

## **A SOLDIER'S SECRET READING GROUP GUIDE**

1. *A Soldier's Secret* is a fictionalized account of an actual person's life. Do you prefer reading about history this way? Why or why not?
2. Sarah has several different jobs while serving in the Union army—nurse, postmaster, and spy. What qualities does she possess that make her well suited for these roles?
3. Early in her service, Sarah becomes close to her fellow nurse, Jerome. What does their friendship mean to Sarah, and how does it change her view of herself? Why doesn't Jerome betray her secret?
4. Some of the best relationships Sarah has throughout her life are with animals. Why do you think she makes such strong connections with her horses?
5. When Ambrose Burnside takes control of the Union Army, his strategy leads to heavy casualties at the Battle of Fredericksburg. Later, General Franklin and General Poe are both punished for refusing to advance in order to protect their men. Do you think the two generals were right to do what they did, or should they have followed the orders of their commanding officer?
6. During one Independence Day, Union and Confederate soldiers meet during a planned ceasefire to celebrate. Why was it important to have rules of civil warfare, like parole for prisoners and brief truces to bury dead? How do you think these practices affected Sarah's choice to treat enemy wounded soldiers?
7. Several times during her career as Frank, Sarah has to requisition food and medical supplies from Confederate townsfolk who don't support the Union cause. Do you think this is fair, even if Frank paid them for their goods?
8. Sarah shoots a woman's hand on one of her requisition missions but later regrets it. Was she right to fire back in retaliation? Give examples from the text that argue both sides.
9. Author Marissa Moss uses tangible details to make the war more immediate. Think of some examples of her sensory writing—dealing with sight, sound, scent, touch, and taste—and list them here. What made the biggest impression?
10. As Frank, Sarah could do many things that a lady of the time was not allowed to do. Are there things today that a woman can't do but a man can, and vice versa? If you could pass as the opposite gender in the present, what would you do?
11. How does Sarah's position as a woman—from her life at home to her disguised army days—make her more sympathetic to the slaves she encounters? What experiences motivate her to fight for their freedom?

12. This book is pieced together using Sarah Edmonds' real journal entries and other primary source documents. Did this book inspire you to look them up? Are you curious to do research on your own about other female war heroes, like the Union nurse Clara Barton?
13. Over the course of the book, soldiers have conversations with each other about their motivation for enlisting. What were they fighting for? In the North? In the South? Do their reasons change as the war goes on? How did slavery factor into their respective causes?
14. Sarah mentions that escaped slaves are called "contrabands," which is a word normally used to describe stolen or illegal goods. Based on what you know of the time period, why were slaves seen as property and not people? How could vocabulary contribute to their dehumanization?
15. Both sides—Union and Confederate—underestimated the time and effort it would take to fight the Civil War. What were some of the consequences of this way of thinking? Were soldiers right to desert, given the conditions?
16. Sarah tells her story in the first person, meaning we see the war unfold through her eyes. Do you think she is a reliable narrator? What biases might she have that separate this book from a strictly factual account?