

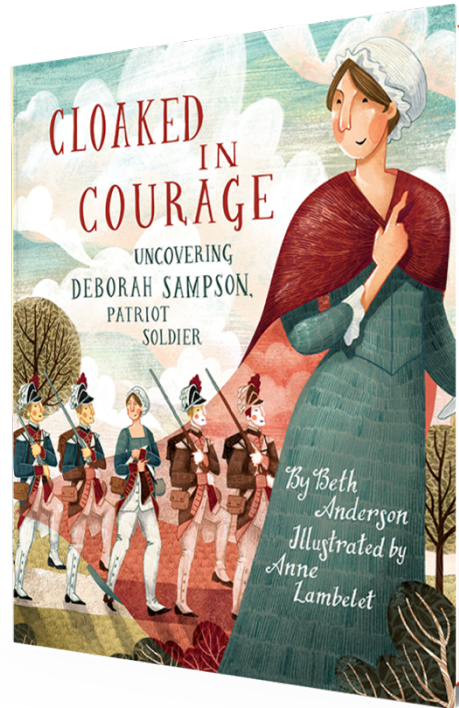
DISCUSSION GUIDE

CLOAKED IN COURAGE: UNCOVERING DEBORAH SAMPSON, PATRIOT SOLDIER

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Grades: 2–5
Ages: 7–10



ABOUT THE BOOK

Deborah Sampson longs to break free—to be much more than a girl is allowed to be. Caught up in her country’s fight for independence, 18-year-old Deborah declares her own independence. She soon enlists in George Washington’s Continental Army, signing on as Robert Shurtliff. A young lady can’t battle the British—a man can!

But being a soldier is hard, dangerous work. Can she keep her identity a secret? Can she prove herself in combat? Will she win her battle to choose her own path? Find out in this inspirational story of a true American rebel.

PRAISE FOR *CLOAKED IN COURAGE*

“Cloaked in Courage is inspiring storytelling centering the life and actions of a brave woman and soldier, Deborah Sampson. Anderson’s contribution brings to light a lesser-known hero in history and emphasizes the importance of historical investigation and research.” —Lori Ann Terjesen, director of education, National Women’s History Museum

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the cover of *Cloaked in Courage*. What do you notice? What do you know about the American Revolution? What questions do you have? Make some predictions about the story.
2. How do you think five-year-old Deborah felt when her mother “put her out” to live with an elderly aunt?
3. What kinds of chores did Deborah do? What kinds of chores do you do or what do you do to help your family?
4. When Deborah lived in the Thomas home, she listened to Master Thomas’s “patriot protests” against British rule. What did she hear? How did this affect her?
5. What does “independent” mean? What does it mean for a country? What does it mean for a person? Why was it so important to Deborah? How do you show independence?
6. What happened the first time Deborah enlisted? What happened the second time? What do these scenes show about her?
7. What was it about Deborah that made her able to pass as a male when she joined the army?
8. The author wrote, “Deborah drilled harder and longer, hiding behind excellence.” How did excellence help hide her identity? How did excellence also result in risks? What would you have done?
9. When the war was over, Deborah Sampson didn’t want to leave the Continental Army. Why do you think she loved serving as a soldier?
10. Why do you think General Paterson gave Deborah an honorable discharge instead of jailing her?
11. Return to the predictions you made earlier. Were you correct? Did you find answers to any of the questions you asked? What would you like to know more about?

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CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

1. How do words and illustrations work together in the story's opening to help you understand what the author means by the sentence, "Deborah Sampson's spirit was always a little too large"?
2. "In each chore, hardship, and book, Deborah discovered pieces of herself." What do you think she discovered about herself? How did her childhood and teen years prepare her for adulthood? Think about a time when you faced a challenge or had to do hard work. What did you discover about yourself?
3. Deborah didn't attend school like most boys did. When she was very young, her mother or aunt taught her to read and write. After that she educated herself using the Thomas boys' books and lessons. Why do you think she did that, especially when she was exhausted after working hard all day?
4. The author wrote, "When soldiers described battles against the British, she hungered to join the fight." What does *hungered* mean here? Why do you think the author chose that word?
5. In the past, according to tradition, men and women had separate roles in society with different expectations about what was appropriate. People disapproved of individuals who broke those "rules." Use a T-chart to list traditions/rules for women and for men in Deborah's time. What conclusions can you draw? Which "rules" did Deborah break? How is today different?
6. What are three character traits of Deborah Sampson? Use evidence from the story to support your choices.
7. Deborah lived in constant fear of being discovered, shamed, and rejected from the army. As a soldier, she "shielded herself with integrity." What is integrity? And how can it protect you? Do any of her actions show a lack of integrity?
8. Deborah made difficult choices. She could have been arrested and jailed for enlisting in the army and impersonating a man. What do you think about her choice to break the law to serve in the military?
9. What can you understand from the text and illustrations about life in colonial times? Which details surprised you? Would you have liked to live at that time? Why or Why not?

