

HOW TO START YOUR OWN BOOK CLUB

Think it would be hard to start your own book club? Think again!
All you need is a little bit of organization and some
friends who are as excited about the books they read as you are.

HERE ARE A FEW TIPS TO GET YOU STARTED:

The best way to find people to be in your reading group is to ask your friends.

Think of all the people you know who like to read, and ask them to join. If you still don't feel like you have enough people, ask each of your friends to bring someone else. You can usually get a good discussion going with 6–8 people, but any number that is comfortable for you will work. If you're having trouble finding enough cool people to form your reading group, check with your school, local library, or bookstore to see if there's a group that you can join.

Figure out when and where you want to meet.

Some groups meet once a month, some meet every other month. You could get together at someone's house, in a park, on the beach, or in your school's library. If it sounds too official and overwhelming to decide all the "wheres" and "whens" right now, don't worry! It's YOUR group and so YOU get to make all the decisions. All you have to do is get together once, and you can work out the rest of the details later.

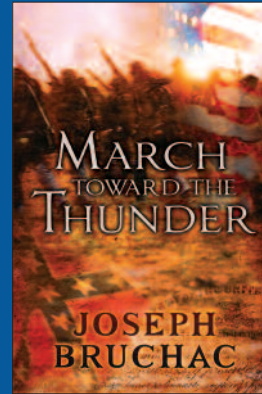
Decide how you will choose books, and how the discussions will be run.

This is another one that sounds a little scary but totally isn't. Maybe you have a favorite author that you and your friends would like to focus on. Or maybe you want to take turns picking your favorite book. Maybe one person likes to talk and would like to lead the discussion, or maybe you would rather just get together and talk about the books you are reading. If you get stuck, you can often find discussion questions online (try the publisher's website) or at your local library or bookstore.

The most important thing to remember is that there's no right or wrong way to have a reading group. Do what you're comfortable with and always have fun, and your group will be a success!

For more discussion guides to get your group going, visit
www.penguin.com/teachersandlibrarians

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March Toward the Thunder

by Joseph Bruchac

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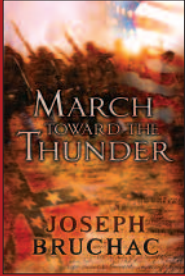
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DISCUSSION GUIDE



ABOUT THE BOOK



By spring of 1864, the Union is desperate for soldiers to fight the Confederacy. So it offers young men, like fifteen-year-old Abenaki Louis Nolette, a great deal of money to enlist. Louis becomes a Union soldier, but not only for the money that will buy his widowed mother a piece of land. He thinks once he puts on a clean blue Union uniform, no one will ever again call him a “dirty Indian.” He also feels a kinship for dark-skinned men and women who’ve had to endure similar taunts and worse. Freeing enslaved people seems a cause worth risking one’s life for.

But being a soldier doesn’t turn out the way Louis expects. When he joins the Irish Brigade, his fellow soldiers call him “Chief” and tease him because he’s an “Indian.” Then his company reaches the terrifying battles—Cold Harbor, the Wilderness, the Crater—during which thousands die. Although they are hungry, ragged, hurt, and exhausted, Louis and his fellow soldiers continue to fight so they might swim, play marbles, sing, and kiss their mothers and sweethearts again. Louis and those who survive grow closer than brothers, and discover prejudice and acceptance, courage and cowardice, and strong and weak leadership in the most unexpected places.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



JOSEPH BRUCHAC, master storyteller and acclaimed author, has written more than 100 books, many of which draw on his Abenaki heritage. In *March Toward the Thunder*, he tells a Civil War story that is based on the experiences of his own great-grandfather. This well-researched book is full of historical facts and details that give readers new insight into the untold stories and unsung heroes of the War Between the States.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why might author Joseph Bruchac have chosen to write a historical fiction story based on his great-grandfather’s experiences rather than a non-fiction story? What are the differences between historical fiction and historical non-fiction? Which do you prefer and why?
- Why might it be important to read about people who, like American Indian soldiers in the Civil War, had different perspectives on historical events than many other participants? To truly understand a historical event, how many perspectives should you study? Explain your answer.

