

## BASED ON A TRUE STORY SERIES

FOR  
USE WITH  
COMMON CORE  
STATE  
STANDARDS

### PRE-READING ACTIVITIES FOR ENTIRE SERIES

✚ Historical fiction is a genre unlike any other. Novels of this genre include details on the every-day life of those who lived in the past and paint a clear picture of historical time periods. Prior to reading the novels from the Based on a True Story series, brainstorm a list of facts that you think you know about the time period. Be sure to pay careful attention to details about every-day life: how did people dress, what did people eat, how did people interact with one another, etc. As you read the novel, circle items on your list that were accurate and cross out your inaccuracies. As you learn more information, add those details to your list, too.

**CCSS.RL.6.10** By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 6–8 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.

### POST-READING ACTIVITIES FOR ENTIRE SERIES

✚ Survival is a central theme in the Based on a True Story series. Mary Jemison must learn to survive as a Native American captive. Sybil Ludington must make a daring midnight ride and survive the elements as well as the Loyalists. John Clem must survive the harrowing battlefields of the Civil War. Nettie and Nellie Crook must survive against impossible odds as orphans sent West. Research someone from your town, city, or state who has survived what seemed to be impossible odds and create a website or infographic to report your findings.

**CCSS.W.6.7** Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and refocusing the inquiry when appropriate.

**CCSS.W.6.8** Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources; assess the credibility of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and providing basic bibliographic information for sources.

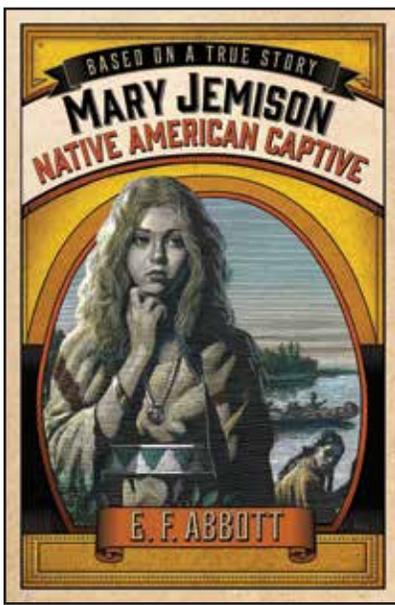
**CCSS.W.6.6** Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing as well as to interact and collaborate with others; demonstrate sufficient command of keyboarding skills to type a minimum of three pages in a single sitting.

✚ Discrimination plays a part in the novels of the Based on a True Story series. Characters either witness discrimination firsthand or are discriminated against. Find examples of discrimination in at least three of the four novels and compare and contrast the role it plays in each of the plots. Why is this theme present in so many time periods? What should the moral of the story be?

**CCSS.W.6.4** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1–3 above.)

**CCSS.W.6.5** With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of Language standards 1-3 up to and including grade 6 here.)

This guide is aligned with Common Core Standards for 6th grade but can be applied to grades 3–7. To attain specific Common Core grade level standard for their classrooms and students, teachers are encouraged to adapt the activities listed in this guide to their classes' needs. You know your kids best!



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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why did Mary's family live in fear of the Indians living near their farm?
2. In Chapter 6, why was Mama so upset when Mary was given moccasins by her captors?
3. In Chapter 7, how did the blue jay inspire Mary to keep persevering?
4. "Mary stood shivering on the shore, watching her real self float away. The clothes sank. Mary's heart sank with them" (Abbott 60). This is a turning point in Mary's life. Describe how Mary reacts to her first day with the women who purchased her. Predict how Mary will react as her captivity continues.
5. "'Three sisters help one another grow,' Odankot said" (Abbott 124). This phrase is repeated throughout the text. What is the deeper meaning behind Odankot's words?
6. "Yes, Mary thought. Like it or not, she was Seneca now" (Abbott 148). Mary feels more a part of the tribe than ever. What has pushed her to this realization?
7. Who is Sheninjee and how does he change Mary's life?

**CCSS.RL.6.1** Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

**CCSS.RL.6.4** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.

**CCSS.RL.6.3** Describe how a particular story's or drama's plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.

**CCSS.RL.6.5** Analyze how a particular sentence, chapter, scene, or stanza fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the theme, setting, or plot.

