

BOOK STATS

Grade Level Equivalent: 4–6

Ages: 9–12

Lexile Measure: 950L

Pages: 218

Genre: Historical Fiction

Subject/Theme: Civil War, Persistence and Perseverance, Siblings

Common Core State Standards	Reading	Writing	Listening & Speaking	Language
Grade 4	RL.4.1, RL.4.2, RL.4.3, RL.4.4, RL.4.6	W.4.3	SL.4.1, SL.4.4	L.4.4, L.4.6
Grade 5	RL.5.2, RL.5.4, RL.5.6	W.5.3	SL.5.1, SL.5.4	L.5.4, L.5.6
Grade 6	RL.6.1, RL.6.2, RL.6.4, RL.6.6	W.6.3	SL.6.1, SL.6.2	L.6.4, L.6.6

Teaching the Book

Homer P. Figg, a 12-year-old orphan with a lively imagination and a loose regard for the truth, narrates this colorful tale of Civil War-era thieves, scallywags, soldiers, and spies. This award-winning book provides an engaging opportunity to teach historical fiction, summarizing, and content-area vocabulary. Students will participate in activities ranging from interacting with a website about the Underground Railroad and Civil War to writing a tall-tale about their own mostly true adventures.

Theme Focus: Historical Fiction

Comprehension Focus: Summarize

Language Focus: Content-Area Vocabulary

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rodman Philbrick began writing short stories in 6th grade and finished a novel by 11th grade. Although his first novels were rejected, he went on to publish more than a dozen novels for adults before writing *Freak the Mighty*, which established Philbrick as a new voice in young adult fiction.

The Mostly True Adventures of Homer P. Figg grew out of Philbrick’s fascination with the Civil War and his family’s roots in the state of Maine. Philbrick acknowledges that Huck Finn was an inspiration for Homer Figg. The book was chosen as a Newbery Honor Book and an ALA Notable book.

Philbrick has written other novels for young adults, many with the themes of imagination, courage, and childhood conflicts. He has said: “I believe that we have the ability to change our lives using our imaginations. Imagination is a muscle—the more you use it, the stronger it gets.”

For more information about Philbrick, visit:

<http://www.rodmanphilbrick.com/topten.html>.

OVERVIEW

Book Summary

The year is 1863. Homer P. Figg of Pine Swamp, Maine, is suddenly thrust into the turmoil of the times when his older brother, Harold, is sold into service as a Union soldier by their evil uncle, Squinton Leach. Determined to rescue Harold from a likely death on the battlefield, Homer runs away in search of him and is soon captured by bounty hunters tracking down runaway slaves. A kindly Quaker, Jedediah Brewster, whose house is a station on the Underground Railroad, rescues Homer and sends him off again on his quest to find Harold. After an adventure on a steamboat and a stint as the “amazing pig boy” in a medicine show, Homer takes flight in a hot-air balloon and lands in the middle of the Confederate Army.

With a combination of heroism and foolhardiness, Homer steals a pony and rides through the rebel lines straight into the Battle of Gettysburg. He finds Harold and the two fight side-by-side in a bloody charge that helps the Union forces win the day. After the war, the two brothers return to Maine to live with the Brewster family. As Homer says at the end of his mostly true adventures, “We’re all of us haunted by yesterday, and we got no choice but to keep marching into our tomorrows.”

Get Ready to Read

Pre-Reading Activities

Meet-the-Author Book Talk Where does an author get his or her idea for a book? That is one of the questions most-asked by young readers. In the following audio clip, Rodman Philbrick discusses his ideas for *The Mostly True Adventures of Homer P. Figg*. Philbrick introduces the book, shares some of its backstory, and reads the first chapter. Visit the Teaching Books website to play the clip for students at <http://bit.ly/SpqpXn>.

Build Background About the Civil War After they listen to Philbrick's introduction, ask students what they know about the Civil War. Clarify their understanding about the two sides of the war—the Union and the Confederacy—by showing the following map on the whiteboard or screen. Use its interactive features to acquaint students with the North and the South in 1861. Find the map by visiting the Scholastic website at <http://bit.ly/UGp4aX>.



