

Unit 9

Wartime Themes: Patriotism, Faith, & Moral Values

GRADES 5-8 & 9-12

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Patriotism, faith, and spirit are all emotions, which offer succor during times of crisis. We all need to call on these emotions to steel our resolve, and to feel solace and hope in troubled times. Patriotism may be defined as “the devotion or readiness to support or defend one’s country.” Faith may be defined as “complete trust or confidence,” or as “a system of religious belief.” Connected to faith, is spirit, which is personified by a “person’s mental or moral nature or qualities.” One who has an ‘ardent spirit,’ for example, has an unbending spirit. During times of great stress, one’s emotions may react like a swinging pendulum. The extent of the pendulum’s swing may depend on the strength of one’s faith, the resilience of one’s spirit or moral values, or even the magnitude of one’s patriotism. Many soldiers and their families are able to come through difficult times because of their faith and values.

These emotions have been supremely tested during America’s wars during the past century and a half. Not surprisingly, then as now, the flag automatically becomes a focal point for patriotism: whether the 1812 ‘Star-Spangled Banner,’ the Union flag in the Civil War-inspired song, ‘Rally around the Flag Boys!’, or the “Bonny Blue Flag” of the Confederacy. During World War II, the flag raisings on Mt. Suribachi became the inspiration for war bond sales.

Many letters & diaries written during the American Civil War, illustrate a soldier’s faith and patriotism, which helped them through the ordeal of war.

PROCESS

Read and discuss the following stories in the context of their times. *Do these emotions still resonate today? Why? Why not?* Excerpts from these letters lend themselves very well to special assemblies or programs about twenty minutes in length. They work well for Veteran’s Day or Memorial Day programs.

OUTCOMES

Students will at various grade levels gain a better understanding of the role of patriotism, faith and moral values through examples found in following selected accounts.

A. Civil War Example of Patriotism

William Penn Bogardus was invited to join the Union Light Guards, which consisted of 103 men, one recruit from each county in Ohio, and sent to Washington, D.C. in December 1863. The Civil War had already been endured two and a half years of bloodshed and Bogardus’ unit had been yet untouched by battle. Bogardus’ unit was responsible for providing an escort for Lincoln and his family in and around Washington, D.C.

Language Arts & Social Studies

- If time permits read pages 13-20, I. otherwise read a shorter excerpt from the diary of William Bogardus dated July 12, 1864 (pages 17-18, I). Washington, D.C. was protected during the Civil War by a ring of forts. On this particular day, William Bogardus and other members of the Union Light Guard escort Lincoln. Thus, Bogardus is the perfect eyewitness. *On the visit to Fort Stevens, why was Bogardus so enthralled with the action then taking place?*

Why did the soldiers in the 6th Army Corps make unfavorable remarks about the members of the Union Light Guard?

- Mark E. Neely, Jr., an author of numerous books on Lincoln, stated at a Civil War conference that he believed Lincoln might have had a “death wish” while standing up on a parapet at Fort Stevens. *Does Bogardus’ eyewitness account support this or not?* [As a challenge, see if additional eyewitness reports can be found to support or refute Neely’s argument.]
- *What especially moved Bogardus’ emotions during this excursion?*

B. Importance of Religion

- **Private Duncan in World War I**

Private George R. Duncan served with the 5th Australian Division in France in 1916. He wrote the following to rector of his church back home in New South Wales, “ So far I have had no sickness, of course the most severe test of all is to come.”

Language Arts

- Read the rest of Duncan’s reflective letter (third paragraph, page 45, II). *What would the severest test be? How religious was Duncan? Discuss the importance of faith for soldiers and their families. How would Duncan’s letter eventually help his family back home?*
- **William Catching in Vietnam** [sound file to be added later]

William Catching grew up in Chicago, where he developed from an early age a strong religious faith. His faith helped him survive the horrors of Vietnam.

Language Arts

- Read Catching’s two letters (pages 288 & 295, II). What was the most terrifying experience for him? How did his faith help him through this? Discuss the importance of faith for soldiers and their families.

C. Examples of Moral Values WWII

- **PFC E. Carver McGriff**

PFC McGriff served in an infantry regiment following D-Day. During operations in northern France, he went searching with his squad for some food. This is an account that has stayed with McGriff for his whole life. Following the war McGriff became a minister.

Language Arts

- Read McGriff’s account “The Silver Box.” *Discuss how his moral values affected the outcome of this event* (pages 182-183, II). *How was McGriff affected emotionally?*
- Have a student read the next account aloud about moving through the hedgerows of France (page 181). *Why did this event have a profound mark on*

McGriff? Discuss why humans may respond differently when an animal is involved.

Social Studies

- View the movie “Agent of Grace” about the Lutheran theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Expand class discussion from these oral accounts to those of Bonhoeffer. *What was his moral compass? What dilemmas gave Bonhoeffer great difficulty? How did Bonhoeffer resolve this conflict? Should he have done what he did? Cite other examples of selfless individuals in history or from your own personal experience.*

Additional Activities:

- Discuss these themes in the light of current events; read and bring newspaper editorials to class for further discussion of these topics.
- Research and discuss the Abu Ghraib prison scandal.
- Identify another individual during wartime that was similarly affected by patriotism, moral values, and/or religion (Sergeant Alvin York, Nathan Hale, Benedict Arnold, etc.)

Selected Bibliography:

See the PBS video program, “Agent of Grace”: <http://www.pbs.org/opb/bonhoeffer/>
There is an excellent educator packet which accompanies this video.

Selected Web Sites:

For an examination of the role Dietrich Bonhoeffer played in his opposition to Nazism, see the Holocaust Museum’s web pages: 1) <http://www.ushmm.org/bonhoeffer/>
and 2) <http://www.ushmm.org/bonhoeffer/b1.htm>

For a discussion on the morality of war, go to the Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War> and click on the subtopic, “Morality of War” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War#Morality_of_war)