



THE HISTORY CHANNEL.



Study Guide for *Band of Brothers* – Episode 1: Currahee

INTRO: *Band of Brothers* is a ten-part video series dramatizing the history of one company of American paratroopers in World War Two—E Company, 506th Regiment, 101st Airborne, known as “Easy Company.” Although the company’s first experience in real combat did not come until June 1944 (D-Day), this exemplary group fought in some of the war’s most harrowing battles. *Band of Brothers* depicts not only the heroism of their exploits but also the extraordinary bond among men formed in the crucible of war.

The first episode begins with the company in England in June 1944, preparing for the Allied forces’ assault on Normandy. Most of the episode consists of a flashback that traces the history of Easy Company up to that point: its training at Camp Toccoa in Georgia, at Camp Mackale in North Carolina, and at Aldbourne in England. The story focuses on the intense demands of the company’s training and the soldiers’ ambivalence about their commanding officer, Lt. Herbert Sobel. Lt. Richard Winters emerges as leader within the company.

CURRICULUM LINKS: *Band of Brothers* can be used in history classes.

NOTE TO EDUCATORS: *Band of Brothers* is appropriate as a supplement to units on World War Two, not as a substitute for material providing a more general explanation of the war’s causes, effects, and greater historical significance. As with war itself, it contains graphic violence and language; it is not for the squeamish. Mature senior high school students, however, will find in it a powerful evocation of the challenges of war and the experience of U.S. soldiers in the final phase of the European theatre.

STANDARDS: *Band of Brothers* fulfills the following National Standards for History for grades 5-12: chronological thinking, historical comprehension, historical analysis and interpretations.

PRE-VIEWING ACTIVITIES:

Band of Brothers is a compelling story which reveals a great deal about World War Two. However, as it is the story of one U.S. Army company, it reflects only a few of the war’s many facets. Topics such as the war’s origins, the prosecution of the war up to 1943, the Pacific Theater, the Final Solution are beyond its scope. To put *Band of Brothers* in historical context, review a timeline of the entire war. Students should be able to answer questions such as: When did the war begin? When did the United States enter the conflict? What were the war’s major causes and what major events led up to the start of military hostilities? Who were the belligerents and what were they fighting for (or against)? What was the Holocaust and how was it part of the war as a whole? What was D-Day and what was its significance in the war’s progression? How and when did the war end in Europe and in Asia?



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CRITICAL VIEWING QUESTIONS:

1. What kind of training did Easy Company experience under Lt. Sobel? What were the pros and cons of his strict, unrelenting command? Do you get the sense that it prepared them well for battle? Why or why not?
2. How would you characterize the backgrounds the men of Easy Company? Was it a homogenous group or a diverse one? What did the men have in common? What incidents revealed divisions or differences among the men? What evidence is there of class differences among the men?
3. One soldier calls Lt. Sobel a “genius,” while others clearly dislike him and come to distrust him. What options were open to the Easy Company soldiers for dealing with this?
4. Why do you think Sobel tried to censure Winters? Why did Winters insist on a court martial? What did this incident reveal about Winters’s standing among the men of the company?
5. The title of this episode is “Currahee,” a Cherokee word meaning “stands alone” and a word that became the cry of the 506th Paratroopers Regiment (which included Easy Company). One reason this became a rallying cry for the paratroopers was that they trained at Currahee Mountain when they were at Camp Toccoa. Beyond that, why might they have chosen a motto of “We stand alone, together.” What do you think this meant to the men?

ADVANCED VIEWING QUESTIONS:

1. *Band of Brothers* adapts a book by the historian Stephen Ambrose, based on interviews and scholarly research. How does it affect our understanding of the past to experience it through a dramatic reenactment? Does it matter that the words spoken by the actors were written as dramatic dialogue and do not come from the historical record? What’s the difference between something that is *historical* and a *work of history*? In what ways are the goals and needs of filmmakers different from those of people who write history books?
2. There are almost no women in *Band of Brothers*. Women, however, were affected by World War Two as much as men were. American women worked in the war industries in the United States and hundreds of thousands served in the women’s divisions of the U.S. armed forces. What is the effect of focusing on the war as essentially a contest fought by male military combatants? What aspects of the war does this leave out?
3. Why do World War Two stories enjoy such widespread popularity—in books, movies, public commemorations? What does this tell us about the war, and what does it tell us about our own times?
4. *Band of Brothers* is not a documentary. It was made as a work of dramatic entertainment. The story—and it *is* a story—depicts handsome, earnest young men who face daunting challenges and bravely achieve great victories. Does *Band of Brothers* romanticize the story of Easy Company? Does it romanticize World War Two, or war in general? Is it significant that The History Channel’s on-air broadcast of *Band of Brothers* was sponsored by the U.S. Army?



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NAMES:

Richard Winters
Lewis Nixon
Herbert Sobel
Donald Malarkey
William Guarnere
Joseph Liebgott
Edward “Babe” Heffron
David Webster
Harry Welsh
Joseph Toye
Joseph Ramirez
Darrell “Shifty” Powers
Frank Perconte
Ronald Spiers
Robert Sink
Thomas Meehan
Robert Strayer

EXTENDED ACTIVITY:

The episode ends with Easy Company flying to Normandy for the D-Day invasion. Write a journal entry recording the thoughts of one of the soldiers during that flight. Reflect on both their training and preparation up to that point and feelings about the military engagement they were about to experience.

RESOURCES - WEBSITES:

<http://www.hbo.com/band/landing/currahee.html> - HBO.com’s Band of Brothers website
<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/wwii/wwii.htm> - World War Two Documents: The Avalon Project of the Yale Law School
http://www.archives.gov/digital_classroom/lessons/powers_of_persuasion/powers_of_persuasion.html - Powers of Persuasion: Poster Art of World War II – On-line Educational Program of the National Archives

RESOURCES - BOOKS:

Stephen E. Ambrose, *Band of Brothers: E Company, 506th Regiment, 101st Airborne from Normandy to Hitler’s Eagle’s Nest* (New York, 1992)
David Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (1999)
John Keegan, *Six Armies in Normandy: From D-Day to the Liberation of Paris, June 6-August 25, 1944* (1982)