Jones Story

Development of the John W. Jones Museum itself seems a bit stalled, but the site does include this excellent, readable biography.

<http://www.johnwjonesmuseum.org/jwjstory.html>

Chapter One: The Letter



Vocabulary

Knowing what these words mean will help you enjoy the chapter
cloak lean-to clamber wick sexton tart (*adj.*)

Facts and Details: Literal Meaning

1. Why is Betsy coming home late at night?
2. Who is the letter on the table from?
3. What chore does Betsy have to do?
4. What time of year is it?
5. What year is it?

What's Going On? Reading Comprehension

1. What are some ways the author lets you know when this story takes place?
2. Why is she unhappy that her mother was reading the letter?
3. Why does Betsy have to pitch hay before she goes to bed at night?
4. How do you know that Betsy's mother misses her son?

In your own words...

In his letter, Jim wrote several things to try to keep his family from worrying too much about him. Pretend you are Betsy and that Jim can get letters in prison. Write him a letter to try to cheer him up. (Will you call him "Jim" or "Jimmy"?)

Dinner on the warming shelf

Betsy finds her dinner waiting for her in the warming shelf above the stove, next to the stovepipe that vents the wood smoke outside.

This stove, at the Yarmouth County Museum in Nova Scotia, may be somewhat newer than the one in Betsy's kitchen, but the technology is the same: A firebox at the side heats both the oven and the stovetop, and cooks who have used wood stoves are particularly fond of how well bread and other baked goods came out. A more deluxe stove would also have a tank for water, providing a limited supply of hot water.

Typically, Father would start the fire on waking, before going out to morning chores, so that the stove would be hot and the kitchen warm when Mother came down to cook breakfast.

Part of Betsy's dinner, apples and onions, was an easy fall dish: Thin-sliced onions were fried in a little bacon fat, then topped with sliced apples (skin intact) and sprinkled with brown sugar or a drizzle of molasses and simmered. An excellent companion to ham, it was best with tart apples and thus a very good dish in the early autumn.



Town cows?

It is not clear in this first chapter, but Betsy lives in town. How, then, does her family have a cow?

Until fairly recent times, it was quite common for people to keep cows and chickens in town.

In this 1885 painting of a Dutch village by German artist Max Liebermann, the cow grazes on the roadside grass while the two girls talk. The grass along roadsides was considered public property in most places and open for grazing.

Many towns, and even cities, had a "green" or "common" in the center of town where people could bring their cows to graze, while people who lived on the edge of town might hire a child to take their cows out into the countryside to graze.

The Boston Commons and many other city parks are remnants of this practice.

In the News

Betsy has an afterschool job helping Mrs. Baxter with her housework and her baby. Look through the classified ads in today's paper for a job that a student could do after school and on weekends to make extra money. Can you find one that sounds like fun?

Answer Key

Facts and Details

1. She works after school.
2. Betsy's brother Jim or Jimmy.
3. Pitch hay down from the loft.
4. Autumn
5. 1864

Reading Comprehension

1. Possible answers: lantern, shaving mug, fireplace, Ma not having much schooling, reference to Civil War battles in letter, date in letter.
2. She knows it means her mother was thinking of Jim and worrying about him.
3. Her father has an injured leg.
4. Despite it being hard for her to read, she often reads the letter he wrote several months ago.

Chapter Two: The Widow Woman

Vocabulary

Knowing what these words and phrases mean will help you enjoy the chapter

rebel truck patch licked
Edwin Stanton chimney lamp
widow pension



Facts and Details: Literal Meaning

1. Why had Betsy not been up on the tower to see into the prison camp?
2. How old is Mrs. Baxter?
3. Why is Betsy doing chores at Mrs. Baxter's house?
4. What chores did she have to do on this day?
5. What can Mrs. Baxter see from her front porch?

What's Going On? Reading Comprehension

1. How can you tell that Betsy and Mrs. Baxter have known each other a long time?
2. Why did Pa think the South "didn't know when it was licked"?
3. Who are Lincoln and Stanton?
4. Why does Betsy think Mrs. Baxter would hate living so close to the prison?

In your own words...

Everybody has an idea of what Mrs. Baxter should do, but Mrs. Baxter doesn't want to do any of those things. Imagine that you are in a group of people who start talking about Mrs. Baxter and what they think she should do.

Write a brief essay explaining how you would feel or what you would do or say in that conversation?

A Generation of Widows

“There are those ... whose sex forbade them to offer their lives, but who gave instead their happiness.” – Oliver Wendall Holmes, *Memorial Day* 1884

The Civil War resulted in some 625,000 deaths from wounds, illness and other causes and, since the majority of those military deaths were of young men, it also resulted in the creation of many widows who were far younger than the widows of the past.

Many of them, like the fictional Martha Baxter, had young children to raise and were, even if their pensions came through, much at the mercy of friends, relatives and their community to get by.

In a later chapter, Christopher Baldwin depicts Mrs. Baxter in “widow’s weeds,” the black clothing that would be expected of her for at least two and a half years following Tom’s death. She would certainly not be expected to look as beautiful in them as the widow depicted in this 1880s work by Swedish artist Anders Zorn.

According to Angelo Esco Elder, writing at the “Essential Civil War Curriculum” site, these young women carried the additional burden of being unofficially called upon to represent the heroism and sacrifices of the war, serving as living memorials in their communities.

Elder also writes that not all of these young, suddenly-single women could afford a new wardrobe and some had to resort to dyeing their existing clothes black, a largely ineffective attempt that only added to their pitiable appearance.



Getting a look at Johnny Reb close up

There really was an observation tower outside the Elmira prison camp-- in fact, for a time, there were two of them -- complete with candy and lemonade stands.

It’s not clear if the towers were closed because they were tasteless or because they posed a security risk, but it’s natural that people wanted a look at the “rebs” inside.

