War Words

This issue’s nonfiction includes several terms that have to do with fighting a war. In this activity, you’ll become familiar with these terms.

Directions: Complete sections A and B below, then respond to the writing prompt in the box.

A. What words might you expect to find in an article about a major war? Brainstorm some words and write them here:

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B. We’ve highlighted 10 terms in “The Pigeon Hero of World War I” related to fighting a war. Here they are with their definitions. Circle the terms that are new to you and refer to these definitions as you’re reading.

1. allies: countries that fight for the same side in a war
2. ammunition: bullets and other objects shot out of guns
3. artillery: large weapons, such as cannons and missile launchers, that fire objects through the air
4. battalion: a large group of soldiers
5. chariot: a small vehicle pulled by a horse, used in ancient times in battles or for racing
6. medics: doctors and others trained to help people who are sick and injured; in the military, specifically someone who provides emergency medical care to those wounded in battles
7. navigation: the process of finding the way from one place to another
8. rampant: uncontrollable; widespread
9. shards: small, sharp pieces of something
10. telegraph: a system that uses electricity to send messages

As you read, find one more challenging word in the article that you could use when discussing World War I. Write it in the space below, then write a definition based on context, or look up the word in the dictionary.

11. Word: ______________________

   Definition: ____________________

Continued on next page >
Imagine you are a soldier fighting in World War I. What might you see? What might you hear? On the lines below, describe your experience. Use at least three of the words from the previous page.

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Video Discussion Questions

**Directions:** Watch the video “Behind the Scenes: The Pigeon Hero of World War I.” Then answer the questions below.

1. Based on the second section of the video (0:42-1:30), describe what “superpowers” carrier pigeons had. How did these powers make the pigeons useful during wartime?

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2. According to the third section (1:31-2:15), why did author Lauren Tarshis want to write an article about Cher Ami?

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3. In the third section, Lauren calls World War I “a bleak time in history.” How do the images, video clips, and narration in this section support her statement?

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4. At the end of the video, Lauren says her goal in writing nonfiction stories is to “open doors of curiosity in your mind.” Based on the video, explain what topic you think you’ll want to research further after reading the article and why.

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Think About It!

Close-Reading Questions: After reading “The Pigeon Hero Of World War I,” go back and reread sections to answer the questions below.

1. At the beginning of the article, author Lauren Tarshis writes, “The American soldiers were doomed.” What evidence does she give in the first section to support this statement?

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2. Based on the section “Incredible Powers,” what qualities make carrier pigeons skilled at carrying messages?

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3. Reread “Brutal Battles.” During World War I, what communication problem did pigeons help solve?

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4. In “Mud, Rats, and Fear,” what details help you understand what life was like for soldiers living in the trenches? Why do you think Tarshis includes these details?

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5. How does the sidebar “Animals in Wartime” add to your understanding of the article?

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6. Reread the first three paragraphs of “Under Attack.” What problems did Major Whittlesey’s men face at the beginning of their battle against the Germans?

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7. What new danger appears at the end of this section? How does this help you better understand the first section of the story?

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8. In the final section of the article, how does Tarshis create a feeling of excitement? Explain using specific details from the section.

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(Continued on next page)
Critical-Thinking Questions: After answering the close-reading questions, answer the critical-thinking questions below, thinking about the meaning of the whole article.

9. At the end of the article, Tarshis calls Cher Ami a “courageous pigeon hero.” In your own words, explain why Cher Ami was a hero, using examples from the story.

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10. Based on the article and the “Animals in Wartime” sidebar, do you think it’s OK to use animals in the military? Why or why not?

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Think About It!

Directions: After reading “The Pigeon Hero of World War I,” go back and reread sections to answer the questions below. Write your answers on a separate sheet of paper.

Close-Reading Questions:

1. At the beginning of the article, author Lauren Tarshis writes, “The American soldiers were doomed.” What evidence does she give in the first section to support this statement?

2. Based on the section “Incredible Powers,” what qualities make carrier pigeons skilled at carrying messages?

3. Reread “Brutal Battles.” During World War I, what communication problem did pigeons help solve?

4. In “Mud, Rats, and Fear,” what details help you understand what life was like for soldiers living in the trenches? Why do you think Tarshis includes these details?

