Unlocking the Past: Making History Come Alive

Looking for ways to engage students with Social Studies? Ways to make all those statistics, dates, treaties, and cultural trends tangible and exciting to them? Methods that make research FUN?

It can be as simple as this: Make history a human drama.

AdLit.org, a teen literary webpage run by PBS affiliate, WETA, has combined forces with YA historical fiction author L. M. Elliott, national adolescent literature expert Dr. Denise Ousley, and Fairfax County Teacher of the Year Jamie Sawatsky, to create a themed website to provide proven techniques, projects, and resources to do just that. The focus is on WWII.

Go to [http://www.adlit.org/unlocking_the_past/](http://www.adlit.org/unlocking_the_past/) to find:

1. Podcasts by L.M. Elliott discussing the treasure hunt magic of research. Primary documents—film, photos, memoirs, letters, songs—fuel students’ empathy and imagination. “They remind young people of the human beings who struggled to survive the events they study for standardized tests,” says Elliott. Adding well-researched historical novels to social studies curriculum dramatizes the time period in such a way that students are emotionally engaged with the characters and ponder how they might have responded to situations as they follow the protagonist’s journey through historic events. The experience invests them in the time period. Imagination becomes a catalyst for learning. For links to webpages on the historical eras of her novels, including *Under a War-torn Sky* and *A Troubled Peace*, also see: [http://www.lmelliott.com/about_teachersandlib.php](http://www.lmelliott.com/about_teachersandlib.php)

2. Taped interviews with Jamie Sawatsky about the genesis and success of the after-school Oral History Club and the WWII Day he has created at Rocky Run Middle School in Chantilly, VA. [http://www.adlit.org/unlocking_the_past/oral_history/](http://www.adlit.org/unlocking_the_past/oral_history/). More than 100 veterans and survivors come to Rocky Run annually to spend the day talking with students. Also included are interviews with students about the process of preparing tailor-made questions for the WWII Day participants and how moved and inspired the students were by their answers and personal stories.

3. Innovative and creative teaching strategies and materials developed by Denise Ousley, professor of education at University of North Carolina-Wilmington that promote critical thinking and deeper, broader, and more lasting comprehension of literature and history. One such strategy, the Brown Bag Exam, offers hands-on opportunities to connect historical objects to the themes, emotions, and lessons of literature. [http://www.adlit.org/unlocking_the_past/brown_bag_exams/](http://www.adlit.org/unlocking_the_past/brown_bag_exams/)

4. A WWII glossary; a pre-study synopsis of what lead to WWII, plus comprehensive reading lists and extension activities for the study of WWII developed by Dr. Joan Kaywell, Professor of English Education at the University of South Florida and past president of ALAN, the adolescent literature arm of NCTE (National Council of Teachers of English). For Dr. Kaywell’s strategies see: [http://www.adlit.org/unlocking_the_past/related_readings/](http://www.adlit.org/unlocking_the_past/related_readings/) and [http://www.adlit.org/unlocking_the_past/extension_activities/](http://www.adlit.org/unlocking_the_past/extension_activities/)

Other hand-outs will be available at the panel, including a list of do’s for librarians by Ann Voss, Head Librarian, Fairfax High School; Adjunct Professor School of Library and Information Science, Catholic University of America; and past chair of the Virginia Readers’ Choice award.
Laura Malone Elliott’s historical novel, *Under a War-Torn Sky*, tells the story of a B-24 bomber pilot who is shot down behind enemy lines and is saved by the French Resistance. Winner of Border’s 2001 Original Voices Award for Young Adult Literature, *Under a War-Torn Sky* is a National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) 2002 Notable Social Studies Trade Book for Young People.

Her next young adult novel, *Flying South*, will be published in May 2003. A first-person narrative told by an 11-year-old girl, *Flying South* is about developing friendships and growing up in 1968, a turbulent year marked by the assassinations of the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy, the Vietnam protests, and the civil rights riots.

Elliott is also the author of *Hunter’s Best Friend at School*, a picture book which addresses friendship and peer pressure. This is the first in a series of books best friends Hunter and Stripe.

