

Albert Marrin

Educators' Guide

Teach the new *When Forests Burn* and other works from this renowned nonfiction master and National Book Award finalist



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WHEN FORESTS BURN

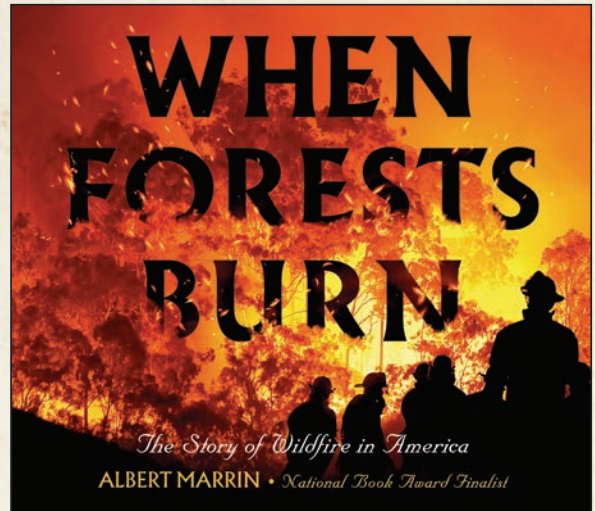
The Story of Wildfire in America

ABOUT THE BOOK

One day about sixty years ago, Albert Marrin, his wife, and neighbors found themselves tamping out a creeping forest fire in the Catskill Mountains. That day, he learned that fires had been happening there for time immemorial and an idea—although subconsciously—was sparked.

When Forests Burn explores the history and circumstances surrounding forest fires in the United States. From controlled burns by Native Americans to the raging fires in Northern California in 2020, Albert Marrin takes a nuanced and engaging look into what fuels fire and the effects it has on the surrounding environment. The book highlights stories of courage in the midst of the most destructive fires, as well as the rise of the Forestry Service and the conservation movement.

At a time when the existential question of climate change looms large, Albert Marrin's book educates readers, coaxes questions, and engenders hope.



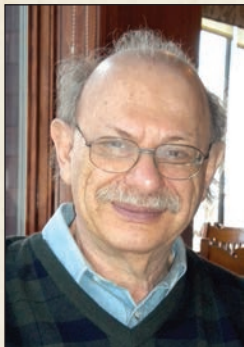
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PRAISE FOR THE BOOK

★ “Vivid, wide angled, and all too timely.”
—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

“Marrin breaks down the history of wildfires and their place in the cycle of nature in this thorough work.”
—*Publishers Weekly*

★ “Compelling. . . . Offers a tremendous amount of accessible information for both researchers and general-interest readers and fills a gap in current literature for this age group.”
—*Booklist*, starred review



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Albert Marrin is a distinguished historian and author of over forty nonfiction books for young readers. His notable publications include *Flesh & Blood So Cheap*, a finalist for the National Book Award, and *Uprooted*, recognized with a Sibert Honor. He was awarded the National Humanities Medal in 2008. His new book, *When Forests Burn*, chronicles the intricacies of how and why wildfires rage in the United States. He currently serves as history chair at Yeshiva University and previously taught in New York City public schools.

PRE-READING QUESTIONS

1. Before reading, ask yourself about wildfires. What do you know about them? How often do you hear about them? Have you ever been affected by a wildfire? If you haven't, what do you imagine it would be like?
2. Albert Marrin introduces the book with the following line: "Forests need fire—it's as necessary to their well-being as soil and sunlight. But some fires burn out of control, destroying everything—and everyone—in their path." How is fire necessary and how is it dangerous? What do you anticipate the book will cover based on your first impressions?
3. Write a definition of wildfire based on previous knowledge before you begin reading. Keep track of your definition and whether information in the book necessitates edits to your definition.
4. In the book, Albert Marrin quotes fire historian Stephen J. Pryne: "[Humans] are, uniquely, a fire creature. Other animals knock over trees, dig holes, eat plants, and hunt, but only human beings apply and withhold fire." (p. 11) Off the top of your head, list three things people use fire for in their daily lives.
5. Albert Marrin has an extensive vocabulary that he uses throughout the book. For example, he teaches readers the meaning of the word *zoonotic*—"from the Greek *zōio* ('animal') and *nosos* ('disease')"—early in the book. (p. 29) As you read, log terms that are new or unfamiliar using the chart below.

