

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Topics suggested include all areas of the curriculum. A few have been included here.

- Nathaniel calls his sister's husband an "American rebel" and describes his parents as Tories. Why was the American Revolution a "rebellion" from the British point of view and a "War of Independence" from the American point of view?
- How did Nathaniel's and Ben's views about being in the war differ? Who would you say changed the most? Why?
- How did the British policy that "the life of a soldier is the property of the King" affect the British soldiers? Why do you think the British had such a policy?
- By the end of the story, Nathaniel had learned much about battles and war in general. What opinion about the war did the author express through the character of Nathaniel?

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- Suppose this story were made into a movie. Create a movie poster advertising the movie. Illustrate your poster with a scene from the story.
- There were other important battles in the American Revolution. Make a map of the thirteen colonies. Research other battles and mark their sites on the map. Give dates and a few other important facts.
- Interview an older person who is a veteran of a war (World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Gulf War). Ask him or her to discuss their experiences and views. Have their views changed in any way as a result of their experiences? Tape record their answers or write them in a notebook. Share and discuss the answers with classmates.

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TEACHERS GUIDE

Drums at Saratoga

by Lisa Banim



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Drums at Saratoga, by Lisa Banim, offers an up-close, exciting view of a turning point in the Revolutionary War—the Battle of Saratoga in 1777. This historical novel is part of the *Stories of the States* series—historical novels whose intent is to show the diversity and strength of our American culture. *Drums at Saratoga* concludes with a short “historical postscript” section that tells more about the real people and events depicted in the story.

The events of that turbulent time in the latter part of the 1770’s unfold through the experiences of a young boy. Nathaniel Phillips, lured by the glamour and excitement of a soldier’s life, joins the British Campaign heading down from Montreal to cut off the northern (New England) colonies from their southern counterparts. Nathaniel’s journey is not only one of physical rigors, but also an awakening to the hardships of war. By the end of the story, he realizes that war exacts a terrible price from people and is worthwhile only when it involves a fight for important things, such as a person’s right to be free.

BACKGROUND

The British General John Burgoyne commanded a large force of loyalists—also known as Tories—which included hired German soldiers, Canadians, and Native Americans. They sailed down the Richelieu River, along Lake Champlain, and then marched inland through the wilderness to Saratoga. Their plan was to travel further to Albany to meet up with British forces from the west and those coming up the Hudson River from New York. The plans never materialized, however, because the British were confronted at Saratoga by a small but determined force of American patriots led by Colonel Dan Morgan. The patriots were not as organized or experienced as the British forces, but they were expert riflemen who fought with courage, determination, and cunning. The defeat of the British at Saratoga is considered a turning point in the War for Independence because it filled Americans with confidence in their ability to fight the mighty British forces. It also ended the British threat to cut off and take over the New England colonies. Perhaps most important, France saw that the Americans could defeat the British and entered the war on the side of the Americans. The rest, as they say, is history.

FACT, FICTION, AND OPINION

Share with students that *Drums at Saratoga* is a novel of historical fiction, and that this form of literature mixes fact and fiction. Many of the events and characters are real, but the dialogue is often made up; sometimes certain characters and events are made up, but they are based on people who really lived at the time and actual events that took place.

Discuss how a reader can tell what is fact (history) and what is fiction. Students should understand that historical facts can be checked in reference books such as encyclopedias, dictionaries, almanacs, and atlases; in historical documents and other official public records; and in personal accounts (of real people) such as letters, journals, diaries and memoirs. Photographs, paintings, and drawings also serve as records of another time.

Point out that in addition to facts and fiction, authors also include opinions—thoughts, feelings, and beliefs for which there is no proof—of their own and of others. Make students aware that in *Drums at Saratoga*, the author has expressed others’ opinions about the importance of the battle that took place at Saratoga. The author has also expressed an opinion about the war. Add that authors often convey these opinions through fictional characters.

If you use the preceding material before students read the novel, encourage them to use what they already know about the Revolutionary War to help them be aware of what is fact, what is fiction, and what opinions the author may be expressing. If you choose to discuss the preceding material after students read the novel, be sure to review the Postscript section at the back of the book.

Consider having students fact check in other sources the following material:

- When did the Battle of Saratoga take place?
- Where is Saratoga located?
- Who was General Burgoyne? General Gates? Benedict Arnold? Colonel Dan Morgan?
- What was the route traveled by General Burgoyne and his troops?
- What did British soldiers wear during the American Revolution? What did American soldiers wear?