A senior writer with the *Washingtonian* magazine for 18 years, Elliott wrote often on teenagers, children, and families and issues important to them. She recently reduced her work at the magazine, becoming a contributing editor, to concentrate on her fiction writing.

Elliott’s husband is a high school English teacher in Fairfax County, and they and their two children live in Northern Virginia.
Suggested Activities

1. Choose one of the characters in the book. Write an in-depth study of the character, describing his or her physical appearance, behavior, purpose, and relationship with other characters. Describe the conflicts your character faced in the book and how these conflicts were resolved.

2. When Henry parachuted into unknown territory “all he knew was that west was the way home.” Trace Henry’s journeys through the book. How many miles or kilometers did Henry travel?

3. Interview a veteran of any war or conflict. Compare his or her experiences with those of the characters in the book.

4. Make a list of the decisions Henry had to make in the book. Do you agree with his choices? What would you have done?

5. Write a letter to a friend, telling your friend why he or she should read this book. Try to word your letter in such a way that your friend will want to rush right out and get the book. Use specific details from the book to arouse your friend’s interest. Of course, you will not want to give away the ending.

6. Use a map of the world and mark the cities, villages, and countries that are mentioned in the book.

7. We don’t know what happened to many of the people who helped Henry in Europe. Select one of the characters and write what might have happened.

8. Henry and many characters in the book were teenagers. Interview family members or friends who were in their teens during World War II. Ask them what life was like for them at that time.

9. Use the author’s descriptions to create a drawing of a Nissen hut or the B-24 bomber. Use the library, the Internet, or another resource to compare your drawing with a photo of the hut or the bomber.

10. Imagine that you are far from home and things are not going well. Write a letter to a family member or friend telling him or her how you are doing, what you miss most at home, and what you are looking forward to when you return home.

Research Questions

1. What countries were members of the Allied powers; what countries were members of the Axis powers? Which countries were neutral? Who were the leaders of these countries? Select one country from each group and answer the following questions.
   a. Why did each country become involved or not become involved in the war?
   b. How did the war’s outcome affect each country?

2. How would the world be different today if the Axis powers had won?

3. Of the countries that fought in the war:
   - Which country was at war longest?
   - Which country had the most casualties?


5. How did World War II change the role of women? Compare the role of women in the armed forces in the 1940s with the role of women in the armed forces today.

6. During World War II, the United States established the Office of Price Administration. One of this office’s duties was to ration scarce products. What products were rationed? What did Americans use as substitutes for the products that were in short supply?

7. Compare the B-24 bombers and crews used in World War II with today’s B-2 bombers.
8. Compare the treatment of African American enlisted personnel during World War II, for example the Tuskegee Airmen, to the treatment of African American enlisted personnel in military life today.

9. Many World War II songs are still well known today. Many of the songs fall into three categories: songs about patriotism, songs about the soldiers and the war, and songs about longing for home. What ideals did the songs promote? What role did the songs play during wartime?

10. What connection did the following have with World War II:
   - The French Resistance
   - Charles de Gaulle
   - Vichy
   - Marshal Philippe Pétain
   - Maquis
   - La Malice

Discussion Questions

1. Think about the words and images that made strong impressions on you as you read the book. Which part of the novel made the strongest impression? Why? What words or phrases did the author use to create those impressions?

2. What did you learn about personal risk in the story?

3. What did you learn about World War II in the story?

4. Did you have a favorite French expression in the book? What was it and what does it mean?

5. Many young people participated in the French Resistance at great personal peril. Could you ever imagine yourself fighting for a cause that could have such deadly consequences? Why or why not?

6. If the author writes a sequel to Under a War-Torn Sky, what would you want to know?

7. What would you ask the author if you had a chance to meet her?

8. The poem called “High Flight” is quoted early in the book. The last few lines read, “… while with silent, lifting mind I’ve trod/The high untrespassed sanctity of space,/Put out my hand, and touched the face of God.” What do you think the poem means to Henry, and why do you think the author included it in the book?

9. There are two very interesting dogs in the story, Henry’s pet Skippy and the Gestapo’s Doberman. What do these creatures represent in the story?