BIG QUESTION

Critical Thinking Ask students to think about this question as they read. Write the question on chart paper or the whiteboard.

Do you think Homer P. Figg is a hero?

STORIA ENRICHMENTS

This Storia e-book has the following enrichments to enhance students' comprehension of the book.

- Word Twister (3)
- Word Scramble (2)
- Video
- Who Said It?
- Do You Know?

Vocabulary

Content Area Words The book is full of vocabulary that describes the history of the United States at the time of the Civil War. Learning the meaning of these words aids students' comprehension of the novel, as well as, builds their academic vocabularies. Encourage students to use context clues to figure out word meanings, check definitions, and record other unfamiliar words under each of the Civil War-era topics. Use **Resource #1: Vocabulary Cards** on page 7 and distribute copies to students.

Slavery

emancipation (p. 33)
abolitionists (p. 56)

Civil War

rebel (p. 173)
Yankee (p. 166)

Historical Terms

livery (p. 9)
schooners (p. 84)

As You Read

Reading the Book

Independent Reading The engaging narrative format of the book lends itself to independent reading by students. Assign students to do a silent reading of the book on their own.

Chunking the Book Assign the book in four sections, or chunks, for independent reading. After they finish reading a section, have students discuss the book with partners to ask questions and clarify comprehension.

- Chunk #1: pp. 1–49
- Chunk #2: pp. 50–101
- Chunk #3: pp. 102–152
- Chunk #4: pp. 153–218

Comprehension Focus

Summarize Remind students that a summary is a short statement of the most important ideas or events in a story. Teach students the steps of summarizing, which include:

1. Identify the main events.
2. Find the most important details about the event.
3. Restate the event and important details in a short summary using your own words.

Make sure to remind students to use their own words when summarizing. Point out that summarizing helps them understand and remember books they have read.

Use **Resource #2: Summarize** to model for students how to restate a short summary in their own words. Pass out copies of the resource to students to use for subsequent parts of the book. Then model for students how to summarize a part of the text. Project the organizer on a whiteboard or screen and fill it out as you model summarizing.

Model: I'm going to summarize what happens in the story from pages 4 to 20. The main event in this part of the book is that Harold is sold into the army and Homer escapes from his uncle. What are the important details? First, Homer and Harold get in trouble with their Uncle Squint. Next, Squint brings men to find the brothers and to swear Harold into the Union Army. Then, after Harold is taken away, Homer is locked in the root cellar. Finally, Homer digs his way out of the cellar and rides away on a horse to find Harold and save him.

Give students a brief oral summary of the story chunk in your own words. Assign them to summarize another important event in the story.

After You Read

Questions to Discuss

Lead students in a discussion of these focus story elements. Ask them to provide textual evidence to support their answers.

1. Historical Fiction What historical facts have you

learned about everyday life in the 1860s? (*Sample answers: clothing, transportation, treatment of children.*)

2. Summarize Use your own words to sum up Homer's flight in the balloon from start to finish. (*Sample summary: Homer escapes from the spy hunters by jumping in the hot-air balloon and cutting the anchor. He flies up into the sky, almost falls out of the basket, and then finally lands when the balloon springs a leak and gets caught in trees.*)

3. Content Area Words What color uniform would you wear if you were a Yankee soldier? (*Sample answer: a blue uniform.*)

Questions to Share

Encourage students to share their responses with a partner or small group.

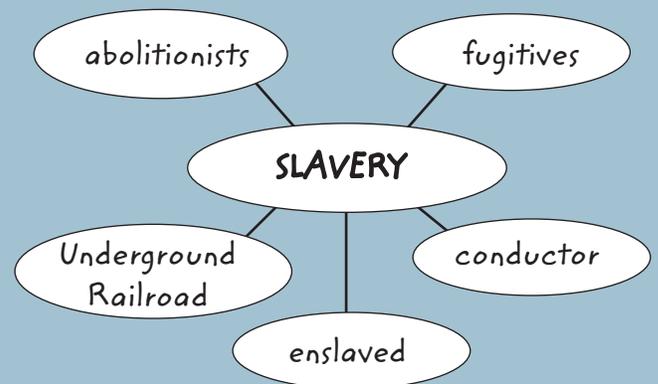
1. Text-to-Self How do you feel about Homer P. Figg personally? Would you want to be his friend? Why or why not?