“Rebs,” or “Secesh” (for “secessionist”) were seen primarily as rebels, not as supporters of slavery.

One popular myth is that the war was “not about slavery,” but the threat of abolishing slavery was specifically men-



tioned in most statements of secession.

The Confederate States were fighting for “states rights,” but mostly for the right to own slaves without interference from the federal government.

It is apparent, however, that individual soldiers were only fighting “the enemy” and were neither philosophers nor political theorists.

And, by the time Elmira opened, the South was losing.

The ill-equipped “scarecrows” Pa saw marching into prison were coming from other prisons, not straight from battle.

But, by 1864, tattered clothes and short rations were seen on the battlefield as well.

Ginger Water

Ginger Water, or “switchel” is a simple, thirst-quenching drink you can make by combining a cup of sugar, half a cup of molasses, half a cup of vinegar and half a teaspoon of powdered ginger with a half gallon of water. Taste and adjust ingredients.

In the News

Mrs. Baxter tries to make ends meet by growing vegetables and by using sticks as kindling. Look through today’s paper for ideas of how a family could save money on things they really, truly need.

Answer Key

Facts and Details

1. Her mother wouldn’t allow it.
2. A scarecrow
3. She’s paid to help out there.
4. Collect eggs, clean the lamps and trim wicks, pick up branches in the yard
5. The prison camp

Reading Comprehension

1. Mrs. Baxter was married to Betsy’s brother’s friend from school.
2. They’re running out of supplies and men but won’t give up. (*specific answers will vary*)
3. The president and the secretary of war.
4. Because it would remind her of her dead husband and who killed him.

Chapter Three: News from the South



Vocabulary

Knowing what these words mean will help you enjoy the chapter

sabbath bushel brakeman grammar school figures
ledger postmark wasted damper

Facts and Details: Literal Meaning

1. What were Betsy and her mother doing in the kitchen?
2. What was Pa doing in the front room?
3. What did Mr. Jackson bring to the house?
4. What was the good news in the letter?
5. What was the bad news in the letter?

What's Going On? Reading Comprehension

1. Why did Mrs. Pierce give the Harringtons a bushel of cucumbers?
2. Why did Betsy's father quit working for the railroad company?
3. Why did Jimmy have to trade his pocket watch to get the letter mailed?
4. Why did Betsy's parents have to go visit the Stouts?

In your own words...

This chapter begins with neighbors helping neighbors: The Pierces and Harringtons give each other milk and vegetables. And it ends with neighbors helping neighbors, as Betsy and her parents let John and Charlie's parents know the news they've had from Andersonville.

Write about a time when you've seen neighbors helping neighbors,
for happy reasons or for sad ones.



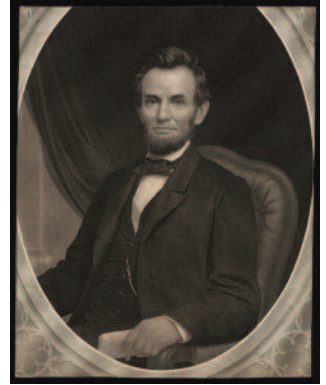
We Are Coming, Father Abraham

In Jimmy's letter, he refers to a very popular song of the era, "We Are Coming, Father Abraham, 300,000 More."

Two years earlier, President Lincoln had called for another 300,000 men to volunteer for three years to give the Union Army the strength he felt it needed to win the war.

His request was the subject of a poem in the New York Evening Post, July 16, 1862, that was then set to music and became very popular throughout the North.

Was Jim Harrington inspired to enlist in the army by this song? The story doesn't say, but many of his fellow soldiers certainly were!



We are coming, Father Abraham, 300,000 more,
From Mississippi's winding stream and from New England's shore.
We leave our plows and workshops, our wives and children dear,
With hearts too full for utterance, with but a silent tear.
We dare not look behind us but steadfastly before.
We are coming, Father Abraham, 300,000 more!

CHORUS: We are coming, we are coming our Union to restore,
We are coming, Father Abraham, 300,000 more!

If you look across the hilltops that meet the northern sky,
Long moving lines of rising dust your vision may descry;
And now the wind, an instant, tears the cloudy veil aside,
And floats aloft our spangled flag in glory and in pride;
And bayonets in the sunlight gleam, and bands brave music pour,
We are coming, father Abr'am, three hundred thousand more!

CHORUS

If you look up all our valleys where the growing harvests

Mr. Jackson's mysterious brother

Jimmy's letter was sent to Mr. Jackson's brother in Baltimore who "knows a lot of people in a lot of places." It's likely he was a blockade runner dealing in smuggled goods. Mail could go from the USA to the Confederate States, but not quickly or dependably, and POW mail was restricted and censored. The Harringtons are happy enough to hear from Jim that they won't question how it came about.

shine,
You may see our sturdy farmer boys fast forming into line;
And children from their mother's knees are pulling at the weeds,
And learning how to reap and sow against their country's needs;
And a farewell group stands weeping at every cottage door,
We are coming, Father Abr'am, three hundred thousand more!

CHORUS

You have called us, and we're coming by Richmond's bloody tide,
To lay us down for freedom's sake, our brothers' bones beside;
Or from foul treason's savage group, to wrench the murderous blade;
And in the face of foreign foes its fragments to parade.
Six hundred thousand loyal men and true have gone before,
We are coming, Father Abraham, 300,000 more!

CHORUS

In the News

Betsy is lucky: She gets to go give the Kelleys some very good news about their son. But her parents have a harder task. Reporters also face stories that are fun to write and stories that are very hard to work on. Go through today's news and find three stories that you'd be happy to write about, and three that you would wish someone else was covering.

