

Across Five Aprils

Study Guide

by Carol Clark

For the novel by Irene Hunt

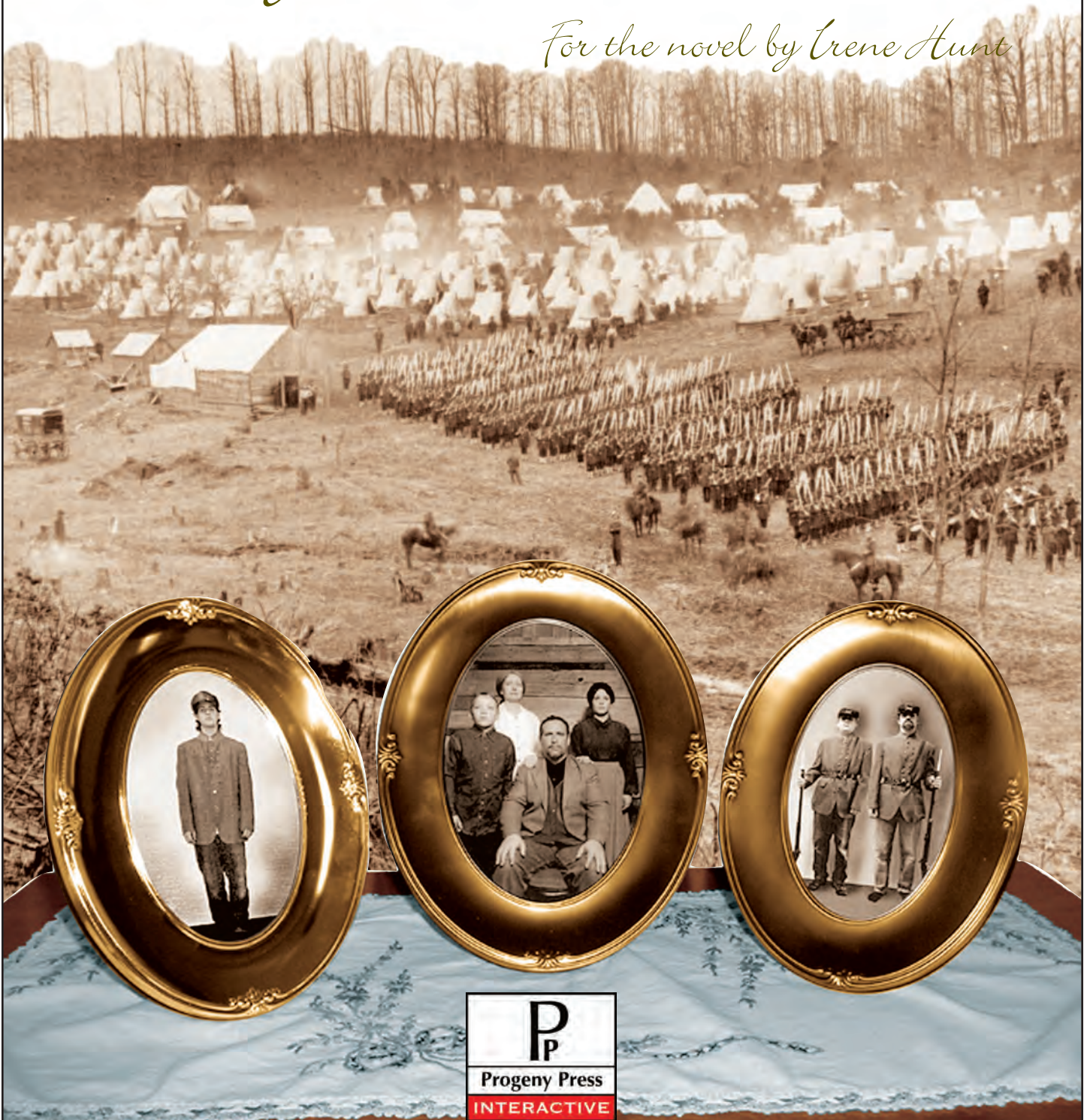


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Synopsis

Times are uneasy for the Matthew Creighton family as tensions rise between the north and the south as the war between the states approaches. The Creightons and their neighbors in southern Illinois have friends and relatives on both sides of the issues. The younger sons look forward to the gallantry and excitement they believe war will bring, but Matthew and his older sons better understand war's cost. When war breaks out, the Creighton boys head off to fight, expecting a quick and easy victory for the north. But when an older son, Bill, goes off to fight for the south, the Creightons find the war has divided their family and brought dangerous strife between neighbors.

Nine-year-old Jethro Creighton suddenly finds himself the only remaining son in the family, and when his father suffers a heart attack, Jethro becomes the working man of the family. Times are hard and the work endless, but their thoughts always are with their boys in the war. They seem to live from letter to letter and for each newspaper with accounts of the fighting.

With boys on both sides of the war, the Creightons also find themselves the target of whichever troublemakers wish to pick a fight. But they also learn that some neighbors remember old kindnesses, and people still will band together against injustice. Young Jethro discovers that a man's good character can be stronger than a gun and last longer than a war.

Chapters 7 & 8

Vocabulary:

Match each vocabulary word with its definition by writing the letter in the blank provided. Some words will not be used.

