Spying on the South

During the Civil War, a young black woman born into slavery helped the Union defeat the Confederate South—and end enslavement in America.

About the Article

LEARNING OBJECTIVE
Students will read and analyze primary and secondary sources to learn about slavery and the Civil War.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS
• The Civil War
• Slavery
• Jefferson Davis, Robert E. Lee, and Ulysses S. Grant
• The 13th Amendment
• The Freedmen's Bureau
• Virginia

KEY SKILLS
Social Studies:
• Study the past and its legacy
• Analyze the causes and consequences of events
• Use sequence to establish a sense of order and time
• Evaluate historical accounts

English Language Arts:
• Analyze author's craft and figurative language
• Cite text evidence to support ideas
• Integrate information from text features

KEY CCSS STANDARDS
RH.6-8.1, RH.6-8.2, RH.6-8.4, RH.6-8.7, RH.6-8.9, WHST.6-8.2, WHST.6-8.4, WHST.6-8.9, RI.6-8.1, RI.6-8.3, RI.6-8.4, RI.6-8.5, RI.6-8.7, RI.6-8.9, RI.6-8.10, SL.6-8.1

Your Teaching Support Package
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Lower-Lexile Version
• Differentiate instruction

Skill Builders
• Words to Know: Spying on the South
• Close-Reading Questions: Spying on the South
• Create a Timeline
• Primary Source: “Do Us Justice”
• Know the News: Spying on the South
• Quiz Wizard
1. Preparing to Read
Develop Social-Emotional Learning
Have students respond to this prompt as a Do Now: Describe a time you took a risk. What made it risky? How did you decide the risk was worth taking? Looking back, would you do anything differently? Discuss responses as a class and explain that students will read about a young black woman who took risks as a spy during the Civil War.

Preview Vocabulary
Use Words to Know: Spying on the South (subscribers only) to preteach the terms Civil War, Confederacy, Union, missionary, abolished, economies, secede, sympathizer, intelligence, operatives, siege, ratification, 13th Amendment, Constitution, and Congress. Have students refer to it as they read.

2. Reading and Discussing
Read the Article
Read the article aloud or have students read it independently or in pairs. Tell students that they will create a timeline after reading. Direct them to underline key dates and sequence words and phrases such as “within days” as they read.

Answer Close-Reading Questions
Have students write their responses or use the questions to guide a discussion.

• How does the author create suspense (excitement about what will happen next) in the first paragraph? (Author’s Craft)
Tonya Bolden begins by describing Mary Richards’s heart rate, which makes readers wonder why she’s excited or scared. Sensory details describing the sounds of a knock, silence, and a creaking door also create suspense, as in a scary story or movie. The last sentence of the paragraph makes readers wonder what the “next mission” might be.

• What caused the Civil War? (Cause and Effect)
Tensions over slavery were the main cause of the Civil War. By 1804, all Northern states had passed laws to ban slavery. Southern states worried that slavery could be abolished nationally. They feared that the end of slavery would hurt their economies, which relied on enslaved people to grow cotton. The issue “reached a fever pitch” as seven states seceded between November 1860 and February 1861 and formed the Confederate States of America. War broke out when Confederate forces fired on Fort Sumter in South Carolina on April 12, 1861. By June, Virginia and three more states had joined the Confederacy.

• What evidence supports the idea that no one was more important to Elizabeth Van Lew’s spy ring than Mary Richards? (Text Evidence)
According to the article, Richards “was said to possess a photographic memory,” which would have helped her remember important details from maps and other documents so that she could pass them along. She was also an important spy because white people often underestimated black people like Richards and spoke openly around them. Richards passed coded messages and gathered fresh intelligence, as when she snuck into the Confederate Senate and listened to a secret session from a closet. In her diary, Van Lew wrote that Richards “never fails.”

• How did the Civil War and slavery come to an end? (Key Details)
By the summer of 1864, Union troops were fighting in Petersburg, Virginia, only 25 miles from the Confederate capital of Richmond. They cut off supplies to the city. On April 2, 1865, Union troops broke through Confederate lines at Petersburg, and the Confederate Army retreated from Richmond. One week later, Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrendered. In December 1865, the ratification of the 13th Amendment abolished slavery nationally.

• What does the author mean when she writes that Richards was “always hiding in plain sight”? (Figurative Language)
The author means that many people around Richards didn’t really notice or acknowledge her because she was black. The article says that she was “a nobody, invisible in the eyes of most white people.” Many white people wrongly assumed that black people were less intelligent and unable to understand sensitive information. Richards took advantage of this by playing dumb, as she did when Confederate President Jefferson Davis caught her searching drawers in his house.

• How does the map support the article? (Text Features)
The map supports the article because it shows which states seceded to form the Confederacy. It also shows which states allowed slavery during the war. In addition, the map shows where the events explained in the sidebar took place and helps readers visualize some of the troop movements described in the article.

3. Skill Building
Read a Primary Source
Download the Skill Builder Primary Source: “Do Us Justice” to have students read a newspaper account of one of Mary Richards’s lectures in New York City in 1865. Guide students to analyze it by answering the questions individually or in pairs.

Create a Chronology
Use the online Skill Builder Create a Timeline (subscribers only) to have students select and organize key dates in Mary Richards’s life and the Civil War. To help students visualize the time between events, you can use string or yarn to make a timeline across your classroom and have students stand where key events occurred.

Assess Comprehension
Assign the 10-question quiz Know the News: Spying on the South (subscribers only), available in PDF or interactive forms. Use Quiz Wizard to assess comprehension of this article and three others from the issue.

Differentiate and Customize

For Struggling Readers Build background knowledge before reading the article by having students watch the video “America’s Civil War” at junior.scholastic.com. Search for it by title. As students watch the video, have them use two-column notes to record information about key dates, people, and events.

For Advanced Readers Have students learn about another woman who had an active role in the Civil War by searching for “Mary Walker’s War” at junior.scholastic.com. Ask: What did Mary Richards have in common with Mary Walker? How were the women different?

For Map Readers To have students answer questions about a map similar to the one in the article, use the Skill Builder A Nation Divided from our December 9, 2019, issue. Search for it by title at junior.scholastic.com. You can also reinforce geography skills with our Map Skills Boot Camp curriculum. Find it by clicking “Map Skills” in the top menu.

For Writers Have students write an informative essay responding to the “Write About It!” prompt from the article. Make sure students introduce the topic clearly and provide a concluding statement.