Word	Book Quote	Dictionary Definition
Zoonotic	"from the Greek <i>zōio</i> ('animal') and <i>nosos</i> ('disease')—[diseases] that can spread from animals to humans, and then from person to person, sparking epidemics" (p. 29)	Zoonosis (noun): an infection or disease that is transmissible from animals to humans under natural conditions (from Merriam-Webster)



DISCUSSION AND WRITING QUESTIONS

1. Albert Marrin begins his book with an anecdote about witnessing a small fire while on vacation with his wife in the Catskills: "The fire had not climbed into the trees, but its low flames moved across the ground, consuming dead leaves and brush. It was not a windy day, so the fire spread slowly, and we were beating it down with all our might. Still, without our noticing, it crept behind us. That was scary, but after an hour or so we put it out and headed home." (p. 2) Why do you think he starts his book with a personal story? How do you think this will inform the rest of your learning throughout the book?
2. Much of "Chapter 1: Ice, Fire, and Forest" focuses on ice, geological change, migration patterns, and forests. How are these subjects connected to forest fires?
3. In "Chapter 2: Once Upon a Time in America," we learn about how Native Americans are stewards of the land. Identify how forests and wood were essential to First Peoples' lives. Explore how they used forests and fire to both their advantage and the environment's benefit. Finally, take a look at how environmental circumstances changed with the arrival of Europeans.
4. In the 1800s, the federal government saw trains as "essential for binding the nation together." (p. 58) How did the development of the railroad affect American industry's relationship with wood? Additionally, what risks did the railroad pose when it comes to forest fires?
5. As the Industrial and Wooden Revolutions progressed, America's relationship with and uses of wood developed. Wood was used as a "chief source of energy in homes, businesses, and factories" and was made into paper. (p. 55) As a result of wood's importance and prevalence, how did wood change the makeup of local economies?
6. In "Chapter 3: Harvesting the Northwoods," we learn about how timber barons like Frederick Weyerhaeuser affected the life and economy of some small towns. (p. 63) Young men were given the "adventure of living in the wilderness" as a means of work when they labored in logging camps. (p. 66) However, it wasn't an easy life. Describe working at a logging camp in the Northwoods. Include the different jobs these men were assigned.
7. On October 8, 1871, the much-remembered Chicago Fire raged and the thriving town of Peshtigo, Wisconsin, was obliterated by fire in under thirty minutes. (pp. 74-77) Albert Marrin gives a detailed account of the Peshtigo Fire in "Chapter 4: The Night Hell Yawned," narrating events while pulling from primary sources, including those from Father Peter Pernin, James Monahan, and Isaac Stephenson. Father Pernin wrote, "It was a grand sight, the fire that night. It burned to the tops of the tallest trees, enveloped them in a mantle of flames, or, winding itself about them like a huge serpent, crept to their summits, out upon the branches, and wound its huge folds about them." (p. 84) What is the benefit of including eyewitness accounts alongside narration of the events surrounding the Peshtigo Fire?
8. Despite dire circumstances during the firestorm that engulfed Hinckley, Wisconsin, in 1894, the actions of people such as William Best, John Wesley Blair, and Albert Speyer saved lives. (pp. 106-109) What can we learn from these extraordinary stories?
9. After the Peshtigo Fire, nothing changed to prevent another major forest fire in Wisconsin. Compare and contrast the causes of and circumstances surrounding the fires in Hinckley and Peshtigo.
10. In "Chapter 6: America's War on Wildlife," we learn about the decimation of the American buffalo and the passenger pigeon. According to Marrin, "The driving forces in America's war on wildlife were money, military 'necessity,' women's fashion, and just plain willfulness." (p. 113) What does America's treatment of the buffalo and passenger pigeon tell us about attitudes toward the land?
11. Imagine George Perkins Marsh, John Muir, Gifford Pinchot, and Theodore Roosevelt are having a dinner conversation about natural heritage. How do you imagine the conversation would go? Who would advocate for conservation, and who would champion preservation? What are the main differences? What do you believe is the best approach?
12. After the Big Blow Up of 1910, Gifford Pinchot launched a public relations campaign to garner support for the Forestry Service. Forest rangers were depicted as heroes fighting fires and congressional politics. (p. 162) What cultural impacts did this PR campaign have? What were the effects on Forestry Service policy regarding fires?

13. In the final chapter, Marrin discusses climate change, human activities, and forestry service policies. He quotes environmental scientists about the contributors to those bigger, hotter, and faster wildfires of today. For example, he quotes David Romps, director of the Berkeley Atmospheric Sciences Center: "To cut to the chase: Were the heat wave and the lightning strikes and the dryness of the vegetation affected by global warming? Absolutely yes. Were they made significantly hotter, more numerous, and drier because of global warming? Yes, likely yes, and yes." (p. 189) Marrin points out the "likely" in Romps's quote, emphasizing that there is not one simple cause or solution to wildfires. What is your nuanced take on our current environmental situation? Take it a step further and categorize human and natural causes of wildfires.

