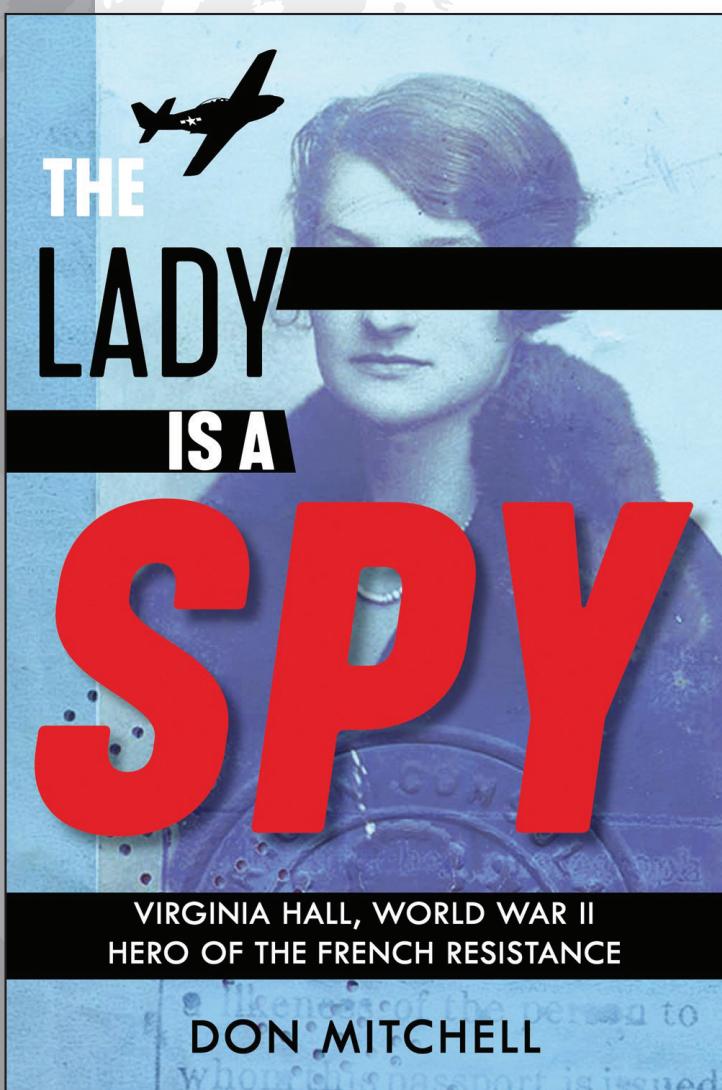


# DISCUSSION GUIDE



THE  
**LADY**  
IS A  
**SPY**

VIRGINIA HALL, WORLD WAR II  
HERO OF THE FRENCH RESISTANCE

DON MITCHELL

Grades 7-12

HARDCOVER

978-0-545-93612-5

\$18.99

EBOOK

978-0-545-93656-9

\$11.99

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](http://corestandards.org).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.1, 8.1,  
9-10.1, 11-12.1;

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.2, 8.2,  
9-10.2, 11-12.2;

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.3, 8.3,  
9-10.3, 11-12.3

# ACTIVITIES FOR STUDENTS

- Though Virginia Hall was unique in her role as an intelligence agent, she was not the only female spy during World War II. Other women involved in intelligence during the war included Joan Bondurant, Claire Phillips, and Julia Child. Select one of these intelligence agents to research and collect information about the role that agent played in supporting the efforts of the Allies in World War II. Write a short report comparing the life of your selected spy to the life events of Virginia Hall. How were the two spies alike? What attributes and situations differed between the two?
- Virginia Hall adopted different identities and aliases in order to complete her intelligence missions. Spies were routinely issued a dossier containing background information about their cover identity before departing for their missions. Imagine that you are a leader in the Special Operations Executive. Write a fictional dossier for Virginia Hall that she might have used when she was working undercover in wartime France. Include important details such as her cover name, occupation, language spoken, and personal history.
- Virginia Hall's cover was often that of a newspaper journalist writing for an American newspaper. Assume the role of foreign correspondent for a newspaper and write an article about the living conditions of the French under German occupation. Use information from the book about food rations and the black market in your article. In addition, you may want to research more details about food scarcity in wartime France to enrich your factual reporting. Be sure to include a headline for your piece.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Virginia Hall went to several colleges. She started at Radcliffe, then transferred to Barnard, and then studied in Europe. What qualities and talents did Virginia possess after her time in Europe that lead to her future success in espionage?
- Virginia was excited to work abroad for the State Department, and she was sent to Poland, Italy, Estonia, and Turkey. During her time working at the US Consulate in Izmir, Turkey, what fateful event happened to Virginia when she went hunting with friends?
- Who came to Virginia's defense after her accident when she unsuccessfully tried to pursue a position in the Foreign Service? Why do you think this person was sympathetic to Virginia's struggle?
- Virginia found herself in Paris when France surrendered to Germany in 1940. Who

