

This guide is aligned with the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards (CCR) for Reading (Informational Text), Writing, and Language.

The broad CCR standards are the foundation for the grade level–specific Common Core State Standards.

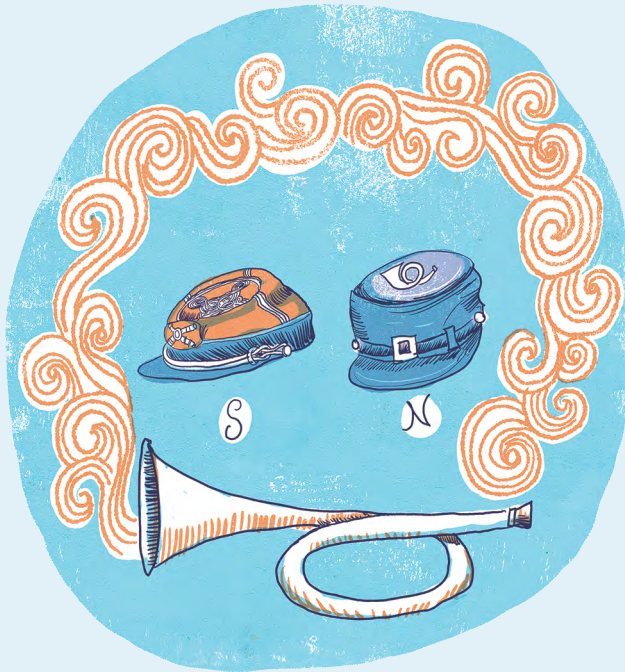
## DISCUSSION GUIDE

Disney • HYPERION

## ABOUT THE BOOK

This true story of the uniting power of music takes readers to the Battle of Fredericksburg in December 1862. In the aftermath of the Confederate victory, Northern and Southern troops settled into their winter camps and fought a different kind of battle, volleying competing songs back and forth across the Rappahannock River. Through soldiers' letters and journal entries and song lyrics of the day, readers learn of duty and heartbreak, of loyalty and enemies, and of the peace and common ground only music can provide.

*Soldier Song: A True Story of the Civil War* can be a unique introduction to the Civil War, or an engaging part of a larger study. The book also provides good opportunities to launch exploration of primary sources, prompt discussion and comparison about letter writing and other forms of communication, and offer lessons in researching the story—and history—in song.



## BEFORE READING

### *Civil War Time Line*

Activate student background knowledge and generate interest in the book and the Civil War with an overview of this era in American history. Given the many events of this conflict, a time line is a great place to start. Adapt the helpful **Time Line of the Civil War** included at the end of *Soldier Song* for your classroom wall, leaving space to add additional details that students uncover as they learn how events related to each other and what caused those events to transpire. Review the time line with your students. As they gain Civil War knowledge, encourage them to balance perspectives with any images and information they add to the time line.

### *Soldier Life*

To help students gain better appreciation and understanding of the importance of music in a Civil War soldier's life, get them thinking about what life was like for soldiers on both sides of the conflict. As a class, generate a list of questions about the soldiers' daily life and experiences. What did they eat? Where did they eat? Where did they sleep? How did they get around? What did they bring with them? What did they do when they weren't fighting? Let students come up with questions they want answers to—including the bathroom question! Categorize and group the questions and have students work in small groups to research answers using primary and secondary sources.

As students conduct their research, use the web links included in *Soldier Song* to play “Home Sweet Home,” “The Battle Cry of Freedom,” “The Bonnie Blue Flag,” and other songs to help students enter the mind-set of the soldiers they are learning more about. Have student groups present their answers—and their sources—to the class.

