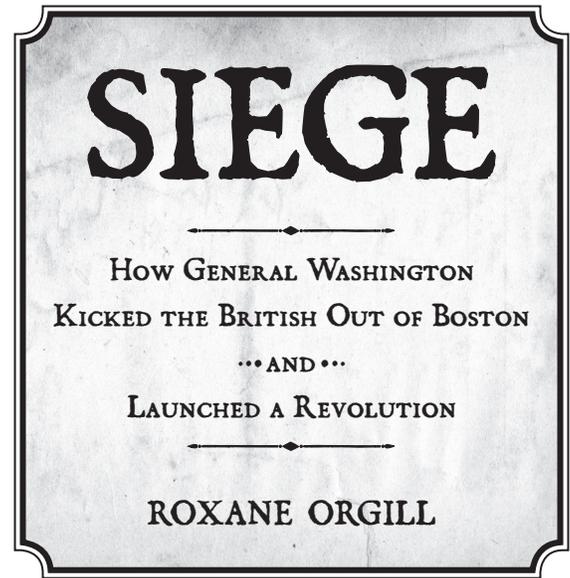


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### Common Core Connections

The Common Core State Standards require close reading of literary texts, with analysis of themes, structure, narrative voice, and use of language. The poems in *Siege* offer rich opportunities for careful reading to glean facts, understand nuances of history, and analyze use of language and poetic format. Poems about a range of historical figures give readers different perspectives on the event and era. This teachers' guide includes discussion questions and curriculum activities to be used with grades 5–8. Several of the activities capitalize on the benefits of using poetry to teach history. This powerful novel in verse conveys a great deal succinctly, appealing to strong readers with the poetry's depth and to less proficient readers with the brevity of the poems and the ample white space.

Notes throughout the guide correlate the questions and activities with specific Common Core English Language Arts Standards. For more information on specific standards for your grade level, visit the Common Core website at [www.corestandards.org](http://www.corestandards.org).



### About the Book

It's the summer of 1775, and George Washington would rather be home at Mount Vernon than commanding the ragtag troops outside of Boston. But he's agreed to lead the colonial soldiers against the well-equipped British who occupy Boston and its harbor. Washington's troops have cut the British off from vital supplies, but what will happen next? Who will attack first? In different verse formats, a rich array of perspectives—George Washington; his wife, Martha; his slave; a young messenger; bookseller-turned-engineer Henry Knox; and other participants—conveys the drama of the siege, the last-minute arrival of essential artillery, and the surprise outcome in this stirring story from the Revolutionary War.



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## Discussion Questions

### Curriculum Connections

These questions correlate to Common Core ELA Reading Standards for Literature: Key Ideas and Details RL.5–8.1, RL.5–8.2, RL.5–8.3; Craft and Structure RL.5–8.4, RL.5–6.5, RL.5–6.6; and ELA Speaking & Listening Standards: Comprehension and Collaboration SL.5–8.1.

