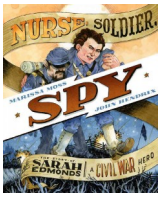
Nurse, Soldier, Spy: A Civil War Hero



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This year marks the 150th anniversary of the start of the Civil War. This isn't an anniversary to "celebrate", but such a pivotal conflict in our nation's history is certainly one to commemorate and learn more about through the amazing stories told by the people involved. Sarah Edmonds was one of those people.

In the picturebook biography Nurse, Soldier, Spy: The Story of Sarah Edmonds, A Civil War Hero, we learn that when she was just 16, Sarah disguised herself as a man and ran away from her home in Canada to escape an arranged marriage. She came to the United States and assumed the name Frank Thompson. When the call came in Michigan for young men to join the Union army, "Frank" wanted to sign up as a way to thank the country she had been living in for the last three years. While the other soldiers teased Frank about her small feet, no one ever guessed that Frank was actually a woman. Frank distinguished herself on the battle field and as a nurse tending to the wounded. Her courage was noted and when one of the best spies for the Union army was captured and killed, the chaplain came to Frank with the invitation to take on this risky position, saying: "I think you're just the man to replace him." Frank accepted and disguised herself as a freed slave in order to cross over into enemy territory. Several times slaves helped Frank keep her secret identity. Her appreciation of their assistance fueled her determination to repay them and help attain freedom for all.

At the end of this book, recommended for children in grades 1 though 4,
a note from the author summarizes the remainder of Frank's life, why she needed to resume her identity as a woman, and the work she did as the manager of an orphanage and developer of a home for disabled veterans. A note from the illustrator enhanced my appreciation for the drawings in the story, which are cartoonlike, but dramatic and compelling and filled with details of the time period. This book also contains a glossary, bibliography and index.

For another look at the life of Sarah Edmonds, see: Sarah Emma Edmonds Was a Great Pretender: The True Story of a Civil War Spy, a second picturebook biography of her published in 2011. Sarah's life also is detailed in the book, I'll Pass For Your Comrade: Women Soldiers in the Civil War, recommended for children in grades 5-8.

To learn more about what Bloomington and Monroe County was like before, during and after the Civil War, take a look at the variety of original artifacts the Monroe County Public Library has helped gather together in an online collection called: At War and At Home: A Digital Collection of our County's Civil War History. And the Indiana State Library has an online exhibit of Indiana Civil War Photographs. Like the biographies of people who lived during that time period, these resources help make history come alive for all students, younger - and older alike.

Posted by Lisa C. on September 1, 2011

Oh, the Thinks You Can Think

Nonfiction

Picture Book

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