POST-READING QUESTIONS AND EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Throughout *When Forests Burn*, Marrin explores how human actions have both cultivated and damaged the environment. Research conservationist and preservationist efforts in your area to learn how you can get involved.
2. Smokey the Bear, one of the most recognizable government mascots, was introduced in 1944 to remind park goers, "Only You Can Prevent Forest Fires!" (p. 165) Based on what you've read and learned, design your own mascot and slogan to promote stewardship of our natural heritage.
3. With national awareness of human effects on the environment growing, media, especially movies, have sought to center environmentalism. Think of movies or books you're familiar with that focus on the environment. How are their messages similar or different from this book and one another?
4. Using what you've learned in the book and supplemental research, come up with a wildfire action plan. Here are some resources you may want to consult:
 - Wildfires (Ready.gov)
 - Wildfire Safety (American Red Cross)
 - Preparedness (National Weather Service)
5. Throughout the book, we have seen how industry and government have affected the environment. We have also been educated on misperceptions of forest fires. How can we change our approach and behaviors as individuals to fires, forests, and the overall environment?



This guide was prepared by Leslie Michaels, who holds a BA from the University of Georgia and an MA from New York University, with experience as lead teacher at Success Academy in Harlem, New York, and Talent Lab of Arts in Queens, New York.



A Light in the Darkness



JANUSZ KORCZAK, HIS ORPHANS, AND THE HOLOCAUST

ABOUT THE BOOK

From National Book Award finalist Albert Marrin comes the moving story of Janusz Korczak, the heroic Polish Jewish doctor who devoted his life to children, perishing with them in the Holocaust.

Janusz Korczak was more than a good doctor. He was a hero. The Dr. Spock of his day, he established orphanages run on his principle of honoring children and shared his ideas with the public in books and on the radio. He famously said that “children are not the people of tomorrow, but people today.” (p. 6) Korczak was a man ahead of his time, whose work ultimately became the basis for the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child.

Korczak was also a Polish Jew. On the eve of World War II, he turned down multiple opportunities to escape, standing by the children in his orphanage as they became confined to the Warsaw ghetto. Dressing them in their Sabbath finery, he led their march to the trains and ultimately perished with his children in Treblinka.

But this book is much more than a biography. In it, renowned nonfiction master Albert Marrin examines not just Janusz Korczak’s life but his ideology of children: that children are valuable in and of themselves, as individuals. He contrasts this with Adolf Hitler’s life and *his* ideology of children: that children are nothing more than tools of the state.

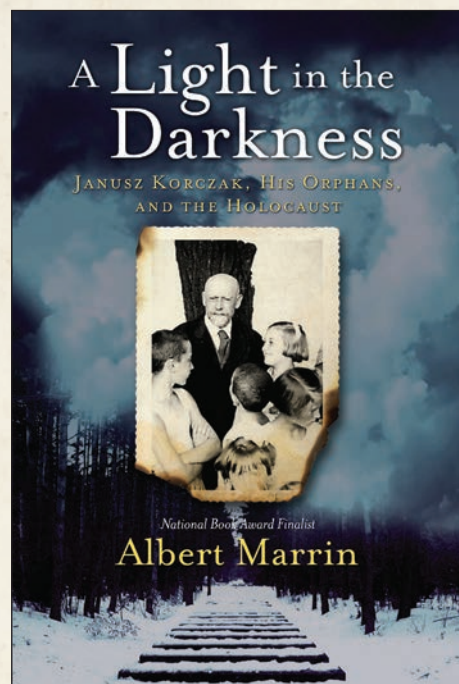
And throughout, Marrin draws readers into the Warsaw ghetto. What it was like. How it was run. How Jews within and Poles without responded. Who worked to save lives and who tried to enrich themselves on other people’s suffering. And how one man came to represent the conscience and the soul of humanity.

Filled with black-and-white photographs, this is an unforgettable portrait of a man whose compassion in even the darkest hours reminds us what is possible.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Albert Marrin is a decorated historian and the beloved author of numerous works of nonfiction for young readers. His books include *Flesh & Blood So Cheap*, which was a National Book Award finalist, and *Uprooted*, a Sibert Honor Book.



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PRAISE FOR THE BOOK

YALSA Excellence
in Nonfiction for
Young Adults Award Finalist

★ “Through meticulous research and impeccable storytelling, the result is an astonishing account of the Holocaust that alternates between the worst and best of humankind.”

—Booklist, starred review

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The book begins with a prologue, or introduction, in which the author introduces the big ideas he will develop. Six chapters follow this prologue. Use the questions below to start conversations about the content of each chapter.

The questions below reflect the Common Core standards for English language arts and history/social studies. These standards ask students to cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6.1-CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH12.1), determine the central ideas of information and provide accurate summaries of primary and secondary sources (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6.2-CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH12.2), and identify key steps in a text's descriptions of a process related to history/social studies (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6.3-CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH12.3).

Prologue: The Two Saddest Nations on Earth

1. On page 8, Marrin states that Janusz Korczak's story is part of a larger story that raises profound questions. What are these questions? What information does Marrin offer to help us think about these questions?
2. Marrin tells us that although this book deals with both Korczak and Hitler, it is not a traditional biography. Instead, he will develop two themes in this book. What are these themes?
3. The author tells us why he thinks history matters. What does he suggest? Do you agree?

