



Learning activities to accompany  
*Spies, Soldiers, Couriers, and Saboteurs:*  
*Women of the American Revolution*

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“K. M. Waldvogel has done a masterful job of telling the stories of brave young women, many little-known, who risked their lives during the years America was fighting for its independence. Waldvogel’s stories are fast moving and filled with drama and suspense.” ~ Jerry Apps, author of *Letters from Hillside Farm*.

## Synopsis

*Spies, Soldiers, Couriers, and Saboteurs: Women of the American Revolution* reveals heroic efforts of ordinary women in extraordinary times. Included is an introduction explaining the emotional climate of the 1770s as well as a glossary of terms for young readers. The 20,000-word book allows middle-grade students an opportunity to learn about the “Founding Mothers” of our country.

Some women spied on the enemy and relayed the information to the Continental Army. Others physically fought in the war or obstructed British efforts by destroying gunpowder, warning the Patriots of British movements, or intercepting information. History books don’t reveal the contributions of these women. But, each of these women has her own story—a story worth reading.

## Introduction

During the 1770s, tensions mounted between the colonists and Britain. Having to pay for the French and Indian war, the British Parliament felt it needed to pass several unpopular laws and decrees, such as the Sugar Act, Stamp Act, and the Quartering Act. Americans reacted strongly to these decisions. Many rebelled while others felt a strong loyalty to King George and Britain. Men alone did not possess these feelings. Women also rebelled and risked their lives.

**Possible Learning Activities:** Cause and Effect (class discussion or writing activity); Cloze activity (focus on various acts passed by British Parliament or material teacher wishes to emphasize)

## Chapter One

### The Female Highwaymen

Sisters-in-law Grace and Rachel Martin receive word that a British courier will be riding close to their home in South Carolina. Their husbands are both in the Continental Army. Terrified that the information being carried will affect their husbands, the women devise and execute a successful plan to intercept the courier. Once home, a knock on the door disturbs their evening. Standing on the doorstep are the courier and his guards, who request lodging for the evening. The men leave the home the next morning never realizing the two women were the highwaymen who accosted them.

**Possible Learning Activities:** Making Inferences (determine women's feelings when soldiers return to house, cite women's actions to support answer); External vs. Internal Conflict (class discussion or writing activity)

## Chapter Two

### Muster at the Ludingtons'

Late at night, a messenger arrives at the home of Colonel Ludington of the Continental Army stating that the British are marching to Danbury, Connecticut, where the Patriots have stored supplies and munitions. Ludington needs someone to alert the countryside and rally the militia to engage the British, but the messenger is too exhausted to go on. The colonel's sixteen-year-old daughter, Sybil, rises to the challenge and rides nearly 40 miles through dangerous terrain on a

stormy night to muster troops for her father. Nearly 400 members of the militia answer the call that night to help Colonel Ludington face the enemy.

**Possible Learning Activities:** Compare/contrast (Sybil's ride vs. Paul Revere's; writing activity comparing distance, dangers faced, etc.); class discussion or writing activity (read section of story when Tories planned to attack house. What words would you use to describe Sybil as she defended the house?); Write diary entry from point of view of Sybil, or one of the militia about her ride. Vocabulary development using context clues.

## **Chapter Three**

### **A Hard Secret to Swallow**

Eighteen-year-old Emily Geiger bravely volunteers to carry a message from General Nathanael Greene of the Continental Army to General Thomas Sumter, requesting reinforcements. General Greene has received word that the British are vulnerable to attack if Greene can arrive in time. Emily's mission involves traveling 70 miles through Tory-infested areas. While en route, British scouts stop and detain her. Suspicious of her answers, they take her to Fort Granby for further questioning. When the commander of the fort calls for a matron and leaves Emily alone, the young girl takes extraordinary measures to ensure that the British do not discover her message.

**Possible Learning Activities:** Identify main conflict (How does main character resolve conflict? What is reader's reaction to solution?); Character motivation (What details support this?); Reenact scene of Emily being escorted to the fort and detained; Discuss art of persuasion and how Emily needed to persuade general that her message was real.

## **Chapter Four**

### **I Can Fight as Well as Any Man**

As a camp follower, Anna Maria Lane feeds the men and tends the sick. When her husband and his unit are supposed to be gone for weeks or possibly months, she knows she cannot stay behind. Donning some of her husband's clothing, she becomes Virginia's only known female Revolutionary War soldier. She marches with the men and fights in the Continental Army, keeping her identity secret. During the Battle of Germantown, she is severely wounded. Her husband manages to get her to safety and performs a primitive surgery on her leg. The wound never fully heals, but she returns to fight again. After the war, her contribution and sacrifice are noted, and she receives a pension for her service.

