



A Greek soldier holding his daughter. (ca. 1941)  
courtesy of the Library of Congress

**mll**  
middle level learning

# Dramatic Narratives: Capturing the Human Side of World War II

Anita Perna Bohn and  
Penny Britton Kolloff

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Supplement to  
National Council for the  
Social Studies Publications  
Number 27  
September 2006  
[www.socialstudies.org](http://www.socialstudies.org)



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Anita Perna Bohn and Penny Britton Kolloff

**The atmosphere in the fifth grade** classroom was electric as students dressed in World War II-era costumes waited in turn to tell their stories. A dignified young “Eleanor Roosevelt,” in long skirt and high-collared blouse, with her hair in a bun, looked over photos of refugee children. A German-Jewish schoolgirl, with her hair in braids, tied and retied the bow to the apron she wore over her simple dress. Beside her sat a sprawling, confident soldier in army fatigues and helmet, his face smudged with the grit of the battlefield. These fifth graders were engaged in the culminating activity of a three-week unit on World War II that emphasized the human impact of the war.

The World War II dramatic narratives project was designed to capture the social, political, and emotional significance of historical events through intensive literary and dramatic explorations of first-person accounts, integrating social studies, literacy, and the fine and performing arts.

Shelly Upperman, a fifth grade classroom teacher at Maroa Grade School in Maroa, Illinois, agreed to help in developing such a unit, and asked the school’s reading specialist, Debbie Johnson, to help in the teaching. “I know in my heart we are short-changing students when we don’t give them the social studies tools and knowledge they’ll need as citizens,” Shelly stated, “but the district goals stress reading and math scores as our number one priority. I also believe that literature can be an engaging venue for exploring social studies issues. I thought that if we could approach important social studies topics in ways that also developed literacy

skills, we could give the kids what they needed and deserved in both areas of the curriculum.”

World War II, a topic for study in the fifth grade, seemed an ideal subject with which to test the project. A wealth of first person accounts from World War II and supplementary materials offered great potential for breadth and depth of coverage. The extraordinary diversity of people whose stories reveal the human dimension of World War II provided endless possibilities for character study and dramatic interpretation. Such accounts offered powerful opportunities to investigate issues related to social class, race/ethnicity, gender, nationality, religion, and age. The reading and writing processes and the development of dramatic narratives could be creatively interwoven with students’ growing historical thinking skills: chronological thinking, comprehension, interpretation, research capabilities, issues analysis, and decision-making.<sup>1</sup>

## Developing the Unit of Study

Using the chronological story of World War II presented in the students’ textbook as a framework, the authors began the process of identifying the essential individuals or groups of people along the war’s timeline who had witnessed or participated in key events. Although state and national history standards place a strong emphasis on U.S. history at the elementary level, we also wanted to underscore the impact of the war on people around the world. We developed a list of potential characters, some real-life personages and others “composite characters” who represented a social group that lived through World War II. About half of the characters were female, and many were from other countries, since the war was fought primarily on foreign soil. Our criteria for selection of characters included the accessibility of information for any one character that was age-appropriate, and an overall representation of diversity of perspectives and life experience among the group to flesh out the complex picture of wartime.

A wide selection of nonfiction texts and photo essays were identified to elaborate the textbook treatment of the causes and chronology of World War II. In addition, a variety of high-quality children’s historical fiction, including picture books, was selected that would

allow children to identify with engaging and realistic younger characters. (Recommended books and videos are listed at the end of this article.) These materials represented a range of reading levels to accommodate the diverse composition of the classroom, and presented a balance between factual accounts and historical fiction.<sup>2</sup>

We also selected a number of video documentaries and dramatizations appropriate for young audiences. A few World War II-era poster reproductions, readily available from social studies suppliers, helped set the tone in the classroom.

With regard to internet resources, we pre-screened websites and identified a few appropriate ones for each character (listed at the end of this article). These sites offer engaging personal accounts of World War II events at a level of reading difficulty, emotional intensity, and detail appropriate for young readers.

### Additional Teaching Tools

We created a biographical sheet to guide the students through the process of collecting and organizing information from their various Internet and book sources, and for preparing their dramatic historic narratives. Questions posed on this form help the young learner see the character as a three-dimensional human being with a childhood and a personality, and as a product of a certain time and place. (**Handout: Biography of a World War II Survivor, p.6**).

Guidelines for dramatic presentations include appropriate styles of speech, body language, props, and types of clothing that would reflect the characters and the time in which they lived. Tips for embellishing the presentations with dramatic elements, as well as general public speaking techniques, were included in these guidelines.

### Teaching the Unit

Shelly distributed the list of the historical figures and allowed each student to narrow his or her choice down to four, but Shelly made the final selection. This process allowed her to match degrees of



**Private Henry F. Rourke shows a rosary to a wounded Japanese soldier. Later Pvt. Rourke learns that the soldier is a Buddhist. (ca. 1942)**

research and writing difficulty with the interests and abilities of the students, to distribute the available characters fairly, and to ensure a good representation of World War II personages. Characters were assigned before the students read any text materials so that they could begin immediately to look at events from the perspective of their historical figures.

*Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry was selected as a common initial reading assignment in language arts class, so that students could discuss how to relate and extract textual content they could later use to create portraits of people living during World War II.<sup>3</sup> Discussions of this book provided a foundation for seeing how time and place in history work to shape people's lives.

Students then began to research their own characters using the internet sources provided (See the lists at the end of this article). Debbie guided students through the process of skimming and taking notes from online sources. She also worked to find additional appropriate sites for students when needed. She commented:

“There was a large range in students’ abilities. Those who used the internet at home generally were more at ease working their way through electronic texts than those who did not.” The students also made selections from the wide range of fictional and non-fictional books related to the war, with Debbie’s help, and used them to enhance their understanding of their characters and the realities of the times in which they lived. This allowed for significant instructional differentiation, as the strongest readers took several novels and non-fictional works during this unit, while weaker readers could read a picture book or two and still obtain useful information. The videotapes were also utilized during this period. The whole class viewed some of them, while others were checked out by students interested in a specific topic.

Students used their biography handouts to cull information from all of these resources and answer the questions or respond to the prompts. For some of the students, this meant creating a “back story,” as actors call the background history for their fictitious characters, while



others collected key factual information they could piece together about their character's biographies. Work time for the research and writing phases of the project lasted 1–2 hours a day. Most internet research was conducted during class time, but the reading of related literature was done either during free time or for homework.

### Writing

As the writing began, students took biographical information and created webs or outlines from which they wrote their first drafts. During the drafting stage, students worked to integrate materials from several sources in order to develop their chosen character. This proved to be a challenge to fifth grade writers, since most of them had not done the kind of narrative writing that requires one to create character sketches from fragmented information. The task of synthesizing varied material into a coherent portrait typically required multiple drafts. Each student read his or her draft aloud to a partner and posed three feedback questions:

1. Are there parts of my story that you do not understand?
2. What would help you understand the character better?
3. Where does the story need more details?

Peer feedback, along with written comments from both teachers, helped students fill in gaps, provide transitions between text and narrative materials, and create more three-dimensional characters.

Shelly created a complementary art assignment during the unit: each student prepared a poster that visually communicated some aspect of the character's story. The required elements were a title,



U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum

**At a center in Bavaria for non-German displaced persons, a girl holds a name card intended to help surviving family members locate her through the United Nations. (ca. 1945)**

a photograph (taken digitally in class), a symbol, and a drawing. Some students chose to highlight the cultural background of their character, such as their Jewish heritage, while others illustrated the historical context of their character, such as the story and the symbols of the Tuskegee Airmen. The art projects were developed in a single class period and then finished at home.

The culmination of the World War II unit was the dramatic presentations. Almost every student created a costume of some kind. Students were asked to practice their presentations at home, in front of a family audience. Many students were proud to be able to incorporate family photographs, uniforms, period clothing, badges, medals, and other artifacts into their presentations.