- How might people learn more about themselves by studying their family history, as author Joseph Bruchac has done? How does your family’s past affect who you are? How might choices you make affect your descendants?
- Does Louis have good reasons for becoming a soldier? Why or why not? If you were in his situation, what reasons might convince you to become one? Why might you find these reasons convincing?
- Are the recruiter’s attempts to persuade underage Louis to become a soldier moral or immoral? Explain your answer. Why do governments set minimum age limits for soldiers? What do you think the minimum age limit for fighting in wars should be and why?
- What do the soldiers in Louis’ company say when they find out that he is an American Indian? How does he feel about what they say to him and how does he react to them? Why might he feel the way he does?
- Why does Sergeant Flynn think the Irish are similar to American Indians? In what ways do you agree and disagree with his assessment? How might people from one minority racial or ethnic group be able to understand the situation of people from another, and how might they be unable to?
- Louis follows the traditions of his Abenaki ancestors and the traditions of the Catholic Church. Does this make him more Abenaki, more Catholic, or equally both? Explain your answer. Can people devoutly practice two religions at the same time? Why or why not?
- In *March Toward the Thunder*, what traits make someone a good soldier? Would these traits make someone a good soldier in today’s wars or not? Why? In what ways has soldiery stayed the same since the Civil War and how has it changed?
- What are the worst hardships Louis and his company face as they travel and fight? How do they survive these hardships? If you were in their situation, what tactics or techniques would you use to survive?
- Fighting in a war brings out the best in the character Bull Belaney. Why? In what ways might it have brought out the worst in others? How would fighting in a war bring out different aspects of your character?
- How valuable are news and newspapers to Louis and his company? What do you think is the proper role of news and newspapers during wars? In what ways is their wartime role similar to and different from their role during peacetime? What are the reasons for the similarities and differences?
- Why are flags and songs so important to the story’s characters? Why might flags or songs be important to today’s soldiers? Could soldiers fight as effectively without them? Explain your answer.
- In what ways do the women Louis sees participate in the war? Do their roles in this story reflect the roles contemporary women hold in wars today? If women you cared for went off to war, would you feel the same emotions as you would if men you cared for went off to war? Why or why not?

- Why are the African American soldiers Louis meets from the Tenth U.S. Colored of the Eighteenth fighting in the war? If you were one of those men, why might you choose to fight? What expectations might you have for life after the war?
- Near the end of the war, Louis and the other soldiers speak with a Confederate prisoner. What are the reasons the prisoner gives for fighting the war? Do you think his opinion is representative of what many Confederate soldiers thought or is his perspective unique? What are the reasons that Louis and his fellow soldiers have for fighting on the side of the Union?
- How is the landscape in the story changed by the huge battles? What do you think Virginia looked like after the war was over? How might the changes in Virginia’s landscape have influenced the way Virginians felt about the war?
- Soldiers and generals have different perspectives on the war and how it is being fought. What influences their perspectives? Look for an example of where soldiers and generals differ in their assessment of a situation. Who do you think has the best idea of what to do? What might have happened if a different decision had been made?
- Why is *March Toward the Thunder* an accurate and interesting title for this story? Do you expect titles of historical fiction books to somehow convey that the story is historical fiction? How could they do so?
- Why might the author and publisher have included maps in *March Toward the Thunder*? What are the differences between the two maps? How do the differences help tell the story?

RESEARCH & ACTIVITIES

- In *March Toward the Thunder*, Louis sees that other soldiers have written last letters to their sweethearts or mothers. Instead of mailing these letters, the soldiers keep them in pockets. The soldiers hope that if they die, someone will find and send the letters. Pretend you are one of these soldiers. Write a last “My Dearest Ma” or “My Dearest Sweetheart” letter, a goodbye that you hope someone will send if you don’t survive a battle.
- Research the companies that men from your town, city, or state joined during the Civil War. Then research the locations these companies traveled to and the battles they fought in. Create a map that illustrates the path they took during the war. Include major geographic features as well as battle sites.
- Investigate the people in your family who lived during the Civil War and what they did during that time. Construct a family tree of your Civil War ancestors and include all the details you collect.