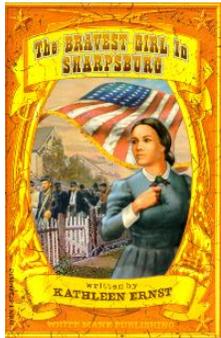




## Teacher's Guide for *The Bravest Girl In Sharpsburg* An American Civil War Novel

Written by Kathleen Ernst  
Published by White Mane Books 1997



The daring adventures of best friends Teresa Kretzer and Savilla Miller have earned them the title of "the bravest girls in Sharpsburg" --and the admiration of Teresa's shy younger sister, Bethie. But when the Civil War looms, the girls become political enemies. Teresa is a staunch Unionist; Savilla, a Secessionist.

Tensions escalate as the Confederate army marches into Maryland in September 1862. The question of which flag to display and how, the fear for the lives of loved ones on both sides, and the daily dangers facing the girls all culminate in the confrontation between Confederate and Union armies along Antietam Creek.

Each girl faces challenges which test everything she believes in. In the end, Teresa, Savilla, and Bethie all learn new definitions of courage as they struggle with issues of love, loss, and friendship amidst the horror of the Battle of Antietam Creek.

This book contains a period map, photos and illustrations, and an author's note about the real people and events that it is based on.

### Activity Suggestions

1. Ask students to look in the media for examples of modern issues that are causing deep divisions within families or communities. What parallels can students find in other areas of the world today?
2. Have students create Venn Diagrams, comparing Teresa, Savilla, and Bethie. What characteristics and beliefs do they share? How are they different?
3. Ask students to write a diary entry from the point-of-view of one of the civilians sheltering in the Kretzer cellar during the Battle of Antietam.



4. Discuss the difficult position of people living in Maryland and other border states during the Civil War. Ask students to write two first-person letters to President Abraham Lincoln on the subject of the declaration of war: one from the point-of-view of a Sharpsburg Unionist, and one from the point-of-view of a Sharpsburg Secessionist. Or, ask students to choose design a recruitment poster, or radio ad, intended to convince people to support the Union or the Confederacy.

5. Take a vote in class: which of the three main characters do students think is the bravest girl in Sharpsburg? How do Savilla and Teresa, who did daring things but felt little fear, compare with Elizabeth, who needed to summon a great deal of courage to help her friend Timothy? Ask students to write an essay explaining their answer.

6. Discuss the constraints Teresa and Savilla felt throughout the book. What do they say about gender roles in the 19th century? Guide students through an independent study of women's roles during the Civil War. How did women around the country find ways to express their patriotism and serve their cause?

7. Allow students to choose a prominent historical figure from the period you are discussing. Ask them to read a biography or other nonfiction book about the person, then try fictionalizing one experience. They should include the character's thoughts and feelings. Afterwards, have students discuss the experience. Did they find it difficult to put themselves in that individual's place? Are they comfortable fictionalizing real people, or do they think all main characters in novels should be created from the author's imagination?

### **For Further Exploration**

Antietam National Battlefield  
Sharpsburg, Maryland, Phone (301) 432-5124  
<http://www.nps.gov/ancm/index.htm>

A visit to the national battlefield will provide a good overview of the Battle of Antietam. The park's website is a particularly rich resource, and includes background information, maps, timelines, historic photos, and other resources.

*Kathleen Ernst*  
WRITING AT THE INTERSECTION OF PEOPLE, PLACES, AND THE PAST



## What Others Are Saying

"...a lovely, poignant story."  
— **School Library Journal**

"A vividly drawn story set against a meticulously researched historical background that will raptly engage young readers."  
— **Midwest Book Review**

"A realistic story of the Civil War."  
— **The Civil War Courier**

*The Bravest Girl In Sharpsburg* is available as a paperback book from local independent bookstores as well as from Amazon, Barnes & Nobles, and other national book vendors. Signed and personalized copies can be acquired directly from the author, Kathleen Ernst. For more information, click on [http://www.kathleenernst.com/book\\_bravest\\_girl.php](http://www.kathleenernst.com/book_bravest_girl.php).