### Presentations

On presentation day, students used the posters they had made as backdrops for their presentation. These provided good visual references for the audience

forth over my head." A female supply pilot told an outraged audience that, although she risked her own life to help them, a few of the men to whom she had flown supplies teased her for being a female doing a man's job.

Following each oral presentation, classmates posed questions to which the presenter responded in character. In these few minutes, students drew upon their research and preparation either to ask questions, or to respond in character. This exercise revealed the extent to which some students internalized the information they had gathered, as they responded personally to the questions or the comments of other characters. One student in the audience made the connection between the prejudice he had "felt" as a Tuskegee Airman and the prejudice described by the female supply pilot. Another student, dressed as a member of the much-decorated Japanese-American 442nd battalion that served in Europe, was asked by a classmate, "Why did you want to fight for America after the way

that enhanced their understanding of the characters' circumstances. Everyone's attention was riveted on the speakers. Eleanor Roosevelt showed photos of her beloved parents who both died young, and another of her boarding school days at Allenswood School in England. She talked about meeting and marrying Franklin, and told of her strong desire to ease people's suffering that led her on many goodwill missions throughout World War II. A young man talked of being a Jew hidden in a root cellar by a non-Jewish Belgian farmer and his family. He told his mesmerized classmates about a day when German soldiers came to search the house: "I can still hear those German boots clomping back and

they put your family in the internment camps?” He thought for a long time before responding earnestly, “I guess I thought that they would respect me more if I did that.” Another classmate pressed him further: “How did you feel when the United States dropped the atomic bomb on Japan?” After another thoughtful pause, he carefully stated, “I didn’t like it, but I didn’t like it when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor either.”

### Evaluating the Unit

At the conclusion of the unit, there were several assessments of the outcomes. The teachers created a rubric with criteria that matched the components of the unit, and gave each student an evaluation of their writing, research, and presentation skills. While a range of performance can be expected in any task of this nature, both the classroom teacher and the reading teacher were pleased with evidence of solid research and successful narrative writing from almost all students. Shelly also compared the written narratives with paragraphs the students had written for their previous social studies chapter on the Great Depression, and shared with the authors that “the final written products they’ve turned in reflect an imagination and polish I have not seen in these students’ previous writings, even though the task of synthesizing information was harder this time.” She and Debbie attributed the improvement to the combined effects of exposure to the imaginative and provocative literature about people and events, and to the students’ sense of personal commitment to the characters and their stories that they took on as their own. Both teachers expressed enthusiasm and determination to employ this unit again with subsequent fifth grade classes.

Each student completed an assessment of the overall unit, responding to questions about their perceptions of this atypical approach to learning social studies. There were the inevitable students who said they did not enjoy writing, and a few complained about having to do research beyond the textbook, but

the class unanimously indicated a preference for this method of learning about history over the traditional textbook-and-test format. Students were asked to describe their favorite part of the assignment. The dramatic presentation was a hands-down winner, but written responses to this question were surprisingly varied:

“Learning from other people’s characters.”

“Getting dressed up for the person I was.”

“When we wrote out narrative.”

“Doing research and getting tons of awesome information and facts.”

The authors were interested in whether this method of teaching resulted in better long-term retention of content. The following September, fifth grade students who had participated in the unit were distributed across four different sixth grade classrooms. We asked the sixth grade teachers to have their students list as many things as they could remember about World War II. The authors evaluated the 72 responses (with students’ names removed) for accuracy and quality of information, and for the number of events and concepts remembered. Results were gratifying: the top four students were all members of the class that had participated in the dramatic narratives project. Only two members of that class (both very low-performing students in general) did not appear in the top fifty percent. More important, the overall quality of the responses from students who had been in the dramatic narratives project was better, often revealing more complex ideas and details, and going beyond narrow factual data more commonly reported, such as “The war lasted four years.” The following two responses illustrate this point:

“Combat nurses could set up a hospital just about anywhere.”

“A lot of nurses were killed, too, because they were on the front.”

### Conclusions and Reflections

The use of first person dramatic narratives to explore significant historic events proved to be a motivating and

engaging experience for fifth grade students studying World War II.<sup>4</sup>

The unit of study extended the classroom time available for consideration of social studies issues, and allowed students to develop a sense of the human drama of historic events. It provided opportunities for meaningful use of technology and integration of subject matter, and occasioned the exploration and interpretation of primary sources. Evidence of students’ improved narrative writing supports the notion that social studies can be an effective venue in which to address grade-level language arts goals.

The development of personal dramatic narratives in the teaching of history is a process that can be used to enrich students’ historic understanding of many major events and eras: the Great Depression, the Civil War, and the American Revolution, to name a few likely candidates that are revisited at various grade levels from fifth grade upward.<sup>5</sup>

### Notes

1. National Center for History in the Schools, *National Standards for History* (Los Angeles, CA: NCHS, 1996).
2. If senior citizens are available for oral interviews, they can be a rich source of information. See Thomas E. Gray, “A World War II Oral History Project for Eighth Graders,” *Middle Level Learning*, 10 (January/February 2001): 7-8.
3. Lois Lowry, *Number the Stars* (New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Books, 1990).
4. A unit of study about World War II should include the biographies of notable leaders and leading figures of the era. (e.g., these students learned about Eleanor Roosevelt, among others). This article describes an enhancement activity—studying the experiences of common citizens of the era.
5. The authors thank Shelly Upperman and Debbie Johnson at Maroa Grade School in Maroa, Illinois, for their collaboration on this project.

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# Biography of a World War II Survivor

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_ Class \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

My historical character's name \_\_\_\_\_

(Check one) This person was  a real person.  a fictional character.

Answer the questions on this page as though you were the person about whom you are writing. Try to “see” the world from this character’s point of view.

For *real persons*, you will be gathering and summarizing biographical information.

For *fictional characters*, you will be composing answers on the basis of what you read in historical fiction and in accounts of real people in similar situations. Aim to create a historically accurate *composite character*, which is a single character that accurately reflects the typical experiences of many people.

You may ask adults to help you with details of your answers to avoid *anachronisms*—things, activities, or conversations that are chronologically out of place. (For example, it would be wrong to describe a person watching news of the war on television in 1943, because people did not have home television sets at that time. They listened to the radio, and short newsreels were shown before popular movies.)

Gather information about your historic character using information that you find in books, magazines, and on internet sites. Your teacher will suggest some sources with which to begin.

Cite all the *references* that you use to find the information that you gather. Write down each book’s title and author. If you use websites, write down the name of the site plus its URL address.

Later, you will write a *narrative* from your character’s point of view, based on your answers to these questions.

1. How old are you during the years of World War II, 1941–1945?
2. Describe the place where you lived before the war started. Was it in the city or in the country? What was the climate? What was the landscape like? What was the architecture?
3. What language did you speak at home? To what ethnic group or religion (if any) did you belong?
4. Describe your family members and tell how you lived before and during the war. How did you (or your parents) earn a living?
5. Were you aware of any signs of the coming war? Were you sheltered from the news, or were you concerned about the growing conflicts?
6. Where were you during the years of World War II? What happened to you during World War II? What did you do during those years?
7. Try to “remember” some of the feelings you had as you went through these experiences. Name at least two emotions, and explain what evoked them.
8. Tell two *anecdotes* (short stories) about yourself that provide a little insight about your past or your personality—how you behaved in difficult situations, what you were thinking during these years, or how you might have expressed your thoughts and feelings to other people.
9. Did your experiences during the war affect the rest of your life in any way? If so, try to describe how you were affected.
10. Why were the events that you were involved in during World War II important? Why should people know about them and care about them? What meaning did they have for people during World War II? Why should we remember them today?



# Recommended Books and Videos

Anita Perna Bohn and Penny Britton Kolloff

## HISTORICAL FICTION

### Primary Grades Reading Level

Bishop, C. H. *Twenty and Ten*. Minneapolis, MN: Sagebrush Education Resources, 1978.