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10. Onomatopoeia is the use of sound words in writing. For the sounds in the battle scene, the author listened to recordings of muskets firing and swords slashing, then chose the letters to represent the sounds. "*CH-BOOM! TSINGGG!*" Read the page with and without those words. What effect does onomatopoeia have on a story? Try adding a few sound words to your own narrative writing.
11. Alliteration is the repetition of initial sounds in words. Example: "*She pushed back heartache—her hard work, a hint of who she could be.*" Find more examples of alliteration in the story. How does alliteration affect the telling? Try it yourself! Write a sentence about Deborah using alliteration.
12. Vivid verbs: Reread the battle scene paying attention to verbs. Then think about the author's word choices and how they add strength and meaning to the scene: *lugging* vs. *carry*, *scouted* vs. *looked*, *scrambled* vs. *ran*, *whizzed* vs. *went*, *slashing* vs. *swinging*, *streamed* vs. *went*, and *pierced* vs. *hurt*. Verbs can add power, gentleness, humor, or all sorts of feelings. Write a sentence about something you did today. Use a vivid verb.

EXTENSIONS

1. **Connect to Self:** In the beginning, the story says that Deborah's mother gave her "a chance." At the end it says, "All she needed was a chance." Think about a time when life offered you a chance. Did you take it? Why or Why not? What happened? Did you change in some way or learn something about yourself as a result of your decision? (Personal narrative option)
2. **Math:** Deborah Sampson enlisted in Bellingham, Massachusetts. From there, her unit marched to West Point, New York. Approximately how far did they march? If you hiked 10 miles each day, how long would it take you?
3. **Integrate Ideas:** When Deborah studied the Thomas boys' lessons and read stories of adventure and women warriors, she "fueled a boldness growing inside." How can learning and stories help a person become stronger and braver? Think of an example from your own life.
4. **Compare and Contrast:** How is the fight for independence of the thirteen colonies like Deborah's fight for her own independence? How does the author connect these ideas in the story? What similarities and differences do you see? (Venn diagram option)

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5. **Connect Texts:** Deborah Sampson joined the American fight for independence near the end of the Revolutionary War. Another book by the author, *Revolutionary Prudence Wright*, tells the story of a woman's actions at the start of the war. Compare and contrast these two women and their stories. How do these books help widen your understanding of this time period?
6. **Research:** In the back matter, the author provides information about various primary sources (first-person accounts, speeches, official records, newspapers, etc.) and secondary sources (oral history, experts, information about setting, and accounts written after the event). Which kinds of sources do you think are best for discovering facts? Why? What would you consult to gain insight into a character's emotions? Why? Why are both facts and a character's feelings important to tell a story like Deborah's?
7. **Setting:** To understand Deborah Sampson, we have to understand the time and place of her life. Setting is more than dates and locations. It includes influences on our lives such as what we read and listen to, traditions, expectations, daily life, institutions like schools, churches, and the army. In the back matter, the author shares how learning about setting helped her tell the story. What are three objects, ideas, customs, activities, issues, or events of your time and place that have shaped your life and might help others understand who you are?
8. **Try on the character's shoes:** At the Continental Army camp at New Windsor, New York, the soldiers' huts were 35 feet long by 18 feet wide, divided into two rooms, each housing 6–8 men. Measure off a space 17 ft. x 18 ft. and have 6–8 people sit in it. Imagine eight cots and eight soldiers' equipment in this space. What are the challenges of hiding your identity in these close quarters? What could you do to lessen your chances of being discovered? How did customs and traditions help Deborah keep her secret? (for example, sleeping in clothes, long shirts, seldom bathing) How does thinking about the space provide deeper understanding about the choices Deborah made in camp—to not participate in social activities, to volunteer for extra work assignments, and to risk being under the eyes of officers as General Paterson's servant?