## COMMON CORE ACTIVITIES

✚ "Somehow, even after losing their loved one, they had found a way to forgive" (Abbott 88). In Chapter 12 at the Strawberry Festival, Mary understands how critical a role forgiveness plays in the culture of the tribe she is living with. Rewrite this chapter as a news reporter would cover breaking news. Be sure to support your claim with relevant textual evidence from the chapter.

**CCSS.W.6.1** Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

**CCSS.W.6.1.A** Introduce claim(s) and organize the reasons and evidence clearly.

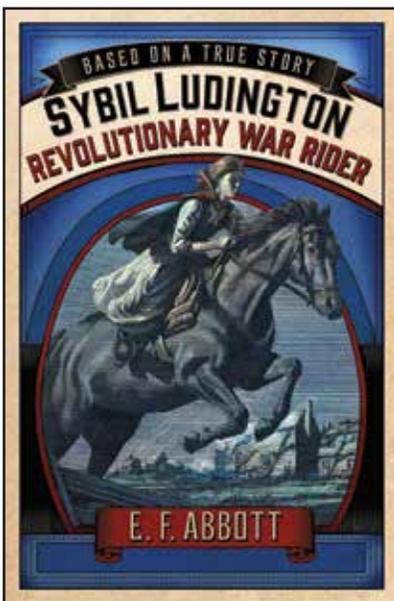
**CCSS.W.6.1.B** Support claim(s) with clear reasons and relevant evidence using credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text.

✚ "Mary watched the sticks burn. Had the English broken their promises? Why would they do that? Then she remembered her father always called the tribes savages. He said they didn't deserve the land because they didn't farm or build houses. Now Mary knew differently. She slept in a bark house. She ate the corn the tribes grew. They had cared for her" (Abbott 94).

As Mary's time with the Indian tribe continued, she began to see that everything she thought she knew was wrong. However, before she knew and understood the tribe, she believed they were the savages she'd always heard about. The cultural differences between the English and the local tribes impacted their willingness to understand and live amicably with one another. This pattern of hatred due to a lack of understanding has happened again and again throughout our history. Research an example of a cultural clash similar to the one presented in this novel. It can be from any time period. Write a public service announcement to share your findings and to prevent the pattern from continuing.

**CCSS.W.6.2.A** Introduce a topic; organize ideas, concepts, and information, using strategies such as definition, classification, comparison/contrast, and cause/effect; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., charts, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.

**CCSS.W.6.2.B** Develop the topic with relevant facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples.



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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why did the Tories believe that “Colonel Henry Ludington was a traitor, and his wife and children were just as untrustworthy” (Abbott 5)?
2. When Papa reminds everyone that their discussion is “family business,” what does he mean?
3. Why does Papa remind Sybil to “just dwell on what you can do” (Abbott 30)?
4. In Chapter 9, what role do shadows play in protecting the family?
5. Throughout the novel, Sybil encounters or hears about many brave and daring individuals. One such individual is Captain Molly. How did Captain Molly earn her title and why is she one to be admired?
6. In Chapter 15, Papa admits that “sometimes a girl is the best man for the job” (Abbott 127). What does he mean by this statement?
7. What motivates Sybil to complete her ride even when it becomes cold, dangerous, and overwhelming?
8. Why was Becky so disappointed with Leazar?

**CCSS.RL.6.1** Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

**CCSS.RL.6.2** Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.

**CCSS.RL.6.3** Describe how a particular story’s or drama’s plot unfolds in a series of episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot moves toward a resolution.

**CCSS.RL.6.4** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone

**CCSS.RL.6.6** Explain how an author develops the point of view of the narrator or speaker in a text.

## COMMON CORE ACTIVITIES

✚ “The children’s imaginations were caught by the idea of the spies sneaking around like spiders in their black clothes, leaving coded messages that could be read for dates and time, names and places—which could make the difference between winning and losing the war” (Abbott 32).