Borden, L. *The Little Ships*. New York: Margaret K. McElderry Books, 1977.

Bunting, E. *So Far from the Sea*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1998.

Hesse, K. *The Cats in Krasinski Square*. New York: Scholastic Press, 2004.

Innocenti, R. *Rose Blanche*. New York: Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 1991.

Mochizuki, K. *Baseball Saved Us*. New York: Lee & Low Books, 1995.

Polacco, P. *The Butterfly*. New York: Philomel, 2000.

Say, A. *Home of the Brave*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2002.

Trottier, M. *Flags*. Markham, Canada: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1999.

### Intermediate Grades Reading Level

Borden, L. *The Greatest Skating Race: A Story from the Netherlands*. New York: Margaret K. McElderry Press, 2004.

Drucker, M., and Halpern, M. *Jacob's Rescue*. New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Books, 1994.

Hoobler, T, and Hoobler, D. *Aloha Means Come Back*. Parsippany, NJ: Silver Burdett, 2000.

Lowry, L. *Number the Stars*. New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Books, 1990.

Raven, M. T. *Mercedes and the Chocolate Pilot: The Berlin Airlift*. Chelsea, MI: Sleeping Bear Press, 2002.

Vos, I. *Hide and Seek*. Minneapolis: Sagebrush Education Resources, 1995.

### Middle School Grade Level

Buchignani, W. *Tell No One Who You Are*. Plattsburgh, NY: Tundra Books, 1996.

Giff, P. R. *Lily's Crossing*. New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Books, 1997.

Greene, B. *Summer of My German Soldier*. New York: Bantam Books, 1974.

Hahn, M.D. *Stepping on the Cracks*. New York: HarperTrophy, 1992.

Mazer, N. *Good Night, Maman*. Orlando: Harcourt, 1999.

Myers, W. D. *The Journal of Scott Pendleton Collins*. New York: Scholastic Books, 1999.

Napoli, D. J. *Stones in Water*. New York: Puffin Books, 1999.

Orlev, U. *The Man from the Other Side*. Boston: Walter Lorraine Books, 1991.

Osborne, M. P. *My Secret War*. New York: Hyperion Books, 2000.

Propp, V. W. *When the Soldiers were Gone*. New York: Putnam Books, 1999.

Reiss, J. *The Upstairs Room*. New York: HarperCollins, 1972.

Vos, I. *The Key is Lost*. New York: William Morrow, 2000.

Westfall, R. *The Kingdom by the Sea*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1993.

Yolen, J. *The Devil's Arithmetic*. New York: Viking Press, 1998.

### Mature Reading Level

Bitton-Jackson, L. *I Have Lived a Thousand Years: Growing Up in the Holocaust*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997.

Bruchac, J. *Code Talker*. New York: Dial Press, 2005.

Pausewang, G. *The Final Journey*. New York: Puffin Books, 1998.

Westfall, R. *Blitzcat*. New York: Scholastic Books, 1990.

## NON-FICTION

### Primary Grades Reading Level

Colman, P. *Where the Action Was: Women War Correspondents*. New York: Crown, 2002.

### Intermediate Grades Reading Level

Korenblit, M., and Janger, K. *Until We Meet Again*. Mansfield, MA: Charles River Press, 1995.

Leitner, I. *The Big Lie: A True Story*. New York: Scholastic Books, 1992.

Pettit, J. *A Place to Hide*. Minneapolis: Sagebrush Education Resources 1993.

Warren, A. *Surviving Hitler: A Boy in the Nazi Death Camps*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001.

### Middle School Level

Adler, D. A. *We Remember the Holocaust*. New York: Henry Holt, 1995.

Ambrose, S. E. *The Good Fight: How WWII Was Won*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001.

Colman, P. *Rosie the Riveter*. New York: Crown, 1995.

Fox, A. L., and Abraham-Podietz, E. *Ten Thousand Children: The Kindertransport*. New York: Behrman House, 1998.

Kuhn, B. *Angels of Mercy*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999.

Levine, E. *Darkness Over Denmark*. New York: Holiday House, 1999.

McClain, S. *Navajo Weapon*. Tucson, AZ: Treasure Chest Books, 2002.

Nathan, A. *Yankee Doodle Gals: Women Pilots*. Washington, DC: National Geographic Society, 2001.

Sullivan, G. *The Day Pearl Harbor was Bombed: A Photo History*. New York: Scholastic Books, 1991.

Uchida, Y. *The Invisible Thread*. New York: HarperTrophy, 1995.

Waktsuki, J., and Houston, J. *Farewell to Manzanar*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002.

Wassiljewa, T. *Hostage to War: A True Story*. New York: Scholastic Books, 1997.

Wiesel, E. *Night*. New York: Batam, 1982.



A line for sugar rationing in the United States. (ca. 1942)

National Archives and Records Administration

Yep, L. *Hiroshima*. Minneapolis: Sagebrush Education Resources, 1996.

### WORLD WAR II VIDEOTAPES

*The Diary of Anne Frank*. California: Twentieth Century Fox, 1959.

*PT-109*, Warner Studios Studios, 1963 (VHS 2001).

*Into the Arms of Strangers: Stories of the Kindertransport*. New York: Warner Home Video, 2000.

*The American Experience: Fly Girls*. New York: PBS Home Video, 1999.

*Windtalkers*. MGM/UA Video, 2002. (Selected clips only).

## Oral History Online

The following pages (9–10) cite many internet links to oral histories of people who lived during World War II. One worth special mention is the “People’s War” website of the British Broadcasting Corporation ([www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar](http://www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar)). Simply entering a key word (like “blitz”) into the search box usually yields a long list of readable interview transcripts. Or read over the well-organized archive list and choose from a category like “Location,” “Key Events,” or “Home Front.” There are 42,000 oral histories at your fingertips. The only obvious limitation to this wonderful collection is that it emphasizes the British experience in this worldwide conflict, but at this site, students can find information quickly, with few distractions or dead ends.

Another notable site is “Experiencing War: Stories from the Veterans History Project” of the U.S. Library of Congress ([www.loc.gov/vets/sights.html](http://www.loc.gov/vets/sights.html)). Teachers should preview this site carefully before recommending it to middle school students because:

- Most of the interviews are sound or video recordings, which require audio and video software.
- Digitized interviews are grouped together under themes, but the interviews are from various wars of the 20th century, not just World War II.
- Many of these themes (ex. “Buddies,” “Courage,” and “On a Mission”) do not correspond with a specific character type or historical event.
- Searches with the use of key words yield catalogue notes for the most part, not actual interviews, because the work of digitizing the collection is still in progress.
- The experiences of U.S. veterans are emphasized (which is appropriate, but it excludes some of the civilian roles listed in the classroom assignment described here).

It’s tempting to spend a lot of time listening to interesting interviews at this site, but students may end up with little to show for a particular assignment. Teachers might do well to recommend specific interviews from this site, as opposed to inviting students to browse the collection.

**Caption Error:** The caption for the cover photo of the May/June 2006 issue of *Middle Level Learning* contained an error. Those demonstrators chopping at The Wall were in West Berlin, not East Berlin. The Wall in East Berlin was behind land mines and concrete fortifications—a death strip. It would not have been covered with graffiti. I visited this area many times during the Cold War.

