

# Unit Overview: Parent Guide

## Behind the Scenes, Grade 7

### What is the goal of this unit?

Your child will read fiction and nonfiction texts about the Civil War, a tumultuous period in our country's history. She will examine different perspectives through various accounts - both real and fictional - to more deeply understand the time period.

### What topics and skills is your seventh grader learning in this unit?

- Civil war
- Historical perspective
- Point of view
- Compare and contrast
- Informational writing
- Research
- Primary and secondary sources

### What tasks will your child engage in to help them consider the topics and skills of this unit?

- **Culminating Writing Task:** Your child will bring together all her learning near the end of the unit by writing an essay in response to the prompt: *In the Preface to her memoir Behind the Scenes: Or, Thirty Years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House, Elizabeth Keckley introduces two topics, slavery and Mrs. Lincoln. What is Keckley's position on slavery and Mrs. Lincoln? How does she develop and support her position on each topic?*
- **Extension Task:** Your child will extend her learning by investigating various accounts of the American Civil War and prepare a presentation that compares and contrasts the different accounts on a selected topic.

### Your child will read these texts and watch these videos:

Text Title	Author/Source	How it is used in the Unit
<i>Behind the Scenes, Or Thirty Years a Slave and Four Years in the White House</i>	Elizabeth Keckley	Main text of the unit
"A Fitting Friendship Between Dressmaker and Mary Todd Lincoln"	Jeanne Kolker	Student text

"The Great Escape from Slavery of Ellen and William Craft"	Marian Smith Holmes (SmithsonianMag.com)	Student text
"Notable Visitors: Frederick Douglass"	The Lehrman Institute (Mr. Lincoln's White House)	Student text
"The People Could Fly"	Virginia Hamilton	Student text
<i>Harriet Jacobs and Elizabeth Keckley: The Material and Emotional Realities of Childhood in Slavery</i>	EDSITEment!	Student text
"O Captain! My Captain"	Walt Whitman	Student text
Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave	Frederick Douglass	Student text
"Mary Todd Lincoln – Influence Peddler"	Biography.com	Read aloud
"Mary Todd Lincoln – Mini Biography"	Biography.com	Read aloud
"Mary Todd Lincoln – The White House"	Biography.com	Read aloud

### Ideas for discussing the American Civil War and historical perspective

- What was the American Civil War?
- Who was fighting and why?
- How might the perspectives of the North be different from the perspectives of the South?
- How might slaves and indigenous peoples have viewed the Civil War?
- How might women have viewed the Civil War?
- What was the outcome of the Civil War?
- Do the tensions of the Civil War still exist today? Have you read or heard of any current events that can be tied back to that time in history?

Want to deepen your and your child's knowledge on the topic being studied?

Here is a suggested book list:

Title	Author
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Hidden Figures	Margot Lee Shetterly
Heart and Soul: The Story of America and African Americans	Kadir Nelson
The Boys' War: Confederate And Union Soldiers Talk about the Civil War	Jim Murphy
Chasing Lincoln's Killer	James L. Swanson

## What does independent reading look like at home?

Independent reading gives your child the opportunity to read and interact with books that are on her reading level and that address topics that she chooses. Supporting independent reading at home helps build your child's confidence with reading, her reading stamina and reading achievement, and will help her do better in school.

Here are some ways you can encourage independent reading at home:

- Let your child pick out books that she finds interesting
- Prioritize reading. Protect time every day for reading. Before bedtime is a great time to read!
- Read together
- Read aloud
- Discuss what you're reading. Ask questions like:
  - Tell me about what you read today.
  - What did you like about it?
  - What didn't you like about it?
  - What did you learn?
  - What questions do you have about what you read?
  - What didn't you understand about what you read?
  - What do you want to learn more about after reading?
  - How does what you've read connect to other things you've read?