Answer Key

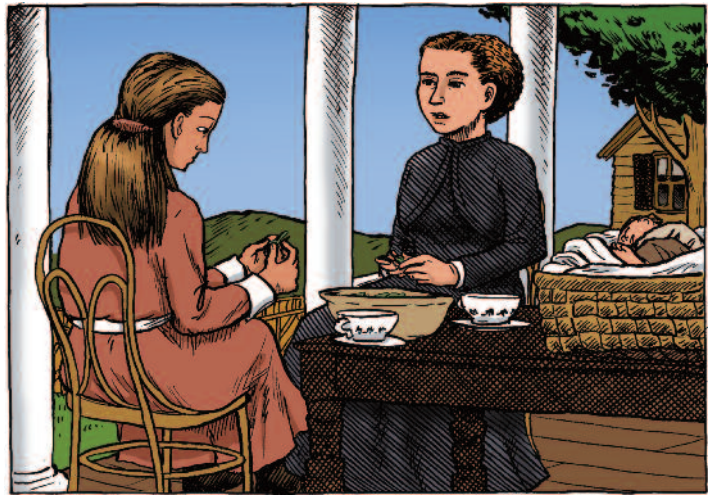
Facts and Details

1. Making pickles
2. Working (bookkeeping)
3. A letter from Jimmy
4. Jimmy is alive and fairly healthy
5. Charlie Stout died.

Reading Comprehension

1. They sometimes give the Pierces free milk.
2. He injured his ankle (foot) in an accident
3. Prisoners weren't allowed to send mail; he bribed someone.
4. They have to let them know that their son Charlie died.

Chapter Four: Kindness



Vocabulary

Knowing what these words and phrases mean will help you enjoy the chapter

cambric tea amid caterwauling sexton Underground Railroad
regiment

Facts and Details: Literal Meaning

1. What are Betsy and Mrs. Baxter doing while they talk?
2. Why does Mrs. Baxter say Jimmy is “kind and thoughtful”?
3. What example does Mrs. Baxter give of a detail about her husband’s death that made her happy?
4. Who gives Betsy a ride home?
5. How does she know him?

What’s Going On? Reading Comprehension

1. What does it mean to “shell peas”?
2. Why is Mrs. Baxter glad that John Kelley is a prisoner of war?
3. How does Betsy feel about saying she’ll never be glad until Jimmy comes home?
4. Why does the way Betsy feels about the rebels make it hard for her to talk to Mr. Jones?

In your own words...

Mrs. Baxter says that even bad news is news and that it’s good to know the truth about things, even if they are painful. Do you agree with her? How can you tell when it would help to tell someone the truth and when it probably wouldn’t?

Got a question or comment about this chapter? Come to <http://www.weeklystorybook.com/comehome>

In the News

“Even bad news is news,” Mrs. Baxter says. Sometimes the news can be frightening or upsetting, but that doesn’t mean it isn’t helpful. Look through today’s paper for a news item that is unpleasant but that might get somebody to help solve an important problem, or persuade someone to make positive changes in their personal life.

What would readers have to do in order to turn that piece of “bad news” into something helpful?

A Kindness

The marble headstones in Woodlawn National Cemetery were erected in the first years of the 20th Century, long after the wooden markers put up during the Civil War were gone.

It was thanks to the careful record-keeping of John Jones that each soldier’s grave could be found and marked.



For instance, this headstone marks the grave of Sgt. A. McBride, who was in Company G of the 45th North Carolina Regulars, Confederate States Army.

Historic diction in historic fiction

Besides doing things like shelling peas, driving wagons and drinking cambric tea, the characters in this chapter help set the scene with their words.

The challenge in writing historic fiction for young people is to keep the language from being entirely modern without making it so old-timey that they can’t figure out what people are trying to say.

From a teacher’s point of view, the use of authentic language offers an opportunity to work on contextual translation, a critical skill in reading.

Ask your students what these old usages and expressions mean. How might we say it each of them today? Having them read the entire sentence may help them apply context to unfamiliar terms.

From this chapter:

“It was a kindness”

“that has to gladden his parents’ hearts”

“amid the sorrow”

“Goodness knows”

“wake you up with their caterwauling”

“I feel it in my bones!”

From earlier in the story:

“Ma had not had much schooling”

“The South didn’t know when it was licked”

“she wasn’t but nineteen”

“Her father’s farm was a ways out of town”

“he’d always had a good head for figures”

“if he plays me fair, it was worth it.”

Answer Key

Facts and Details

1. Shelling peas and drinking tea
2. He sent details about what happened to Charlie Stout.
3. He knew about their baby being born.
4. John Jones
5. He is the sexton at her church and he hired her to help Mrs. Baxter.

Reading Comprehension

1. To take them out of their pods
2. She’s only glad that Jimmy isn’t alone in the prison.
3. Ashamed and embarrassed (answer will vary)
4. She hates the rebels but he is kind to them, even though he was a slave.

Chapter Five: Tunnelers

Vocabulary

Knowing what these words and phrases mean will help you enjoy the chapter

mounted commotion riddance
armory coffin roll call
buckboard



Facts and Details: Literal Meaning

1. Why was Ma worried?
2. What was Betsy doing when she saw the soldiers?
3. How did the teacher say they could find out the facts about the escape?
4. How did Betsy find out the facts?
5. Why does Betsy hate the rebel soldiers?

What's Going On? Reading Comprehension

1. Why does Betsy think it's best to not argue with Ma about going to Mrs. Baxters?
2. Why do Pa and Mr. Jones say it's probably safe in Elmira now?
3. Why does Betsy think Mr. Jones should hate the rebels?
4. Why does Mr. Jones say the rebel prisoners aren't fighting for slavery anymore?
5. What comparison makes Mr. Jones think Jimmy will get home?

In your own words...

The things we say and the words we use can tell a lot about how we feel. Look at what Ma, Pa, Betsy and John Jones say about the prisoners. Write a brief essay tell how you think each of them feels about the prisoners, using quotes from the story to explain your opinion.

