

The Fighting Ground

by Avi

Classroom Favorites

Teacher's Guide by Kathleen Greenholdt

A Perma-Bound Production

Synopsis

Jonathan is thirteen years old, and he can handle a gun. But, without his father's permission, he decides to join the American Corporal and a group of local men who are going to battle Hessian soldiers during the Revolutionary War. He dreams of drums and marching, but his dreams are quickly shattered when the shooting begins and Jonathan finds himself in the depths of war.

As the battle is ending, Hessian soldiers come after Jonathan, who runs into the woods. He is taken captive by three Hessians who are lost. Because they speak only German, Jonathan cannot communicate with the men. He has no idea what they will do with him, and he is ashamed he ran away from battle.

The party comes upon an abandoned house where they stay for the night. While milking a cow, Jonathan discovers a small boy hiding in the barn. The boy later shows Jonathan his dead parents, who had been shot to death and left unburied.

Jonathan decides to dig a grave for the deceased, and he forces the Hessians to help him. Because they seem to lack any emotion regarding the murders, he suspects that they killed the boy's parents. In the middle of the night, Jonathan escapes with his small friend.

Eventually they come upon the camp where the Corporal and the other American soldiers are staying. Jonathan tells them the whole story, only to discover that the Corporal himself shot the boy's parents, believing that they were traitors and spies.

The American soldiers force Jonathan to take them back to the abandoned house, where he gains entrance easily. However, Jonathan tries to help the Hessians escape, because he has seen enough killing and because the Hessians did not harm him.

The Americans shoot the Hessians while they are trying to leave the house.

Jonathan returns home disillusioned with the war effort and wondering whose side he is on after all.

Biographical Sketch

Avi Wortis, who uses the pen name "Avi," was born in New York City in 1937. He received bachelor's and master's degrees in 1959 and 1962, respectively, from the University of Wisconsin, Madison. He also earned a master's from Columbia University in 1964. In addition to his work as a children's author, he is a librarian.

Critic's Corner

The Fighting Ground was written in 1984. The book received the Scott O'Dell Award for Historical Fiction for Children.

General Objectives

1. To understand what it means to be involved in a war
2. To explore the concepts of courage, fear, and compassion

Specific Objectives

1. To examine the motivations of Jonathan, before and after he becomes a soldier
2. To learn about the American Revolution

Meaning Study

Teacher's note: Go through the translation at the end of the book and have students identify which Hessian soldier said what phrase. It will be necessary for testing.

regiment, p. 3 - an army unit

mercenary, p. 4 - a hired soldier who works for another country

Hessians, p. 4 - German mercenaries hired by the British

flintlock, p. 4 - a type of gun that is fired with a spark from a flint

palisades, p. 33 - wooden fences of sharp stakes

bayonet, p. 41 - a knife-like fixture that attaches to a gun

grenadiers, p. 42 - tall soldiers wearing pointed caps

musket, p. 51 - a long-barrelled gun used by foot soldiers at the time of the American Revolution

linsey-woolsey, p. 80 - a fabric of wool and cotton, woven by American colonists

(French) Papists, p. 121 - a slur against (French) Roman Catholics

garrison, p. 122 - an army unit stationed in a town

Class Discussion Questions

1. Before Jonathan became a soldier, how did he feel about war? (*He thought that war was glamorous. He thought that soldiers finished battle with a feeling of glory. He thought battles meant fancy uniforms, marching, and exciting battle strategies. To Jonathan, war was a game.*)

2. When Jonathan came home from battle, had his perceptions about war changed?
(Yes. He had experienced the cruelty and violence of war. He saw that it was not glamorous to be dead or to kill other people.)
3. Whose side was Jonathan on while he was a soldier?
(This is unclear. Jonathan showed much compassion towards his "enemies" by burying the Tories and by trying to help the Hessians escape death. Jonathan was evidently on the side of life.)
4. How did Jonathan communicate with the Hessians?
(Have students refer to the book to answer this. Jonathan and the Hessians communicated through facial expressions, voice inflection, and body movements. For example, Jonathan showed the drinking of milk by using hand gestures.)
5. After reading the German translations in the back of the book, do you think that the young Hessian soldier was Jonathan's friend?
(Allow students to debate this point. Perhaps the soldier was his friend, because he wanted to let him go when the Americans were attacking. On the other hand, Jonathan had been a prisoner. We do not know what would have eventually become of him if the Hessians had escaped with him. However, when he was first captured, the Hessians told him that nothing would happen to him.)
6. Describe the Corporal. Was he a good or bad man?
("Good" or "bad" are probably not applicable terms in this case. The Corporal was a soldier, and he did his job as prescribed by the conditions of war. Sometimes he showed compassion toward Jonathan by attempting to comfort him and to walk with him when the boy "failed" as a soldier by running away, by not killing the Hessians, and by trying to save the Hessians. However, the Corporal was a ruthless soldier. For example, he offered a condition of surrender to the Hessians when he knew that they could not understand English.)
7. Was Jonathan right or wrong to try to help the Hessians escape?
(Students could approach this issue in terms of patriotism and human kindness.)
8. When the American soldiers returned to the tavern, the keeper was happy and feeling a sense of glory. Did the soldiers feel this way, too?
(No. The tavern keeper offered them all a victory drink, and only one man accepted.)
9. At the end of the book, Jonathan realized that his father was frightened for his son, not for himself. Why?
(Jonathan's father knew that his son could carry a gun and that he was old enough to fight in the war. The father had already experienced the pain of war, and he had another son who had become a soldier. He wanted Jonathan to be spared the pain of war, and he wanted him to be alive.)
10. How did this story affect your own perceptions of the American Revolution?
(Allow students to explain whether or not this story changed their opinions regarding the war, which is often portrayed with great glory.)