2. Text-to-World How are the wars you hear about on TV different from the Civil War? How are the

WORDS TO KNOW

Content Area Words

Draw a concept map for each of the word concepts—Slavery, Civil War, Historical Terms—using chart paper or a whiteboard. Ask students to suggest words from their lists that connect to each concept. As you add a word to the map, have students explain how it connects to the concept.



weapons different? How do the soldiers fight differently? Which kind of war do you think is worse?

3. Text-to-Text How is this book different from other historical novels you have read? How is it different from history textbooks?

Extension Activities

Reading/Writing Connection

Point of View The story is told in first person through Homer's point of view. Ask students to think about how scenes in the story would be different if they were told from another character's point of view. For example, how would Frank Nibbly tell the story of tricking Mr. Willow and Homer on the steamship? How would Professor Fleabottom tell the story of using Homer to learn about the Union troops? How would Harold tell the story of the battle at Gettysburg?

Ask students to choose a short scene from the book and rewrite it from another character's point of view. Remind them to use first person to narrate the story.

Don't forget the



BIG QUESTION

Critical Thinking Give each student an opportunity to answer the big question. Encourage students to support their answers with details and evidence from the text. Tell them there is no one right answer.

Do you think Homer P. Figg is a hero?

Content Area Connections

Geography **The Underground Railroad** Students interested in learning more about the Underground Railroad can visit the interactive Scholastic website at: <http://bit.ly/YVtX2Q>. Encourage students to share what they learned with the class, summarizing the information about the different stops on the Underground Railroad

History **The Gettysburg Address** Homer P. Figg and his brother, Harold, both survived the Battle of Gettysburg; however, over 51,000 soldiers on both sides died during the battle. Abraham Lincoln honored those dead in his Gettysburg Address. Acquaint students with this important American document by playing a reading by Sam Waterson, an actor who often played Lincoln on stage, which can be found at the NPR website: <http://n.pr/SWI4Co>.

Arts **Faces of the Civil War** Matthew Brady and other photographers captured the images of both generals and soldiers during the Civil War. After reading about Homer P. Figg, show students images of the young soldiers in this slideshow of Civil War participants from Time.com. Encourage students to study the photos and connect what they

learned from them with what they learned in the novel. Access the slideshow by visiting: <http://ti.me/Wc80Q4>.

Science **Hot-Air Balloons** One of the most thrilling parts of the book is when Homer takes off in a hot-air balloon. Hot-air balloons were used for a time during the war for spy missions. Challenge interested students to research the science behind hot-air balloons and report on their findings using an annotated diagram.

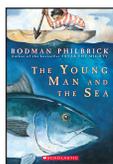
BIG ACTIVITY

The Mostly True Adventures of . . . Give students the opportunity to practice some of Homer Figg's hilarious truth-stretching tales. Have students write a tall-tale version of an adventure of their own. Reread Homer's story to Mrs. Bean from the bottom of page 40 to the end of page 41 as inspiration for them. Then challenge students to choose an event from their life to wildly exaggerate, as Homer often does. Make copies of the **Big Activity: The Mostly True Adventures of . . .** and distribute to students. Encourage them to share the stories they have written.

READ MORE AND LEARN MORE

Use these books and other resources to expand your students' study of the book or theme.

