



Teacher's Guide to *Ghosts of Vicksburg*

By Kathleen Ernst

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Synopsis

Jamie Carswell, a young soldier with the 14th Wisconsin Infantry Regiment, is haunted by the civilian suffering he witnesses while campaigning in Mississippi. His favorite cousin, Althea, is already tormented by a past mistake when she finds herself trapped inside Vicksburg during the Union Army's sieges in 1863. *Ghosts of Vicksburg* is the compelling story of two young people struggling to find their way during one of the most dramatic campaigns of the Civil War.

Activity Suggestions

Note: Wisconsin (WI) standards refer to 4th grade curriculums; National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) standards refer to early grades. Similar standards for middle grades are also addressed.

1. Ask students to create Venn Diagrams for Althea and Jamie. What characteristics and beliefs do the two share? How are they different? What admirable values do these characters exhibit?
 - WI Model Academic Standards for English Language Arts: A.4.2; A.8.2
 - WI Model Academic Standards for Social Studies: E.4.2; E.8.2
 - NCSS Standards for Social Studies: 1a, 1b, 1c, 2a, 2c, 2e, 4g, 5d
2. Jamie was shocked to discover that his army didn't confine its fighting to the battlefield. He struggled throughout the story because he didn't believe war was justification for harming civilians, although many of his friends did not have the same concerns.

Lead a discussion about the impact of the Vicksburg campaign on local civilians. Was winning the war sufficient cause to burn homes and besiege the city? Ask students to write an essay defending their position on this question. You may wish to have them write from the point-of-view of an historical character of their choosing, and ask them to include the factors that motivated their feelings.

 - WI Model Academic Standards for Language Arts: A.4.1, A.4.2, A.4.3, A.4.4, B.4.1, B.4.2; A.8.1, A.8.2, A.8.3, A.8.4, B.8.1, B.8.2
 - WI Model Academic Standards for Social Studies: C.4.3, E.4.6, E.4.7
 - NCSS Standard for Social Studies: 5b, 5d, 6a, 6c, 6f, 6h, 10a, 10h

OR, divide students into teams and allow them to debate this issue. Set ground rules, such as giving each team member a chance to state their position before answering questions from you or other students.

- WI Model Academic Standards for Language Arts: A.4.1, A.4.2, A.4.3, C.4.1, C.4.2, C.4.3; A.8.1, A.8.2, A.8.3, C.8.1, C.8.2, C.8.3
- WI Model Academic Standards for Social Studies: C.8.7
- NCSS Standards for Social Studies: 2f, 4g, 5b, 5d, 5e, 6a, 6c, 6h, 10a

OR, ask students to look for parallels in other armed conflicts, either historically or from current events.

- WI Model Academic Standards for Social Studies: B.4.3, B.4.4, C.4.6, E.4.6, E.4.7; B.8.10, E.8.6
- NCSS Standards for Social Studies: 2f, 4g, 5b, 5d, 5e, 6a, 6c, 6h, 10a

- Ask students to write a diary entry or poem from the point of view of a civilian trapped in Vicksburg during the siege. If time permits, have them illustrate their entry.
 - WI Model Academic Standards for Language Arts: B.4.1, B.4.2; B.8.1, B.8.2
- Discuss motivation with students. What motivated Jamie to join the army? Ask students to brainstorm possible motivations for fighting in the Civil War. (Possible answers include patriotism, loyalty, search for adventure, need for financial security, desire to emancipate slaves, peer pressure, draft, family expectations, etc.) Which reasons do students feel are valid for fighting in a war? What motivations would compel students to fight in a war today? How do current events compare with the events that led to the American Civil War?
 - WI Model Academic Standards for English Language Arts: A.4.2, C.4.3; A.8.2, C.8.3
 - WI Model Academic Standards for Social Studies: C.4.1; B.8.3, C.8.1
 - NCSS Standards for Social Studies: 1b, 1d, 2a, 2e, 4e, 4g, 5b, 5e, 6a, 6h, 10a
- Jamie's experience of war was very different than what he expected. Invite a veteran to visit the class and discuss his or her expectations and experiences, and compare those with Jamie's. Or, ask students to find narratives written by soldiers in a variety of different wars. What do the experiences have in common? What is different about each?
 - WI Model Academic Standards for Social Studies: B.4.1, B.4.3, B.4.4; B.8.1, B.8.4
 - NCSS Standards for Social Studies: 1b, 1d, 2a, 2c, 2d, 2e, 4g, 5e
- Help students compare Jamie and Althea's fictional experiences with real people's accounts by guiding them through an exploration of primary source materials from the Civil War. In addition to titles listed in the "Resources" section of *Ghosts of Vicksburg*, and quotations in the Author's Note, online materials are available. These include:
 - The Fifteenth Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry Website <www.15thwisconsin.net>. This extensive site features both primary and secondary material about soldiers, mostly from Wisconsin, who fought in "The Scandinavian Regiment." Click on "Memories" for primary materials. Or, allow students pick a name from the

“Profiles” section, then read his biographical sketch to find out what happened to that soldier.

- The Valley of the Shadow: Two Communities During the Civil War <<http://valley.vcdh.virginia.edu/>>. The Valley of the Shadow Project takes two communities, one Northern and one Southern, through the experience of the American Civil War. The project is a hypermedia archive of thousands of sources for the period before, during, and after the Civil War for Augusta County, Virginia, and Franklin County, Pennsylvania. Teacher materials available; intended for Middle School or older. Click on “The War Years” and “Letters and Diaries” to access primary accounts.
 - WI Model Academic Standards for English Language Arts: A.4.2, A.4.3, B.4.2; A.8.2, A.8.3, B.8.2
 - WI Model Academic Standards for Social Studies: B.4.1, B.4.3, E.4.2, E.4.3, E.4.7; B.8.1, E.8.1, E.8.2, E.8.3
 - NCSS Standards for Social Studies: 1d, 2a, 2c, 2d, 2e, 4g

For Further Exploration

Vicksburg National Military Park
3201 Clay Street
Vicksburg, MS 39183
Phone 601-636-0583

<http://www.nps.gov/vick/>

The Vicksburg National Military Park provides visitors with the opportunity to tour the siege ground. The park’s website contains images, background information, maps, archival materials, and a teacher guide that provides cross-curricular activity suggestions.

Old Court House Museum
Court Square, Vicksburg, MS 39183
Phone: 601-636-0741

<http://www.oldcourthouse.org>

The museum displays a number of artifacts relevant to the Vicksburg Campaign and the siege. General information, a virtual tour, and historic photographs are available on the museum’s website.

Author Presentations

Kathleen Ernst offers a number of programs and presentations for student audiences. Information about her current offerings can be found on her website: www.distaff.net. Kathleen can be contacted by phone at 608-836-9218 Central US time zone or via email at k.ernst@distaff.net to discuss content, cost, and scheduling arrangements.