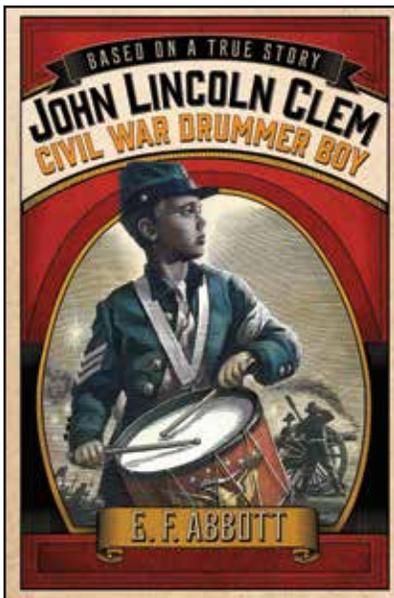
Although the idea of Revolutionary War spies excited the imaginations of the Ludington children, the spies of the war were an exciting group of dedicated Patriots who were ready to lay down their lives for a cause they wholeheartedly believed in. Using one of the techniques presented by Mount Vernon’s Spy Techniques of the Revolutionary War, create an example of how spies communicated: <http://www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/the-revolutionary-war/spying-and-espionage/spy-techniques-of-the-revolutionary-war/>. Additionally, research a spy from the war and write a historical fiction narrative account of an important mission or task they completed.

**CCSS.W.6.3** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

**CCSS.W.6.4** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1–3 above.)

✚ Compare and contrast the novel to Berton Braley’s poem “Sybil Ludington’s Ride”: [http://www.hudsonrivervalley.org/review/pdfs/hvrr\\_17pt2\\_brale.pdf](http://www.hudsonrivervalley.org/review/pdfs/hvrr_17pt2_brale.pdf). How did each format approach the topic of Sybil’s ride? Which format does a better job of sharing Sybil’s story? Next, compare the poem to Longfellow’s poem on Paul Revere: <http://www.bartleby.com/42/789.html>.

**CCSS.RL.6.9** Compare and contrast texts in different forms or genres (e.g., stories and poems; historical novels and fantasy stories) in terms of their approaches to similar themes and topics.



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## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. “Johnny knew, somehow, that it meant stop here. Somehow, that drum spoke to him and he understood” (Abbott 31). Why did the drum have such a powerful pull on Johnny? How will this impact his future?
2. By Chapter 4, Johnny is frustrated with William, another drummer boy. What are some of the reasons Johnny is frustrated?
3. “‘When’re we gonna get to fire these things, Captain?’ Harry would shake his musket and yell at Captain McDougal when the captain made inspections. The captain would glare at him and say, ‘I hope you never do’” (Abbott 42). Why would Captain McDougal respond in such a way to Harry?
4. In Chapter 5, how did Johnny react to his first battle?
5. “Johnny thought Jackson’s scar was disgusting, too, but for a different reason than William did. Funny how you can agree with a fella and still disagree with him” (Abbott 64). Explain why both Johnny and William find Jackson’s scar disgusting.
6. “His drum was a weapon. If you asked Johnny, it was the most powerful weapon

on the battlefield. The loudest, too” (Abbott 88). Why does Johnny believe his drum is the most powerful weapon on the battlefield?

7. In Chapter 10, Johnny comes to a few shocking realizations. Most notably, “winning didn’t feel as glorious as Johnny thought it would” (Abbott 97). Describe how Chapter 10 was a turning point for Johnny and how the events changed his feelings toward the war.

8. “Because Johnny was a kid, he was able to be a hero” (Abbott 161). How did Johnny’s age allow him to become a hero?

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**CCSS.RL.6.6** Explain how an author develops the point of view of the narrator or speaker in a text.

## COMMON CORE ACTIVITIES

✚ The Civil War is a conflict misunderstood by many. “‘Ladies and gentleman, the United States are no longer united. We are a nation ripped apart at the seams, and for what reason?’ ‘Because those greedy rebels and their slaves!’ someone yelled from the back of the crowd. ‘Slavery, yes,’ the man on the stump stated. This guy oozed calm. ‘But also tariffs. And a different economy. And states’ rights. Those Confederate states that seceded? They left our Union because they believe their individual needs are more important than the needs of the whole.’ ‘Selfish morons!’ someone else from the crowd yelled, and a bunch of the adults chuckled” (Abbott 11). After researching the reasons why the Union and Confederate soldiers joined the war effort, design two propaganda posters, one for each side of the conflict, convincing others to join.

**CCSS.W.6.8** Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources; assess the credibility of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and providing basic bibliographic information for sources.

**CCSS.W.6.9** Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

**CCSS.RH.6–8.3** Identify key steps in a text’s description of a process related to history/social studies (e.g., how a bill becomes law, how interest rates are raised or lowered).

✚ “That was a law enforced by states that no longer want to be part of this Union,’ the captain said to William. ‘Those laws no longer apply to us. As far as I’m concerned, the Confederates make a law, and I’m going to do the exact opposite’” (Abbott 58).

Captain McDougal is speaking about the Fugitive Slave Law. After researching the law, is Captain McDougal accurate with this statement? Use evidence from the law itself as well as arguments from other Union leaders to defend your claim.

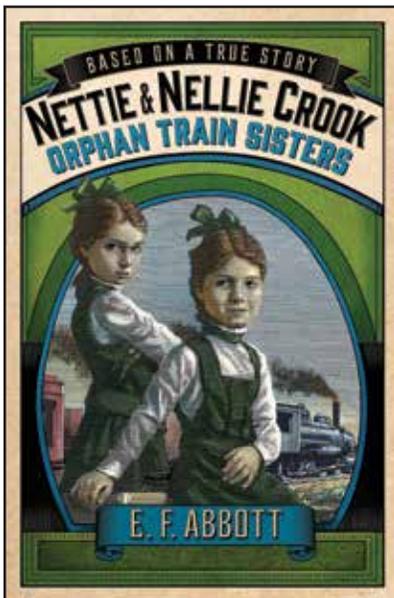
**CCSS.W.6.4** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1–3 above.)

**CCSS.RL.6.6** Explain how an author develops the point of view of the narrator or speaker in a text.

✚ In Chapter 17, Johnny is introduced to a photographer who works for Matthew Brady. Research this photography studio and create a slideshow of powerful images that prove Johnny, Jackson, or Captain McDougal’s opinion on the war.

**CCSS.W.6.7** Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and refocusing the inquiry when appropriate.

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9781250068354 • Ages 8–12

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. “Maybe this time, Nettie thought, things would get better. At least they were all together again now. Maybe things would change” (Abbott 9). What does Nettie hope to see change?
2. In Chapter 3, Nettie and Nellie are told they are burdens to society. What does that mean and why do they fall into this category?
3. Describe what life in the orphanage is like for Nellie and Nettie and the other children who live there.
4. Using what you’ve read in Chapter 10, write detailed instructions on how to do laundry just like Mrs. Chapin prefers it done.
5. At the end of Chapter 12, Nettie believes she had found a forever home. Why does she feel this way and what does that phrase mean?
6. “One day in that long year of 1912 was worse than all the others” (Abbott 124). What day was the worst and why?
7. What were the storm clouds in Nellie and Nettie’s lives and how did they persevere?

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# COMMON CORE ACTIVITIES

✦ “‘How are orphans made, let me count the ways,’ Brenda went on as she scrubbed. ‘Parents die of typhoid.’ Scrub. ‘Or fever.’ Scrub. ‘Or flu.’ Scrub. ‘Parents come from Italy or Ireland, and don’t speak English, and don’t make enough dough to keep their kids in bread.’ Scrub. ‘They don’t have gardens and chickens, like they did in the old country. They don’t have enough to eat.’ Scrub-scrub” (Abbott 28).

Research the growth of orphans in a major city of the United States between the years 1880 and 1915. Create a graph of the number of orphans during this period and research the years where the number of orphans is the highest.

**CCSS.W.6.7** Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and refocusing the inquiry when appropriate.

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**CCSS.W.6.9** Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

✦ In Chapter 5, Nettie and Nellie learn about the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire. Using the resources provided by Cornell University, <http://trianglefire.ilr.cornell.edu/story/introduction.html>, research a victim of the fire and write their obituary for the *New York Times*.

**CCSS.W.6.2** Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

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