5. How does the sidebar “Animals in Wartime” add to your understanding of the article?

6. Reread the first three paragraphs of “Under Attack.” What problems did Major Whittlesey’s men face at the beginning of their battle against the Germans?

7. What new danger appears at the end of this section? How does this help you better understand the first section of the story?

8. In the final section of the article, how does Tarshis create a feeling of excitement? Explain using specific details from the section.

Critical-Thinking Questions:

9. At the end of the article, Tarshis calls Cher Ami a “courageous pigeon hero.” In your own words, explain why Cher Ami was a hero, using examples from the story.

10. Based on the article and the “Animals in Wartime” sidebar, do you think it’s OK to use animals in the military? Why or why not?
Think About It!

Close-Reading Questions: Read “The Pigeon Hero of World War I.” Then go back and reread sections of the article to answer the questions below. We’ve started the first answer for you.

1. Reread “Incredible Powers.” What are three reasons the military used carrier pigeons to deliver messages?

The military used carrier pigeons to deliver messages because

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2. Based on “Brutal Battles,” how was World War I different from other wars before it?

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3. Reread “Mud, Rats, and Fear.” What are trenches? What was life like for soldiers who fought in trenches?

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4. Based on “Under Attack,” what problems did Major Whittlesey and his soldiers face on October 3 and 4, 1918?

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5. How did Cher Ami help solve the problems in question 4?

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6. Reread the sidebar “Animals in Wartime.” Describe how one other kind of animal, besides pigeons, has helped soldiers at war.

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Critical-Thinking Question (a big question that makes you think):

7. When Cher Ami was brought to America, why was she given a medal and treated like a hero?

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The Soldiers’ Problem

Directions: After reading “The Pigeon Hero of World War I,” fill in the boxes below to identify the problem and solution in a dramatic event during World War I. You’ll provide details about each. We’ve provided some clues to help you.

Problem:

(Hint: What did Major Charles Whittlesey and his men face? Look in the opening section and in “Under Attack.”)

Detail 1
The American soldiers were surrounded by German soldiers who were attacking them with artillery.

Detail 2

Detail 3

Solution:

Detail 1
As a carrier pigeon, Cher Ami knew exactly how to get back to the American headquarters.

Detail 2

Detail 3

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Exploring Text Features

Directions: Answer the questions below to help you explore the photos, captions, and other text features in the nonfiction article “The Pigeon Hero of World War I.”

1. Study the headline, subhead, and images on pages 4-5. How do these text features help get you interested in the story? _____________________________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________________________

2. What does the map on page 6 help you understand about World War I? _____________________________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________________________

3. How does the section header “Incredible Powers” fit with the text in that section? _____________________________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________________________

4. Review the headings on page 7. What do they suggest about the conditions soldiers faced during World War I? _____________________________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________________________
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5. Look at the images and captions on page 7. What did pigeons do during the war besides send messages? What was one of their limitations? _____________________________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________________________
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6. Look at the images of the soldiers in the trenches on pages 8 and 9. How do these images illustrate what you learned about the soldiers’ wartime experiences in the section “Mud, Rats, and Fear”? _____________________________________________________________________________
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Storyworks S-T-R-E-T-C-H: Review the sidebar “Animals in Wartime” on pages 6-8. What information from the sidebar did you find most interesting or surprising? Why? _____________________________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________________________
Summary of “The Pigeon Hero of World War I”

“The Pigeon Hero of World War I” is about _________________________________.

It tells the story of Cher Ami, a pigeon who _________________________________.

Cher Ami was especially suited for her job because _____________________________.

The soldiers fought and lived in trenches. They faced hardships such as _________.

On October 3, 1918, American soldiers were attacked by a German force. The situation worsened when _________________________________________________.

The soldiers knew their only hope was to _____________________________________.

As she flew to deliver the message, Cher Ami ___________________________________

Still, Cher Ami successfully delivered the message. As a result, _________________.