Books by Laura Malone Elliott


Novels by L. M. Elliott
A Selected Bibliography

A Troubled Peace
Tr 978-0-06-074427-4
$16.99 ($22.50)
Lb 978-0-06-074428-1
$17.89 ($23.89)
This powerful sequel to L. M. Elliott’s award-winning Under a War-Torn Sky chronicles a young American pilot’s struggle with post-traumatic stress disorder and his journey to find a lost boy of war.

Give Me Liberty
Tr 978-0-06-074421-2
$16.99 ($19.99)
Pb 978-0-06-074423-6
$7.99 ($8.75)
“A rich and robust piece of historical literature.”
—School Library Journal
“A lively account of the times with a likable narrator and solid action.” —Kirkus Reviews

Annie, Between the States
Pb 978-0-06-001213-7
$7.99 ($8.99)
“Part Ken Burns’ The Civil War, part Gone with the Wind . . . will be devoured by fans of historical fiction.” —ALA Booklist
“A strong and memorable heroine, romance, and an understanding of both sides of the conflict.” —School Library Journal
IRA/CBC Teachers’ Choice
New York Public Library Book for the Teen Age

About the Author
L. M. Elliott is the author of several highly praised historical novels for young readers, including Annie, Between the States, Give Me Liberty, and A Troubled Peace. She is also the author of three picture books about a raccoon named Hunter: Hunter’s Best Friend at School, Hunter and Stripe and the Soccer Showdown, and Hunter’s Big Sister. A popular speaker, L. M. Elliott makes many memorable visits to schools and libraries each year, and teachers and libraries rave about her ability to make history come alive. She lives in Great Falls, Virginia. You can visit her online at www.lmelliot.com.

Katherine Tegen Books
An Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers
www.harperteen.com
For exclusive information on your favorite authors and artists, visit www.authortracker.com.

To order, please contact your HarperCollins sales representative, call 1-800-C-Harper, or fax your order to 1-800-822-4090.
Prices and availability subject to change.

Guide prepared by Linda Z. Hamilton, Ph.D., Leawood, Kansas.
About the Book

A Troubled Peace, the sequel to L. M. Elliott’s award-winning Under a War-Torn Sky, chronicles nineteen-year-old U.S. Air Force pilot Henry Forester’s adventures in France from March through July 1945. Although Henry safely returned from World War II to his family’s tidewater Virginia farm the previous year, he is scarred emotionally by the horrors of war, and he suffers from nightmares and flashbacks. Leaving his parents, dog, and girlfriend, Patsy, Henry sneaks back into France in an attempt to find Pierre Dubois, the young boy who once saved his life, and thus fulfill his promise, find salvation, and move on with life.

Discussion Questions

1. In chapter one, Patsy says to Henry, “You seem so angry . . . so haunted.” Why is Henry angry and what is he haunted by? What disorder is Henry suffering from? What are its characteristics? What recent events in U.S. history have resulted in people suffering from the same ailment that afflicts Henry?

2. Do you think Henry’s plan to illegally sneak back into war-torn France is wise? Is he well prepared? Why does Henry’s mother encourage him to go?

3. What valuable lessons has Henry learned from his parents, and what traits has he inherited from them that help him during his dangerous trip through France? Make a list of characteristics that you have inherited from your parents. Are some of these characteristics positive, while others are negative? Be honest in your appraisal.

4. What is rationing? What items in the United States and France were rationed during World War II and why? What is the black market? Why do the police think Henry is a black marketer? What are bribes?

5. Why does Henry give Pierre his good luck marble? How does Henry get the marble in the first place? What role does the marble play in Henry finding Pierre, and how does it cement family relations at the end of the story? Do you have a treasured lucky object?

6. Henry’s heroes are Captain Dan, Billy, le patron, and Madame Gauloise. Who are these people, and why do they matter so much to Henry?

7. In chapter six, the restaurant owner in Marseille says, “The world is full of grays, in-betweens. Especially France right now.” What does he mean? Who or what are the RMAs, turncoats, collaborators, maquis, Vichy government, Free France, Milice, Gestapo, and Allies? Were all Germans bad and all Allies good? Are people and issues ever only bad or good, or do all things have gray areas?