— Andrea Noel  
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# Suggested WWII Characters and Website Resources

*Teachers could assign characters marked with an asterisk if they are not utilizing all of the characters on the list. Visit websites before recommending them to your students. This list is available to NCSS members (for easy cut-and-paste of URLs) at [www.socialstudies.org/Lessons/WWII](http://www.socialstudies.org/Lessons/WWII). A unit of study about World War II should include the biographies of notable leaders; this is a resource list for an enhancement activity— studying the experiences of common citizens of that period of world history.*

—Anita Perna Bohn and Penny Britton Kolloff

## 1. Woman Worker in an Aircraft Factory \*

The oral history project of Kaiser Shipyards

[www.rosietheriveter.org/memory.htm](http://www.rosietheriveter.org/memory.htm)

Memoir and history

[www.loc.gov/rr/program/journey/rosie-transcript.html](http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/journey/rosie-transcript.html)

Article with quotes

[www.defenselink.mil/news/May2004/n05302004\\_200405303.html](http://www.defenselink.mil/news/May2004/n05302004_200405303.html)

## 2. Witness of Pearl Harbor Attack \*

Senator Daniel Inouye's Eyewitness Account is a PDF file (following the phrase "more than two thousand people are dead") at [www.pbs.org/wnet/historyofus/web12/segment5.html](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/historyofus/web12/segment5.html)

[www.nps.gov/usar/ National Park Service](http://www.nps.gov/usar/NationalParkService)

Witness to the attack, [www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/pearl.htm](http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/pearl.htm)

Q & A first-hand account

[teacher.scholastic.com/pearl/transcript.htm](http://teacher.scholastic.com/pearl/transcript.htm)

## 3. Tuskegee Airman (U.S. Soldier)\*

Captain Robert Marshall Glass's story is a sidebar to click in the left-hand margin at

[www.cr.nps.gov/museum/exhibits/tuskegee/airoverview.htm](http://www.cr.nps.gov/museum/exhibits/tuskegee/airoverview.htm)

First-person account

[www.jimcrowhistory.org/resources/narratives/Levi\\_Thornhill.htm](http://www.jimcrowhistory.org/resources/narratives/Levi_Thornhill.htm)

Excellent photos and good captions

[www.frankambrose.com/pages/tusk.html](http://www.frankambrose.com/pages/tusk.html)

## 4. U.S. Soldier\*

Lieutenant Robert Edlin's eyewitness account is a PDF file (following the phrase "We are on our way to Berlin") at

[www.pbs.org/wnet/historyofus/web12/segment7.html](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/historyofus/web12/segment7.html)

An account of D-Day

[www.memoriesofwar.com/veterans/hinton.asp](http://www.memoriesofwar.com/veterans/hinton.asp)

Eyewitness of Iwo Jima flag-raising

[www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/voiwo.htm](http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/voiwo.htm)

## 5. U.S. Pilot Over Germany

A gripping account of being shot down

[www.memoriesofwar.com/veterans/dreiseszun.asp](http://www.memoriesofwar.com/veterans/dreiseszun.asp)

George Rarey's story and original artwork

[www.rareybird.com/](http://www.rareybird.com/)

## 6. American Child at the "Home Front" \*

The efforts of Scouts, children, and the elderly are described at [www.qconline.com/progress99/2ration2.shtml](http://www.qconline.com/progress99/2ration2.shtml)  
Living with rationing and price controls  
[www.archives.gov/northeast/boston/exhibits/homefront/](http://www.archives.gov/northeast/boston/exhibits/homefront/)

## 7. Japanese-American Child at a Prison Camp \* Q & A with Marielle Tsukamoto at

[memory.loc.gov/learn/lessons/99/fear/interview.html](http://memory.loc.gov/learn/lessons/99/fear/interview.html)

Letters written by children

[www.lib.washington.edu/exhibits/harmony/Exhibit/willis.html](http://www.lib.washington.edu/exhibits/harmony/Exhibit/willis.html)

Shizuye Takashima's memoirs

[www.nps.gov/manz/ed\\_child\\_prison\\_camp.htm](http://www.nps.gov/manz/ed_child_prison_camp.htm)

## 8. European Jew Hidden by Non-Jews \*

Click on the "Hiding" link at

[www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/online/phistories](http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/online/phistories)

Rachel G.'s memoirs

[www.library.yale.edu/testimonies/excerpts/rachelg.html](http://www.library.yale.edu/testimonies/excerpts/rachelg.html)

Jeannine Burk's recollections

[www.southerninstitute.info/holocaust\\_education/jeannine\\_burk.html](http://www.southerninstitute.info/holocaust_education/jeannine_burk.html)

Article with quotes

[history1900s.about.com/od/holocaust/a/hiddenchildren.htm](http://history1900s.about.com/od/holocaust/a/hiddenchildren.htm)

## 9. Japanese Citizen near Hiroshima \*

Mr. Mamoru Yukihiro was 36 years old when the bomb fell,

[www.inicom.com/hibakusha/mamoru.html](http://www.inicom.com/hibakusha/mamoru.html)

Francis Mitsuo Tomosawa's story

[teacher.scholastic.com/activities/wwii/hiroshima/](http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/wwii/hiroshima/)

Akihiro Takahashi's story

[www.vqronline.org/printmedia.php/prmMediaID/9131](http://www.vqronline.org/printmedia.php/prmMediaID/9131)

## 10. Londoner during the Blitz \*

A large archive of WWII memories. Enter "blitz" in the search box, [www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/)

## 11. Housewife/Mother who Rations\*

Many descriptions and quotes

[www.bbc.co.uk/dna/ww2/A3311056](http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/ww2/A3311056)

## 12. Civil Defense Air Raid Warden \*

Pat Deneen was a 12-year-old warden, [www.wndu.com/news/generationofheroes/062004/generationofheroes\\_35592.php](http://www.wndu.com/news/generationofheroes/062004/generationofheroes_35592.php)

Rhode Island memory

[www.stg.brown.edu/projects/WWII\\_Women/Letter.html](http://www.stg.brown.edu/projects/WWII_Women/Letter.html)

## 13. Member of the French Resistance

Madeleine Riffaud's memories

[www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,2144,1306109,00.html](http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,2144,1306109,00.html)

Enter "French Resistance" in the search box

[www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/)

## 14. Concentration Camp Survivor at Liberation\*

Click on "Liberation" at

[www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/online/phistories](http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/online/phistories)



A riveter at Lockheed Aircraft Corp., Burbank, California. (ca. 1943)

Anita Lasker-Wallfisch recalls

[news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4439613.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4439613.stm)

1st Lt. William Cowling's letter and report

[www.remember.org/witness/cowling.html](http://www.remember.org/witness/cowling.html)

15. USO Worker or Entertainer \*

Oral history project at [www.stg.brown.edu/projects/WWII\\_Women/HelpingServicemen.html](http://www.stg.brown.edu/projects/WWII_Women/HelpingServicemen.html)

Article with quotes, [satinballroom.com/features/USO.html](http://satinballroom.com/features/USO.html)

Article with quotes

[www.qconline.com/quest2002/answers/WW2WOMEN.shtml](http://www.qconline.com/quest2002/answers/WW2WOMEN.shtml)

16. Bill Mauldin (U.S. Soldier and War Cartoonist)

Article with quotes

[www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/ARTmauldin.htm](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/ARTmauldin.htm)

17. U.S. Woman Supply Pilot \*

Pearl Harbor attack, [www.wasp-wwii.org/news/press/fort1.htm](http://www.wasp-wwii.org/news/press/fort1.htm)

mp3 voice file of Dawn Seymour

[www.wxxi.org/warletters/wasp.html](http://www.wxxi.org/warletters/wasp.html)

Jackie Cochran's memoir

[www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/flygirls/peoplevents/pandeAMEX01.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/flygirls/peoplevents/pandeAMEX01.html)

18. Female Journalist

Sonia Tomara's writing

[www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/2WWtomara.htm](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/2WWtomara.htm)

Eight women featured at [www.loc.gov/exhibits/wcf/](http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/wcf/)

19. Navajo Code Talker (U.S. Soldier)

Article on Carl Gorman

[www.lapahie.com/Carl\\_Nelson\\_Gorman.cfm](http://www.lapahie.com/Carl_Nelson_Gorman.cfm)

Notes from 1995 film

[history.acusd.edu/gen/filmnotes/codetalkers.html](http://history.acusd.edu/gen/filmnotes/codetalkers.html)

20. U.S. Combat Nurse \*

Book excerpt, Diane Burke Fessler

[www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/bulge/sfeature/sf\\_nurses\\_ggp.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/bulge/sfeature/sf_nurses_ggp.html)

