

INCLUDES
COMMON CORE
STATE STANDARDS
CORRELATIONS



A VOLCANO BENEATH THE SNOW

JOHN BROWN'S
WAR AGAINST SLAVERY

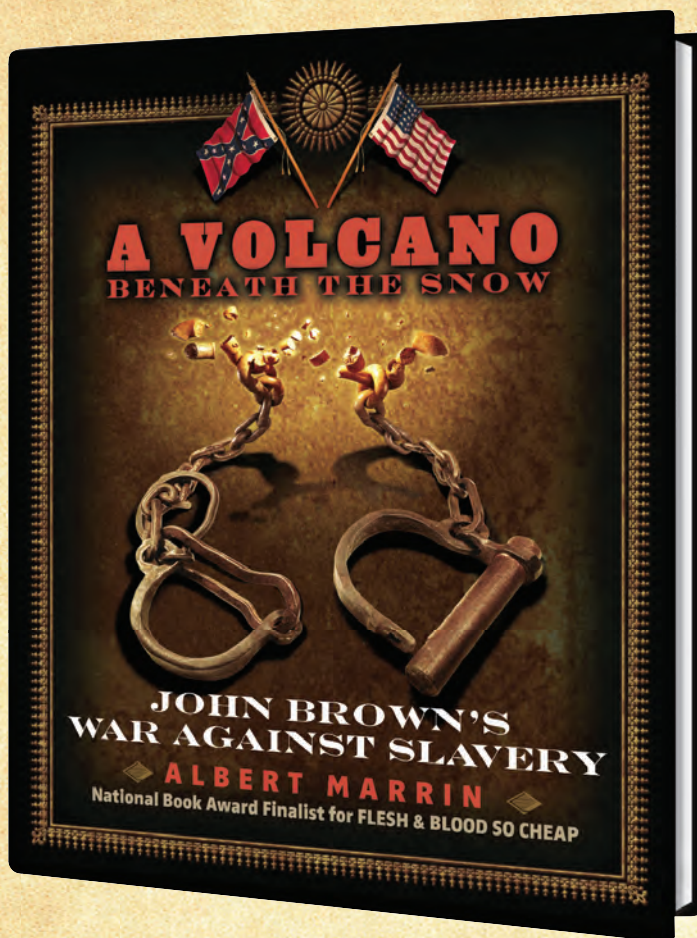
◆ ALBERT MARRIN ◆

National Book Award Finalist for FLESH & BLOOD SO CHEAP

EDUCATOR GUIDE



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Grades 7 up

HC: 978-0-307-98152-3

GLB: 978-0-307-98153-0

EL: 978-0-385-75340-1

ABOUT THE BOOK

Hundreds of volumes have been written about the Civil War: its causes, battles, and, of course, the people who lived, fought, commanded, and died during the bloodiest war waged on United States soil. Although the subject of Albert Marrin's *A Volcano Beneath the Snow: John Brown's War Against Slavery* was dead for two years before the first shot rang out at Fort Sumter, his actions became a catalyst that hastened the war between the states and, ultimately, the end of slavery. His plan to start a slave rebellion by providing arms to southern slaves and his subsequent raid on the arsenal at Harper's Ferry, Virginia, helped to further polarize an already divided union over the South's "peculiar institution." Marrin takes an honest, unflinching look at the man who "consecrated" his life to "the destruction of slavery," and, in doing so, used any means necessary to achieve his goal. Most importantly, as in any study of an historical figure, Marrin places John Brown "within his world," so that we may more fully understand the man behind the myth.

PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Historical context is defined as the political, social, cultural, and economic environment related to historical moments, events, and trends (TeachingHistory.org). Write the term *historical context* on the board. Give students time to form a definition of the term and share their ideas. Next, provide students with the definition and share that when studying any historical figure, one must always be mindful of the times in which he/she lived. To truly understand John Brown, it is imperative that students first understand the United States that he experienced. Have students create a list of words and concepts that fall under the heading: "USA: 1800–1859." Give students time to share their word lists. Set these lists aside for use in a later activity.