- | | | |
|-------|---|-----------------|
| _____ | 1. occurring or coming after | a. furrow |
| _____ | 2. cheap trinket or ornament | b. contempt |
| _____ | 3. lack of ability to perform | c. subsequent |
| _____ | 4. narrow groove made by a plow | d. zeal |
| _____ | 5. adorned or enhanced by ornamentation | e. dispel |
| _____ | 6. eager desire; enthusiasm for a person or cause | f. incompetence |
| _____ | 7. to drive off; scatter | g. embellished |
| _____ | 8. to lie hidden, as in ambush | h. proprietor |
| _____ | 9. owner of a business | i. bauble |
| _____ | 10. unrelenting, doesn't give up | j. engraved |
| | | k. lurk |
| | | l. tenacious |

Questions:

1. What news does Dan Lawrence bring to the Creightons?

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accomplished or failed to accomplish. (Note: Remember to add flags to your map to show the locations of each of these battles.)

General	Battle	Accomplishments/Failures

8. As the war drags on, how do the attitudes of the soldiers and the nation begin to change regarding the President and government of the Union?

9. *Juxtaposition* is the act of placing two things side by side for comparison or contrast. An author uses juxtaposition to underscore the distinctive characteristics of two people, things, happenings, or places. At the end of Chapter 7, what two things does the author juxtapose in the country and the city newspapers? What does this comparison emphasize?

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10. A *metaphor* is an implied or stated comparison of two unlike things, but no comparison word (*like* or *as*) is used. For example, “Sherman’s march was a raging sea of destruction.” In this sentence, Sherman’s march is compared to a raging sea by actually *calling* it a raging sea. Underline the metaphor in each of the following passages, then tell what comparison is being made.

a. Now the cabin had the look of a lonely old man brooding in the summer sunlight.

_____ is compared to _____

b. If they wished to think of him as an ignorant child, he must not try to change their idea of him, but it was a bitter dose to swallow.

_____ is compared to _____

Dig Deeper:

11. As the Creighton barn is being rebuilt, one of the men says to Jethro, “Be glad you’re a boy, young feller, and don’t hev to pester yourself with all these troubles that men be sufferin’ through these days.” What is Jethro’s response to the comment? What do we learn about his inner character from this response?

12. Read 1 Corinthians 13: 4–5, 11. How does Jethro’s answer connect with this passage of Scripture? How does his response indicate his growth from childhood toward adulthood?

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13. Reread the two letters from Shadrach Yale that the Creightons receive in Chapter 8. What is Shad's opinion of General McClellan? Of General Burnside?

14. Read Titus 3:1–2 and Romans 13:1–7. According to these verses, what should our attitude be regarding those in authority over us? Does Shad have this attitude? Why or why not?

Class Discussion:

In the first of Shadrach's two letters near the end of Chapter 8, he says of General McClellan, "He does not have the cold approach to killing, the singleness of purpose, the brutal tenacity, that the winner of this war—if there ever is to be one—must have." What does Shadrach mean by this? Do you think a Christian can or should be able to act in such a way, even in war? Use scripture in your discussion as much as possible.

As an alternative to this discussion, you may wish to examine and discuss the life and circumstances of one of the great warrior kings of the Old Testament, King David. How can David's obvious skill and pleasure in being a warrior be reconciled with his being "a man after God's own heart" (1 Samuel 13:13, 14; Acts 13:22)?

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e. looking somewhat like a solemn dwarf; Jethro is compared to a solemn dwarf

f. like a woman talkin' to a young 'un; Bill's speech to his horse is compared to a woman's speech to a child.

Idioms:

12. Taking away someone's enthusiasm.

13. Someone cannot criticize another for a fault they have themselves.

14. A very old saying that means you'd endure terrible hardships for someone else because of your love for them.

15. Saying different things to different people about the same subject.

16. To change ones' mind, to vacillate. Unable to decide what they really want to do.

Dig Deeper:

17. The grandfather of Travis Burdow had been accused of stealing a team of horses and had fled to Jasper County to escape prosecution. Because of this, an air of suspicion and dislike has settled on the family, causing his children to be persecuted. His son Dave is sullen and silent and keeps to himself. His children (including Travis) are often the same, but are given to drunkenness, which gives them courage and increases their defiance. The author states that the gunshot fired over the heads of Rob Nelson's horses was "fired at a society that had kicked a boy from childhood on because he bore his grandfather's name."

18. Jethro finds it difficult to accept that Travis Burdow paid no consequences for the actions that led to Mary's death. This reminds him of Lincoln's wavering regarding the declaration of war, and Jethro finds himself angry at both his father's actions and Lincoln's inaction. Jethro wonders if it is the fear of having "blood on people's hands" which motivates both men.

19. Answers will vary. Matthew Creighton's actions are godly in that he was slow to anger and showed compassion to those who had wronged his family. He chose to repay an evil act with one of kindness. He could not quite go so far as to show love for the Burdows, however. As God has not dealt with us as our sins deserve, so Matthew did not deal with Travis Burdow as his sin deserved.

20. Answers will vary. Ezekiel 18 tells us that God will not hold a grudge against a son who lives righteously, despite the sins of his father. Each soul will be judged based on their own guilt or righteousness. Although the community never punished any of the Burdows in a legal sense, they never trusted them and they made them outcasts because of the grandfather's actions.

21. Ellen's religious upbringing taught her to depend on the sovereignty of God, and did not allow her to regret her own fading beauty. She's lived a hard life, losing four of her twelve children. Sickness and poverty taught her that a pretty face is of little value when it comes to survival.

22. Answers will vary. Matthew Creighton's intervention teaches us that he is not afraid to stand up for what he believes is right. He is not vengeful, even in grief. He obviously is well respected by the community and exercises great influence over his neighbors. He is able to persuade them to put aside their revenge and thereby avoid further bloodshed and death.

Chapters 3 & 4

Connections to History:

1. *Jefferson Davis*: President of the Confederate States. Davis served as U.S. Senator from Missouri until that state seceded from the Union in 1861. He left his Senate seat and was elected to command the