These helpful resources include primary sources you can print for students:

- Life of a Civil War Soldier Lesson Plan from the National Park Service: [nps.gov/museum/tmc/GETT/GETT\\_Life\\_of\\_a\\_Civil\\_War%20Soldier.html](https://www.nps.gov/museum/tmc/GETT/GETT_Life_of_a_Civil_War%20Soldier.html)
- The Life of a Civil War Soldier Teacher’s Lesson Plan from the Tennessee State Museum: [tnmuseum.org/Traveling\\_Trunks\\_Top\\_Level/The\\_Life\\_of\\_a\\_Civil\\_War\\_Soldier](https://tnmuseum.org/Traveling_Trunks_Top_Level/The_Life_of_a_Civil_War_Soldier)
- Civil War Soldiers’ Stories from the Library of Congress: [loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/civilwar/soldiers](https://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/timeline/civilwar/soldiers)
- The Making of African American Identity: Civil War Soldiers from the National Humanities Center: [nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai/emancipation/text6/text6read](https://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai/emancipation/text6/text6read)

## READ AND DISCUSS

The questions below can be used for class discussion and reflection or be offered to students as reflective writing prompts. These questions correlate to the Common Core College and Career Readiness (CCR) Anchor Standards for Reading, which ask students to identify, analyze, and summarize main ideas and key supporting details, use textual evidence to ask and answer questions, analyze text structure and the author’s craft, and describe the relationship between a series of events, concepts, or ideas.

- 1 As you read, pay close attention to the illustrations of the soldiers of the North and South. How are soldiers from opposite sides depicted in the illustrations? What message is conveyed about Union and Confederate troops by the author and illustrator? Support your response with evidence from the text.
- 2 What was the Emancipation Proclamation? Explain why you think President Lincoln wanted a “bold military victory over the rebels” before it took effect?
- 3 Why do you think the author included the letters and journal entries of real soldiers? What did you learn by reading letters from both Union and Confederate soldiers? How do the letters throughout the book help the reader better understand a soldier’s life?

- 4 Letters included in the book are all from soldiers writing home and missing home. Point to evidence in the book that shows what they missed about home. What would you miss? Why do you think the book doesn't include any letters written to soldiers from their loved ones?
- 5 Why do you think the author chose to write about the Battle of Fredericksburg and the song "Home, Sweet Home"? What did the book help you to understand about the Civil War? If you were writing about the Civil War, what would be your focus? Why?
- 6 Though the song was a favorite of soldiers, Union commanders banned the playing of "Home, Sweet Home." Why? Explain why you agree or disagree with the decision that the song should be forbidden in camp.
- 7 What do the songs the soldiers sing tell us about their lives? What do the songs people sing today tell us about their lives? Share a song that has meaning for you, and explain why.



## CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

These activities align with the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts for grades 4 and 5 and offer connections to the social studies curriculum. Many of these activities provide opportunities for students to identify with events and people in history by using and analyzing primary and secondary sources. For students who find this work challenging, *think-pair-share* or working in small groups may be a helpful strategy. Other students may need more support to guide them through the experiences, with helpful paraphrasing or vocabulary instruction.

## HISTORY: RESEARCH AND WRITING

### *War Correspondence*

Ask students to share how they communicate with faraway friends and family. Texts, e-mails, phone calls, and social media may keep them connected, but do they ever write and send messages by mail? Why is it sometimes considered more important to send a note or letter than a text or e-mail? Why is it sometimes considered nice to handwrite a note rather than type it? Get students thinking about how their primary form of communication differs from that of Civil War soldiers and their families. What accounts for these differences in how we communicate?

During the Civil War, news did not travel quickly, and no mail was sent across Confederate lines into Union states. Have students imagine and discuss reasons why letters and newspapers would be important to soldiers and their friends and families, even when they were written or published weeks or even months before they reached their readers.

Guide student use of the **Selected Bibliography** in the book to investigate accounts of what happened at the Battle of Fredericksburg and help students seek additional sources and information about Civil War life on the home front. Read and analyze an account together to get students practiced in making research notes; they will use notes like these to write a letter to a soldier at the Battle of Fredericksburg. A graphic organizer may help them note details of the battle and the impact of the war on the lives of individuals for use in the following activities.

## *Responding to War*

Have students select a letter from their research, or provide them with one of the resources below. Ask them to imagine that they are the recipient of the letter and write an appropriate response that makes use of their research and their own questions for the letter's author. Have students read their letters aloud to the class.