Activities

1. Ask your class to research twentieth century wars and write short reports comparing and contrasting those conflicts to the American Revolution.
2. Have each student write a short story in which one or more characters speaks a foreign language. The language could be an imaginary one. At the end of the story, ask the students to provide translations of the foreign communication.
3. Visit a museum or historical site to learn about colonial life. Many historical attractions offer demonstrations in candle dipping, weaving, music making, and more.
4. Have your students continue the story by writing about how Jonathan will exhibit his new attitude throughout the remainder of the war. For example, he might choose to help nurse the wounded.
5. In a history lesson, teach the story of the American Revolution. On a large wall map, have students re-create the sites of battles, charting the courses of losses and victories.
6. In an art lesson, ask students to paint portraits of the Corporal. The portraits should communicate the students' views of his personality and character. These traits can be shown through use of color, light, and line.
7. What would it be like to be in a war? Through a simulation, assign groups of Tories, Hessians, British soldiers, and patriots to fight a battle. On cards, give each child a task in the battle (such as capturing a Hessian or being wounded by the enemy). Once the battle is over, lead a group discussion of how the students felt to be a part of the war.
8. Teach the Bill of Rights to your class, and discuss the meaning of the right to bear arms.
9. Invite a law enforcement official to speak to your class about the dangers of guns and firearms safety.
10. Why would an American colonist choose to be a Tory? Have your students prepare short essays on why they might side with the King of England, rather than the American rebels.

Other Books by the Author

No More Magic, 1975

Captain Grey, 1977

Emily Upham's Revenge, 1978

Vocabulary Test

Write the correct vocabulary word next to its definition.

1. Long-barrelled gun: _____
2. Type of gun fired with flint: _____
3. German soldier hired by the British: _____
4. Army unit: _____
5. Army unit stationed in a town: _____
6. Fabric of wool and cotton: _____
7. Hired soldier: _____
8. A tall soldier wearing a pointed cap: _____
9. Wooden fence with sharp stakes: _____
10. Knife-like fixture attached to a gun: _____

Comprehension Test A

True or False (25 points)

Mark each statement "T" for "True" or "F" for "False".

- _____ 1. Jonathan was an only child.
- _____ 2. Jonathan's father had wounded his arm in battle.
- _____ 3. Jonathan was thirteen years old.
- _____ 4. The Americans were well organized for battle.
- _____ 5. Americans who sided with the British were Tories.
- _____ 6. The little boy who Jonathan found spoke only German.
- _____ 7. The Hessians told Jonathan that no one was going to do anything to him.
- _____ 8. The young Hessian was eager to help Jonathan dig the grave.
- _____ 9. Americans killed the little boy's parents.
- _____ 10. Two American soldiers died during the battle.

Quotation Identification (25 points)

Match each quotation with a character from the list below.

- _____ 1. "Just find out! . . . Then come on right back!"
- _____ 2. ". . . if they do come, it'll be your home they'll burn, as well as mine."
- _____ 3. "Trade you in for a general . . ."
- _____ 4. "I am almost not here."
- _____ 5. "It's a beautiful country."
- _____ 6. "Have I got your word of honor you'll bring it back?"
- _____ 7. "Just stay here. Don't you move. I'll be back as fast as I can."
- _____ 8. "Idiot! They never understand anything. Come here, boy."
- _____ 9. "Could be someone's come on through with news. I'd need to know."
- _____ 10. "My God! Right before our eyes!"

- | | |
|----------------------|----------------------|
| a. Jonathan | f. Older Hessian |
| b. Corporal | g. Young Hessian |
| c. Frenchman | h. American soldier |
| d. Jonathan's father | i. Tall Hessian |
| e. Tavern keeper | j. Jonathan's mother |

Story Identification (25 points)

In a sentence or two, explain the significance of each of the following in the story.