**Possible Learning Activities:** Character motivation (What details support this?); Research women's role during American Revolution (compare to today); Vocabulary development; Compare/contrast woman's actions with those of other women involved in battles (Chapters 6, 9, 12)

## **Chapter Five**

### **The Quaker Spy**

Lydia Darragh wrestles with her conscience after overhearing British officers plan a surprise attack on a nearby rebel camp. As a Quaker, she does not believe in war. However, her son, who broke away from the Quaker religion, is in that rebel camp. Lydia has to decide if she can defy her religion and find a way to warn her son. If she does this, she risks sanctions from her church, and also possible charges of treason. Her actions may affect not only her own freedom, but also that of her husband and her family.

**Possible Learning Activities:** Interval vs. External Conflict (class discussion or writing activity); Character motivation; Research Quaker beliefs concerning war; Research purpose of Quartering Act (compare to today's rights)

## **Chapter Six**

### **Alias Bobby Shurtleff**

Feeling a strong desire to fight for freedom, Deborah Samson disguises herself as a man and enlists in the Continental Army using the name Bobby Shurtleff. Discovery of her gender could trigger more than ridicule. Fighting side-by-side with her male counterparts, she never lets down her guard. After a small skirmish with the British, Deborah's comrades carry her to a medic to tend her wounds. Fearing that a thorough examination will reveal her secret, she lies to the medic and sneaks out of his tent to tend her wounds herself. The wound does not heal properly, but Deborah returns to her unit and continues to fight bravely for her new country. Eventually, her secret is revealed and she is discharged.

**Possible Learning Activities:** Character motivation (cite details from chapter to support); Class discussion on how character's beliefs affected her actions; Class discussion on women's roles during this time to today; Vocabulary development using context clues: Compare/contrast main characters in chapters four and six; discuss reaction of fellow soldiers after revelation of Deborah's true identity; discuss doctor's compassion when discovering Deborah's identity.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Secret Codes and Petticoats**

British troops occupy Setauket, New York, where Anna Smith Strong lives. Due to the location of her home, which has a clear view of the Long Island Sound, Anna is recruited to be part of

General Washington's secret espionage group, the Culper Spy Ring. She and her contacts devise a simple means of communicating with one another in plain view of the British and her Tory neighbors. Although this spy ring works directly for General Washington, he knows only their code-names—not their true identities. This group passes along vital information to Washington, including Benedict Arnold's plot to turn over West Point to the British.

**Possible Learning Activities:** Vocabulary development; Research espionage and secret codes during Revolutionary War; Class discussion on Quartering Act; Research Benedict Arnold and compare spying efforts on both sides; discuss how codes play role in world today.

## **Chapter Eight** **Dacey's Midnight Swim**

Despite warnings from her Tory neighbors about helping the Patriots, sixteen-year-old Dacey Langston sets out to warn her brother and his comrades about an impending attack. Fearful that her neighbors will harm her invalid father as they threatened, she sneaks from her house in the dark of night. After traveling for miles, she swims through the raging current of the Tyger River, searching for her brother's company. Once finding their camp, she delivers the warning, helps them gather food and supplies, so they escape before the attack. Dacey returns to her home without other family members realizing her night escapade.

**Possible Learning Activities:** Class discussion on character traits (cite specific examples from story); Interval vs. External Conflict (list specific examples using T-chart, class discussion, writing activity); Discuss setting of story; Research terrain surround Tyger River and role of setting.

## Chapter Nine

### There Goes My Petticoat

When Mary Ludwig Hays' husband decides to join the Continental Army, she knows she must pull up stakes and join him. In the camp, she cooks for the men, mends their clothes, tends the wounded, but also follows her husband in battle. She and others who bring water to the men on the battlefield, are called "Molly Pitcher" because of their duties. One sweltering day in 1778, Mary sees her husband collapse from the heat. Immediately, she takes over his duties at a cannon. While tending it, an enemy's cannon ball streaks through her outstretched legs, ripping off her petticoat. Mary is unscathed and continues loading and firing at the British.

**Possible Learning Activities:** Research Joseph Plumb Martin's account of Mary's deed, note language of the day compared to today's language; Compare/contrast actions of Mary vs. actions of Margaret Corbin in Chapter 14; Discuss character traits (cite details to support); Review Mary's actions throughout the battle, pick one scene, and journal.

## Chapter Ten

### Knit One, Purl One, Spy on the British

Molly Rinker hikes up to her favorite ridge overlooking Pennsylvania's Wissahickon Valley. Pretending to knit and bleach her linens, she notes British troop movements and activity. While working in her tavern, she also picks up bits of information pertaining to the war. Molly writes down the details and wraps the notes in balls of yarn that she "accidentally" drops off the ridge. A waiting courier retrieves her information and carries it to nearby rebel camps.

**Possible Learning Activities:** Discuss British officers' beliefs about women and their inability to understand strategies of war and how that helped Molly's spying efforts; Research spying during American Revolution and methods used to transmit information; Research

location/setting—discuss how setting impacts story; Class discussion of Quartering Act; Character motivation.