- Letter, dated December 14, 1862, from Henry Frank Babcock, Company I of the 122nd New York Infantry, to his parents:  
**[www.soldierstudies.org/blog/2010/06/battle-of-fredericksburg-letter](http://www.soldierstudies.org/blog/2010/06/battle-of-fredericksburg-letter)**
- Letter, dated December 25, 1862, from Isaac Adams Howard of Gonzalez, Texas, to his father, Dr. William Henry Howard:  
**<http://blogs.lib.unc.edu/civilwar/index.php/2012/12/25/25-december-1862>**
- Letter, dated December 17, 1862, from James A. Carman to his father, Martin W. Carman: **<http://valley.lib.virginia.edu/papers/F0694>**

*CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.3; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.9; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.3; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.7; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.8; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.9*

## *Writing to the Front Lines*

Search the Chronicling America archive at the Library of Congress for newspapers printed during December 1862, and choose a newspaper article about the Battle of Fredericksburg to read aloud to students. As you read, ask students to imagine they are reading or hearing this article knowing a family member is involved in the conflict. After reading, talk with students about who is reporting this story and whose perspectives are heard. Ask students to think about what is missing from the story that they want to know. Provide students with a copy of the news article and have them write a letter to their soldier relative that summarizes the facts in the article and asks appropriate questions. Ask students to read their letters aloud to the class.

*CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.3; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.9; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.3; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.7; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.8; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.9*

## HISTORY AND MUSIC

### *Wartime Audience*

Music played important and varied roles in the Civil War. *Soldier Song: A True Story of the Civil War* shares many of the ways music was used to motivate, regulate, and entertain soldiers on the front lines. As a class, create a list of all the ways music and songs were a part of a Civil War soldier's life. Start with those included in the book, then brainstorm additional roles music might have played in the lives of all those affected by the war between the states. Break students into small groups to research and discover specific songs and uses; each group should focus on music intended for one specific audience, such as abolitionists, secessionists, potential soldiers, civilians, Northerners, Southerners, slaves, free blacks, or immigrants. As groups explore songs, have them look for: the date of the song; the composer and lyricist; historic events, people, or places in the song; and special significance in the song's words, phrases, or chorus. Have groups play a recording of one of their songs for the class (or read the lyrics aloud) and share their ideas about the impact the song had on audiences during the Civil War. *America Singing: Nineteenth-Century Song Sheets from the Library of Congress* will be a helpful resource: [loc.gov/collections/nineteenth-century-song-sheets](http://loc.gov/collections/nineteenth-century-song-sheets).

*CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.4.1; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.4.4; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.7*

### *Noting Historical Figures*

At the end of the book, the author shares a list of **Notable People at Fredericksburg** with an explanation of how each one was connected to the battle. Ask students to select one of the people for further research. As they analyze the life of their figure, have them identify the person's significant contributions to society, three to five outstanding characteristics of the person, and five to ten major events in the person's life. Invite students to use their research to write their own song about the person, using the tune of "Yankee Doodle" or another melody of their choosing. As an alternative challenge, students could write a poem about their figure in the style of Walt Whitman. Students should present their work to the class.

*CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.2; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.9; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.4; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.7*



## Song History

Every song has a story. *Soldier Song: A True Story of the Civil War* tells just one of many stories about “Home, Sweet Home.” **The Song** in the back of the book tells another, and also offers details about the song’s origin. Get students to explore more Civil War music to see how songs both reflect and make history.

Listen to “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” and share the story of “John Brown’s Body”/“The Battle Hymn of the Republic” ([pbs.org/wgbh/amex/brown/sfeature/song.html](https://pbs.org/wgbh/amex/brown/sfeature/song.html)) with your students. In pairs or small groups, let students choose a song from the book to listen to and research. Have students use the following questions to guide their research and then share and illustrate their own thoughts about the song and the story behind it.



**HOME SWEET HOME**  
Words by John Howard Payne • Music by Henry Bishop

'Mid pleas-ures and pal - a - ces, though we may  
roam, Be it ev --- er so hum - ble, there's  
no .. place like home; No more from that  
cott - age a - gain will I roam. Be it  
ev --- er - so hum - ble there's no place like home.  
Home! Home! Sweet Sweet home! There's  
no place like home, there's no place like home.

The image shows a musical score for the song "Home Sweet Home" in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. The score consists of eight staves of music with lyrics written below. The lyrics are: "'Mid pleasures and palaces, though we may roam, Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home; No more from that cottage again will I roam. Be it ever so humble there's no place like home. Home! Home! Sweet Sweet home! There's no place like home, there's no place like home." The score is surrounded by blue line drawings of a rural landscape, including houses, trees, a river, and a person on a horse.



