



THE FLAGS OF WAR AND BATTLE SCARS

WRITTEN BY JOHN WILSON

ABOUT *THE FLAGS OF WAR*

As the American Civil War draws near, Nate MacGregor knows he must fight for his Southern homeland. Meanwhile, his cousin Walt in Canada West fears that, due to the seizure of a Confederate ship with British envoys on board, Britain and her colonies could be drawn into the war — on the side of the Confederate South and slavery. Walt believes slavery is wrong and could never fight in defense of it. Nate and Walt have never met, but as a country descends into chaos, a runaway slave named Sunday is about to change the cousins' lives forever.

ABOUT *BATTLE SCARS*

At the end of *The Flags of War*, the boys separate. Walt and Sunday head north, back to the farm in Cornwall, Ontario, and Nate travels back home to South Carolina. At the beginning of *Battle Scars*, Nate finds the estate in ruin and his sick father terrified and paranoid. His father dies, leaving Nate with no family, no home and nothing but debts, forced to seek his livelihood the only way he knows — in the army. Walt and Sunday are also pulled back into the struggle — as the foundations of a country and its people are being shattered all around them.

The three characters find themselves reunited once again, but each in his own way is trapped by the walls of Libby Prison. Will they find freedom in a nation torn apart by civil war?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Wilson is the author of *Flames of the Tiger*, *And in the Morning*, *Four Steps to Death* and more than a dozen other historical fiction and non-fiction books for young people and adults. He lives on Vancouver Island, British Columbia, with his wife and their three children.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

The following discussion questions and activities are suitable for classes in language and literature, history, visual arts and science and technology.

Please note that some of the activities in this learning resource require students to visit their local library or use the Internet for research.

BEFORE READING QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES FOR *THE FLAGS OF WAR* AND *BATTLE SCARS*

1. Using features of the book such as the title, the cover and the description on the flap, ask students to predict what they think will happen in the story and write down three to five predictions in point form. Then, either while they are reading or after they have finished reading the novel, they should refer back to their predictions to see how accurate they were.

2. The settings of *The Flags of War* and *Battle Scars* alternate between Canada and the United States before, during and after the American Civil War. Ask students to make a list of three to five things they know about the American Civil War, but would like to learn more about. For example: Where were the major battles fought? What types of weapons were used during battle? What were the issues at the root of the conflict?

Once they have created a list, ask students to choose one item that interests them the most and research it, either at their local library or using the Internet, and write a detailed paragraph about that item.

DURING READING QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES FOR *THE FLAGS OF WAR*

1. While students are reading *The Flags of War*, ask them to refer back to question 2 in the Before Reading section and review their list of things they wanted to learn more about, which they created before they started reading the book. When they find something that teaches them more about what they wanted to know, ask them to mark the page with a sticky note or write it down in their notebook and include a note that says “I wanted to know this!”

2. Throughout the novel, the author makes reference to historical battles that took place before and during the American Civil War, such as the Battle of Shiloh, Bull Run and the Battle of Chrysler Farm.

Ask students to choose one of the above battles and use the novel to record details of the battle. They should write a list of questions they would like answered about the battle. For example, who was involved in the battle? What type of weapons did the soldiers use? Where and when was the battle fought? Why did the battle take place? Students should also visit the library or use the Internet to fill in any missing pieces of information about the battle and verify facts that they pulled from the book, such as names of people involved, geographical locations and dates.

Once they have completed their research, ask students to write a letter to a loved one as if they were a soldier in the American Civil War. In their letter, they should describe a battle and how they feel about the war.

3. The American Civil War produced some great songs, many of which are still sung today. Throughout the novel, characters sing these songs for various reasons; either to remember an escape route, to lift up their spirits in the face of war to intimidate the other side or to express pride for their country. Some examples are “Follow the Drinking Gourd,” a slavery escape route song (pages 20–21 and 61); “Union Dixie” (page 159); and “Anacreon in Heaven” (page 37).

Divide your students into three groups and assign each group one of the songs listed above. Each group will be responsible for researching the origin of the song, the creator/s of the song, the meaning of the song and, if applicable, other versions of the song.

A possible class activity would be to choose one song and rewrite it for the present day. For example, “Star-Spangled Banner” could be rewritten as a school anthem, or the slavery escape route song could be rewritten to describe a possible escape route from the school in a time of crisis.

4. In the novel, John Wilson thoroughly explores America’s role in the American Civil War through Nate, whereas Canada’s role in the American Civil War is only briefly revealed through Walt. Ask students to conduct their own research about Canada’s involvement in the American Civil War by using information from the novel, the library and the Internet. Students should create a list of questions they would like answered before beginning their research. Ask students to share their research as part of a class discussion.

AFTER READING QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES FOR *THE FLAGS OF WAR*

1. Nate MacGregor and Walt MacGregor are cousins who live separate lives and do not meet until they come face to face on opposite sides of the battlefield at Shiloh. Throughout the story, the author includes bits of information that allow the reader to learn more about the history of the MacGregor family. Using the information from the story, ask students to create a family tree and write a detailed paragraph about the history of the MacGregor family.