Escaping from Elmira



There were successful escapes from the prison camp at Elmira, the most famous of which is the one in this chapter: On October 7, 1864, ten prisoners made their way through a tunnel under the stockade wall.

None of the tunnelers were ever recaptured, though only nine of them were reported back in Dixie. The fate of the tenth man remains unknown.

Another famous escape involved a young soldier from South Carolina, Bennie Orcutt, who had been assigned to run errands in the prison offices.

An officer serving at the prison was permitted an assistant, so brought his son to work each day. This young man, James Dumars, was one of only eight civilians with a pass to enter the prison regularly.

He became so well-known to the guards that he would simply pass out through the gate at night saying his name, “Dumars,” as he walked past the grate of the guard’s window.

Noting that they were not only the same size but had similar looks, Orcutt watched for his chance, which came when James Dumars didn’t come to work one day.

Orcutt stole a black civilian jacket from a closet in the prison offices and, when it came to be quitting time, walked out the gate, saying “Dumars” to the guard as he passed by the barrier.

Some weeks later, the clerk whose jacket had been stolen received a letter from Orcutt, now safely back home in the South, apologizing for the theft.

“Bottom rail on top now!”



John Jones may have been gracious to the rebel POWs, but not all former slaves were that forgiving.

Among the regiments assigned to guard duty at Elmira was The 20th Infantry Regiment of the US Colored Troops, as African-American soldiers were known then.

Many Confederates resented black guards, but the African-American guards, many of whom had been slaves in the South, took little abuse from the rebs, often using a metaphor based on rail fences and responding to racist comments with an in-your-face “Bottom rail on top now!”



In the News

Betsy’s mother is much more worried by the news than Betsy’s father. Look in today’s paper for a news item that might frighten some people, but not others. Who do you think would be wiser? Why?

Answer Key

Facts and Details

1. She was scared of the escaped prisoners
2. Bringing in eggs from the henhouse
3. Read the next day’s newspaper.
4. From Mr. Jones.
5. She blames them for Tom and Charlie’s deaths and for Jimmy being a POW.

Reading Comprehension

1. Pa will probably persuade Ma to let her go.
2. The prisoners are most likely a long way away.
3. He was a slave and escaped, and the South fought the war so they could keep on owning slaves.
4. They’re prisoners and can’t take part in the war.
5. He compares his determination to be free with Jimmy’s determination to come home.

Chapter Six: Counting Eggs



Vocabulary

Knowing what these words and phrases mean will help you enjoy the chapter

skein fleece cracked corn butcher paper satchel

Facts and Details: Literal Meaning

1. What did Mrs. Prestridge give Mrs. Baxter?
2. What does Tommy do while Betsy and Mrs. Baxter wind the yarn into balls?
3. What did Betsy have for lunch at school?
4. What did Betsy have for breakfast?

What's Going On? Reading Comprehension

1. In what order did these things actually happen: A. They roll yarn. B. They have tea with Mrs. Prestridge. C. Betsy gathers the eggs.
2. How can you tell that Mrs. Prestridge has known them both for a long time?
3. What does it mean when it says Betsy knew "that there was no such thing as "too much yarn," but ... that there was such a thing as "too much charity"?"
4. Why does Betsy think that her eggs are not being stolen by a skunk or raccoon?
5. How does she know, at the end of the chapter, that the thief is not an animal?

In your own words...

There are several examples of good manners being shown here. Mrs. Pritchard says she has "too much wool" and Betsy and Mrs. Baxter pretend to believe her. Then Mrs. Pritchard pretends not to want to stay for tea until Mrs. Baxter asks her more than once. And Betsy thinks that you can't choke on oatmeal, but she doesn't say it out loud. Write a brief essay about good manners, using modern examples of how to be polite.

Rolling yarn into balls



The activity Betsy and Mrs. Baxter are involved in while they talk may be familiar to some students and completely alien to others.

Mrs. Prestridge had taken some fleeces to the local mill to be spun into yarn, which would have involved washing them and “carding” them -- combing the wool to take burrs and other matter from the wool and remove tangles from the wool.

Then it would be spun into yarn, which would be formed in large circular loop, then twisted into a “skein” or “hank,” as seen in the photo, above left.

To use the yarn for knitting or weaving, you would want to wind it in a ball, and there is a frame called a “swift” that will hold the loop of yarn, or you can drape it over the back of a wooden chair to hold it while you create a ball from it.

But only a dedicated weaver would have a swift and, while Mrs. Baxter could have used one of her chairs, it’s more sociable and pleasant to have someone hold their hands apart to support the yarn, as the monk in the detail from the A. Humborg painting at the upper right is doing.

However, even in this small moment of conversation with Betsy, Martha Baxter’s widowhood is brought forward: Balling yarn most often involved the wife rolling up the yarn from a skein held between her husband’s outstretched hands as they chatted before the fire at the end of the day.



In the News

Mrs. Prestridge brings a generous gift of yarn to Mrs. Baxter, and Mrs. Baxter’s father gives her cracked corn from his farm to feed her chickens. We also know that the church took up a collection to pay Betsy to go help Mrs. Baxter every day after school.

Look in today’s newspaper for examples of how people in a community look out for each other and provide help for those who need it.

Chicken Feed

The familiar image of the farm girl with a pan of chicken feed, scattering it across the barnyard, is ingrained in the imagination, but, as Mrs. Baxter suggests here, the cracked corn and grain given to chickens was just a supplement, not their chief diet.



There are any number of predators who will dine on chickens, including not just foxes but mink and other weasels. And, as Betsy and Mrs. Baxter discuss, raccoons and skunks are frequent suspects when eggs disappear. Snakes also steal eggs, but have to be careful not to wind up on the wrong end of the food chain.