- Before reading, discuss the title and subtitle of the book, noting the different words and what you know about them. What is a siege? What do you know about George Washington, including his role as a general? Discuss Boston and the Revolutionary War and how they are related.
- Before reading, look at the cast of characters on page viii and talk about why the author might have chosen to include those people. Do you recognize any of the names besides George Washington? What do you know about them? Why might “The News from Boston” and “Orders” be listed as characters? How is having a cast of characters helpful?
- Before reading, take a look at the glossary. Which words and phrases do you recognize? Is the definition listed the one you know? Which words and phrases are new to you? In what ways does a glossary assist readers?
- What did you learn from this novel about George Washington’s background and personality? What parts of his life gave him pleasure or satisfaction? How was the war hard for him?
- Why did Washington agree to be the commander? What made him a good leader? Describe some of the frustrations that he faced. When were his preferences and ideas ignored, and why?
- Describe the relationship between Joseph Reed and General Washington, pointing to evidence in the verse. What did Reed do for Washington? Why did Washington want Reed to go to Cambridge from Pennsylvania during the siege?
- Cyrus was only eleven in the novel. Give specifics about what he did during the siege. Why do you think his father brought him along? Which lines in Cyrus’s poems give you a sense of his personality?
- What can you tell about the relationship between George and Martha Washington? Why did she travel to Cambridge? What was the journey like? Why were her visitors surprised to find Martha Washington darning socks? What does that activity reveal about her?
- What was William Lee’s role in Washington’s life? Give specific details about Will’s duties and feelings. What did you learn about Washington’s attitude toward Negroes (the term Will uses) and toward slavery?
- In the poem “One Long Night on the River” (page 34), what decision did Thomas Machin make, why did he make it, and how did it benefit the rebels? Why do you think Machin “did not regret/not ever/his decision”?
- Describe Henry Knox’s accomplishment in fetching artillery and how he managed it. Why was his expedition so important? Why did Washington choose Knox? Discuss the role of engineering in Knox’s journey and in other aspects of the siege.
- Discuss the letters from Joseph Hodgkins to his wife. What do they show about him? What do they convey about the siege? Examine the poetry format used and the repetition patterns of the lines. What is the effect of the repetition?
- Why did the author tell the story from multiple perspectives? Which characters speak in the first person? Which poems are written with a third-person point of view? Analyze these choices and their impact on the story.
- What was the general attitude of the British toward the rebels? Give specifics from the text. How did the siege proceed? How did it end? Why did the British destroy and steal so much in Boston before they left, including the contents of John Rowe’s warehouse?
- According to an old saying, “an army marches on its stomach.” Why is food so important during war? Find references in the text to food and discuss them in light of the old saying. Which foods do you recognize? Look up any that are unfamiliar.

# Activities

## Curriculum Connections

These activities correlate to Common Core ELA Reading Standards for Literature: Key Ideas and Details RL.5–8.1, RL.5–8.2; ELA Speaking & Listening Standards: Comprehension and Collaboration SL.5–8.1; Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas SL.5–8.4, SL.5–8.5, SL.5–8.6; and ELA Writing Standards: Text Types and Purposes W.5–8.2, W.5–8.3; Research to Build and Present Knowledge W.5–8.7.

## Dramatizing the Siege

With its many characters and viewpoints, *Siege* lends itself to performance. Have students stage a readers' theater production by creating a script from all or part of the text. Students should convert third-person poems into first-person monologues, choose or be assigned parts, practice their lines, and then read the lines aloud from the script. Props and costumes are optional.

## Clothing with a Message

Review the book's references to uniforms. Why does Washington believe they are important? What aspects of a uniform convey information? Have students choose a war or an era and research a military uniform from it. They should give a short multimedia presentation that shows the uniform and discusses its features and what they convey.

## A Poem Found in History

The novel's source notes and bibliography point readers toward many primary documents available online. Have students locate a document of interest to them and use it to create a found poem. They should select words, phrases, and sentences from the document and combine them in a poetic way. (The Library of Congress teachers' page on Making Connections Through Poetry gives tips on writing found poems from primary documents: [loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/activities/history/teachers/](http://loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/activities/history/teachers/).)

## Dear Character

Poems written as letters, such as those of Joseph Hodgkins, are called epistolary poems. Have students choose one of the characters in the book and write an epistolary poem to that character. For a challenging variation on this activity, have students replicate the format of the Hodgkins poems, which is called a pantoum. (See more on the pantoum at [poets.org/poetsorg/text/pantoum-poetic-form/](http://poets.org/poetsorg/text/pantoum-poetic-form/).)

## Alphabet or Acrostic?

As a class, reread the alphabet poem (pages 142–143) and the acrostic poem (page 170) and talk about their formats. Then have students create their own poems related to the story or characters in one of these formats. Have the students print out and illustrate their poems.

## Arms and Artillery

The novel mentions many kinds of weapons, large and small. Have the class make a list of them. Then have students, working alone or in pairs, research one weapon on the list. They should make a small poster with an illustration of the weapon and an explanation of how it worked and what it was used for. Create a wall of the posters so students can learn from one another's research.