1. Begin with a topic sentence that tells what the article is mainly about.

2. What was Cher Ami’s job?

3. Give two reasons that pigeons were a good choice for sending messages.

4. Describe the conditions soldiers faced while living in the trenches.

5. What did the American planes do?

6. What did the soldiers do to try to stop the bombing?

7. What happened to Cher Ami as she tried to deliver the message?

8. What happened to the soldiers because of Cher Ami? What happened to Cher Ami?
Quick, Tell Me What Happened!

Your friend Stephen was absent from school and didn’t get to read “The Pigeon Hero of World War I” in Storyworks. You call him to tell him about it, but he has only one minute before he must rush off to his circus arts class. Quick, give him a short summary!

Directions: Follow the prompts below to write a one-paragraph summary. Remember, a summary is a brief retelling of the most important parts of the story, without minor details or your own opinion.

1. Decide what the article is mainly about. Think about:
   - What do the headline and subhead on pages 4-5 suggest the article is about? 
   - What appears in the picture on pages 4-5? 
   - What problems does the article tell you about?

   Use your answers to create a topic sentence for your summary.

2. Decide what the most important information in the article is. Go through each section and jot down notes about what you think is necessary to know to explain what you wrote in your topic sentence. Your notes don’t have to be complete sentences. We’ve given you some examples (and crossed out what does not belong).

   Opening Section
   - World War I
   - dark rainy forest
   - Americans needed help.

   “Incredible Powers”

   “Brutal Battles”

Continued on next page >
Quick, Tell Me What Happened! p. 2

“Mud, Rats, and Fear”
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“Under Attack”
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“A Feathered Missile”
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3. Look at your notes. Cross out anything you wrote that is not necessary. Add anything that’s missing.
   Ask yourself:
   * Did I include information about what happened? Where and when it happened? Why it happened? Who was involved? How it ended?
   * Is there a detail or two describing what the event was like?
   * Did I write details that aren’t essential for understanding the main event? Get rid of those! (See example on page 1.)

4. Number your notes above so you can retell them in an order that makes sense.

5. Use your topic sentence and your notes to write your one-paragraph summary on a separate sheet of paper, retelling what happened in your own words. Reread it to make sure it’s clear and that it sums up what’s important in the article. Then you can share your summary with your friend Stephen!

Tip! Use your notes to summarize the article out loud with a partner. This will help you decide if you need to add or take out any information.
Find the Evidence

Directions: Read each question below carefully. Some will ask you to select text evidence—or details in the story—to support a statement. Others will ask you to respond in your own words, supporting your ideas with text evidence.

1. Circle the letters of TWO pieces of text evidence that best explain why pigeons were used to deliver messages during World War I:
   a. “For one thing, these pigeons are fast—some can fly up to 90 miles per hour.”
   b. “A pigeon’s brain is no bigger than a wad of bubble gum.”
   c. “For example, pigeons can be trained to recognize letters and words.”
   d. “These gray birds can travel over seas and mountains, across hundreds of twisting miles. They almost never get lost.”

2. In your own words, describe other situations in which pigeons were used as messengers. Use details from the text.

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3. Circle the letter of the piece of evidence that best explains why the battles in World War I were “bigger and bloodier than the world had ever seen.”
   a. “In the 1800s, new inventions like the telegraph and the telephone transformed the way humans communicated.”
   b. “But when it came to sending messages from a battlefield, no new invention was as reliable as a pigeon.”
   c. “And in World War I, the battles were bigger and bloodier than the world had ever seen.”
   d. “New weapons changed the way battles were fought.”

4. Using evidence from the text, explain how the Argonne Forest was different during World War I than before.

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Continued on next page >
Find the Evidence, p. 2

5. Circle the letter of the piece of text evidence that best explains why soldiers fought from trenches:
   a. “Trenches were deep, narrow ditches that stretched for miles.”
   b. “Soldiers would stay inside the trenches, which offered them some protection from bullets and grenades.”
   c. “They coped with knee-deep mud, with the sickening stench of garbage and human waste . . .”
   d. “The noise of machine guns and bomb blasts made sleep almost impossible.”

6. Using evidence from the text, explain why October 3, 1918, was such a difficult day for the American soldiers.

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7. The author writes that when American planes appeared, “Whittlesey’s men cheered.” Circle the letter of the piece of text evidence that best explains why they did this:
   a. “But one by one, the pigeons were shot or disappeared.”
   b. “They believed the planes would drop much-needed food, ammunition, and other supplies.”
   c. “But it wasn’t food and bullets those planes were dropping. It was bombs.”
   d. “. . . the Americans didn’t realize that he and his men were in this part of the forest.”