Have students create their own family tree by researching their family history using their relatives as main sources. Students should try and reach as far back into their history as they can. Ask students to research the origins of their surname as well. They should try and answer the following questions:

What is the meaning of your surname? What side of the family does it come from? Where did it originate? As part of the assignment, students should also write a short essay about the history of their family based on their research.

2. Looking at the picture of the soldier on the front cover of *The Flags of War*, ask students to research how soldiers’ uniforms looked during the American Civil War. As part of a class discussion, ask students to answer the following questions: Why were the Confederate uniforms blue and the Union uniforms gray? Besides color, what were some of the differences and similarities between each uniform?

As a separate research assignment, ask students to trace the evolution of American soldiers’ uniforms from the American Civil War, World War I and World War II. As part of their research, students should document the major changes in the uniforms from each war and try to figure out why the design of the uniforms evolved. Ask students to present their research to the class and include pictures to show differences in the uniforms and how they evolved.

3. Weapons have also changed throughout the course of history. Divide the class into groups and ask each group to choose three types of weapons from the list below. They should prepare and fill in a chart that will show the type, origin and unique feature or purpose of each weapon. Students should also try to find or draw pictures of the weapons. Each group will present their research to the class on three of the following weapons: Cannon, Musket, Saber, Bayonet, Rifle, Mortar, Pistol.

Create a chart with the following headings: Type, Origin and Unique Feature.

For example:

Type	Origin	Unique Feature
Bayonet Rifle	This weapon was first introduced into the French army in 1647.	A blade that can be attached to the end of a gun or removed and used in hand-to-hand combat.

Note that the column “Origin” does not require an exact date.

DURING READING QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES FOR *BATTLE SCARS*

1. While students are reading *Battle Scars*, ask them to refer back to question 2 in the Before Reading section and review their list of things they wanted to learn more about, which they created before they started reading the book. When they find something that teaches them more about what they wanted to know, ask them to mark the page with a sticky note or write it down in their notebook and include a note that says “I wanted to know this!”

2. *Battle Scars* contains both fictional and historical figures as well as composite characters. For example, Colonel Abel D. Streight (see pages 88–89) is a historical figure from the Civil War, while Nathan Hanson Woods (see page 65) is based on two historical figures: Nathan Bedford Forest and John Hanson McNeill.

Ask students to research one of the historical figures mentioned above and explore what their significance was during the American Civil War. Were they important figures? What was their role during the war? How are their characters depicted in the novel?

3. One of the most sensational and shocking events of the Civil War occurred off the battlefields when the streets of New York erupted into riots shortly after draft lists were published in newspapers (see page 33). Ask students to explore the historical significance of the New York Draft Riots during the American Civil War using information from the novel and resources from their local library or the Internet. As part of their research, students should try to answer the following questions: Why did the riots begin? Did a single event cause the riots to break out or were there multiple causes? How many people were involved? How long did the riots last? Who was affected by the riots and how? When and how did the riots end? What was the outcome? Have students share their research with the class.

AFTER READING QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES FOR *BATTLE SCARS*

1. *Battle Scars* ends with Nate, Walt and Sunday escaping from Libby Prison and making their way back to Canada. Ask students to extend the ending of the story by creating their own one to two page conclusion describing what they think will happen to these characters after the Civil War. Students should also provide a brief explanation of why they chose these endings for each character.

2. Libby Prison and Andersonville were used as prisons during the American Civil War. In the novel, Nate, Sunday and Walt are reunited at Libby Prison. Have students choose one prison and research the history of it before, during and after the Civil War. What were the conditions of the prison? Who was sent there? Was the prison created specifically for the war or did it exist before the war? What happened to the prison once the war was over? Were there any escapees from the prison? Does the prison still exist today? If so, what is it? Ask students to compile their research and write a short paper (including pictures if possible) about the prison they chose.

3. From *The Flags of War* to *Battle Scars*, Sunday experiences many life changes that eventually set him free. “From being a runaway slave with a price on his head, he had become a free soldier and a free man.” (page 164) Ask students to create a timeline for Sunday, documenting his growth from *The Flags of War* to *Battle Scars*. The timeline should include major events, experiences and people that contributed to Sunday’s growth, either for better or for worse.

Once students have completed their timelines, ask the class to discuss which event, experience or person they feel “truly set Sunday free.” Was it his ability to read and later communicate through sign language? Was it his escape from the plantation? Was it joining the war and fighting against slavery as a member of the 54th Massachusetts army? Was it his friendship with Nate, Walt and Touss? Students should be able to defend their answers by using examples from the novel to back up their argument.

The activity pages in this learning resource have been designed as originals that can be reproduced for home or classroom use only. For more learning resource materials, please visit kidscanpress.com.



Kids Can Press is a iCORS™ Entertainment company