



THE HISTORY CHANNEL.



Study Guide for *Band of Brothers* – Episode 9: *Why We Fight*

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.

In the ninth episode, Easy Company finally enters Germany in April 1945, finding very little resistance as they proceed. There they are impressed by the industriousness of the defeated locals and gain respect for their humanity. But the G.I.s are then confronted with the horror of an abandoned Nazi concentration camp in the woods, which the locals claim not to have known anything about. Here the story of Easy Company is connected with the broader narrative of the war—the ideology of the Third Reich and Hitler’s plan to exterminate the Jews.

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, and 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 was the significance of the string quartet playing Beethoven at the beginning and end of the episode?
2. What is the significance of Capt. Nixon's statement that he never fired a gun in combat? Why does he get demoted?
3. What ideas do the men have about their life when they get back home? How are those ideas shaped by their experience in the war?
4. What is the significance of the framed portrait that Nixon sees when he goes into the German house?
5. Why were the G.I.s so surprised when they found the concentration camp?
6. At the end of the episode, Nixon walks through the concentration camp and sees the wife of the SS officer whose house he had walked through, and she is now burying corpses. She and Nixon exchange long glances. What do you think each one was thinking?
7. At the end of the episode what did the musician's violin and violin case symbolize?
8. What were the major themes of this episode?

ADVANCED VIEWING QUESTIONS:

1. The on-screen text at the close of the episode mentions the "Final Solution" and the "German Question." What were these?
2. At the end of the episode, what did the G.I.'s think about the Germans? How did they perceive the difference between the Nazis and the German people, or didn't they?
3. *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?
4. 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?
5. *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?
6. 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?



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NAMES:

Richard Winters
Lewis Nixon
Donald Malarkey
Lynn “Buck” Compton
Joseph Liebgott
Edward “Babe” Heffron
Joseph Ramirez
Darrell “Shifty” Powers
Frank Perconte
Ronald Speirs
Col. Robert Sink

EXTENDED ACTIVITIES:

Sending and receiving letters was one of the most important ways soldiers coped with the loneliness and fear of war and with the pain of missing loved ones. For historians, such letters mix personal stories with important firsthand accounts of the war’s major (and minor) developments. Imagine you were a member of Easy Company; write a letter (or several) to a loved one back home, describing your experience in the German towns of Sturzelburg, Buchloe, and Thalham.

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)