Answer Key

Facts and Details

1. Yarn
2. Plays with a spoon and bowl
3. Bread, cheese and an apple
4. Oatmeal (porridge) with buttermilk

Reading Comprehension

1. B-C-A

2. She remembers them when they were much younger.
3. Mrs. Prestridge is making a gift of good yarn but doesn’t want to make Mrs. Baxter feel poor, so she’s pretending she didn’t want it.
4. They would leave a mess behind.
5. Animals couldn’t steal milk out of the cow.

Chapter Seven: The Egg Thief

Vocabulary

Knowing what these words and terms mean will help you enjoy the chapter

sickly corn shocks
self-reliance tines



Facts and Details: Literal Meaning

1. Why does Mr. Vanderleese start talking to Betsy about chickens?
2. What does he warn Betsy about?
3. Where does the conversation between Betsy and Mr. Vanderleese take place?
4. What did Betsy find that let her know someone might be in the hay loft?
5. What did she pick up as a weapon to defend herself?

What's Going On? Reading Comprehension

1. Again in this chapter, we don't hear about things in the order they happened. Write down the two main actions of this chapter in the order they happened.
2. Why does Betsy hope her parents don't join the conversation at the church?
3. Why doesn't Betsy bring the lantern into the hayloft with her?
4. How does Betsy act so that the reb won't realize she knows he's there until it's too late for him to escape or to harm her?

In your own words...

Mr. Vanderleese says "Self-reliance is good, but being stubborn, well, now, that's a fault." Write a brief essay explaining what he means and giving examples of times when you might have tried to be too self-reliant, and of other times when you asked for help with something you could have done by yourself.

Dialects and regionalisms

In the guide for Chapter Four, we talked about old-fashioned expressions.

In this chapter, Mr. Vanderleese says that Martha must be “pret’near” out of cracked corn for her chickens.

That’s less an old-fashioned use than it is a regional way of speaking. “Pret’near” for “pretty nearly” is still heard in several parts of the country, just as, in the South, people may use “might could” to mean “might be able to,” as in “I might could come over later.”

Dialectical language is often too informal for school work or business writing, but it is not any more “wrong” or grammatically incorrect than saying, “Please inform the president that my mommy will be coming to the bank tomorrow to discuss this mortgage.”

There may be dialects used in classroom discussions that shouldn’t appear in written work. It’s an interesting and important topic if approached with sensitivity.

In the News

Betsy acts bravely in confronting the escaped prisoner, but she could have put herself in danger. It might have been wiser to pretend she didn’t notice, then go back to the house and tell her parents.

Look in today’s newspaper for examples of people trying to help in a dangerous situation. Were they acting wisely or not? What makes the difference?

The shocking truth about corn!

Mr. Vanderleese tells Betsy that he has his corn in shocks and will likely bring it to the mill soon.



These days, corn shocks are mostly used as autumn decorations, and we forget that, not so many years ago, you would see shocks in the corn fields at harvest time.

We often think of corn as “sweet corn” or “green corn,” the soft, sweet, starchy vegetable we eat on the cob in summer or from the freezer throughout the year.

But when corn is allowed to ripen and then dry, it is hard and needs to be ground into corn meal or masa harina, or processed into hominy grits, in order to be used as food for humans.

For centuries, ripened corn stalks were cut and bundled into shocks to stand in the fields until they were dry. The corn could then be fine milled for human food, or “cracked” for chicken feed. Cattle could eat it more or less as it was, and some of the seed, stripped off the cobs, would be saved for the next year’s planting.

Corn shocks became a sign of a successful harvest year, and not only a symbol of autumn’s bounty, but an important enough sign of plenty that a corn shock is the centerpiece of the seal of the United States Department of Agriculture.



Answer Key

Facts and Details

1. His daughter told him Betsy’s hens were not laying very many eggs.
2. Chickens can get very sick quickly.
3. Outside church on Sunday
4. An egg shell
5. The hay fork

Reading Comprehension

1. Finding the thief in the loft, talking to Mr.Vanderleese
2. She already knows the reb is in the loft.
3. It might set the hay on fire
4. She acts like she’s just going to pitch some hay like she does every night, but uses the fork as a weapon.

Chapter Eight: A Louisiana Tiger



Facts and Details: Literal Meaning

1. Why does the rebel not want to stand up?
2. What does Betsy tell him to do?
3. How did he hurt his ankle?
4. Where is he from?
5. What does Betsy do with her dinner?

What's Going On? Reading Comprehension

1. Why does Betsy want to see the reb's ankle?
2. What does Betsy think she ought to do?
3. What does Seth tell Betsy he's afraid will happen if he goes back to the prison?
4. Why doesn't Betsy finish her dinner?

In your own words...

Imagine that you are Seth and write Betsy a letter asking her to help you escape. What will you tell her to get her to not turn you in to the army or sheriff? Use the things you know about Seth and the things that Betsy has told him about herself.

Tale of two prisoners

The Battle of Bean's Station



In November, 1863, Confederate General James Longstreet attempted to recapture Knoxville, Tennessee, which the Union had taken in September.

His attempt was unsuccessful and, as the rebel army began to withdraw, they were pursued by Union forces, until, on

December 13, they came to the small village of Bean's Station, where Longstreet turned to fight.

At first, the Confederates forced Shackelford's men back, but they were not able to hold the ground they'd won in the two-day battle, as more Union forces came to assist Shackelford.

Longstreet was forced to retreat and the fighting in the Knoxville area was over. Although the battle was considered a Confederate victory, it gained the South nothing.

The Louisiana Tigers

"The Louisiana Tigers" began as one colorful unit of the Confederate Army, but, by November, 1863, the nickname had spread to a number of infantry brigades.

The Tigers fought at most of the major battles of the Civil War, and had just served at Gettysburg a few months before they were asked to help guard a bridge on the Rappahannock River in Virginia.

The Battle of Rappahannock Station turned out to be a lop-sided defeat for the Confederacy, as General Harry Hays and most of his Tigers were

captured. Hays escaped, but 600 Tigers were sent to northern prison camps.

