



Brooklyn *in the* Civil War



Unit: Women

Lesson 3.5: The Making of a Spy

Aim: To learn about the life of a woman spy for the Union.

Objective: Students study archival photographs of Pauline Cushman and learn about her life.

Materials:

1. Copies of Pauline Cushman photos for small groups
<http://www.brooklynpubliclibrary.org/civilwar/cwdoc070.html>,
<http://www.brooklynpubliclibrary.org/civilwar/cwdoc071.html>
2. “Reading a Primary Source Document” handout for each group
3. Shared reading on overhead

Procedure:

1. Divide class in half. Divide each half into small groups. Give one half of the class the photo of Cushman in a dress; give the other half the photo of Cushman in a soldier’s uniform.
2. Groups study the photos and fill out “Reading a Primary Source Document”
3. Share observations with class.
4. Shared reading about Cushman’s life on overhead.

A note about shared reading: During a shared reading session, the whole class is on the same “page”—everyone’s attention is focused on the same overhead transparency. The teacher models the initial reading in several ways. In addition to simply reading the passage aloud, slowly and clearly, he or she reveals thoughts and reading strategies for the group. Be it visualizing, making connections, or noticing new or interesting vocabulary, these thoughts are shared so that students see and understand what goes on in the mind of a good reader.

5. Explain that students will be mapping Cushman’s life, combining the concept of a timeline, with a map of the places she worked and lived. They can create a key with symbols representing her activities (e.g., a baby bottle for her birth in 1833 in New Orleans; curtains for her acting career initiated in 1851 in New York City, etc.).

6. Brainstorm ideas for symbols as a group (record on blackboard).
7. Share maps with group.
8. Discussion: Why do you think the government asked Cushman to be a spy? What would you have done in her place? Explain.

Harriet Wood was born in 1833 in New Orleans. At 18, she ran away to New York City to become an actress and changed her name to Pauline Cushman. In 1853, she married musician Charles Dickinson and moved back to New Orleans. Charles later joined the 41st Ohio Infantry band, but became ill and was sent home to Cleveland, Ohio where he died in 1862.

In 1863 while Cushman was performing in Louisville, Kentucky, she was asked to spy on the Confederate army. In those days, women spies used their large hoop skirts to hide weapons and secret documents. In Nashville, Tennessee, she was captured and sentenced to be hanged as a spy. Three days before her execution, the Union army captured the town and she was freed. Even after this near brush with death, Cushman continued her spying missions behind Confederate lines. “The actress became the darling of Southern troops, and she gathered information of great value to the advancing Union forces*.” President Lincoln recognized her contributions to the Union effort by awarding her an honorary major’s commission.

In 1864, she returned to New York City and was a big hit at P.T. Barnum’s Museum as the “Spy of the Cumberland.” Still, by 1872, the public had forgotten her, so she headed west to San Francisco, California. In 1879 she met her third husband, Jere Fryer, and moved to the Arizona territory where the couple opened a hotel and stable. Fryer became sheriff in their county, but they separated in 1890. Pauline spent her final years working as a seamstress and charwoman back in San Francisco. She died in 1893. Her gravestone is marked, “Pauline C. Fryer, Union Spy.”

- *<http://www.aboutfamouspeople.com/article1016.html>
- <http://www.civilwarhistory.com/Cushman.htm>

Reading a Primary Source Document

1. Identify the document type. (Newspaper article, letter, map, advertisement, diary entry, photograph, illustration, cartoon, etc.)
2. Identify the date of the document. (When was the document created? How do you know?)
3. Identify the author or creator. (Who created the document? What do you know about him or her?)
4. Identify the audience. (What is the purpose of the document? Who was it written or created for?)
5. List 2-3 things the document tells you about life in Brooklyn or New York City during this period.
6. List 2-3 questions you have about the document. What would you ask its creator if he or she were alive today?