*Name of the Song* \_\_\_\_\_

- 1 When was the song written? Is this the original song, or were new lyrics set to an older tune?
- 2 Who wrote the lyrics? Who wrote the music?
- 3 What message(s) or point of view does the song offer? What do you think the author's purpose in writing the song was (to persuade, perform, or entertain)?
- 4 Who was the intended audience for this song?
- 5 What does this song tell us about what people valued or thought was important at that time?
- 6 What is the story behind this story?
- 7 What impact did this song have during the Civil War? Is the song's message still relevant today?
- 8 How did the song change or evolve?
- 9 What are some of your favorite parts of the song? What about this song do you like or dislike?

When students have finished their research, have them create and present to the class an illustration that tells their song's story. If they prefer, they can make a digital collage using a free online tool such as [befunky.com](http://befunky.com) or [photovisi.com](http://photovisi.com).

## Resources

- Civil War Music Primary Sources  
[loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/primarysourcesets/civil-war-music/](http://loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/primarysourcesets/civil-war-music/)
- Civil War Music  
[www.civilwar.org/education/history/on-the-homefront/](http://www.civilwar.org/education/history/on-the-homefront/)
- Music of the War Between the States  
[www.civilwarpoetry.org/music/index.html](http://www.civilwarpoetry.org/music/index.html)

*CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.4.4; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.9; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.2; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.4; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.4; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.7*

## MUSIC AND WRITING

### *Songs of Home*

Listen to recordings of “Home, Sweet Home” and share with students more of the song’s history, which is included in **The Song** at the end of the book. Provide students with a copy of the song and talk about the structure of the song, the difference between the verses and the chorus, the use of rhyme, the word choices in the lyrics, and the meanings of words and phrases that may be unfamiliar.

Ask students, after they’ve heard or read the song, if the words bring their own homes to mind. Have them brainstorm a list of words that describe what they like best about their own homes and communities. Encourage them to use some of those words to write their own verse to “Home, Sweet Home.” Have students share their verses by reading them aloud—or by singing!

“Home, Sweet Home” Song Sheet: <https://www.loc.gov/item/amss.as105460>

*CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.4.1; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.4; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.3; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.4*

## *Song Innovation*

During a battle of the bands, Union and Confederate troops often played the same songs but sang different words. Read aloud—or sing—the versions of “Dixie” included in the book. Which version have students heard before? Ask them to speculate which version came first, Union or Confederate. After they’ve had time to guess, let them know that the Confederate version was written first, in the 1850s, and was a popular song mostly in the North until the Confederacy adopted it as its anthem.

Have the class discuss the differences in the lyrics and note their ideas. How is the South described in each song? What images or feelings are conjured up by the different versions? What are the different purposes of the two songs?

Have students write lyrics to their own Civil War song designed to inspire patriotic feelings in either a Confederate or Union soldier. Divide the class into Confederate and Union troops. Have them work in small groups and choose a song that was popular with their opposition. They should listen to and/or read the song, determine what the song’s message was, and research why it was popular. Once students have an understanding of the song’s message, encourage them to craft a similar message from the opposing point of view for the same tune. For example, if their song expressed a reason for a Union soldier to join the fighting of the Civil War, students should include an appropriate reason for a Confederate soldier in their song.

When the songs (which should each include at least two verses and a chorus) are ready, hold your own battle of the bands!

*CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.4.1; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.4; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.2; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.7*

## *Additional Activity Ideas to Extend the Experience*

- Have students use what they learn from *Soldier Song: A True Story of the Civil War* to write their own song that tells the story of the Battle of Fredericksburg.
- Have students work in small groups to create a music video or multimedia presentation for one of the Civil War songs featured in the book.
- Ask a local university or high school music department if they have music students who could come and perform music of the Civil War for your class.
- Take a Virtual Tour of Fredericksburg Battlefield:  
<https://www.nps.gov/frsp/learn/photosmultimedia/virtualfred.htm>