Lucile Spooner Votta

[www.stg.brown.edu/projects/WWII\\_Women/Philippines.html](http://www.stg.brown.edu/projects/WWII_Women/Philippines.html)

Enter "nurse" in the search box, [www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/)

21. Russian Soldier on the German-Russian Front

Ilya Frenkel's story, [www.hbo.com/apps/band/site/client/stories/curated\\_story.jsp?exid=741](http://www.hbo.com/apps/band/site/client/stories/curated_story.jsp?exid=741)

22. Member of U.S. 442nd (and other Japanese-Americans)\*  
George Sakato's story

[www.pbs.org/weta/americanvalor/stories/sakato\\_interview.html](http://www.pbs.org/weta/americanvalor/stories/sakato_interview.html)

Background information, [www.jamsj.org/442team.html](http://www.jamsj.org/442team.html)

Military intelligence linguists, [www.javadc.org/main.htm](http://www.javadc.org/main.htm)

23. British Soldier

Bob Harding's story, [wartimenews.co.uk/story2.htm](http://wartimenews.co.uk/story2.htm)

Enter "soldiers" in search box at [www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/)

24. German Soldier

Henry Metelmann's story

[www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~semp/reich.htm](http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~semp/reich.htm)

Karl-Heinz Becker's story

[www.geocities.com/schlochau/WWII.html](http://www.geocities.com/schlochau/WWII.html)

Roosen's story, [www.gustave-roosen.de/hamburg-e.htm](http://www.gustave-roosen.de/hamburg-e.htm)

25. Japanese Soldier

Genjiro Inui's story, [www.gnt.net/~jrube/Genjiro/cover.htm](http://www.gnt.net/~jrube/Genjiro/cover.htm)

Tamura Keiko's story in PDF format, [ajrp.awm.gov.au/AJRP/AJRP2.nsf/Web1/Chapters/\\$file/Chapters5.pdf?OpenElement](http://ajrp.awm.gov.au/AJRP/AJRP2.nsf/Web1/Chapters/$file/Chapters5.pdf?OpenElement)

26. A Kindertransport Child\*

Kurt Fuchel and others, [www.kindertransport.org/memoir.html](http://www.kindertransport.org/memoir.html)

Paul M. Cohn's story

[www.rrz.uni-hamburg.de/rz3ao35/kindertransport.html](http://www.rrz.uni-hamburg.de/rz3ao35/kindertransport.html)

Enter "kindertransport" in the search box

[www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/)

Click on "children,"

[www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/online/phistories/](http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/online/phistories/)

27. European Farmer under Nazi Occupation

Enter "L A Mauger" in the search box

[www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/)

Arne Sommer's story, [www.greatwardifferent.com/Great\\_War/German\\_Soldier/Everyday\\_Life\\_01.htm](http://www.greatwardifferent.com/Great_War/German_Soldier/Everyday_Life_01.htm)

28. A Gentile Protecting Jews

A synopsis of *The Hiding Place*

[www.soon.org.uk/true\\_stories/holocaust.htm](http://www.soon.org.uk/true_stories/holocaust.htm)

Five oral histories

[www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shtetl/righteous/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shtetl/righteous/)

Accounts of rescue in PDF format, [131.247.120.10/holocaust/PEOPLE/save1lif.pdf](http://131.247.120.10/holocaust/PEOPLE/save1lif.pdf)

29. A Grocer Dealing with Shortages

Rose Marie's story, [wwii.rice.edu/09story.htm](http://wwii.rice.edu/09story.htm)

Glenn "Rusty" Carpenter's story, [www.knoxnews.com/kns/sands\\_of\\_time/article/0,1406,KNS\\_18696\\_3866627,00.html](http://www.knoxnews.com/kns/sands_of_time/article/0,1406,KNS_18696_3866627,00.html)

Enter "M Davies" in the search box

[www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/)

30. Quaker Conscientious Objector

Larry Miller's story

[www.friendsjournal.org/contents/2004/1104/feature.html](http://www.friendsjournal.org/contents/2004/1104/feature.html)

Enter "conscientious objector" in the search box

[www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/)

# Ernie Pyle: The Foot Soldier's Reporter

Sandra B. Oldendorf

Ernie Pyle's World War II heroes were not military leaders, heads of state or popular culture figures; they were ordinary people trying to survive in extraordinary circumstances. Ernie Pyle, the popular war correspondent, wrote about real people who survived the unglamorous, gritty, boring, sometimes humorous, and often terrifying reality of war. To Ernie (who preferred being called by his first name), the typical infantryman was a hero:

*I love the infantry because they are the underdogs. They are the mud-rain-frost-and-wind boys. They have no comforts, and they even learn to live without the necessities. And in the end they are the guys that war can't be won without.*<sup>1</sup>

Ernie's newspaper columns provide excellent material for teachers and students to look at the realities of being a soldier in World War II. For more in-depth biographical study, one could turn to James Tobin's definitive 1997 biography *Ernie Pyle's War*<sup>2</sup> as well as the 1948 movie *The Story of G.I. Joe*, which was recently re-released.<sup>3</sup>

## Foot Soldiers

Ernie Pyle developed an affinity for fighting men, becoming their voice and champion. John Steinbeck wrote that there were actually two wars, the war of General Marshall that featured logistics and armies, and the war of Ernie Pyle that featured:

*[the] homesick, weary, funny, violent, common men, who wash their socks in their helmets, complain about the food, whistle at Arab girls, or any girls for that matter, and lug themselves through as dirty a business as the world has ever seen and do it with humor and dignity and courage—and that is Ernie Pyle's war. He knows it as well as anyone, and writes about it better than anyone.*<sup>4</sup>

There were other excellent war correspondents. Edward R. Murrow also wrote from the soldier's perspective, but Ernie was the most active and best known. Ernie began by reporting on the effect of the Blitz in London in 1940. He was with the Tunisia campaign in North Africa, was almost hit by a bomb on the beach in Anzio, Italy, arrived at the Normandy beachhead the morning after D-Day, and survived an attack by friendly fire in France. On the Eastern front, he was with the Marines when they landed at Okinawa.

Ernie's trademark article was a profile of an individual (usually a man), giving his hometown, parents' occupations, and marital status, and then describing his personality and current situation. For example, he profiled Lieutenant Jack Ilfrey, the leading American ace in North Africa (a distinction that could change by the hour).

*It is hard to conceive of his ever having killed anybody for he looks even younger than his twenty-two years ... His darkish hair is childishly uncontrollable and pops up into a little curlieue at the front of his head ... He is wholly thoughtful and sincere. Yet he mows 'em down ... I walked into his room late one afternoon, after he had come back from a mission, and found him sitting there at a table, all alone, killing flies with a folded newspaper. And yet they say being an ace is romantic.*<sup>5</sup>

## Dark Humor

The real people in Ernie's stories were often the source of irony or dry humor. For example, Ernie gave readers a look at the Marine landing in Okinawa that was different from reports provided by most other writers. The villages had been destroyed, and the soldiers found many items left behind by the fleeing residents. A private from Tennessee created a dug-out looking over a river, found and killed a chicken, built a fire, and stewed the chicken in his helmet. Ernie describes this soldier riding a one-peddled bicycle while wearing a woman's kimono that he found among the ruins.<sup>6</sup> This is a complex image that might elicit all sorts of reader reactions in 1945 and today—the passage reveals craziness and chaos, violations of decency and social mores, black humor and tragedy, and despair countered by a rage to survive.

Ernie did not glamorize the lives of the fighting men, but tried to capture the realities in simple, descriptive prose. After the Tunisia campaign, he wrote:

*[O]ur segment of the picture consists only of tired and dirty soldiers who are alive and don't want to die;...of jeeps and petrol dumps and smelly bedding rolls and C rations and cactus patches and blown bridges and dead mules ... and of laughter too, and anger and wine and lovely flowers and constant cussing. All of these it is composed of; and of graves and graves and graves.*<sup>7</sup>

His words reflect the despair of war. However, biographer James Tobin points out that a major part of Ernie's success was his ability to help people at home create a "myth" that allowed them to make sense of the destruction,



dehumanization, and chaos of war. Ernie tapped into the readers' social and emotional needs, the need to see purpose in sacrifice, to have hope for the future, and to recognize heroism in the common man.