8. Why can Cher Ami be described as a hero? Use text evidence to support your answer.

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Find the Evidence

Directions: Read each question below carefully. Some will ask you to select two or three pieces of text evidence—or details in the story—to support a statement. Others will ask you to respond in your own words, supporting your ideas with text.

1. The author writes that “The American soldiers were doomed.” Circle the letters of THREE pieces of text evidence that best demonstrate why this was so:
   a. “It was October 1918, not long before the end of World War I.”
   b. “The men were surrounded by enemy German soldiers.”
   c. “Machine guns rattled. Bombs rained from the sky.”
   d. “Their only hope was to get an urgent message to their leaders, 25 miles away . . . And the army radios weren’t working.”
   e. “Luckily, there was one brave warrior who had been trained for a moment exactly like this one.”
   f. “She took off with the message on a life-or-death race across the forest.”

2. In your own words, explain what made pigeons excellent messengers during World War I. Use details from the text.

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3. Circle the letters of the TWO pieces of evidence that best demonstrate the need for pigeon messengers during World War I:
   a. “Ship captains used pigeons to send weather reports back to shore.”
   b. “…new inventions like the telegraph and the telephone transformed the way humans communicated.”
   c. “But in wartime, getting information across long distances was still difficult, especially during battles.”
   d. “New weapons unleashed terror and death on a massive scale.”
   e. “Modern technologies had made killing all too easy.”
   f. “But when it came to sending messages from a battlefield, no new invention was as reliable as a pigeon.”

Continued on next page >
4. In your own words, explain why American soldiers stayed in the trenches despite difficult conditions.

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5. You can infer that the American soldiers were in a desperate situation and Cher Ami was their last hope. Circle the letters of the FOUR pieces of text evidence that best support this inference.
   a. “The Americans were soon surrounded and under fierce attack.”
   b. “Whittlesey understood with horror that the Americans didn’t realize that he and his men were in this part of the forest.”
   c. “But one by one, the pigeons were shot or disappeared.”
   d. “Finally, the next day, American planes appeared overhead.”
   e. “He did his best to keep them safe as the troops moved through the forest.”
   f. “But the bird was so terrified that it flapped away before the message could be placed into its tube.”

6. Using text evidence, explain why Cher Ami is described as a hero.

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“The Pigeon Hero of World War I’ Quiz

Directions: Read the article “The Pigeon Hero of World War I” in the March/April 2019 issue of Storyworks. Then fill in the bubble next to the best answer for each question below.

1. “The Pigeon Hero of World War I” is mainly about . . .
   A the life of Cher Ami, a hero pigeon.
   B life in the trenches during World War I.
   C how a pigeon helped soldiers during World War I.
   D how animals have helped humans during wartime.

2. Which statement about carrier pigeons is true?
   A They fly slowly and carefully.
   B They can take messages to many different places.
   C They can find their home nest, even when it’s far away.
   D They can read and understand messages.

3. A rampant disease is one that is ______.
   A mild
   B severe
   C easily contained
   D out of control

4. Which word best describes the soldiers when they were under attack?
   A thankful
   B desperate
   C fearless
   D relaxed

5. Which line below supports the answer to question 4?
   A “Whittlesey had been ordered to lead his troops in an attack on the Germans . . .”
   B “Whittlesey’s men crossed paths with a large German force.”
   C “. . . they were low on ammunition and badly outnumbered.”
   D “. . . American planes appeared in the sky. Whittlesey’s men cheered.”

6. What happened during Cher Ami’s flight to deliver the message?
   A She hid in a tree until the fighting was over.
   B She got lost on her way to American headquarters.
   C She was hit by bullets and injured.
   D She reached her destination unharmed.

Constructed Response

Directions: On a separate piece of paper, write your answer to each question in a well-organized response. Make sure you support your answers with information and details from the article.

7. What are two descriptive details the author uses to help you feel as if you were in the battle?

8. Why is Cher Ami considered a hero?
1. Which statement about World War I is true?
   A) It was a war in which Americans fought against the French.
   B) It involved many countries and left many people dead.
   C) It was less destructive than previous wars.
   D) It took place in a few key locations.