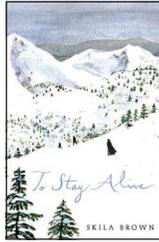
## Looking Closely

Have students choose a poem in the novel of at least two pages. They should write an analysis that addresses the facts the poem conveys as well as other topics, depending on the poem. These can include the use of imagery or other aspects of word choice, character development, repetition, use of quotes, the role of the format, and so on.

## More Poetry for Teaching History



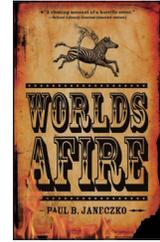
*Caminar*  
by Skila Brown



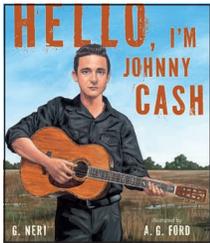
*To Stay Alive: Mary Ann Graves and the Tragic Journey of the Donner Party*  
by Skila Brown



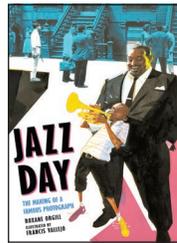
*Requiem: Poems of the Terezin Ghetto*  
by Paul B. Janeczko



*Worlds Afire*  
by Paul B. Janeczko



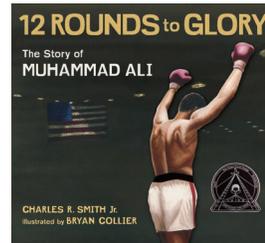
*Hello, I'm Johnny Cash*  
by G. Neri  
illustrated by A. G. Ford



*Jazz Day: The Making of a Famous Photograph*  
by Roxane Orgill  
illustrated by Francis Vallejo



*Lady Liberty: A Biography*  
by Doreen Rappaport  
illustrated by Matt Tavares



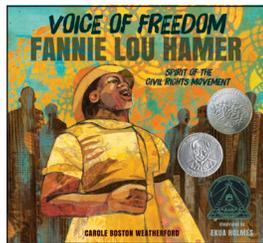
*Twelve Rounds to Glory: The Story of Muhammad Ali*  
by Charles R. Smith Jr.  
illustrated by Bryan Collier



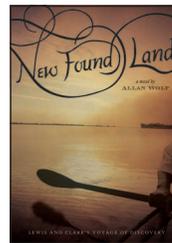
*Something About America*  
by Maria Testa



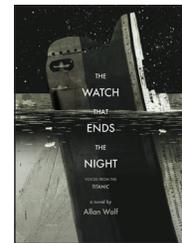
*Becoming Joe DiMaggio*  
by Maria Testa  
illustrated by Scott Hunt



*Voice of Freedom: Fannie Lou Hamer, Spirit of the Civil Rights Movement*  
by Carole Boston Weatherford  
illustrated by Ekua Holmes



*New Found Land: Lewis and Clark's Voyage of Discovery*  
by Allan Wolf



*The Watch That Ends the Night: Voices from the Titanic*  
by Allan Wolf

### About the Author

Roxane Orgill is an award-winning writer on music and the author of several books for children, including the *Boston Globe-Horn Book Award* winner *Jazz Day: The Making of a Famous Photograph*, illustrated by Francis Vallejo, as well as *Skit-Scat Raggedy Cat: Ella Fitzgerald*, illustrated by Sean Qualls, and *Footwork: The Story of Fred and Adele Astaire*, illustrated by Stéphane Jorisch. Roxane Orgill lives in Dobbs Ferry, New York.

This guide was prepared by Kathleen Odean. She was a school librarian for more than fifteen years and now presents all-day workshops on new books for young people, including one that focuses on Common Core nonfiction. She served as chairperson of the 2002 Newbery Award Committee and is the author of several guides to children's books, including *Great Books for Girls*, *Great Books for Boys*, and *Great Books About Things Kids Love*.



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