### Leaders Lost

Ernie's ability to humanize the experience of war is perhaps best realized in his most acclaimed column, the only story appearing on the front page of *Washington Daily News* on January 10, 1944 (excerpted in the **Handout** at the end of this article). It described the death of Capt. Henry T. Waskow from Belton, Texas, an officer of whom one sergeant said, "After my own father, he came next."<sup>8</sup>

After D-Day, when newspapers reported on the leadership of Eisenhower, casualty numbers, and ground gained by the Allies, Ernie provided a more personal account. From Omaha Beach in June of 1944, he wrote:

*I took a walk along the historic coast of Normandy in the country of France. It was a lovely day for strolling along the seashore. Men were sleeping on the sand, some of them sleeping forever. Men were floating in the water, but they didn't know they were in the water, for they were dead ...*

*...There were toothbrushes and razors, and snapshots of families back home staring up at you from the sand ...The most ironic piece of equipment marking our beach was a tennis racket that some soldier had brought along. It lay lonesomely on the sand, clamped in its press, not a string broken.*<sup>9</sup>

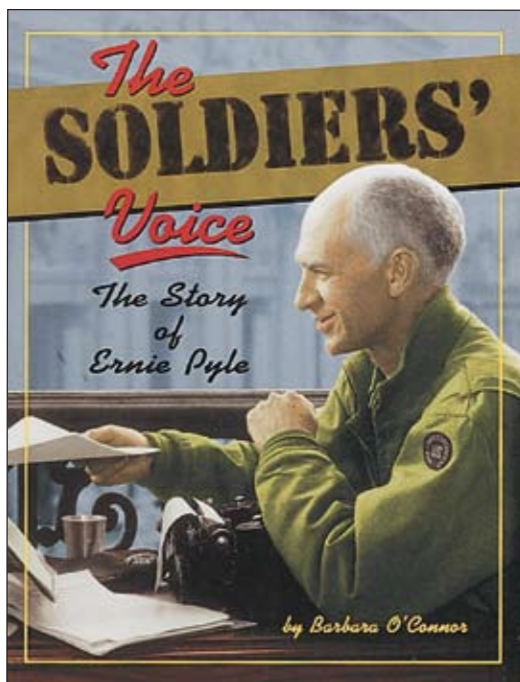
In 1944, Ernie could have retired from front-line reporting, but he was asked by Scripps Howard and the Navy to continue. He had been overseas for 29 months, written about 700,000 words, and thought that was enough. But he also felt that it would be "like a soldier deserting" if he left the war while the fighting continued. So in January of 1945, he began reporting from the Pacific.

On April 18th, Ernie Pyle was killed on the small island of Ie Shima. Soldiers erected a wooden sign that read:

AT THIS SPOT  
THE 77th INFANTRY DIVISION  
LOST A BUDDY  
ERNIE PYLE  
18 APRIL 1945

### Accolades

Ernie's columns appeared in over 500 Scripps Howard newspapers, which had an estimated 13 million readers. In May 1944, he was awarded a Pulitzer Prize. The following month, Congress responded to his column requesting that



combat soldiers be given "fight pay," the same as an airman's flight pay. In June, Congress voted to give soldiers 50 percent extra pay for combat service. This legislation was nicknamed the "Ernie Pyle Bill." On July 17th, he appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine. Also that summer, *The Story of G.I. Joe* was in the making. A then-unknown playwright, Arthur Miller, based the script on columns from Ernie's books, *Here is Your War and Brave Men*. In the fall of 1944, Ernie received honorary doctorates from Indiana University and the University of New Mexico.

### Indiana Beginnings

Such well-meaning tributes probably made Ernie uncomfortable. The heroes when he wrote about were heroic, in part, because they had shortcomings, conflicts, prejudices, and tragedies with which they also had to do battle. Ernie's own life is perhaps the best illustration of that point.

Born Ernest Taylor Pyle on August 3, 1900 near Dana, Indiana, he was the only son of tenant farmers Will and Maria Pyle. He married Geraldine (Jerry) Siebolds, a Minnesota native, and they maintained a vagabond lifestyle. In 1926, Jerry and Ernie traveled around the country, covering 9,000 miles in ten weeks. As Ernie began experiencing success with his columns, his personal life with Jerry became tumultuous. Ernie was a heavy drinker and became addicted to drugs. Maybe Ernie's real home was on the road, with men in the service.<sup>10</sup>

One of Ernie's vices was his love of cigarettes. As a result of his plea in a 1943 column, major cigarette companies arranged to send cigarettes to the troops for five cents a pack. The *Indianapolis Times* arranged the "Ernie Pyle Cigaret [sic] Fund," which paid for more than a million cigarettes to be sent overseas. Each package had a sticker on it crediting Ernie's efforts to furnish the cigarettes.<sup>11</sup>

### Prejudices and Censorship

Ernie also had prejudices that were part of the context of the times and a nation at war. He described the citizens of North Africa as not having "much national loyalty. It looked as if the people, being without any deep love of the country, favored whichever side appeared more likely to feather their nest."<sup>12</sup> He also wrote in a patronizing way about Islam when he reported a comment from a soldier about a man on his knees facing Mecca and praying while his family sat in the wagon: "I guess he's making a deal for the whole family." After landing on

Okinawa, Ernie described civilians in unflattering terms.<sup>13</sup>

Ernie's most obvious bias was an underlying belief that the U.S. soldiers in Europe were somehow more heroic than those on the Eastern front. He described men at rest in Hawaii who had become "mental cases" due to warmth, sunshine, good food and monotony. "I've heard boys say, 'I'd trade this for a foxhole any day.' You just have to keep your mouth shut to a remark like that." These comments got him into trouble with the men serving in the Pacific.<sup>14</sup>

Ernie did not like efforts to sanitize what soldiers felt, how they lived, or the way they talked. As the production of *The Story of G.I. Joe* began, Ernie worried about soldiers' dialogue being reduced to "oh heck." He was right to anticipate the problem. In 1945, the Hays Office of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America decreed that "certain lines of dialogue ... are regarded as profanity under the Production Code." Censorship prevailed, and dialogue that was considered blasphemous was removed.<sup>15</sup> The movie, however, captured the spirit of Ernie's columns and his worldview. *The Story of G.I. Joe* "dared breathe what everyone knew, but found hard to voice aloud—that death was random, and success only partly related to one's desserts."<sup>16</sup>

### Preventing War

Ernie Pyle's columns offer portrayals of imperfect men who "guttled" their way through the war, not looking to be heroes, but only wanting to return to their families alive. As the war in Europe drew to an end, Ernie wrote:

*Thousands of our men will soon be returning to you. They have been gone a long time and they have seen and done and felt things you cannot know. They will be changed. And all of us together will have to learn how to reassemble our broken world into a pattern so firm and so fair that another great war cannot soon be possible ... Submersion in war does not necessar-*

*ily qualify a man to be the master of the peace. All we can do is fumble and try once more—try out of the memory or our anguish—and be as tolerant with each other as we can.*<sup>17</sup>

Ernie's focus on the common soldier as hero demonstrated his belief in the possibility of the hero in all of us. This belief is certainly a worthy lens to use as teachers and students further explore historical resources and deepen their understanding of the human experience of war. 📺