PRE-READING ACTIVITY (continued)

PROLOGUE

A House Dividing

In this chapter, Marrin sets the tone for what is to come by describing the country's bitter divide over slavery in the years preceding the Civil War, and John Brown's intrinsic belief that God "had chosen him to right the wrong of slavery" (p. 2). Brown believed in the concept of "righteous violence." What does this term mean, and do you feel that it is ever acceptable "to break a 'bad' law in a democracy?" (p. 3). Discuss the following statement by Henry David Thoreau: "Is there any necessity for a man's being a tool to perform a deed at which he better disapproves?" Challenge students to discuss how John Brown would have responded to Thoreau's words.

Curriculum Connection

Stage a mock debate with one half of the class representing Abraham Lincoln and the other half representing John Brown. The Lincoln side should be prepared to defend the rule of law and its place within a democracy. The Brown side should be prepared to defend the concept of "righteous violence" as Brown would have argued it in his lifetime. At the debate's conclusion, gather students together and discuss what they learned from the experience. What issues were raised that surprised students or gave them cause for further examination?

CHAPTER ONE

A Volcano Beneath the Snow

FOR DISCUSSION: In this chapter, readers learn about John Brown the boy and young man, his upbringing, and the early experiences that shaped his personal belief system. The author notes "By his early teens . . . [John Brown] had developed some irritating habits. Unable to take criticism, he admitted to telling lies to 'screen himself from blame [and] punishment'" (p. 13). This "habit" continued into Brown's adulthood. Why is it important to be willing and able to take criticism? On page 17, the author notes that "Anyone who disagreed with him [Brown] or had the audacity to argue got a harsh scolding." Why is it important to be able to have civil discourse in a democratic society?

Curriculum Connection

Brown was raised as a strict Puritan, and was once described by a friend as "a Puritan of Puritans" (p. 14). Give students time to research Puritanism and its role in the colonization and early formation of the United States.

CHAPTER TWO

The Foulest Blot

FOR DISCUSSION: After reading this chapter, ask students to share what most surprised them about the rise of the African slave trade. Discuss the interconnectedness between continents in regards to slave labor and economics. How did the desire for sugar fuel the growth of slavery in the New World? Discuss the author's statement, "Different people, and different times in history, have given different meaning to colors. Certain colors stir strong emotions." (p. 39). How did human superstition surrounding skin color contribute to the rise of slavery? Discuss the author's statement on page 44 that, "However evil, the Atlantic slave trade helped create the world as we know it."

Curriculum Connection

This chapter, devoted to the rise of the African slave trade, opens with a stirring poem by William Cowper. (pp. 24–25) Project or write the poem on the board and have students read it once silently, followed by a choral reading. Discuss the poem and challenge students to share personal reactions to the verse. Give students time to review the many reproductions of primary source documents featured in this chapter (illustrations and excerpts of written sources). Have students choose one document to study. Challenge students to write a five-paragraph personal essay or poem in response to the document.

CHAPTER THREE

An Object Vast in Its Compass

FOR DISCUSSION: In this chapter, the author details the rise of slavery in America, creating a context from which to better understand John Brown and his actions. Reread the excerpt from the diary of John Quincy Adams, found on the chapter's opening page. Discuss what Adams means by "a contemplation worthy of the most exalted soul whether its total abolition is or is not practicable." The author explains that "New Englanders saw themselves as God's chosen people." (p. 46) How did this belief contribute to the rise of slavery in the colonies? Throughout the chapter are examples of the brutality of slavery, such as the depiction of the iron mask on page 51. Discuss the Frederick Douglass verse on page 52. How did the horrors perpetrated against slaves fuel John Brown's hatred of the "peculiar institution"? Discuss the role of the founding fathers in the rise of American slavery.

Curriculum Connection

This chapter introduces many major events in American history for students to research, such as slavery in the early colonies, The Slavery Code, physical and emotional treatment of slaves, Thomas Jefferson's relationship to slavery, the rise of the cotton gin, Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad, and the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe. Give students time to dig deeper into these important topics and to create an original research project to present to the class.