8. Discuss the roles that women play in Henry’s life and in the war. Why couldn’t Henry’s mother be a doctor? What is Claudette’s role in Henry’s quest? Why do you think Henry gives the scarf to Claudette and pressed lilies-of-the-valley to his mother?

9. Sadly, wars in general—and World War II in particular—are characterized by torture and the loss of human life. Who in this story is tortured? Is torture always physical, or can it take other forms? What are Ravensbruck, Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen, and Buchenwald? Who was sent to these horrible places and why?

10. When Thurman calls Henry his friend in chapter eighteen, Henry thinks, “Friends? No way. He and Thurman just negotiated a mutual blackmail.” What does Henry mean? Who were the OSS and the SOE? Does Henry intend to “rat” on those Frenchmen who helped him survive? Do you think he should?

11. Who are the Absents? Who do they hurt more, you or the object of your hatred? Why are they important to Henry?

12. Research the historical figure of Madame Zlatin. What did she do during the war? What causes Henry to ponder in chapter twenty-five, “But fate wasn’t fair-minded, was it?” What happened at Hotel Lutetia? Is life fair? Should it be?

13. In chapter twenty, Orwell says, “Peace? Peace is not that easy, that finite, my boy. War ends; then it takes a long time to negotiate a real truce.” What do you think Orwell means? What problems come with peace? How is the United States now experiencing the difficulties of negotiating peace and assessing the price of war?

14. What examples of hatred and revenge can you find in A Troubled Peace? Have you experienced these emotions? Who do they hurt more, you or the object of your feelings?

Extension Activities

1. Map Quest. On a map of France, find the cities and rivers mentioned in A Troubled Peace and follow Henry’s quest for Pierre Dubois. Include the following: Annecy, Chabéuil, Grenoble, Lyon, Marseille, the Massif Central, Montélimar, Morvan, Nîmes, Paris, the Pyrenees, the Rhône River, the Seine River, Valence, Vassieux, and Vercors. Famous Parisian buildings and monuments are also mentioned. Locate them on a map of Paris and look at photos of these magnificent structures. Which ones would you most like to see?

2. The Art of War. What is the Louvre and what does it contain? Who is Picasso and why is he important in A Troubled Peace? What is the Mona Lisa? After reading about the Louvre and its contents, select a work of art that is housed there and learn about it and its creator. What attempts were made during World War II to safeguard the contents of the Louvre? For a broader understanding, watch the documentary film The Rape of Europa.

3. Tell Me a Story. Albert Camus, Simone de Beauvoir, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, Ernest Hemingway, George Orwell, and Jean-Paul Sartre are all famous authors mentioned in A Troubled Peace. Choose one of these authors and research his or her life during World War II. Then read one of this author’s works and think about how it relates to L. M. Elliott’s novel.

4. Living History. Interview a World War II veteran to learn firsthand about his or her experiences during that period of history. Ask him or her some of the questions you have after reading A Troubled Peace.

5. Bombs Away. Learn to recognize the various Allied and German airplanes used during World War II. Airplane spotters could recognize them by their silhouettes—can you? Messerschmitts, B17s, B24s, and Spitfires are mentioned in A Troubled Peace. What other planes were flown and what were the uses for each?

6. An Army Travels on Its Stomach. The subject of war often brings to mind such things as weapons or combat, but what about the more mundane aspects, like food? How did soldiers get their food during World War II? What did they eat? What are K-rations? What is Spam? Try sampling Spam and some of the other foods included in K-rations. What are CARE packages, and how has their purpose changed since World War II?
About this book: Just nineteen years old, Henry Forester is the youngest pilot in his Air Force squadron. Still, he's one of their best fliers, facing Hitler’s Luftwaffe in the war-torn skies above France. But when his plane is shot down on a mission behind enemy lines, Henry finds himself on a whole new battleground. Wounded, hungry, and afraid, he struggles toward freedom on foot, relying on the kindness of ordinary French citizens and the cunning of members of the French Resistance to reach the next town alive. Each day brings him nearer to home and closer to danger. Yet even as Henry struggles for his own survival in a hostile country, he quickly grows to realize the great peril that surrounds all the French people, and to admire the strength and determination of the freedom fighters who risk death to protect him.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Henry travels hundreds of miles on foot to escape capture by Nazi troops. Using a map of France, trace his route from the scene of his bailing out to his final rescue.