Today, Louisiana State University's sports teams carry the Tiger mascot in honor of the state's famed infantry.



The Family Bible



Many in the 19th century were eager readers, but many other people had only one book in their home: The Family Bible.

Besides being read as part of prayer, the Family Bible was where important family records were kept. Bibles even included special pages for writing down births, deaths, marriages and other important events.

In the story, we see that Andrew Harrington has a desk in the front room where he sometimes works. But letters from Jimmy are special, and it would be very natural that they be kept, not in a desk drawer, but tucked between the pages of the Family Bible.

In the News

Seth talks about his family, telling Betsy that he has a brother near her age, which is another way, besides being a POW, that he is like Jimmy.

Obituaries tell the story of a person's life. Find an obituary in today's paper and look in it for ways that the person was like you, or a member of your family, and ways in which they were different. Does seeing the ways that you are alike make you think that, if you had been neighbors, you would have been friendly towards each other?

Answer Key

Facts and Details

1. His ankle is injured
2. Let her see his ankle.
3. He was running and caught his foot in a hole.
4. Louisiana
5. She eats some of it and saves some of it in her boots.

Reading Comprehension

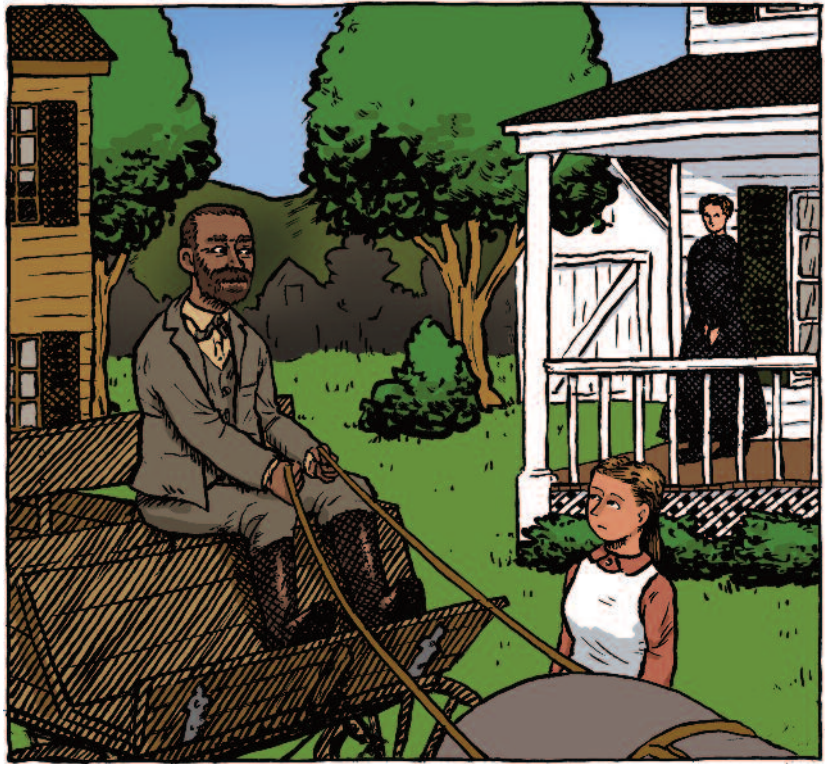
1. To make sure he's really injured.
2. Turn him in. ("She can't decide" is also an acceptable answer.)
3. He'll die.
4. She's saving some food for Seth.

Chapter Nine: A Decision

Vocabulary

Knowing what these words mean will help you enjoy the chapter

extended wince proper
breeches endure



Facts and Details: Literal Meaning

1. Why does Betsy walk slowly towards Mrs. Baxter's house?
2. What does she ask Mr. Jones about?
3. When Seth says he can't walk, what choice does she give him?
4. What does she give him?
5. How does she advise him to find his way back to the South?

What's Going On? Reading Comprehension

1. Why does Betsy have to get up her nerve to ask Mr. Jones those questions?
2. When Betsy says "Thank you!" what is she thanking Mr. Jones for?
3. What does Mrs. Baxter probably think she is thanking him for?
4. How does Betsy know how to wrap Seth's ankle?
5. Why did Betsy help Seth escape?

In your own words...

What does the last line of the story tell you about how Betsy feels about her decision? Pretend you are Betsy and write a journal entry about it, as if it were that night after Seth has gone.

Reading for (deeper) meaning

This dialogue is worth reading again and discussing in the classroom:

“How much did you worry about it?”

“About people talking about it, or about somebody getting me arrested for it?”

“Both.”

“Not a bit.” ... “What I did was right. I don’t know what anybody thought about it, or what they said about it, and I never knew but that maybe I’d go to jail for it. But I know I did what was right.”

What exactly is John Jones saying?

What does it mean when he says that he didn’t worry about it a bit?

Does it mean he was never afraid?

Does it mean he was never concerned?

Or does it mean that he refused to let fear and concern keep him from doing what he felt was right?

It is a mistake to think that “heroes” are never afraid, or that they ignore the chances they are taking.

But to “worry” about it means to give your fear and concerns the power to keep you from doing something you know is right.

Betsy is afraid of getting in trouble for helping an enemy soldier, and she’s even more afraid of being disloyal to Jimmy, whichever choice she makes. She’s not asking Mr. Jones for advice about Seth. She wants advice about fear.

Foreshadowing

This chapter is a good point at which to talk about the literary technique of foreshadowing.

In the first chapter, we learned that Betsy goes up into the loft each evening because her father has a bad foot that makes it difficult.

We also learn from Jimmy’s first letter that he learned how to treat a wound by seeing how Ma cared for Pa’s injured foot.

In Chapter Five, Pa puts on his high, lace-up boots to walk Betsy to school because they give his injured ankle more support.