## **Chapter Eleven**

### **Martha’s Explosive Confession**

Martha Bratton’s husband, Colonel William Bratton, entrusts a supply of gunpowder to her while he is gone with the Continental Army. Somehow, the British discover she has hidden the gunpowder and determine to claim it for their army. Rather than allow them to confiscate it and use it against the Patriots, Martha blows it up. Despite punishment for her act, she remains committed to the rebel cause. She continues to send information to her husband’s unit about British troop movements and plans. Her efforts helped the Patriots execute a surprise attack against British sympathizers.

**Possible Learning Activities:** Make inferences about various characters (cite specific actions by character to support belief); Discuss dialogue and how used to reveal characters; Compare/contrast actions of two different characters in story; Character motivation (writing activity, small group discussion); Discuss Martha’s confinement and how that impeded her life—would friends have dared to help?

## **Chapter Twelve**

### **She Ran for Freedom**

Fort Henry is under siege by British forces and Native Americans. While the garrison is almost impossible to penetrate when the men are properly armed, the gunpowder supply is dwindling. A keg of the precious commodity is in a cabin farther down the hill, but it means sending a runner to face a volley of enemy gunfire. Sixteen-year-old Betty Zane successfully persuades her brothers and other men in the fort to let her try to reach the cabin. She reasons that the men are

needed to fight. Racing down to the cabin, she encounters only hostile shouts from the enemy. Returning with her apron filled with gunpowder, she dodges bullets and arrows and successfully brings the precious supply to the men inside the fort. With the additional gunpowder, the men stave off the attack until reinforcements arrive.

**Possible Learning Activities:** Discuss setting and impact on story; Research use of Native Americans and Hessian soldiers during American Revolution; Make inferences (cite specific examples and details to support).

## **Chapter Thirteen**

### **The Weight on Her Shoulders**

Mammy Kate is devastated to hear that the British have captured her master, Stephen Heard. Imprisoned in Augusta, Georgia, Heard is to be hanged. Mammy Kate, a tall, muscular woman, devises a plan to rescue him. She ingratiates herself with the prison guards by performing laundry chores and convinces them to let her visit her master. Heard, who is small in stature, hides in her laundry basket. Placing the basket on her head, she walks out of the prison past the guards, and frees her master from his certain fate. In turn, Heard offers to free her and her husband but Mammy Kate insists she wants to remain on his plantation.

**Possible Learning Activities:** Make inferences about character motivation (writing activity, class discussion); Discuss setting and impact on story; Make inferences about why Mammy Kate would not leave—choices afforded to her.

## Chapter Fourteen

### Captain Molly

When Margaret Corbin's husband joins the Continental Army, Margaret refuses to stay behind. She accompanies him as a camp follower. Fascinated by the precision and order of arming a cannon, she convinces the men to teach her the steps, earning the nickname Captain Molly. British and Hessian troops attack Fort Tryon, where the Corbins are stationed. Enemy fire hits and kills John while he is operating the cannon. Margaret takes over immediately and retaliates for the loss of her beloved. Her accurate aim draws the enemy's attention. She is hit and disabled during the battle, which the Patriots lose. She receives a pension as a disabled soldier after the war.

**Possible Learning Activities:** Compare/contrast character with character in chapter nine; Character motivation (writing activity, discussion); Research Hessians soldiers used during Revolutionary War; Character motivation (cite specific examples and details to support opinion); Discuss officer's decision to not surrender and idea of soldiers deciding to continue fighting.

## Entirety of Book

**Possible Learning Activities:** Author's purpose (classroom discussion); Author's point-of-view (class discussion); Compare/contrast characters (small groups each read chapter, discuss character traits/actions with whole class); Research concerning women's role during time period, acts of treason at this time, rights of colonists concerning new laws enacted by British.

## Sample Cloze Activity

### Introduction

In 1764, England passed the Sugar Act, which taxed many goods coming into America. While the Sugar Act reduced the tax on imported molasses, it added a \_\_\_\_\_ on many other goods previously not taxed, such as sugar, some wines, printed calico cloth, and coffee. This cost the \_\_\_\_\_ money and hurt the economy in the New World.

A year later, Parliament enacted the \_\_\_\_\_, requiring that all “printed paper” must include a “\_\_\_\_\_” showing a tax had been paid. It taxed newspapers, other publications, legal documents, playing cards, and other materials. This act, which affected everyone not only merchants, was especially unpopular. Colonists viewed this as \_\_\_\_\_. Although they had to pay these taxes, they felt they did not have their \_\_\_\_\_ represented in Parliament. So the slogan, “No \_\_\_\_\_ without representation,” became popular.

To make matters worse, Parliament passed the \_\_\_\_\_ requiring colonists to give room and board to British soldiers and forage for their horses. Depending on the \_\_\_\_\_ of the officers, families could be ordered out of their homes completely. At other times, soldiers resided in the houses while family members were confined to specific rooms. Many colonists resented this, feeling this was a \_\_\_\_\_ of their rights. Housing soldiers in private homes saved the British Army money. So despite the objections, this practice continued.

**Answers to cloze activity for Introduction:**

1. duty
2. merchants
3. Stamp Act
4. stamp
5. unfair
6. opinions
7. taxation
8. Quartering Act
9. needs or whims
10. violation