

SCHOLASTIC
FOCUS

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Grades 7 and up

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The Common Core State Standards addressed by the discussion questions and activities in this guide are listed below. For more information on the Common Core, visit corestandards.org.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.1–12.1;

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.3–12.3;

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.1–12.1;

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.3–12.3



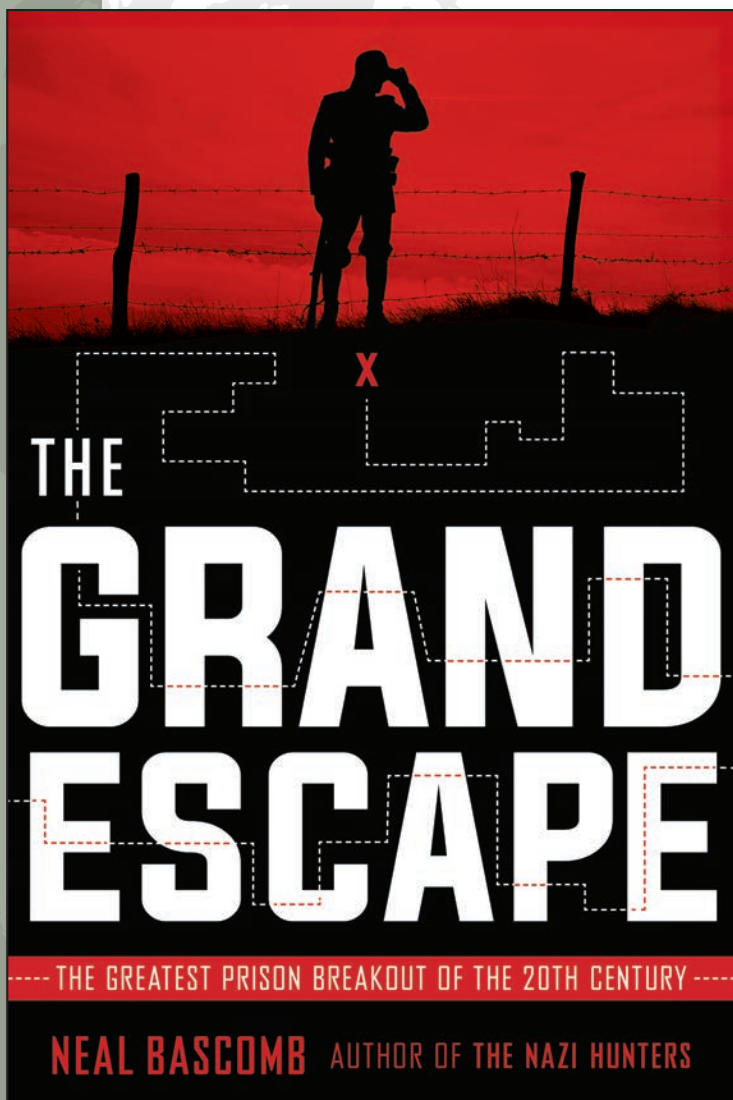
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ACTIVITIES FOR STUDENTS

- During World War I, news of the war was not only conveyed on the pages of newspapers but also through political cartoons that expressed distinct points of view. Cartoons from prisoners depicting creative escape attempts from German POW camps, guard searches of prisoners' parcels, prisoners' ransackings for escape supplies, and more are sprinkled throughout *The Grand Escape*. Select one event from the book to use as the basis for a political cartoon. Consider the point of view that you are trying to express; it should be evident in both the illustration and the words you choose to use in your cartoon.
- The officers imprisoned at Holzminden were allowed to send and receive mail and parcels from home. At times, prisoners were bold enough to embed secret messages in their letters with requests for certain supplies that might aid them in escaping the camp. Reread pages 40–41. Imagine that you are a British officer at Holzminden. What news and requests would you wish to convey to your family back in England? How might you express your need for certain supplies surreptitiously? Write a letter home with this in mind.
- Inscribed on a cell wall at Holzminden was the quote, “Stone walls do not a prison make, / nor iron bars a cage.” These lines are from a poem written in 1642 by Richard Lovelace. Write a persuasive piece that examines the argument supporting the accuracy of the quote. Include details from *The Grand Escape* to support your opinion. Make sure to address the counterargument in your piece as well.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Historically, those captured on the battlefield during war were enslaved or executed. How did the Hague Conventions seek to “civilize war”? How did the Germans interpret the guidelines for treating prisoners as outlined by the Hague Conventions?
- *The Grand Escape* follows the war experiences of several members of the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) who had been captured by the Germans as prisoners of war. One of these captured men, Caspar Kennard, soon discovered that the “Germans had no intention of abiding by the rules of war that should have determined his treatment.” What was the difference between how Kennard thought he should be treated and how he was actually treated by the Germans at the POW camp Osnabrück?
- Many of the captured RFC were consumed with the desire to escape their prison camps. How did Kennard and his fellow breakout team members get the supplies that they needed to escape Osnabrück? Describe their escape plan.

- The German soldiers who ran the POW camps were constantly thwarting escape attempts by the prisoners. Reread pages 55–58 and describe the prisoners’ different methods of escape.
- Many “escape fiends,” or those who repeatedly tried to escape the camps only to be recaptured, were sent to a new POW camp at Holzminden. Describe the conditions at Holzminden and the German camp commander, Karl Niemeyer.
- How was the rigid European class system in place during World War I apparent in the POW camps in Germany?
- Niemeyer was determined to not let any prisoner escape and ruin his reputation as a successful commander, but prisoners were constantly getting out of Holzminden through a secret hatch. Once it was discovered, prisoner “Shorty” Colquhoun came up with a new plan for escape. What was Colquhoun’s novel plan for breaking out of Holzminden? How did he and his fellow POWs start the project?
- In late February 1918, Colquhoun and some other tunnelers were sent to Holland to be interned for the duration of the war. Of this move, Colquhoun said, “I felt like a deserter, nothing more or less.” He was leaving Holzminden to go to comparatively luxurious treatment in a neutral country. Why do you think he felt like a deserter?
- Digging a tunnel of great length and depth poses many challenges and dangers. What difficulties did the tunnelers have to face when excavating stone and dirt far under the ground at Holzminden?
- Even if prisoners escaped through the tunnel at Holzminden, they still had to contend with the 150-mile distance from the camp to freedom in Holland. What extraordinary plan did Gray, Blain, and Kennard devise so that no one would suspect that they were escapees from a POW camp?
- Who was Livewire and what role did senior British officer Rathborne play in the escape plans that were actually carried out?
- What was the ruck and how did they participate in the escape by way of the tunnel? What was the success rate of those who were part of the grand escape from Holzminden? Compare how those in the ruck and those in the original escape party fared.
- Niemeyer was obsessed with locating all twenty-nine of the POW escapees. What did he do to recapture the prisoners?
- After the success of the grand escape from Holzminden, what happened to the British officers who made it all the way to freedom? How did they spend the remainder of the war? How did they participate in British life after the war?

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