In Chapter Eight, Betsy accused Seth of faking because she doesn’t think he could get up the ladder with a bad ankle.

Now, she uses what she learned from watching Ma to help treat his ankle, and gives him Jimmy’s high lace-up boots to help him on the long journey home.

More foreshadowing: In Chapter One, Betsy re-reads the part of the letter in which Jimmy promises “I Will Come Home.” She reads his letters again in Chapter Eight, after she meets Seth. Why?

In the News

Betsy puts things in the sack for Seth that will help him but won’t weigh him down: The cup and matches are light, oatmeal is dry, sardines are full of protein and potatoes are filling and nutritious. Look through the ads in today’s paper for five useful things you could carry easily.

Answer Key

Facts and Details

1. She hopes Mr. Jones will come give her a ride.
2. His work on the Underground Railroad.
3. Walk home or go back to prison.
4. Potatoes, oatmeal, sardines, matches, a cup and a pair of boots (plus bandages)
5. Follow the Chemung and Susquehanna rivers

Reading Comprehension

1. They’re personal, and they are about times he broke the law. He might not want to talk about it. (*any combination of these is acceptable*)
2. His advice.
3. Giving her a ride.
4. From watching her mother wrap her father’s bad ankle.
5. He reminds her of Jimmy. (*Lots of possible ways to say this!*)

Story Map

Use this story map to outline a chapter of the reading serial.

Chapter Title

Setting Description

Characters

Problem/Conflict

Action/ Story Event

Action/Story Event

Solution

Ending

Character Profile Chart

Use this chart to develop a character report

At the beginning.....

Character Name



Description of Appearance
..... List words.....

Description of Personality
....List words.....

What is the character's role
in the story?

Picture of Character

Character reminds me of _____

Why? _____



At the end.....

In the Middle.....

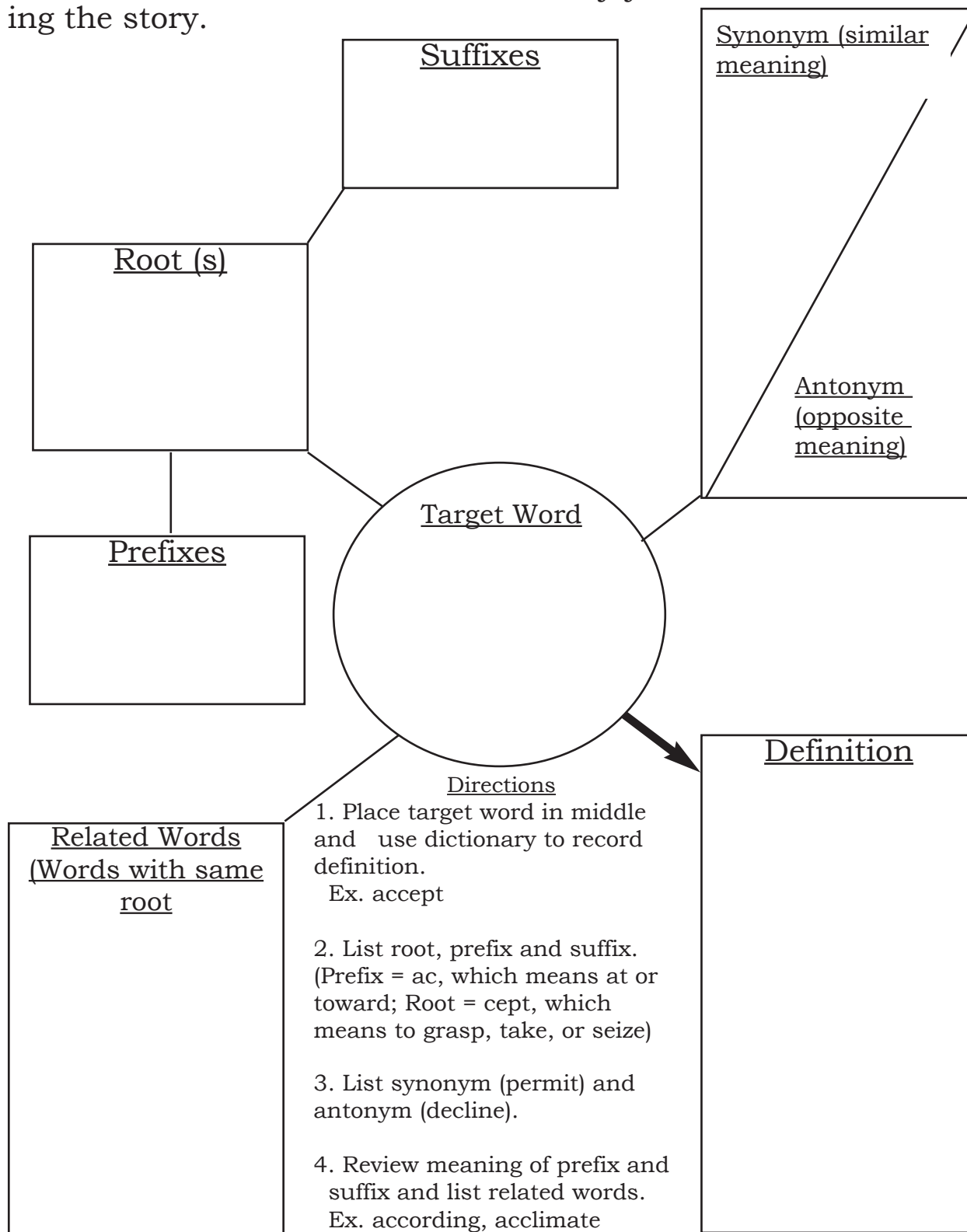
By the end of the story has the
character changed in any way? How
and why?



What has happened in the
story that has affected this
character?
Would you categorize this
character as one-dimensional
or multi-dimensional?