CHAPTER FOUR

Mighty Man of Valor

FOR DISCUSSION: What is the Golden Rule? Explain John Brown's statement, "I believe in the Golden Rule and the Declaration of Independence. I think they both mean the same thing." (p. 78) The author states, "Name-calling only inflames tempers and closes minds." How did the Abolitionists' biased views of slave owners, and vice versa, further alienate the North and the South? Discuss Daniel Webster's proclamation, "No government can exist where every individual is free to disobey [the laws] whenever they do not happen to square with his private conviction of what is the law of God." (p. 85) Discuss how John Brown might have responded to Webster.

Curriculum Connection

On page 99, the author writes, "That before leaving John Jr.'s camp, Brown said he aimed 'to strike terror into the hearts of the proslavery people,'" which the author states "fits the modern U.S. government definition of terrorism." Give students time to research contemporary acts of terrorism in the United States. Encourage students to create a presentation of their research to share with the class.

CHAPTER FIVE

Into Africa

FOR DISCUSSION: In 1857, John Brown went to Boston "seeking allies and weapons for his holy war against slavery." Discuss why John Brown viewed his goal of ending slavery as a holy mission. Discuss the role of the Boston Abolitionists in Brown's plan to raid the armory at Harper's Ferry. Discuss the term *extremism* and how the convictions from both North and South added to the tensions that led to civil war. On page 111, the author describes Brown's constitution, which he planned to install in liberated areas of

the country, with himself as a military dictator. In today's world, how would a person who proposed to replace the U.S. Constitution with a military dictatorship be viewed by civil society? Discuss the first reports of the raid, and how these inaccurate and sensational reports further fueled the lead-up to war.

Curriculum Connections

This chapter mentions many important historical figures who were either directly and/or indirectly connected to John Brown and/or the raid at Harper's Ferry, such as poets and abolitionists Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, The Secret Six (p. 113), and Robert E. Lee. Have each student select one of these people to research. Students should focus on how their subject was connected to John Brown, as well as to the larger issues of the day. Give students time to present their findings to the class.

CHAPTER SIX

The Cause He Loved So Much

FOR DISCUSSION: Page 129 describes how after his capture John Brown "decided to use the time he had left to shape his image for the American people and for history." In today's media- and celebrity-driven world, this reshaping of the facts is known as *spin*. Discuss how Brown spun the facts of the raid at Harper's Ferry. John Brown's legal team attempted to keep him from the gallows with an insanity defense, a tactic that enraged Brown. The insanity defense is commonly used in the legal system today. Given what students know thus far about John Brown, discuss if they think he would be considered mentally ill in today's society. Discuss the term *martyr*, and why John Brown was more useful to the Abolitionists dead than alive. Discuss the term *propaganda*, and how it was used to make John Brown into an American mythological figure.

Curriculum Connections

John Brown's execution was national news in 1859, and could be used as a case study in media sensationalism today. Divide the class into two sides: one representing the Northern press; the other representing the Southern press. Have students discuss how their "side" of the story might be easily influenced by bias. Next, have each side divide into small groups of three or four. Each group should write a one-column article presenting the facts of the raid and execution, as well as an editorial describing the execution as a biased reporter might have done.

PRE-READING ACTIVITY (continued)

CHAPTER SEVEN

High Noon for the Union

FOR DISCUSSION: On page 147, the author quotes a Southerner as saying that John Brown's raid at Harper's Ferry "proved that the North and the South are standing in battle array." Discuss the reproduction of a *Harper's Weekly* illustration on page 148. How do you think this image was received by pro-slavery Southerners? How is this type of media reaction an example of a spark in the chain reaction lit by John Brown? What is meant by the author's statement, "Fear poisoned reason"? Reread the section "Lincoln," on pages 151–154. Ask students to respond to any surprising information learned about the sixteenth president, such as "Though he despised slavery, like most nineteenth century white Americans he held racist ideas."