### Notes

1. Ernie Pyle, "The God-Damned Infantry," in *Reporting World War Two, Part One: American Journalism (1938-1944)*, Samuel Hynes et al., eds. (New York: The Library of America, 1995), 556.
2. James Tobin, *Ernie Pyle's War: Eyewitness to World War II* (New York: Free Press, 1997). Another readable account is by Mark Lane, "This Hero Figure is a Newsguy," *Charlotte Observer* (June 18, 2002): 11A.
3. Lester Cowan, prod., *The Story of G.I. Joe* (Selznick Studios, 1945). Other film tributes to Pyle include the History Channel's "History Alive/Unsung Heroes: Ernie Pyle, The Voice of G.I. Joe," and C-Span's American Writers series: "Ernie Pyle, This is Your War" at [www.americanwriters.org/writers/pyle.asp](http://www.americanwriters.org/writers/pyle.asp).
4. John Steinbeck, in Lee Miller, *The Story of Ernie Pyle* (1950; Greenwood, 1970), 279.
5. Ernie Pyle, *Here is Your War* (Chicago: Henry Holt, 1943), 107-108.
6. Pyle, *Here is Your War*, 126-7.
7. Pyle, *Here is Your War*, 304.
8. David Nichols, ed., *Ernie's War: The Best of Ernie Pyle's World War II Dispatches* (New York: Touchstone, 1987), 22.
9. Ernie Pyle, *Brave Men* (New York: Henry Holt, 1944), 250-251.
10. Miller, *The Story of Ernie Pyle*, 368.
11. "20,000 Cigaretts for Ernie; Is That O.K. to the Donors?" *Washington Daily News* (April 2, 1943); "Ernie Pyle Fans—Here's Chance to Send Cigaretts Overseas," *Indianapolis Times* (June 29, 1943).
12. Pyle, *Here is Your War*, 27, 44, 55.
13. Pyle, in Nichols, 367-369.
14. Pyle, in Nichols, 389-390.
15. "G.I. Dialogue Banned," *New York Times*, (May 19, 1945), quoted in Nichols, 35.
16. Gen. Eisenhower called the film "the greatest war picture I've ever seen."
17. Pyle, *Brave Men*, 466.

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# Teaching Suggestions

For middle school students, Barbara O'Connor's *The Soldiers Voice: The Story of Ernie Pyle* (Minneapolis, MN: Carolrhoda Books, 1996) gives a fairly accurate accounting of Ernie's challenging life.

C-Span American Writers II at [www.americanwriters.org/works/war.asp](http://www.americanwriters.org/works/war.asp) includes video clips from interviews and examples of Ernie's writing, as well as lesson plan ideas.

David Nichols, ed., *Ernie's War: The Best of Ernie Pyle's World War II Dispatches* (New York: Touchstone, 1987) includes a biography and Ernie's best known columns. It is out of print, but used copies are available.

**Show** excerpts from *The Story of G.I.*

*Joe* and compare these with clips from another movie about World War II. Some key discussion questions: How are the movies different? Which do you think is more realistic? What kind of movies do people want to see?

**Examine** a short piece of Ernie's writing. What makes it good writing? Why do you think so many people read Ernie Pyle's columns?

**Search** the archives of your local newspaper office to see whether Ernie Pyle's columns were run in that paper. What else is said about the war in the issues that you look at?

**Imagine** that Ernie Pyle could have been Afghanistan or Iraq. What kinds of stories would he be sending back? What kinds of details would make them human interest stories?

**Compare** and contrast the rescue workers on 9/11 to the people Ernie Pyle wrote about. What makes a person a hero? Can an ordinary person be a hero or heroine today?

# The Writings of Ernie Pyle

Read these excerpts from newspaper articles by Ernie Pyle and then discuss them with your classmates and teacher. What is Pyle's central concern in each excerpt? What is happening to soldiers? To civilians? To the reporter himself? What is Pyle's mood in each passage? Ask about the meaning of any passage that is unclear to you. Mark the different countries and places from which Pyle is writing on a world map. What is the native language (or languages) of each? Had any of these nations been occupied by a foreign power earlier in the 20th century? If so, by whom? Visit your public library to obtain books by Ernie Pyle that were collections of his writings.

## Political Situation in Africa Ticklish and Confusing

January 1943

ALGERIA: Men who bring our convoys from America, some of whom have just recently arrived, tell me the people at home don't have a correct impression of things over here.

Merchant Marine officers who have been here a couple of days are astonished by the difference between what they thought the situation was and what it actually is. They say people at home think the North African campaign is a walkaway and will be over quickly; that our losses have been practically nil; that the French here love us to death, and that all German influence has been cleaned out.

If you think that, it is because we newspapermen here have failed at getting the finer points over to you.

Because this campaign at first was as much diplomatic as military, the powers that be didn't permit our itchy typewriter fingers to delve into things internationally, which were ticklish enough without that. ...

It would be very bad for another wave of extreme optimism to sweep over the United States. So maybe I can explain a little bit about why things over here, though all right for the long run, are not all strawberries and cream right now.

In Tunisia, for instance, we seem to be stalemated for the moment. The reasons are two. Our Army is a green army, and most of our Tunisian troops are in actual battle for the first time against seasoned troops and commanders. It will take us months of fighting to gain the experience our enemies start with.

In the second place, nobody knew exactly how much resistance the French would put up here, so we had to be set for full resistance. That meant, when the

French capitulated in three days, we had to move eastward at once, or leave the Germans unhampered to build a big force in Tunisia.

.....

## Capt. Henry T. Waskow

January 10, 1944

FRONTLINES IN ITALY: In this war I have known a lot of officers who were loved and respected by the soldiers under them. But never have I crossed the trail of any man as beloved as Capt. Henry T. Waskow, of Belton, Texas.

Captain Waskow was a company commander in the 36th Division. He had led his company since long before it left the States. He was very young, only in his middle 20's, but he carried in him a sincerity and a gentleness that made people want to be guided by him.

"After my own father, he came next," a sergeant told me.

"He always looked after us," a soldier said. "He'd go to bat for us every time."

"I've never known him to do anything unfair," another one said.

I was at the foot of the mule trail the night they brought Capt. Waskow's body down the mountain. The moon was nearly full at the time, and you could see far up the trail, and even part way across the valley. Soldiers made shadows as they walked.

Dead men had been coming down the mountain all evening, lashed onto the backs of mules. They came lying belly-down across wooden pack saddles, their heads hanging down on the left side of the mule, their stiffened legs sticking out awkwardly from the other side, bobbing up and down as the mule walked.

The Italian mule-skinners were afraid to walk beside dead men, so Americans had to lead the mules down that night.

## Paris' Food Supply Skimpy During Arrogant Nazi Reign

August 31, 1944

PARIS: Eating has been skimpy in Paris through the four years of German occupation, but reports that people were on the verge of starvation apparently were untrue. The country people of Normandy all seemed so healthy and well fed that we said all along: "Well, country people always fare best, but just wait till we get back to Paris. We'll see real suffering there."

Of course the people of Paris have suffered during these four years of darkness. But I don't believe they have suffered as much physically as we had thought.

Certainly they don't look bedraggled and gaunt and pitiful, as the people of Italy did. In fact, they look to me just the way you would expect them to look in normal times.

However, the last three weeks before the liberation really were rough. For the Germans, sensing that their withdrawal was inevitable, began taking everything for themselves.

There is very little food in Paris right now. The restaurants either are closed or serve only the barest meals—coffee and sandwiches. And the "national coffee," as they call it, is made from barley and is about the vilest stuff you ever tasted. France has had nothing else for four years.

If you were to take a poll on what the average Parisian most wants in the way of little things, you would probably find that he wants real coffee, soap, gasoline and cigarets.

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# Teenage Witnesses to the Holocaust

Tom Kolbe

*We Are Witnesses: Five Diaries of Teenagers Who Died in the Holocaust* by Jacob Boas<sup>1</sup> offers teachers a chance to add another dimension to students' understanding of Anne Frank's diary<sup>2</sup> by contrasting it with four other teenagers' writings. These young people bore witness to the horrors of the Holocaust. The excerpts are not historical fiction, they are from actual diaries. Boas's book of less than 200 pages provides many passages that could be read aloud to middle school students or copied and distributed for reading. His analyses and explanations are informative reading for students at the middle reading level, and excellent background for teachers.