1. the bell

2. glory

3. the tavern keeper

4. burying the little boy's parents

5. the Frenchman

Essay (25 points)

In paragraph form, describe Jonathan's relationship with the young Hessian soldier.

Comprehension Test B

Fill In the Blank (25 points)

Fill in the blank with the correct word(s).

1. The _____ rode a horse and led the Americans into battle.
2. The _____ of the little boy Jonathan found also survived.
3. Jonathan was from the colony known as _____.
4. Jonathan could not talk to the Hessians because they spoke only _____.
5. The little boy's parents were executed for being _____.
6. The American soldiers gathered at a _____ to hear the news of the battle.
7. In the house, the old Hessian tied a rope to Jonathan's _____.
8. The man who offered to take the little boy home with him was called the _____.
9. While marching, Jonathan merrily _____, but quickly stopped when someone gave him an angry look.
10. Before he left the house where the Hessians died, Jonathan broke a _____ in anger.

Quotation Completion (25 points)

Complete each quotation with a word from the list below.

1. "You tried to _____ them, didn't you?"
2. "You've got a reputation for being overfond of _____"
3. "Then, standing a little straighter, the soldier began to speak. Because of the singsong cadence, Jonathan sensed it was a _____"
4. ". . . and Jonathan could see her tongue. It was _____ ."
5. "_____ or be killed!"
6. "We can _____ them from the trees if that's your pleasure."
7. "Go get your _____. It doesn't belong to you. It needs returning."
8. "The old soldier took out a _____, but having no light, merely sucked on the stem."
9. "So it was that at the sound of the _____ they both stood still and listened."
10. "He pictured himself in a fancy blue _____ with red facings, white leggings,"

- a. surrender
- b. pipe
- c. save
- d. jacket
- e. ambush

- f. killing
- g. bell
- h. black
- i. gun
- j. prayer

Story Identification (25 points)

In a sentence or two, explain the significance of each of the following in the story.

1. the Corporal

2. language barriers

3. courage

4. giants

5. the little boy

Essay (25 points)

In paragraph form, describe how Jonathan fought the war inside of himself while he was a soldier.

Answer Key

Vocabulary Test

- | | |
|--------------|-------------------|
| 1. musket | 6. linsey-woolsey |
| 2. flintlock | 7. mercenary |
| 3. Hessian | 8. grenadier |
| 4. regiment | 9. palisade |
| 5. garrison | 10. bayonet |

Comprehension Test A

True or False (25 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. F |
| 2. F | 7. T |
| 3. T | 8. F |
| 4. F | 9. T |
| 5. T | 10. F |

Quotation Identification (25 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. j | 6. e |
| 2. b | 7. a |
| 3. h | 8. f |
| 4. c | 9. d |
| 5. g | 10. i |

Story Identification (25 points)

1. the bell - The bell at the tavern alerted the people in the area of war news.
2. glory - Jonathan thought that soldiers finished battles with a sense of glory. He later found this to be untrue.
3. the tavern keeper - The tavern keeper supported the American soldiers by allowing them to use his establishment as a "headquarters" and by giving Jonathan a gun. He also viewed the American victory with a sense of glory and joy, although the soldiers did not feel that way.
4. burying the little boy's parents - Jonathan felt that it was honorable to bury the dead.
5. the Frenchman - He was Jonathan's friend, and he took the little boy in. This was noble, since the boy's parents were considered enemies.

Essay (25 points)

Answers will vary.

Comprehension Test B

Fill-In the Blank (25 points)

- | | |
|------------------|---------------|
| 1. Corporal | 6. tavern |
| 2. brother | 7. ankle, leg |
| 3. New Jersey | 8. Frenchman |
| 4. German | 9. whistled |
| 5. Tories, spies | 10. gun |

Quotation Completion (25 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. c | 6. e |
| 2. f | 7. i |
| 3. j | 8. b |
| 4. h | 9. g |
| 5. a | 10. d |

Story Identification (25 points)

1. the Corporal - Jonathan viewed him at first as a good man, then as a bad man. He was just a soldier doing his job, though, which made him neither good nor bad.
2. language barriers - Language barriers made it difficult for communication among the Hessians, Jonathan, and the little boy. If they had been able to understand one another, Jonathan might have saved the Hessians and he might have known what happened to the little boy's parents.
3. courage - Jonathan felt that he lacked this after he ran from battle.
4. giants - The American soldiers viewed the Hessians as giants and formidable foes.
5. the little boy - Jonathan befriended the little boy, even though he later learned that the boy's parents were considered enemies.

Essay (25 points)

Answers will vary.



**PERMA-BOUND
VANDALIA ROAD
JACKSONVILLE, ILLINOIS
62650**

**PHONE
1-800-637-6581**