Curriculum Connection

Abraham Lincoln was known for his ability to speak plainly and eloquently about difficult issues. Work with the art teacher to create an original artwork entitled *A Portrait of Lincoln*. Using excerpts of Lincoln's speeches and student-created images, the final multimedia piece should present a balanced representation of the man seen within the context of his own time.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Wiped Out in Blood

FOR DISCUSSION: Discuss Frederick Douglass's statement, "Arrest the hoe in the hands of the Negro, and you smite rebellion in the very seat of its life." Discuss the various issues President Lincoln was grappling with in the weeks leading up to his Emancipation Proclamation. Discuss the meaning of the author's statement, "In a democracy, a leader cannot go faster or further than voters will allow." How does this statement apply to Lincoln's actions described in this chapter?

INTERNET RESOURCES

Africans in America

PBS.org/wgbh/aia/home.html

John Brown Resource Page

IATH.Virginia.edu/jbrown/master.html

Library of Congress/Abolitionist Movement

LOC.gov/exhibits/african/afam005.html

Curriculum Connection

A Volcano Beneath the Snow is full of reproductions of illustrations from this period in American history: posters, magazine illustrations, and political cartoons. Project the two political cartoons of Abraham Lincoln that appear in the chapter—the first on page 183; the second on page 196. Lead students in a side-by-side comparison of the cartoons to determine the message behind each image. Give students an opportunity to create their own political cartoon of Lincoln or another historical figure featured in this chapter.

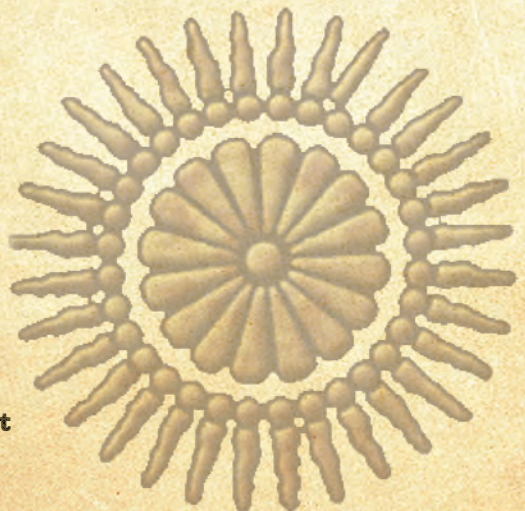
CHAPTER NINE

Legacy

FOR DISCUSSION: What did Abraham Lincoln mean by his statement, "The bullet must never replace the ballot"? (p. 207) Ask students to consider one of the author's concluding statements and offer their own opinion about John Brown: "He was a man of many faces. Gentle and harsh, martyr and terrorist, devout Christian and murderer." What does Lerone Bennet Jr. mean by his 1964 statement, "It is to John Brown that we must go, finally, if we want to understand the limitations and possibilities of our situation." (p. 207)

Curriculum Connections

Retrieve the lists that students created in the pre-reading activity. Have students add to their lists with information gleaned from their reading of *A Volcano Beneath the Snow*. Give students time to write a short description of the historical context in which John Brown lived his life, and, ultimately, died for his cause.



COMMON CORE CORRELATIONS

The following Common Core standards (ranging from grades 6–10) can be correlated to many of the discussion questions and curriculum connections in this guide.

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.6** Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.4** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.7** Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.2** Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.4** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social science.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.9** Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.6-8.2** Write informative/explanatory texts, including the narration of historical events, scientific procedures/experiments, or technical processes.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.6-8.7** Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.6-8.9** Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.9-10.2** Write informative/explanatory texts, including the narration of historical events, scientific procedures/experiments, or technical processes.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.9-10.2b** Develop the topic with well-chosen, relevant, and sufficient facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience's knowledge of the topic.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.9-10.6** Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products, taking advantage of technology's capacity to link to other information and to display information flexibly and dynamically.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.9-10.9** Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Albert Marrin is the author of numerous highly regarded nonfiction books for young readers, including *Flesh and Blood So Cheap: The Triangle Fire and Its Legacy*, which was a National Book Award finalist; *Years of Dust*, *Black Oil: The Story of Oil in Our Lives*; and *Sitting Bull and His World*. His many honors include the Washington Children's Book Guild and *Washington Post* Nonfiction Award for "outstanding lifetime contribution that has enriched the field of literature," the James Madison Book Award for lifetime achievement, and the National Endowment for the Humanities Medal awarded to him by President George W. Bush.



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