was Henri-Philippe Pétain and how was he connected to the Vichy regime? What was the Maquis?

- While working in London, Virginia decided to become a spy for the British. Prime Minister Winston Churchill had just created the SOE. What was its purpose?
- Though Virginia did not receive any training from the British, it was thought she could be of use to the cause. What was Virginia's cover so that she could enter France and gather information? What types of jobs did she do to support French patriots as an intelligence operative?
- As part of Virginia's work as an undercover intelligence agent for the SOE, she traveled quite a bit. What observations did Virginia make about the impact of the war on the French in terms of transportation and food availability?
- In the course of her espionage efforts in France, Virginia crossed paths with Abbé Alesch, a courier. Virginia was wary of this clergyman who spoke French with a pronounced German accent. In the end, who did Abbé Alesch turn out to be?
- Virginia's work in World War II France was decidedly dangerous. She often moved and changed her cover. The Gestapo noted that "the woman who limps is one of the most dangerous Allied agents in France." How did Virginia react as she realized her cover was compromised and the threat to her and her Resistance colleagues was growing?
- What was the process of gathering intelligence for the United States prior to World War II? How did this process change during the war? Who were key people in shaping the changes?
- Virginia operated in a field dominated by men. Though she was not afraid to assert herself, her authority at times was undermined by men. The OSS even sent a letter to Virginia's mother commending Virginia for "doing a spectacular, man-sized job." How did Virginia's gender affect the assignments and responsibilities she was given by intelligence organizations during and after the war? In what ways was Virginia's gender an asset, especially when working undercover?
- How did Virginia's upbringing on a Maryland farm come in handy when she was operating undercover for her second tour of duty in occupied France?
- Though Virginia Hall emerged unscathed from her two tours in wartime France, many of her colleagues in the Resistance did not. What happened to some of Virginia's key supporters during her time as an intelligence officer? How did Virginia respond to the fate of her colleagues?
- All of Virginia's hard work on behalf of the Allies did not go unnoticed. She was recognized by both the British and American governments. What awards did she receive over the course of her time working as an intelligence agent?

# **THE LADY IS A SPY: Virginia Hall, World War II Hero of the French Resistance** By Don Mitchell

When Hitler invaded Poland, Virginia Hall was traveling in Europe. As fighting erupted, instead of returning home, she headed to France.

In a country divided by freedom and fascism, Virginia was determined to do her part for the Allies. An ordinary woman from Baltimore, Maryland, she dove into the action, first joining a French ambulance unit and later becoming an undercover agent for both the British Office of Strategic Services and the US Office of Strategic Services. She passed in plain sight of the enemy and soon found herself being hunted by the Gestapo. Virginia's covert operations, efforts with the Resistance, and risky work as a wireless telegraph operator greatly contributed to the Allies's eventual win.

**Don Mitchell** is a critically acclaimed author of nonfiction for young people, including *The Freedom Summer Murders*, which received multiple starred reviews and was a Kirkus Prize finalist for Young Readers' Literature, an NAACP Image Award nominee for Outstanding Literary Work for Teens, and a Kirkus Best Book of the Year; *Liftoff: A Photobiography of John Glenn*; and *Driven: A Photobiography of Henry Ford*. He has served on the staff of the US Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, as well as on the staff of the National Security Council.

## **Praise for THE LADY IS A SPY**

"An intriguing, informative glimpse into the life of a little-known figure that will appeal to fans of feminist heroes." —Booklist

"Detailed, thoroughly researched, and engaging" —School Library Journal



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