I. The Old Doctor

4. What were Janusz Korczak's beliefs about children—their rights and their identities?
5. How did Dom Sierot, the children's home Korczak directed, reflect his ideas?

II. The Hater

6. Marrin says that "everything that the Old Doctor was—humane, gentle, modest, peace-loving—Adolf Hitler was not." (pp. 54–55) What evidence does he give for this conclusion?
7. How did Hitler interpret Darwin's theory? What did he believe about race, war, religion, and fighting? How did he apply these ideas to Jews?
8. What was Hitler's secret program of childbearing? How did he institute both positive and negative eugenics?

III. The Heart of the Tragedy

9. During the Nazi occupation of Poland, how were Jews treated? Reread the section entitled "Jews under Nazi Occupation" on pages 139–144.
10. What was the true purpose of creating the Warsaw ghetto?

11. Reread the pages dealing with Korczak's walk toward the "small ghetto" with the children of Dom Sierot. (pp. 154–157) What happened? Why did Korczak believe "the Germans won't harm us"?
12. How have diarists shaped our understanding of this period of history? How important are primary sources? (pp. 157–160)

IV. A Dream So Terrible

13. Hitler decided to attack the Soviet Union. Why does Marrin describe it as a "colossal blunder"?
14. How have historians been able to conclude that it was Hitler who ordered the Holocaust when they have not found any paper documents proving his guilt?
15. Describe how Nazi murderers used "office talk" to soothe their consciences. What are some examples of office talk?
16. According to Hitler, what was the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question" in Europe?
17. Even though most Poles did not try to save Jews or help them survive, Marrin tells us there is "another side to the story." What was the story of each of these "Righteous Gentiles"?
 - Zofia Kossak • Irena Sendler • Oskar Schindler

V. Written in Smoke and Ashes

18. How do we know what happened during Korczak's last walk? What information is certain? What is not?
19. From the beginning, why didn't Jews fight back? Marrin tells us that before answering this question we need to understand what Jews thought about violence. What did Orthodox Jews think? Leaders of the Bund, a labor union organization? Members of the Jewish Fighting Organization (ZOB)?
20. How did Varsovians (Poles who resided in Warsaw) react to the final German efforts under SS general Jürgen Stroop?

VI. Reckonings

21. To Hitler, his racist ideology meant everything. As a result, what value did he place on the children of the Hitler Youth?
22. Marrin asks this important question: If Hitler and other Nazis behaved lovingly toward Nazi children and were even decent parents, how could they murder Jewish children? How does Marrin answer that question?
23. How did the children of war criminals confront their parents' crimes?
24. What lessons can we learn from knowing about Janusz Korczak, his orphans, and the Holocaust?
25. Why is "A Light in the Darkness" a good title for this book?

CRAFT AND STRUCTURE

Albert Marrin is a great explainer! Not only does he narrate history by telling what happened, but he also explains how to think about history. He discusses the vocabulary readers need to know, the importance of historical sources, and the original ideas he has for understanding past events.

The questions and activities below highlight examples of the author's craft as identified by the Common Core Standards. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6.4-12.4 asks students to determine the meaning of words and phrases and how the author uses and refines meanings of words related to history and social studies. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6.5-12.5 asks students to describe how a text presents information, and how an author uses text structure to emphasize key events or advance an explanation. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6.6-12.6 asks students to identify an author's point of view or the views of two or more authors on a topic.

- 1. Refining Word Meanings.** Marrin explains how general word meanings were shaped and transformed by Hitler's use of them. First, Marrin explains a word's general meaning. Then he shows how Hitler's specific use of the word or idea shifted its meaning. Look closely at how he does this. On page 10, Marrin explains the meaning of *ideology*. What is the general meaning of *ideology*? What was Hitler's ideology—the one big idea that shaped his thinking? Similarly, on page 80, Marrin explains the meaning of *dictator*. What is a “normal” dictator? What is a “totalitarian” dictator?

Explore other examples of how the author explains word meanings. What does he tell us about the following words? *Holocaust* (p. 2–3), *racism* (p. 8), *empathy* (p.19), *shtetl* (p. 40), *yeshiva* (p. 40), *swastika* (p.61), *blitzkrieg* (p. 128), *ghetto* (p. 148)

- 2. Examining the Prologue.** A prologue is an introduction to a book. What important people, places, and ideas does the author introduce? How does this introduction help you understand what follows? Fill out the table below.

People Introduced in the Prologue	Places Introduced in the Prologue	Ideas Introduced in the Prologue

3. **Visible Author.** A visible author is one who speaks directly to the reader. In this book, Marrin uses many techniques to talk to us and help us understand this difficult history. One example of each technique is provided below. After discussing these techniques, find additional examples of them in the book.