2. During the course of the novel, Henry travels two “odysseys” - one is his physical escape and the other is a journey of personal discovery. How are the two odysseys linked? What does he discover about mankind and himself along the way? How does he change?

3. Henry’s father, Clayton, is a harsh, never-ending voice in Henry’s mind. How does this help Henry and how does it hurt him? Why do you think Clayton is the way he is? In the end, Henry realizes that his father had done the “wrong things for the right reasons.” What does he mean by that?

4. Sometimes characters personify a theme or idea. What could Pierre symbolize? What could Billy or Madame Gauloise represent?

5. To help a flier escape, the Resistance often needed many people to play-act a variety of roles in a sequence of carefully planned events. These exchanges had to happen quickly and fluidly. In chapter eight, Henry is rescued by a series of strangers. How many are there? Who are they and what roles do they perform? How do you think Henry felt when he realizes, “He’d been handled, just like a hot potato. He was a package no one wanted to be caught holding.”

6. To survive, American fliers had to put their lives into the hands of complete strangers, many of whom spoke no English. Recall a time when you had to count on strangers to help you or your family. Write a short narrative about the experience.

7. The novel includes many passages of French dialogue. What does the author accomplish by doing this? How would it have been different if the dialogue were only in English? (continued)
8. Aiding fliers was risky. If caught by Nazi troops or turned in by a collaborator, a French person would be executed. His or her family might be arrested, questioned, and killed. Why do you think the French took such terrible risks? How is this kind of courage different from the bravery needed in battle? How is it similar?

9. Compare Patsy and Claudette. How are they alike? How are they different? Do you think witnessing war first hand might make Patsy more like Claudette?

10. Why do you think the old German soldier releases Henry?

11. Think about your reactions to the novel as you read it. Do you think that there is an overall lesson or moral in the story?

12. Imagine that you have been asked to write a description with some commentary for the back cover. Create one paragraph that tells the reader what the story is about and gives him/her a reason to read it.

13. Henry has to leave behind those who have helped him, not knowing their fate. What do you think happens to Madame Gaulloise? To Pierre? To Claudette? Outline your own sequel. (The author is currently writing hers!)

### ADDITIONAL GUIDES AND WEB PAGES

*The Fairfax Network* interviewed **L.M. Elliott** for their program “Meet the Author”

This excellent activity guide accompanied the program:  

For the British edition of *Under a War-torn Sky*, Usborne Publishing produced a webpage with film clips and personal stories of Resistance fighters. Go to [http://www.usborne-quicklinks.com/](http://www.usborne-quicklinks.com/); click on United Kingdom; enter the keyword war-torn in the search prompt. Or type in:  
[http://usborne-quicklinks.com/uk/uk_entity_pages/uk_all_links_no_text.asp?lvl=1&id=1943](http://usborne-quicklinks.com/uk/uk_entity_pages/uk_all_links_no_text.asp?lvl=1&id=1943)

Finally, visit the author’s website [http://www.lmelliott.com](http://www.lmelliott.com) for a list of WWII books. One of the best catalogues of WWII websites is compiled by **PBS**: [http://www.besthistorysites.net/WWII.shtml](http://www.besthistorysites.net/WWII.shtml)

### HISTORIC FIGURES AND ITEMS

**FOR FURTHER STUDY**

1. President  
   Franklin D. Roosevelt  
2. Prime Minister  
   Winston Churchill  
3. General Charles de Gaulle  
   (and the Free French)  
4. Jean Moulin (and the Resistance)  
5. Philippe Pétain (and Vichy France)  
6. Hitler (and the Third Reich)  
7. American B-24 and B-17 bombers, Mustang and Thunderbolt fighters; Junkers and Messerschmitts of the Luftwaffe  
8. D-Day  
9. The home front: black-outs, rationing, scrap drives, war bonds, propaganda slogans

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR