

A TEACHER'S GUIDE FOR

# TORPEDOED

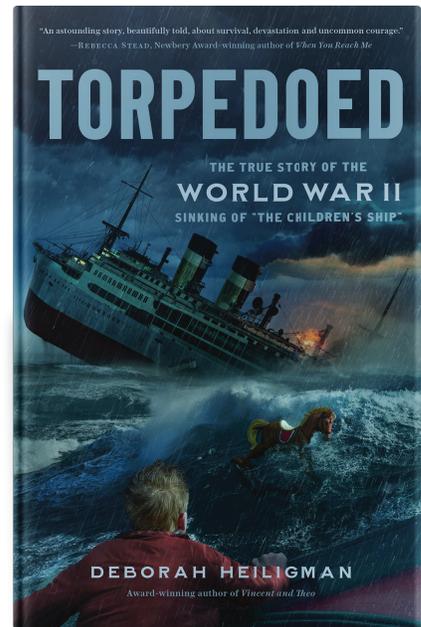
THE TRUE STORY OF THE WORLD WAR II  
SINKING OF "THE CHILDREN'S SHIP"

FOR USE  
WITH COMMON  
CORE STATE  
STANDARDS

## ABOUT THE BOOK

Amid the constant rain of German bombs and the escalating violence of World War II, British parents by the thousands chose to send their children out of the country: the wealthy, independently; the poor, through a government relocation program called the Children's Overseas Reception Board, or CORB. In September 1940, passenger liner SS *City of Benares* set sail for Canada with one hundred children on board.

When the British warships escorting the *Benares* departed, a German submarine torpedoed what would become known as the Children's Ship. Out of tragedy, ordinary people became heroes. This is their story.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**DEBORAH HEILIGMAN** has written many books for children, including Printz Honor, YALSA Nonfiction Award winner, and Boston Globe–Horn Book Award winner *Vincent and Theo: The Van Gogh Brothers*; National Book Award finalist *Charles and Emma: The Darwins' Leap of Faith*; and *The Boy Who Loved Math*. She lives with her family in New York City.



This guide is intended to support your classroom instruction. The standards listed throughout are aligned with the NCSS C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards and the Common Core State Standards for grades six through eight, but the activities and questions can be applied to multiple grade levels. Please adapt the activities and questions to meet the needs of your students. You know your students better than anyone else!

# BEFORE READING

1. Prior to reading, research the Phony War, the Battle of Britain, or the German Blitzkrieg. Create a time line of major events, a list of the key players involved, and write what you believe was the impact of the event on the children of Great Britain.

**CCSS.W.6.4** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

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

**D2.His.1.6-8.** Analyze connections among events and developments in broader historical contexts.

2. Create a map that shows the travel plans of the SS *City of Benares* from Liverpool to the country of Canada. Be sure to include information about the dangers of the journey as well as the push-and-pull factors that led to the CORB children making the journey.

**D2.Geo.8.6-8.** Analyze how relationships between humans and environments extend or contract spatial patterns of settlement and movement.

# DURING READING

1. On page 4, the author states that “Churchill had vowed to ‘wage war, by sea, land and air, with all our might and with all the strength that God can give us; to wage war against a monstrous tyranny never surpassed in the dark, lamentable catalogue of human crime.’” What did he mean by “a monstrous tyranny” and a “lamentable catalogue of human crime”?

**CCSS.RI.6.4** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings.

2. Describe the rules of packing as detailed in chapter 2. What items must children be sure to pack and what items must be left at home?

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

3. Why did the CORB children describe the *Benares* as “a floating palace”? What amenities were on board that surprised the children and made their trip so special? How were these options different from what they had at home?

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

4. “Gussie couldn’t know that their letters would arrive a week later, along with another letter, this one bringing official—and terrible—news to the Grimmond parents” (p. 37). Heiligman ends many chapters with a cliffhanger that allows the reader to predict what is coming next. Make a prediction based on the above quotation and explain why these types of sentences at the end of a chapter have a powerful impact on the reader.

**CCSS.RI.6.5** Analyze how a particular sentence, paragraph, chapter, or section fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the ideas.

5. In chapter 6, the reader learns that Captain Nicoll and Admiral Mackinnon had multiple options to keep those on board safe as they journeyed to Canada. What were these options, and which option did each man think was best? What dangers did they face as they made their journey, and how did this affect their decision-making?

**CCSS.RI.6.2** Determine a 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.

6. After the torpedo hit the *Benares*, what did most of the children aboard smell that clued them into the danger they were in?

**CCSS.RI.6.3** Analyze in detail how a key individual, event, or idea is introduced, illustrated, and elaborated in a text (e.g., through examples or anecdotes).

7. How did the storm affect the deploying of lifeboats from the *Benares*?

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

8. “Mary Cornish climbed into lifeboat 12, a move that, like so many decisions that night, sealed her fate, and the fate of those in the boat with her” (p. 99). How does Heiligman’s phrasing at the end of chapter 10 fit into the overall structure of the text? Do you think Mary Cornish made a wise decision or a tragic one by climbing into lifeboat 12?

**CCSS.RI.6.5** Analyze how a particular sentence, paragraph, chapter, or section fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the ideas.

9. How did the men who torpedoed the *Benares* react when they learned the ship had children aboard? Were you surprised by their reaction?

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

10. Laszlo Raskai, a Hungarian journalist, is remembered as a hero for his actions on the night of the sinking. What did he do to earn this title, as described in chapter 12?

**CCSS.RI.6.6** Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text and explain how it is conveyed in the text.

11. Bess and Beth had to fight to survive after the sinking of the *Benares*. What was difficult about their ordeal, and how did they manage to keep holding on?

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

12. After the rescues were completed, lifeboat 12 was missed. How did the men, women, and children aboard survive their ordeal as they waited for rescue? Who made the biggest impact in keeping everyone safe?

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

# AFTER READING

1. As Heiligman explains in the “Note to Readers” section as well as within the text itself, racism and classism of the period affected how interviews after the sinking were conducted and mostly left out the stories of the 166 Indian lascars on board. How does the lack of lascar interviews influence the overall narrative of the sinking? How would the history of this sinking be different if those interviews had been conducted? Have we learned from this omission, or are voices left out during coverage of current events today? Be prepared to share your thinking in a Socratic Seminar style of discussion.

**D2.His.5.6-8.** Explain how and why perspectives of people have changed over time.

**CCSS.SL.6.4** Present claims and findings, sequencing ideas logically and using pertinent descriptions, facts, and details to accentuate main ideas or themes; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

2. Lieutenant Commander Simms, captain of the HMS *Hurricane*, which was sent to rescue the survivors of the sinking, put his thoughts about the rescue and the loss into poetry found on pages 172 and 176–177. Based on the experiences of Simms and his fellow crew members during their rescue mission, write a poem from their perspective.

**D2.His.1.6-8.** Analyze connections among events and developments in broader historical contexts.

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

3. Rolf Hilse was a crew member aboard U-48, the U-boat that sank the *Benares*. When meeting Hitler, Hilse had an interesting experience. Write a skit of their interaction, making sure to include information about Hilse’s family’s anti-Nazi sentiments. At the end of your play, fast-forward to the end of the war and include your prediction of Hilse’s reaction to Germany’s defeat and war crimes. Do you think Hilse would still describe Hitler as a “nice, normal man” (p. 67)?

**CCSS.W.6.3.D** Use precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to convey experiences and events.

**D2.His.1.6-8.** Analyze connections among events and developments in broader historical contexts.

4. Select a person who was aboard the *Benares* and write a narrative of their time on the ship before, during, and after the sinking.

**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.

5. Design a memorial for the lives lost in the sinking of the *Benares*. Include a sketch of the memorial, a description of why you made the choices you did, and an explanation of where the memorial should be located and why.

**D2.His.12.6-8.** Use questions generated about multiple historical sources to identify further areas of inquiry and additional sources.

**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.

6. Explore the Imperial War Museum website and the information they've included about the sinking of the *Benares*: [iwm.org.uk/history/the-story-of-child-evacuee-beryl-myatt-and-the-sinking-of-the-ss-city-of-benares](http://iwm.org.uk/history/the-story-of-child-evacuee-beryl-myatt-and-the-sinking-of-the-ss-city-of-benares). Evaluate what they've included, then write a letter suggesting an addition to the website based on what you've read in *Torpedoed*.

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

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