Visible Author Techniques	Example
<p>Raise a Question and Then Answer It</p> <p>As a way of guiding our thinking, the author raises a question he wants us to consider, and then he answers it.</p>	<p>“What made Adolf Hitler so devilish? How was he able to corrupt Germany’s young, turning them into tools of aggression?”</p> <p>The ‘anti-Korczak’ in every way, Hitler is among the most fascinating and most evil people who ever lived. . . . Hitler was what we may call a ‘lunatic of one idea,’ an obsession that dominated his very being.</p> <p>Adolf Hitler’s ‘one idea’ was racism.” (p. 8)</p>
<p>Identify Gaps in Information</p> <p>In constructing a historical account, the author tells us that he doesn’t have all the information he would like because it is not available.</p>	<p>“We have no proof that Hitler read <i>The Origin of Species</i>. Most likely, he did not; nor did he need to. During his time in Vienna, newsstands sold cheap pamphlets explaining Darwin’s theory in simple layman’s terms. We cannot be sure if he read any of these or, if he did, which ones. Nevertheless, the theory captivated him.” (p. 73)</p>
<p>Identify and Describe Sources</p> <p>The author tells us where he got the information he used to write the book.</p>	<p>“The Nazis planned to make the ghettos unbearable. We learn the results of their efforts from their victims. Diarists like Chaim Kaplan and Mary Berg were sensitive, verbal people who recorded daily life as they lived it. So did Janusz Korczak, whose diary has become a classic of Holocaust literature.” (p. 157)</p>
<p>Comment on the Process of Writing History</p> <p>The author shares examples of “thinking like a historian.”</p>	<p>“One should never take an eyewitness account at face value; that is why historians and lawyers collect and compare testimony from as many sources as possible.” (p. 245)</p>
<p>Explain How the Book Is Organized</p> <p>The author discusses the structure or design of the book.</p>	<p>“This book is not a biography in the traditional sense of a detailed account of a person’s life. Instead, I explore two themes as embodied in Janusz Korczak and Adolf Hitler, the humanitarian and the racist fanatic.” (pp. 10–11)</p>

WRITING

The writing activities below are meant to encourage readers to write about history in ways that are described in the Common Core State Standards. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6.1-10.1 asks students to write arguments focused on discipline-specific content like history. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6.2-10.2 asks students to write informative/explanatory texts, including the narration of historical events.

1. **Analyzing and Writing About Historical Photographs.** By closely examining historical photographs, reflecting and hypothesizing on their content, and raising questions to investigate, students build their understanding of the past. Follow the steps below.
 - To begin, view the video “Teaching the Holocaust Using Photographs” on the website of Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center, at yadvashem.org/education/educational-materials/learning-environment/using-photographs.html. This video emphasizes the need for critically examining historical photographs.
 - Then download the “Analysis Tool for Students” (print one for each student) and the Teacher’s Guide “Analyzing Photographs and Prints” from the website of the Library of Congress at loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/guides.html. Emphasize the importance of the three sections: Observe, Reflect, Question.
 - Let the students work in pairs to complete the analysis of one or more of the photos below. Then discuss their findings as a class.
 - Ask students to select a question for further investigation and report back on the results.



Nazi youth salute at a rally. (1938)



Construction of the Warsaw ghetto wall. (1940)



SS troops pull Jews from bunkers during the suppression of the Warsaw ghetto uprising. (1943)

2. **Are There “Lessons of History”?** People often use the phrase “lessons of history” to refer to lessons they have learned from studying the past. Can learning about Janusz Korczak and the Holocaust help us today?
 - Review what Marrin tells readers about the lessons of history on pages 11–12 and page 333. Explain what he thinks.
 - Explain your ideas.
 - Share your ideas with others.
3. **Holocaust Poetry.** Marrin tells us that poetry was “a major form of expression in the ghetto,” and today these poems are “valuable historical documents.” (p. 172) Read, study, and practice reciting one of the poems in the book. Then explain in writing how the poem helps you understand the Holocaust, and share the poem with others.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Watch videos about Janusz Korczak:

- **Janusz Korczak**, narrated by Irving Roth, director of the Holocaust Resource Center: [youtube.com/watch?v=MR8z0AiRnM8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MR8z0AiRnM8)

- **Janusz Korczak—Short Biography**, provided by Yad Vashem’s International School for Holocaust Studies: [youtube.com/watch?v=zGwnMgEx6b8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zGwnMgEx6b8)

Visit these websites for teaching and learning resources about the Holocaust:

- **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum:** ushmm.org
- **Facing History and Ourselves:** facinghistory.org/topics/holocaust
- **Museum of Jewish Heritage:** mjhnyc.org
- **Anti-Defamation League:** adl.org/educational-programs-training/holocaust-education

FLESH & BLOOD SO CHEAP

The Triangle Fire and Its Legacy

ABOUT THE BOOK

Albert Marrin creates a world where readers can see the literal blood, sweat, and tears of immigrants working in American sweatshops in the early 1900s. Take your students back in time through an analysis of Marrin's historical backstories, intimate photographs, and infusion of primary sources. This text can be seamlessly integrated into many curriculum units, including early twentieth-century American history and studies of Americans who effected change.