Many educators use Anne Frank's diary as the exclusive first-person account of the Holocaust. Boas points out that this provides a limited view of the Holocaust, in part because of the privileged position of the Frank family. Anne could "avert her eyes" during much of the oppression, whereas it was a more common experience for Jewish families to struggle for survival in a ghetto and then be taken to a death camp (a fate which Anne and her family did ultimately share).

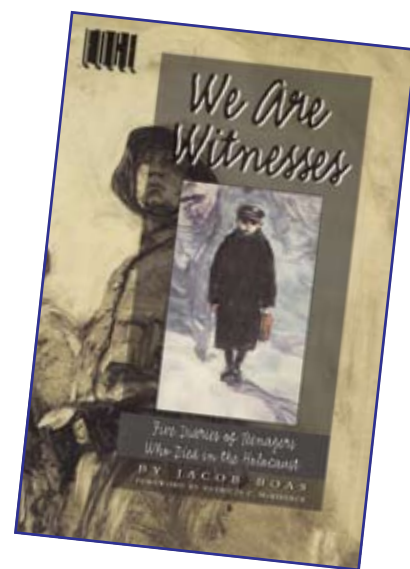
Boas, who was born in the camp at Bergen-Belsen (where Anne Frank died), states that only by "luck" was he not one of the six million Jews, a quarter of whom were children, murdered by the Nazis.

Middle school students wonder, "Why were the Jews targeted, and how did this happen?" Boas offers answers

to these questions through the teenagers' experiences with Nazi anti-Semitic beliefs. In annotations that preface each journal, he discusses anti-Jewish decrees, the "master race" myth, hateful propaganda, and abuses of political power.

Reading or hearing excerpts from the journals of these teenagers (David Rubinowicz, Yitzhak Rudashevski, Moshe Flikner, Eva Heyman, and Anne Frank) might lead our adolescent students to view their own anxieties about growing up in a new perspective. As teachers, we can use the journals to add depth to students' self-awareness and to their perceptions of racial hatred, war mongering, and government oppression as manifest in today's world.

The persistent violence that Anne Frank's family largely avoided is present in the other four accounts. Fear—arising



from beatings, humiliations, and round ups—resounds in the diaries. And yet, the families show various types of resistance: political activism, common courtesy, decent family life, and the Jewish tradition, which grows from a history of persecution and survival. Moshe's journal especially asserts the importance of practicing the family's faith in the face of oppression.

Among the growing collection of Holocaust literature, this book stands out because the youthful accounts were written during the Holocaust (they are journals, not memoirs), and Boas provides an analysis that is helpful to new teachers. 📖

#### Notes.

1. Jacob Boas, *We are Witnesses: Five Diaries of Teenagers Who Died in the Holocaust* (New York: Henry Holt, 1994). Jacket illustration by George Pratt; design by Debbie Glasserman.
2. Anne Frank, *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* (New York: Batam, 1947/1993).

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#### Memoirs of the Holocaust

*The Holocaust in Literature for Youth* by Edward T. Sullivan is a comprehensive bibliography and resource guide for teachers (New York: Scarecrow Press, 1999). Two short, non-fiction, accounts have recently won critical acclaim and are appropriate for middle-level reading:

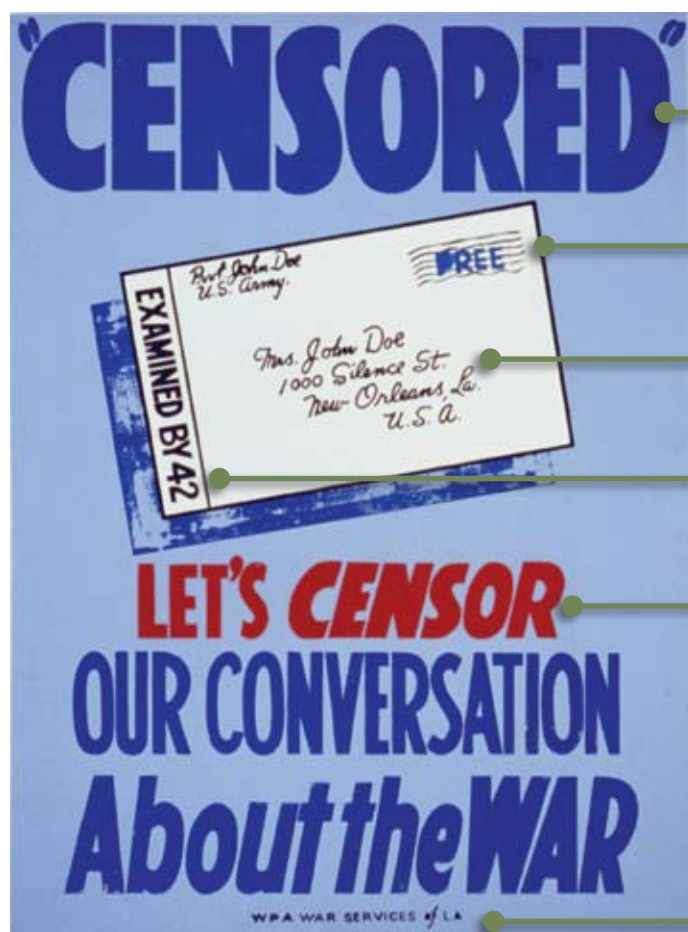
Lobel, Anita. *No Pretty Pictures: A Child of War*. New York: Harper Trophy, 2000. 208 pp. Lobel was five when German soldiers marched into Krakow, initiating years of flight and hiding, ending in capture.

Pearl, Lila, and Marion Blumenthal Lazan. *Four Perfect Pebbles: A Holocaust Story*. New York: Harper Trophy, 1999. 144 pp. The Blumenthal family fled Germany for Holland, but failed to escape persecution.

# CENSORSHIP IN TIMES OF WAR

During a time of war, Americans have to find a balance between the freedom of expression (as promised in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution) and the need for secrecy of military information (like the location and condition of fighting troops). Also, any government wants popular (civilian) support and troop morale to be high during a war, and this can motivate censorship of news or comments critical of the war.

Study the poster below, which was published by the U.S. Government during World War II. Read the captions that explain various parts of the poster. Then discuss the questions below with your teacher and the rest of the class.



In wartime, a censor is an official who reads communications (such as letters) and deletes material considered harmful to the interests of his organization or nation. (Webster's Dictionary)

Soldiers fighting overseas can send letters home without paying postage. During World War II, it could take weeks or months for a letter to arrive, and a censor could slow up communication. Today, e-mail and instant messaging have sped things up—making the job of censorship harder.

"Private John Doe" appears to be writing to his wife, "Mrs. John Doe." In that era, married women were often addressed in letters and documents with the use of their husband's name and the prefix "Mrs."

Number 42 was a military officer working as a censor. In early Rome, a censor was a magistrate who worked as a census taker, assessor (fixing a value to property), and supervisor of morals.

This poster asks citizens and soldiers to censor their own letters. "Loose lips sink ships" was a slogan that reminded people not to talk casually about military details.

WPA stands for the Works Progress Administration. The WPA was part of the New Deal which aimed to end the Great Depression. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, several WPA programs became part of the war effort. This poster, from the collection of the Library of Congress, was made between 1941 and 1943.

**Discussion Questions :** Taking one example at a time from the list below, do you think the situation calls for censorship? Why or why not? Tell about specific aspects of the situation (safety of the troops, civilian morale, etc.) that weigh heavily as you form your opinion.

1. A sentence in a letter describes where troop barracks are located.
2. A soldier states that his flack jacket seems flimsy.
3. TV news shows war injuries among civilians in another country.
4. In a radio interview, a nurse describes injuries suffered by U.S. soldiers.
5. A soldier states in an e-mail message to his family that he wishes he could return home.
6. Is it clear from the World War II poster above exactly what sorts of information people should be censoring in their conversations?