“I Will Come Home” Vocabulary Acquisition Graphic Organizer

Use this sheet to record new vocabulary you learn while reading the story.



Jeopardy Sheet

Create your own Jeopardy answers and questions.

Cut out squares, assign values and play with a partner.

The answer is .
The question is

Value \$

The answer is
The question is

Value \$

The answer is .
The question is

Value \$

The answer is
The question is

Value \$

The answer is .
The question is

Value \$

The answer is .
The question is

Value \$

The answer is
The question is

Value \$

The answer is
The question is

Value \$

Note-Taking Recording Sheet

Recorder's Name _____

Chapter Title _____

Characters mentioned in this chapter _____

Main Event/Action _____

Special terms or interesting words in this chapter _____

Some feelings I had while I read this chapter _____

Self-Monitor Checklist for Group Discussion

In today's discussion, I would give myself the following rating:

- | | | |
|---------------|---------|----------------------|
| 1. Excellent | 2. Good | 3. Needs Improvement |
| 4. Did not do | | |

_____ I completed the note-taking recording sheet.

_____ I used the recording sheet during discussion.

_____ I contributed to the discussion meaningfully.

_____ I listened while others contributed to discussion.

_____ I learned while preparing notes.

_____ I learned during group discussion.

_____ I enjoyed the group discussion.

Literature Circles

Although literature circles are built around student-selection of reading materials, teachers can use the principles and modify for use with one particular piece of literature. This reading serial lends itself to discussion using many of the strategies employed in literature circles.

For each chapter, have students discuss the text in small groups. Assign or allow students to designate a role to each member of the group:

Illustrator: Illustrate a significant scene or idea from the reading.

Vocabulary Master: Selects words in the text that are interesting, unfamiliar, or unusual. This person uses the dictionary to define.

Connector: Finds connections between the reading material and something outside of the text, such as personal experience, a different work of literature, something in the news, or a topic from another discipline.

Literary Summarizer: Summaries the events, main ideas and plot development of the chapter.

Discussion Recorder: Records questions from the group about the text. Records interesting passages or quotes from the text and comments from the group.

After small meeting groups have had a chance to meet, the information can be discussed in a whole group setting.

If you use this strategy, over time all students will have the opportunity to fulfill each of the roles.

Eventually, the process becomes natural and the designation of roles is no longer necessary.

The role of the teacher is mostly of facilitator who monitors group progress and engagement in the task.

The use of literature circles is an effective strategy to help ESL students and reluctant readers.

Web Site Resource

<http://www.edutopia.org/literature-circles>

This article, from the George Lucas Foundation, discusses using literature circles in other middle school subject areas and provides tips as well as discussion of how circles expand learning.

Using “I Will Come Home” to achieve standards

“I Will Come Home” offers a variety of teaching opportunities, and our questions for each chapter are deliberately uniform and basic, in order to allow teachers the choice of what standards and goals they want to emphasize and when.

For example, the first section of questions, **“Facts and Details,”** can be used as a simple check to make sure students understand the basics of what they have read. To that end, you can simply require a simple answer of a few words.

If you are concurrently working on grammar and writing structure, you may wish to require that answers be expressed in the form of complete sentences.

But you should, when time permits, require students to furnish evidence from the text to support their response.

This additional requirement becomes more important in the second set of questions, **“What’s Going On?”**, which calls for inferences from the text.

For example, in Chapter Three, students are asked what Betsy and her mother are doing in the kitchen. It’s a straightforward question that calls for a simple answer: They are preparing to make pickles. A student can quote the passage in the text that says this.

However, another question in that chapter asks why Betsy’s parents have to go visit the Stouts. It’s not stated in the text that they need to give them the sad news about Charlie, but it is implied, since Pa has told Betsy to go to the Kelleys and tell them what Jimmy has reported about John.

You can raise the level of these questions by having students explain the reasoning behind their answers. It would certainly be encouraging to have a student not only draw the simple inference from Betsy’s errand to that of her parents but to also recall from Chapter Two how Jimmy’s first letter provided documentation for Mrs. Baxter’s pension claim.

The way in which neighbors help neighbors is the subject of the more nuanced **“In Your Own Words”** question for that chapter, which asks students to draw a parallel between the Pierces’ sharing of produce in return for sharing of milk and the Harrington’s sharing of news among Jimmy’s friends’ families.

These more open-ended questions are, obviously, designed as writing prompts, but can also be topics for classroom discussion, particularly in settings where more perceptive students can be asked to justify their responses, allowing less advanced readers to see how their classmates are able to analyze the text.

Since some “In Your Own Words” questions are designed to have students probe the text for deeper inferences and others are designed to prompt students to apply the themes of the story to experiences in their own lives, you will want to scan these questions ahead of time to see which ones match the goals you may have in mind.

The **“In the News”** questions can be used to achieve goals regarding informational text, as well as standards that call for comparison of texts.

Tracking individual standards

This matrix is based on the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts, which can be downloaded at <http://www.corestandards.org/the-standards/english-language-arts-standards>.

After creating your lesson plan for each chapter, note the standards by circling that chapter number opposite the standard so you can track those which may still need to be addressed. These are summaries of the standards; consult the actual document itself to see the specific elements for literature and informational text in a particular grade level.

Key Ideas and Details

1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

1	2	3
4	5	6
7	8	9

2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

1	2	3
4	5	6
7	8	9

3. Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

1	2	3
4	5	6
7	8	9

Craft and structure

4. Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

1	2	3
4	5	6
7	8	9

5. Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (*e.g., a section, chapter or scene*) relate to each other and the whole.

1	2	3
4	5	6
7	8	9

6. Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

1	2	3
4	5	6
7	8	9

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

1	2	3
4	5	6
7	8	9

8. Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

1	2	3
4	5	6
7	8	9

9. Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

1	2	3
4	5	6
7	8	9

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

10. Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

1	2	3
4	5	6
7	8	9