ACTIVITIES

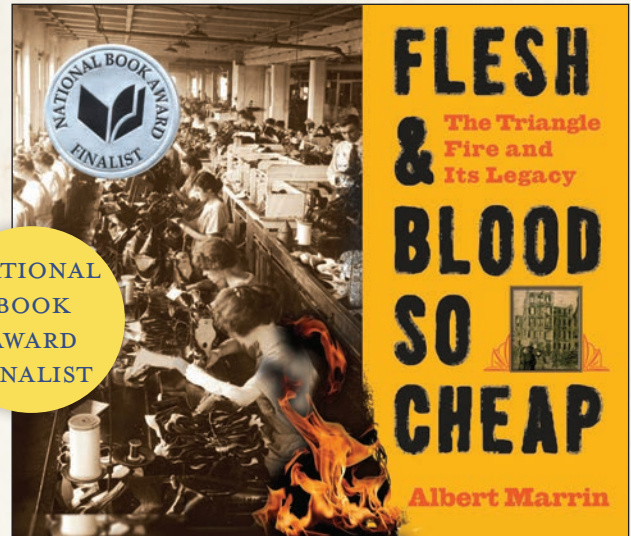
1. Read Martin Espada's poem "Who Burns for the Perfection of Paper" at poetryfoundation.org/poems/57179/who-burns-for-the-perfection-of-paper. Compare and contrast how the poem and book approach the same themes.
2. Be a critical reader. Look closely at how Marrin begins his book. Which stories does he choose to include, and what do they reveal about his point of view and intention?
3. Read pages 156–163 together as a class. Bring in newspaper articles to study the issue of sweatshops in today's news, such as the *Bloomberg Businessweek* article "Overseas Sweatshops Are a U.S. Responsibility" (downtheglobalsupplychain.wordpress.com/2016/04/03/overseas-sweatshops-are-a-u-s-responsibility/) and excerpts from the *New York Times* article "In China, Human Costs Are Built into an iPad" (nytimes.com/2012/01/26/business/ieconomy-apples-ipad-and-the-human-costs-for-workers-in-china.html). Explore both sides of the existing debate of whether US companies should regulate the safety measures in their manufacturing factories abroad. Be sure to evaluate the claims of each side, and check for evidence to support each claim!

Correlates to Common Core State Standards:

RL.6.9: Compare and contrast texts in different forms or genres (e.g., stories and poems; historical novels and fantasy stories) in terms of their approaches to similar themes and topics.

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).

RI.7.8: Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient to support the claims.



Grades 5 & up • F&P: Z • Lexile: 1000L

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★ *Publishers Weekly* ★ *School Library Journal* ★ *Booklist*

★ "The writing is compelling and detailed. . . . A useful and thoughtful addition to any American history collection." —*School Library Journal*, Starred

★ "Highly readable. . . . Sure to spark discussion." —*Booklist*, Starred

★ "[A] powerful chronicle. . . . Marrin's message that protecting human dignity is our shared responsibility is vitally resonant." —*Publishers Weekly*, Starred

BLACK GOLD

THE STORY OF OIL IN OUR LIVES

ABOUT THE BOOK

Oil is not pretty, but it is a resource that drives the modern world. It has made fortunes for the lucky few and provided jobs for millions of ordinary folks.

Thick and slippery, crude oil has an evil smell. Yet without it, life as we live it today would be impossible. Oil fuels our engines, heats our homes, and powers the machines that make the everyday things we take for granted, from shopping bags to computers to medical equipment. Nations have gone to war over it throughout the last century. Indeed, oil influences every aspect of modern life.

This riveting book explores what oil is and the role this precious resource has played in America and the world.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

I. A Freak of Geology

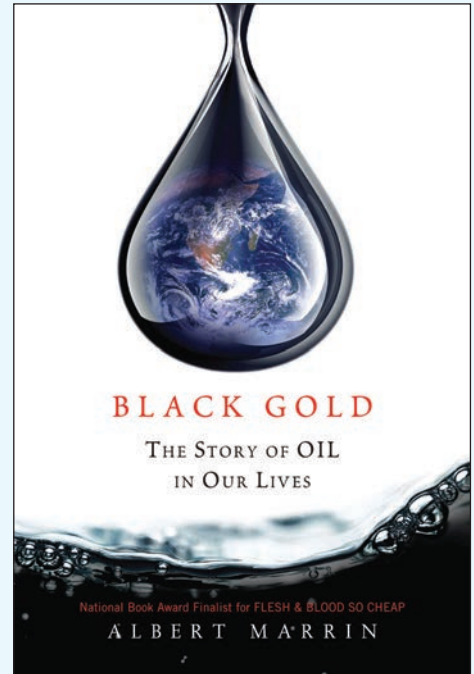
The author claims that oil “helps shape the history, society, politics, and economy of every nation in earth.” (p. 2) Discuss this statement and challenge students to offer concrete examples of oil’s power to shape world events. The author concludes this chapter with the statement, “For without oil and natural gas, our lives would be very different and very poor.” (p. 10) Challenge students to describe how their lives are rich as a result of oil. Ask students to think of countries in the world that do not have a ready supply of oil, and how the people of those countries are poor as a result. After students read this chapter, have them explain why oil as a major source of the world’s energy is a “freak of geology.”