2. The section header “Incredible Powers” refers to carrier pigeons because they . . .
   A) fly slowly and carefully.
   B) can take messages to many different places.
   C) can find their home nest, even when it’s far away.
   D) can read and write messages.

3. Which phrase from the story supports the answer to question 2?
   A) “. . . some can fly up to 90 miles per hour.”
   B) “. . . pigeons can be trained to recognize letters and words.”
   C) “. . . their ability to return to their home nest . . .”
   D) “. . . they could only be used to send messages one way.”

4. A rampant disease is one that is ______.
   A) mild
   B) contained
   C) severe
   D) uncontrollable

5. Which word best describes Whittlesey’s soldiers when they were under attack?
   A) mighty
   B) desperate
   C) fearless
   D) refreshed

6. Which line from the article supports the answer to question 5?
   A) “Whittlesey had been ordered to lead his troops in an attack on the Germans . . .”
   B) “Whittlesey’s men marched into the path of a large German force.”
   C) “. . . they were low on ammunition, badly outnumbered, and exhausted.”
   D) “. . . American planes appeared overhead. Whittlesey’s men cheered.”

7. The author creates suspense in the section about Cher Ami’s flight by describing . . .
   A) the sound of the battlefield.
   B) how Cher Ami got shot repeatedly but kept going.
   C) what other pigeons did.
   D) the medal Cher Ami received.

8. Which conclusion about World War I can you draw from the article?
   A) Soldiers faced many challenges and horrors.
   B) New technologies made fighting safer and easier.
   C) Only humans were affected by the battles.
   D) There were many ways to communicate during battles in the war.

9. What are two descriptive details the author uses to help you feel as if you were in the battle?

10. Use evidence from the text to describe why Cher Ami was considered a hero.
The Pigeon Hero of World War I

To the teacher: We suggest using these questions with the lower-Lexile version of the story, supported by the lower-Lexile audio version. Select the ones that are best for your students, depending on where they are in their acquisition of English. Ask them orally or choose questions to create your own written assignment. If students are ready, prompt them to follow up their answers with more details.

Yes/No Questions
These questions allow students who are new to English to show their understanding with a simple answer.
1. Was it easy for soldiers to send messages to their leaders during World War I? (No, it wasn’t.)
2. Was Cher Ami a soldier? (No, she wasn’t.)
3. Were trenches comfortable places to stay? (No, they weren’t.)
4. Did German planes drop food for the American soldiers? (No, they didn’t.)
5. Was Cher Ami shot? (Yes, she was.)
6. Did Cher Ami save about 200 soldiers? (Yes, she did.)

Either/Or Questions
These questions allow slightly more-advanced students to use language from the question in their answer.
1. Were 17 countries or 135 countries involved in World War I? (135 countries were involved in World War I.)
2. Do pigeons fly fast or slow? (They fly fast.)
3. Is the Argonne Forest in France or Germany? (It’s in France.)
4. Did Cher Ami carry medicine or messages for the soldiers? (She carried messages.)
5. Did Cher Ami live or die after she got shot? (Cher Ami lived.)

Language Questions
Ask students whether each word below is related to travel or warfare. Then have them make up their own sentences with each.
1. navigation (p. 6) (travel; Sample sentence: I used my compass for navigation through the city.)
2. chariot (p. 7) (travel; Sample sentence: Today, adults drive cars not chariots.)
3. ammunition (p. 8) (warfare; Sample sentence: A soldier needs ammunition to fight a battle.)
4. medics (p. 9) (warfare; Sample sentence: The medics helped the injured soldiers.)
Cher Ami Contest

My name: ____________________________

Teacher’s name: ______________________

School name: __________________________

School address: ________________________________________________________________

(Remember to include city, state, and ZIP code!)

School phone: __________________________

Parent’s name and email (optional): ____________________________________________

See page 9 of the March/April 2019 issue of Storyworks for more information about this contest.

My Response

You just found the journal of a World War I soldier who lived thanks to Cher Ami! What would it say for the day of the rescue? Write a journal entry with details from the article.

Entries will be judged on:

- a clearly stated main idea
- effective use of supporting evidence
- good organization and transitions
- grammar, spelling, and punctuation

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Continue on another piece of paper if you need more room.

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