The Pigeon Hero of World War I
How one brave bird saved hundreds of American soldiers

About the Article

Levels
Lexile Range: 800L-900L
Guided Reading Level: V
DRA Level: 50

Learning Objectives
Students will gain knowledge about World War I as they identify a problem a group of U.S. soldiers faced and how a bird helped solve it.

Content-Area Connections
Social studies: World War I
Science: animals

Key Skills
Problem and solution, vocabulary, text evidence, key details, author’s purpose, text features, text structure, author’s craft, drawing conclusions, supporting an opinion, narrative and explanatory writing

Standards Correlations
This article and lesson support the following Common Core anchor standards: R.1, R.2, R.3, R.4, R.5, R.7, W.2, W.3, SL.1, SL.2, L.5, L.6
Check our website for more standards information.

Your Teaching Support Package
Here’s your full suite of materials, all of which you’ll find at storyworks.scholastic.com:

Video: “Behind the Scenes: The Pigeon Hero of World War I”

Audio:
• On-level version  • Lower-Lexile version

Differentiated article:
• Lower-Lexile version (printable)

Activities to print or project:
• Vocabulary
• Video Activity
• Close-Reading and Critical-Thinking Questions*
• Core Skills Workout: Text Structure: Problem and Solution, Text Features, Summarizing,* Text Evidence*
• Comprehension Quiz*
• Questions for English Language Learners

Vocabulary Slideshow Great visual support!

*Available on two levels
working radios to call for help.

- Based on the section “Incredible Powers,” what qualities make carrier pigeons skilled at carrying messages? (key details) Carrier pigeons are fast, smart, and good at finding their way home, even over very long distances.

- Reread “Brutal Battles.” During World War I, what communication problem did pigeons help solve? (problem and solution) New long-distance communication technologies did not always work during wartime, especially in the middle of battles. Pigeons offered a more reliable way to send messages.

- 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? (author’s purpose) Details include that the soldiers had to deal with deep mud, smelly garbage and waste, the noise of bombs and machine guns, and scurrying rats. Tarshis probably includes these details to help readers understand how scared, tired, and desperate the men were.

- How does the sidebar “Animals in Wartime” add to your understanding of the article? (text features) The sidebar explains how other animals have been used in the military throughout history. This helps you understand that it isn’t only the carrier pigeon that has helped humans during wartime.

- 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? (identifying problems) The men did not have enough ammunition, food, or water. They were exhausted and outnumbered by German soldiers. Many were being killed and wounded by artillery fire.

- What new danger appears at the end of
At the end of the section, American planes begin bombing the Argonne forest, not realizing that Whittlesey and his men are below. This helps you understand one of the main reasons the Americans needed to send an urgent message in the first section—to stop their own planes from bombing them.

In the final section of the article, how does Tarshis create a feeling of excitement? Explain using specific details from the section. To create excitement, Tarshis uses vivid figurative language such as “the sky was a storm of bullets.” She also uses very short paragraphs to draw the scene out, building suspense about whether Cher Ami will be able to make it through danger and complete her important mission.

Critical-Thinking Questions

- 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. Cher Ami was a hero because she stayed calm and determined in the middle of a fierce battle. She bravely refused to give up on her mission, unlike other pigeons that flew away in fear. Even after being seriously injured, “she kept flying” and made it to the American headquarters with her life-saving message.

- 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? Answers will vary. Some students may say yes, because these animals help win battles and keep humans safe. Others may say no, because animals should not be put in danger for the sake of humans.

3. Skill Building

Featured Skill: Problem and Solution

- Distribute the problem and solution activity and have students complete it in groups. Then ask them to respond to the writing prompt at the bottom of page 9.

Differentiate and Customize

For Struggling Readers

Have students read the lower-Lexile version of the story in pairs, highlighting details about the soldiers’ main problem in one color and details about the solution using Cher Ami in another. Then come together to discuss what students highlighted.

For ELL Students

The story includes a number of domain-specific words related to warfare (e.g., ammunition, artillery, battalion) that may be difficult for ELLs. Before reading the article, go through these words together, using our vocabulary slideshow.

For Advanced Readers

Guide students to Storyworks Online to watch our video “Beyond the Story: Into the World of Military Working Dogs.” Ask them to write a short essay comparing and contrasting the role of pigeons with the role of dogs in warfare, based on the article and the video.

For Research

Have students choose one of the species featured in the “Animals in Wartime” sidebar and research a famous military animal of that species. They should then write a three-paragraph article about their chosen animal’s heroic deeds, using the Cher Ami story as a model.