II. Black Gold

What qualities did the men described in this chapter have that led them to their discoveries and fortunes in the oil business? John D. Rockefeller believed that “everything good that came to him was a gift from God,” and based on this belief, he donated millions of dollars to charity. What is the negative side of this belief? Why did people eventually come to “see Rockefeller as two people—one with an angel’s halo, the other with devil’s horns”? (p. 24)

III. The Destiny of Nations

In this chapter, it becomes clear that oil will become a key issue in modern warfare. Discuss why those countries that control oil are at a greater advantage than those that lack the resource. Discuss how the following statement by Walter Long is relevant to the wars that are being fought today: “You may have men, munitions, and money, but if you do not have oil . . . all your other advantages would be of . . . little value.” (p. 48) Discuss the meaning of the statement, “The Allied cause had floated to victory upon a wave of oil.” (p. 49)



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IV. Automobiles and Middle Eastern Oil

Read and discuss the quote at the beginning of this chapter. Challenge students to debate the statement. Discuss current conflicts in the Middle East, each conflict's connection to oil, and how "western blood" is being shed as a result. How was Henry Ford's assembly-line method of producing automobiles directly related to the increase in oil demand and consumption? Talk about the posters the British put up throughout Baghdad referring to the British army as "liberators." How are western armies viewed in the Middle East today? Discuss the author's point, "For, in reality, mandates gave legal cover to foreign domination." (p. 58) How is oil "the blood of victory"?

V. Hopeless Monsters

Lead a discussion on how "black gold helped cause World War II, then governed its course and decided its outcome." (p. 70) What was the German blitzkrieg, and how did it depend on oil? Review and discuss the events of Pearl Harbor. How could the outcome of the war have been different if the Japanese bombers had not dropped bombs on Pearl Harbor's tank farms?

VI. Richest Prize, Greatest Problem

Display the two quotes that begin this chapter. Lead students in a debate on the two differing perspectives: oil as "one of the greatest material prizes in world history" versus "the greatest problem of all time." Discuss the prevalence of plastic in contemporary daily life. Gamal Abdel Nasser once suggested that without oil, the machines of the world are "mere pieces of iron, rusty, motionless, and lifeless." Discuss with students how many machines they use on a daily basis that are dependent on oil to run, and have them imagine and discuss how their lives would be different without these machines.

VII. A Day of Reckoning

What is the meaning of the word *reckoning*? Will humanity ultimately have to reckon with a world without oil? Discuss the following quote from business leader Fred Tennant: "In the U.S., we get fired up about doing something when oil prices are high; then when prices drop, we forget about it." (p. 121) Do you agree? How is forgetting about high oil prices an easy way to keep people dependent on oil consumption? Do you agree with the modern doomsday scenario described in this chapter? How can humanity avoid such a disaster? Middle Eastern countries will still have 83 percent of the world's proven oil reserves by the year 2020. How is this the "energy equivalent of nuclear weapons"? (p. 125)

VIII. Fossil Fuels and the Natural Environment

Discuss the issue of global warming and climate change, focusing on what scientists predict will be the effects of steadily rising temperatures. Discuss why the United States refused to participate in the 1997 Kyoto Protocol. Discuss China's and India's growing economies and the effects they will have on oil consumption, the burning of fossil fuels, and climate change. Why does "continued dependence on fossil fuels threaten our economic, political, and physical well-being"? (p. 138)

A VOLCANO BENEATH THE SNOW

ABOUT THE BOOK

John Brown is a man with a complicated legacy, from hero, freedom fighter, and martyr to liar, fanatic, and “father of American terrorism.” Some have said that it was his seizure of the arsenal at Harpers Ferry that rendered the Civil War inevitable.