## ADDITIONAL EDUCATOR RESOURCES

- The Civil War Trust offers a full Civil War curriculum for students in grades 3 to 6: [www.civilwar.org/curriculum](http://www.civilwar.org/curriculum)
- In conjunction with Ken Burns's *The Civil War*, PBS provides classroom activities for grades 5 and up, including one on Civil War music: [www.pbs.org/kenburns/civil-war/classroom/teaching-civil-war](http://www.pbs.org/kenburns/civil-war/classroom/teaching-civil-war)
- This newsletter from Middle Tennessee State University's Teaching with Primary Sources includes lessons on the life of a Civil War soldier and Civil War music: <http://library.mtsu.edu/tps/newsletters/TPSNewsletterJune2014.pdf>



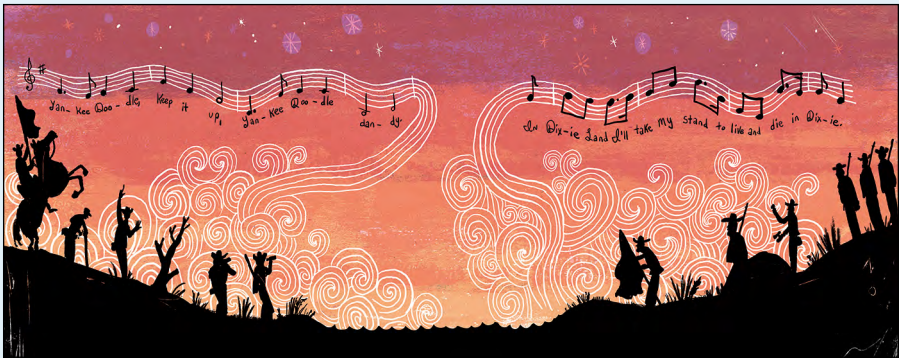
## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Debbie Levy is the award-winning author of nonfiction and fiction books for young people, including *New York Times* best-selling *I Dissent: Ruth Bader Ginsburg Makes Her Mark*, winner of the 2017 Sydney Taylor Book Award and 2016 National Jewish Book Award; and *We Shall Overcome: The Story of a Song*, a 2014 Jane Addams Award Honor Book and Bank Street College Best Book. She also wrote *The Year of Goodbyes*, a 2010 Sydney Taylor Honor Book and *Kirkus Reviews* Best Book. Debbie is a former lawyer and newspaper editor, and lives in Maryland with her husband. They have two grown sons. [www.debbielevybooks.com](http://www.debbielevybooks.com).



## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Gilbert Ford has lived half his life in the South and half his life in the North. He has illustrated covers for many books for young readers, including *Three Times Lucky* and *Mr. Lemoncello's Library*, and is the illustrator for the Secret Series by Pseudonymous Bosch, as well as a number of picture books, including the award-winning *Mr. Ferris and His Wheel*. Gilbert currently lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. Visit him online at [gilbertford.com](http://gilbertford.com).



Rachael Walker ([belleofthebook.com](http://belleofthebook.com)) created this guide. She works in a middle school library in Arlington, Virginia, consults on a wide variety of educational programs and multimedia projects, and develops educational materials and reading resources for children, parents, and teachers.

Many more guides can be found on the Disney•Hyperion website at [disneybooks.com](http://disneybooks.com).

## Books by Debbie Levy



### THE YEAR OF GOODBYES

Hardcover

978-1-4231-2901-1

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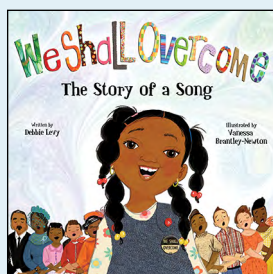
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★ “An outstanding and emotionally taut read for children. . . .”

—*School Library Journal*,  
starred review



### WE SHALL OVERCOME

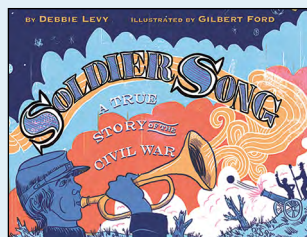
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### SOLDIER SONG

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★ “Through insightful narration and vibrant silhouettes and cartooning, Levy and Ford vividly bring to life a chapter in the U.S. Civil War and the integral role music played during the conflict.”

—*Publishers Weekly*,  
starred review

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