Author Connections



The Young Man and the Sea

Rodman Philbrick

Ages: 9–13

Grades: 4–7

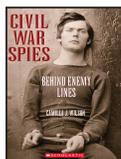
Lexile Measure®: 800L

Pages: 208

Guided Reading Level: S

After Skiff's mother dies, his fisherman father seems to have given up on life. To solve their money problems, Skiff takes matters into his own hands and heads thirty miles out to sea, alone, to catch a mighty bluefin tuna. The wide-open adventure, heart-pounding suspense, and satisfying coming-of-age plot—with a triumphant ending—make this a page-turning classic. **Available as a Storia e-book**

Theme Connections



Civil War Spies

Camilla Wilson

Ages: 9–12

Grades: 4–6

Lexile Measure®: 1000L

Pages: 112

Guided Reading Level: W

Invisible ink, secret hideouts, and risking one's life—it was all part of the dangerous business of being a spy during the Civil War. Readers will learn incredible facts about men and women like Detective Allan Pinkerton, Elizabeth Van Lew, and the brave Harriet Tubman, a former slave who later worked for the Union army. History fans will eagerly soak up these little-known stories from one of the most dramatic periods of US history in this engrossing non-fiction book.

Available as a Storia e-book



The Girl Who Survived

Carol Bierman

Ages: 9–12

Grades: 4–7

Lexile Measure®: 910L

Pages: 112

Guided Reading Level: T

9-year-old Bronia lives a happy life in Poland with her large extended family—until the Nazis begin pulling Jewish people from their homes and sending them to concentration camps. At age 11, Bronia and her siblings are taken to Auschwitz, where her family is broken up once again. Through a combination of luck and circumstance, Bronia makes it through the horrors of the concentration camp, several near-fatal illnesses, and the loss of her family. This memoir, a straightforward presentation of some of the most horrifying events in human history, is both a heartbreaking and inspiring addition to any library.

Available as a Storia e-book



Dear America: A Light in the Storm

Karen Hesse

Ages: 9–13

Grades: 4–7

Lexile Measure®: 850L

Pages: 208

Guided Reading Level: T

It's 1861, the first year of the Civil War, and Amelia helps her family run a lighthouse off the coast of Delaware, a state wedged between the warring North and South. Her father used to command his own ship but was stripped of its command for knowingly transporting a rebel slave. Now, Mother and Father argue constantly—and Amelia feels that only she can light the way for her family. **Available as a Storia e-book**



America at War: Civil War

Ages: 9–13

Grades: 4–7

Pages: 32

This riveting book covers the most important details of a war that pitted brothers against brothers. It contains little known quotes and trivia about specific leaders and battles. Filled with graphics and amazing images, it's an excellent overview of a war that almost ripped the country apart forever. **Available as a Storia e-book**



A Dog's Life: The Autobiography of a Stray

Ann M. Martin

Ages: 9–12

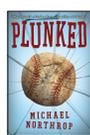
Grades: 4–7

Lexile Measure®: 870L

Pages: 208

Guided Reading Level: Q

Squirrel and her brother Bone are strays. They have a caring mother who protects them and shows them how to survive. But one day she goes away . . . and doesn't return. Now the pups are alone. When Bone decides to leave the only home the dogs have known, Squirrel follows. She can't imagine being separated from him. Yet before long the siblings are separated—and Squirrel faces more hardship than she could have imagined. Can she stay alive on her own? **Available as a Storia e-book**



Plunked

Michael Northrop

Ages: 9–12

Grades: 4–7

Lexile Measure®: 640L

Pages: 192

Jack Morgan's baseball career is on the upswing. The sixth grader is practicing hard and playing well. Jack's work pays off when he finally earns a spot in the Little League Majors. But it all comes crashing down during the opening game of the season, when Jack is hit on the head by a wild pitch on his first at-bat. He suffers only a mild concussion, but Jack is terrified of being hit again. Will his love of the game and his supportive teammates be enough to help him get his head back in the game? **Available as a Storia e-book**

To find PDF versions of the Storia teacher guides and links to purchase the related books, visit:
<http://teacher.scholastic.com/ereading-resources/>

SLAVERY

emancipation (p. 33)

abolitionists (p. 56)

CIVIL WAR

rebel (p. 173)

Yankee (p. 166)

HISTORICAL TERMS

livery (p. 9)

schooners (p. 84)

Name: _____ Date: _____

RESOURCE #2: Summarize

Use this organizer to summarize a part in the book.

Pages _____ to _____

Event: _____

Important Details:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Summary: Use your own words to summarize the event and the important details.