Deeply religious, Brown believed that God had chosen him to right the wrong of slavery. He was willing to kill and die for something modern Americans unanimously agree was a just cause. And yet he was a religious fanatic and a staunch believer in “righteous violence,” an unapologetic committer of domestic terrorism. Marrin brings nineteenth-century issues into the modern arena with ease and grace in a book that is sure to spark discussion.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

PROLOGUE: A House Dividing

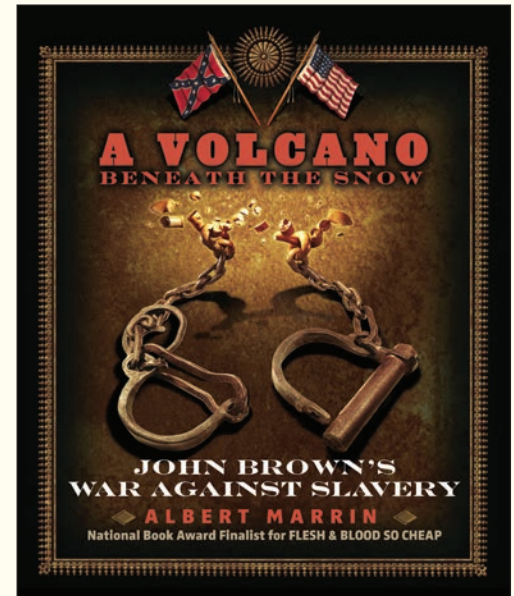
Marrin sets the tone for what is to come by describing the country’s bitter divide over slavery in the years preceding the Civil War, and John Brown’s intrinsic belief that God “had chosen him to right the wrong of slavery.” (p. 2) Brown believed in the concept of “righteous violence.” What does this 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 of which his better nature disapproves?” Challenge students to discuss how John Brown would have responded to Thoreau’s words.

I. A Volcano Beneath the Snow

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 [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?

II. The Foulest Blot

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, at 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?



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III. An Object Vast in Its Compass

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 enslaved people fuel John Brown's hatred of the "peculiar institution"? Discuss the role of the Founding Fathers in the rise of American slavery.

IV. Mighty Man of Valor

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." 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.

V. Into "Africa"

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 Harpers Ferry. Discuss the term *extremism* and how the convictions from both North and South added to the tensions that led to the 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 accounts further fueled the lead-up to war.

VI. The Cause He Loved So Much

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 Harpers Ferry. John Brown's legal team attempted to keep him from the gallows with an insanity defense, a tactic that enraged Brown. 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 a mythic figure.

VII. High Noon for the Union

On page 147, the author quotes a Southerner as saying that John Brown's raid at Harpers 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 would have been received by pro-slavery Southerners? How is this type of media response an example of a spark in the chain reaction lit by John Brown? What is meant by the author's statement, "Fear poisoned reason"?

VIII. Wiped Out in Blood

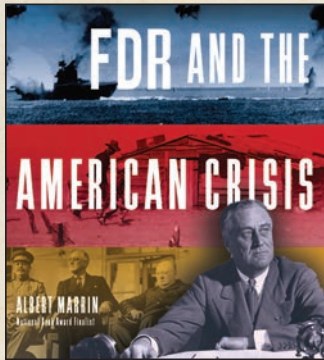
Discuss Frederick Douglass's statement, "Arrest the hoe in the hands of the Negro, and you smite rebellion in the very seat of its life." Discuss the various issues President Lincoln was grappling with in the weeks leading up to his Emancipation Proclamation. Discuss the meaning of the author's statement, "In a democracy, a leader cannot go faster or further than voters will allow." (p. 179) How does this statement apply to Lincoln's actions as described in this chapter?

IX. Legacy

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 fanatic, freedom fighter and terrorist, devout Christian and murderer." What does Lerone Bennett 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)

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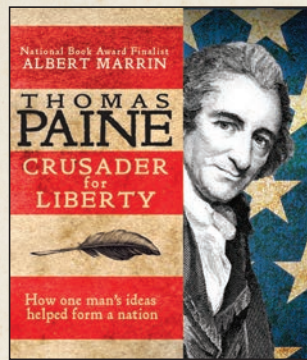
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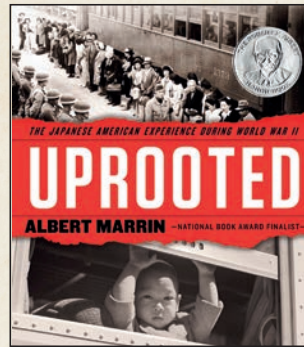
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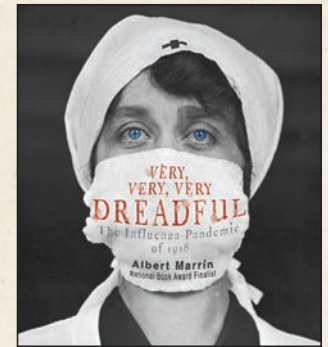
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A Light in the Darkness guide prepared by Myra Zarnowski, professor in the Department of Elementary and Early Childhood Education at Queens College, City University of New York; *Flesh & Blood So Cheap* guide prepared by Erica Rand Silverman and Sharon Kennedy, former high school English teachers and co-founders of Room 228 Educational Consulting; *Black Gold* and *A Volcano Beneath the Snow* guides prepared by Colleen Carroll, children's book author, curriculum writer-developer, and education consultant; Sleepy Hollow, New York.

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