

Across Five Aprils

by

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It was April of 1861. Nine-year-old Jethro Creighton, working with his mother in the field, thought the world a fine place. The youngest child in a large, loving family, he enjoyed working on the family's farm in southern Illinois. He also enjoyed attending the small school nearby which was taught by his hero, Shadrach Yale, who saw great potential in the young boy. But all was not fine in the world that April of 1861. There was talk of war and what it would mean, not only to the country, but to the Creighton family and their neighbors as well.

After the firing upon Fort Sumter in South Carolina, Jethro's older brothers begin to leave the farm to enlist, all but one joining the Northern army. Jethro's favorite brother, Bill, struggling with the issues, decides that he must join the Rebel cause. Bill's leaving causes much grief to his family as well as bringing persecution from men who feel the family should disown Bill. As the Aprils go by, Jethro grows quickly from a little boy to a young man, learning to face the many fears the war brings, grief at the loss of a brother, and the responsibility of managing the farm when his father experiences a heart attack and can no longer work.

Mrs. Hunt tells a moving story of childhood lost and the price that was paid by all during the saddest period of our country's history. She relates that the background of *Across Five Aprils* came from letters and records she found, as well as from the stories told by her own grandfather who was, like Jethro, a boy of nine when the war began. As you read *Across Five Aprils*, you will gain a clearer understanding of the conflict known as the Civil War.

We suggest that you keep a map of the United States available as you read the book. You may follow the major events of the Civil War by finding the places mentioned in the story.

Vocabulary

Find the word in its context. Reread the sentences before and after the word. What do you think the word means? Look up the word in the dictionary and write a clear, simple definition, and use it in a sentence.

1. seceding - (Chapter 1) _____

2. pompous - (Chapter 4) _____

3. genially - (Chapter 8) _____

4. interminable - (Chapter 9) _____

5. tenacity - (Chapter 12) _____

Complete the sentences with the correct vocabulary word.

6. The students shifted in their seats as they waited for the professor to end his _____ lecture.

7. The gentleman's _____ behavior made the young men feel insignificant.

8. Father smiled and greeted the stranger _____ .

9. Life appeared unstable as the states were _____ from the Union.

10. The young boy's _____ was not tolerated by his baby-sitter.

Activities

The following activities are designed to help you increase your enjoyment of *Across Five Aprils*. Choose as many of the activities as you desire. Complete the activities on a separate piece of paper.

1. What important events were taking place in the world during the time of the Civil War?
2. Many of the events related in this story were told to the author by her grandfather. This is known as oral history. Although your grandfather was not alive during the time of the Civil War, he or another older person you know has many stories they can tell you. Ask him what he witnessed in his youth. You may record his stories for others to read.
3. Education was very important to Jethro and his family. His education took place in a one room schoolhouse as well as at home. Today, most children attend public schools. Trace how our education system came to be this way.
4. Read a biography of one of the historical figures mentioned in the book, such as Lincoln, Grant, Lee, or Sherman.
5. Aside from the slavery issue, the Civil War was fought over the issue of secession, the North wanting to keep the states united and the South desiring to separate and govern themselves. Do you think unity was important? Should the South have been allowed to secede? Write a short paper explaining your position.
6. When Jethro had a problem with the government's policy regarding deserters, he decided to write a letter to the president explaining the problem and asking for a reply. Write a letter to the president asking him a question or stating your views.

Vocabulary Answers

1. withdrawing from the Union
2. appearing pretentious and grand
3. cheerfully
4. boringly long
5. persistence of being stubborn
6. interminable
7. pompous
8. genially
9. seceding
10. tenacity

Activities

1. Some events were:

William, Prince of Denmark, becomes George I, King of Greece.

The French capture Mexico City and proclaim Archduke Maximilian of Austria the emperor.

First International Workingmen's Association is founded by Karl Marx.

Bismarck and Napoleon III meet in Biarritz.

Some current authors were: Wilkie Collins, George Eliot, Charles Dickens, Dostoyevsky, Charles Kingsley, Tolstoy, Anthony Trollope, Lewis Carroll, Mary Mapes Dodge, Mark Twain, and Walt Whitman.

Louis Pasteur develops germ theory of fermentation; invents pasteurization for wine; succeeds in curing silkworm disease, thus saving the French silk industry.

Speed of light was successfully measured. Johann von Lamont discovers earth currents.

Germany's botanist, Julius Sachs, demonstrates that starch is produced by photosynthesis.

Ebenezer Butterick develops first paper dress patterns.

Atlantic cable is completed.

Joseph Lister initiates antiseptic surgery by using carbolic acid on a compound wound.

Henri Dunant proposes the foundation of an international voluntary relief organization (the Red Cross).

Football Association is founded in London. Grand Prix de Paris has its first run.

William Booth establishes the Christian Revival Association (the Salvation Army).

2. This assignment allows your student the opportunity to participate in an interview, note taking, and writing.