

The Pigeon Hero of World War I

The incredible true story of Cher Ami

About the Story

Lexile: 940L

For qualitative complexity factors, go to Scope Online.

Learning Objective:

to plan a museum exhibit drawing on key ideas and details from a nonfiction text

Key Skills:

text structure, key ideas and details, figurative language, text feature, inference, author's craft

Essential Questions:

- What makes carrier pigeons extraordinary?
- How can animals help us?
- Why should stories about war be remembered?

Standards:

This article and lesson support these Common Core anchor standards:

R.1, R.2, R.3, R.4, R.5, W.2, SL.1, L.4, L.5, L.6

For more standards information—including TEKS—go to Scope Online.



Your Teaching Support Package

Find your full suite of materials at
scope.scholastic.com.

Video: Behind the Scenes

Audio:

- The article (English and Spanish)
- Vocabulary

Differentiated articles:

- Lower-Lexile version (printable)
- Spanish version (printable)

Literature Connections: ideas for connecting to curricular texts

Activities to print or project:

- Vocabulary
- Close Reading and Critical Thinking
- Key Ideas and Details: Plan Your Exhibit
- Video Discussion Questions
- **Core Skills Workout:** Central Ideas & Details*, Summarizing*, Text Features, Text Structure, Tone
- Quiz*
- Nonfiction Elements*
- Contest Entry Form

**Available on two levels*

Step-by-Step Lesson Plan

Close Reading, Critical Thinking, Skill Building

1 Preparing to Read

Do-Now: Journal about animal heroes

(5 minutes, activity sheet online)

Have students respond to the following in their writing journals once they enter the classroom:
Can an animal be a hero?

Preview vocabulary.

(8 minutes, activity sheet online)

Project or distribute the **Vocabulary Words and Definitions**. Review as a class. (Optionally, assign the activity as homework.) Highlighted words: *battalion, bioluminescent, colossal, embattled, emerged, innate, navigational, rampant, telegraph*

Watch a video.

(15 minutes, activity sheet online)

Project or distribute the **Video Discussion Questions** and preview them as a class. Then watch the **Behind the Scenes** video at least once. Discuss the questions as a class.

2 Reading and Discussing

Read and discuss the article.

(45 minutes, activity sheets online)

- Have a volunteer read aloud the As You Read box on page 6.
- Play the audio at Scope Online while students follow along in their printed magazines.
- Have students work in groups to discuss the following close-reading questions.

Close-Reading Questions

▶ **What is the main purpose of the sections “Incredible Powers” and “Brutal Battles”?** (text structure) *The main purpose of these sections is to explain why pigeons were used as messengers during World War I. In “Incredible Powers,” author Lauren Tarshis describes the*

ways in which pigeons are suited for the job of carrying messages. In “Brutal Battles,” Tarshis explains that on the battlefield, pigeons were the most reliable form of communication.

▶ **In the section “Fear and Rats,” Tarshis explains how difficult conditions were for soldiers in the trenches. Why is this information important to the story of Cher Ami?** (text structure) *Knowing what soldiers in the trenches had to endure helps you understand how desperate Major Charles Whittlesey’s men must have felt as they marched through the forest, and why the run-in with the Germans would have been particularly devastating.*

▶ **What made carrier pigeons an important method of communication in battle? What were some drawbacks to using pigeons?** (key ideas) *Carrier pigeons always return home—no matter where they are. So in the midst of a battle, when it was impossible to send messages over a radio (and there were no cell phones), the birds were the best option. Drawbacks include that messages could be sent only one way—the birds only fly home. Also, the pigeons could be shot down, as happened to many of the pigeons of the 77th Infantry Division, or become too scared to fly.*

▶ **On page 9, Tarshis writes, “The sky was a storm of bullets.” What figurative language is she using here? What does it help you understand?** (figurative language) *Tarshis is using metaphor to describe the dangerous battle scene that Cher Ami flew into. The metaphor helps you understand that there was a lot of gunfire—that the battle in the forest was extremely violent and intense.*

► **What does the sidebar “Animals in Wartime” add to the article?** (text feature) *The sidebar explains how other animals have been used in military efforts throughout history. This information helps the reader understand that it isn't only the carrier pigeon that has been part of human warfare.*

► **In the section “Under Attack,” the author writes, “The only way for the men to get a sip of water was to risk crawling through the mud to a stream.” Why would crawling to a stream be a risk?** (inference) *As Tarshis explains, the trenches offered soldiers some protection from flying bullets and explosives. Leaving the trench for any reason would have meant losing that protection.*

► **Consider how Tarshis describes Cher Ami's flight from the forest. How does she draw the reader in and create drama?** (author's craft) *Tarshis draws the reader in and creates drama by using vivid language and very short paragraphs that draw the scene out and build suspense as Cher Ami takes flight and is shot again and again.*

- Reconvene to discuss the following questions.

Critical-Thinking Questions

► **Why is it important to remember stories from the past like this one?** *Answers will vary. Students may say that it's important because otherwise these stories would be lost to time. Cher Ami and the American soldiers in the forest were courageous. Many of them died. It's important that their experiences are remembered as part of human history, both to honor the soldiers and to contribute to our understanding of World War I.*

► **Do you think it's OK to use animals for military efforts?** *Answers will vary. Some students may say yes, that these animals help win battles and keep humans safe. Others may say no, animals shouldn't be drawn into human conflicts and put in harm's way.*

3 Skill Building

Featured Skill: Key Ideas and Details

(15 minutes, activity sheet online)

Have students work in groups to complete the activity **Plan Your Exhibit**. This activity will prepare students to respond to the writing prompt on page 9. *For alternate culminating tasks, see the box below.*

Differentiate and Customize

For Struggling Readers

In a well-organized paragraph, explain why carrier pigeons were important in military efforts of the past. Use text evidence from the article to support your answer.

For Advanced Readers

In a well-organized essay, explain how animals have been used in military efforts throughout history. Use information from the article, the video about military dogs at Scope Online, and at least one additional source.

For Biologists

Research the biology of carrier pigeons and what makes them such skilled navigators. Then choose and research another animal with incredible navigational powers, such as the dolphin. Compare the two animals in an infographic, slideshow, or essay.

For Poets

Write a narrative poem about Cher Ami and the 77th Infantry Division in World War I. Be sure to include at least one simile and one metaphor.