



Teacher's Guide for *Retreat from Gettysburg*

Winner of the Arthur Tofte Juvenile Fiction Book Award

By Kathleen A. Ernst
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Synopsis

Young Chigger O'Malley is glad when General Lee's battered Confederate Army is trapped nearby while retreating from their defeat at Gettysburg in 1863. Chigger's father and three older brothers had been killed serving in the famed Irish Brigade, and he hopes the Union Army will attack, crush the rebels, and end the war. But when he and his mother are forced to care of a wounded rebel, the questions of right and wrong - of friend and enemy -- become much more difficult to answer. (Age 10 & up)

Activity Suggestions

1. After reading the Author's Note in the back of the book, lead a discussion about what historians know and what they don't know, what is fact and what is interpretation, and what methodologies they use for investigating facts and creating interpretations about past events. Explain the difference between primary sources (first-hand accounts) and secondary sources. Do students think all first-person accounts present a complete and accurate perspective? How accurate do they think a historical novelist should be?
 - Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards for English Language Arts: A.4.3
 - Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards for Social Studies: B.4.1; B.8.1
2. Review the changes in perspective Chigger demonstrated as the book progressed: he wanted to kill Tallard, he wanted Yankee soldiers to kill Tallard, he wanted Tallard to become a prisoner of war, he wanted Tallard to escape, he ultimately saved Tallard's life by helping him escape. Ask students to write an essay defending or criticizing Chigger's actions. Did he do the right thing when he helped Tallard get across the river?
 - Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards for English Language Arts: A.4.2, B.4.1; A.8.2, B.8.1
 - Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards for Social Studies: B.8.10
3. Ask students to consider how Chigger changed from the beginning of the book to the end. What did he discover about himself, about others? Have students choose one idea or theme they think is most important. (Examples might include the importance of helping others, of not judging people because of a group they belong to, etc.) Then, have them apply their conclusion by designing a new jacket for the book.
 - Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards for English Language Arts: A.4.2, A.4.3; A.8.2, A.8.3
 - Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards for Social Studies: B.4.3, C.4.1

4. Ask students to choose one character from the book and list five adjectives that describe that person's personality. Record responses for different characters on the board, and guide a discussion about differences and commonalities that emerge. What traits do characters share? What traits are unique to each character? Follow by asking students to write a sentence containing a simile for each character, using one of the adjectives listed.
 - [Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards for English Language Arts: A.4.2, A.4.3, C.4.3; A.8.2, A.8.3, C.8.3](#)

5. Read aloud the end of chapter 18, pp. 129-131. Lead a discussion about Chigger's mother. Why do students think she chose to play the fiddle that morning, after not playing it for so long? Why did it mean so much to Chigger to hear that tune? Ask them to look for other examples in the book that depict characters communicating without words. Or, ask students to study the lyrics of the song, and conduct research to learn more about the historical references in the lyrics.
 - [Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards for English Language Arts: A.4.2, A.4.3, F.4.1; A.8.2, A.8.3, F.8.1](#)
 - [Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards for Social Studies: B.4.1, B.8.1](#)

6. The weather played a critical role in this novel. Ask students to brainstorm all the examples of ways in which the weather affected events in the story. How might this story have been different if it had *not* rained after the Battle of Gettysburg? What might Chigger's life have been like if the rain had not stalled the Confederate Army in Williamsport? Can students think of other examples of historical events shaped by weather? Follow by having students write cinquains or other simple poems that describe the rain in Williamsport.
 - [Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards for English Language Arts: A.4.2, A.4.3, B.4.1; A.8.2, A.8.3](#)
 - [Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards for Social Studies: A.4.6](#)

7. In 1860, more than four million residents of the United States (about 13 percent of the population) were foreign-born. Many of the men who enlisted to fight during the Civil War, like Chigger's father, chose to serve with other men of the same ethnic origin. Ask students to conduct research in the library and online about the Irish Brigade, or another Civil War regiment or unit with a distinct ethnic identity. (Wisconsin examples include the 15th Wisconsin Infantry Regiment, and the 26th Wisconsin Infantry Regiment; see links below.) What prompted the men to enlist in these units? What was their war-time experience? What were the advantages and disadvantages of serving in such a unit? Ask students to share what they discover by creating a poster, scrapbook, or other display. Or, ask students study period recruitment posters (see link below), then create a recruitment poster for an ethnic regiment.
 - [Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards for English Language Arts: E.4.1, F.4.1; E.8.1, F.8.1](#)
 - [Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards for Social Studies: B.4.1, E.4.4; B.8.1, E.8.3, E.8.9](#)

8. War-time correspondents played a critical role in keeping the public informed about battles and campaigns. Because field photography was in its infancy, artists often traveled with the armies and sketched battles and camp scenes to illustrate newspaper articles. Ask students to find examples of Civil War artist/ correspondents' work in library books or online resources. Then, have them choose one scene from *Retreat from Gettysburg*, and imagine that they are an artist/reporter charged with conveying the scene to readers at home. Students can write a descriptive account of the scene and create an illustration to accompany it.
- Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards for English Language Arts: A.4.2, B.4.1, E.4.1, F.4.1; A.8.3, B.8.1, E.8.1, F.8.1
 - Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards for Social Studies: B.4.1; B.8.1

For Further Exploration

Gettysburg National Military Park
97 Taneytown Road
Gettysburg, PA 17325
Phone: 717-334-1124
<http://www.nps.gov/gett/home.htm>

This website is a particularly rich resource, and includes lesson plans, primary documents, and student-friendly information about Civil War correspondents, food, medicine, and much more.

The Fifteenth Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry Regiment Website
<http://www.15thwisconsin.info>

This phenomenal website is the best resource available about the famous "Scandinavian Regiment" of Norwegians, Danes and Swedes. Highlights include over 160 biographical sketches of individual soldiers, over 200 images, and excerpts from original diaries, reminiscences, and interviews.

The Twenty-Sixth Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry Regiment Website
<http://www.russcott.com/~rscott/26thwis/>

Most of the men in this Regiment were German immigrants. This excellent site includes photos, diary excerpts and other primary documents, and other details about the unit.

Wisconsin Electronic Reader
<http://www.library.wisc.edu/etext/WIReader/Contents.html>

The Wisconsin Electronic Reader is a cooperative project of the University of Wisconsin General Library System and the State Historical Society of Wisconsin. This site contains many primary accounts, photographs, maps, and other graphics pertaining to Wisconsin History. It is organized by categories, and a search feature allows access to other resources. A search for "recruitment poster" provides two images.

Author Presentations

Kathleen A. Ernst offers a number of programs and presentations for student audiences. Information about her current offerings can be found on her website. Contact Kathleen by phone (Central US time zone) or via email to discuss content, cost, and scheduling of programs.

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