

TEACHER RESOURCE

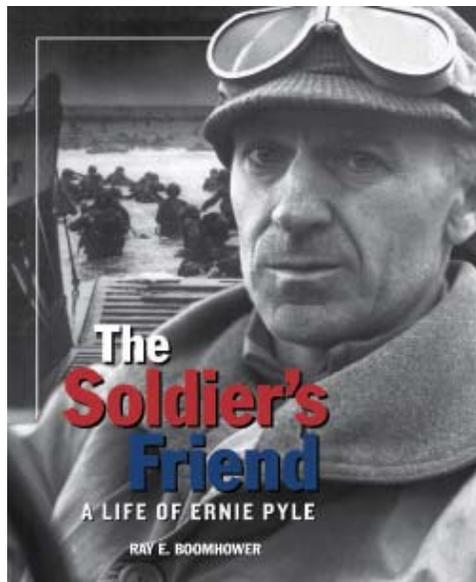
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for the Indiana Historical Society Press publication:

The Soldier's Friend

A Life of Ernie Pyle

by Ray E. Boomhower



INDIANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Overview/Description

Hoosier Ernest Taylor Pyle (1900–45), better known as Ernie, was a famous World War II correspondent. His newspaper reports on the everyday lives of American soldiers from the frontline during the war not only brought him fame but also the respect of readers and soldiers alike. Unlike many reporters at the time who strictly wrote about the war itself, Pyle engaged readers with warm tales about the average soldier that struck a chord with the common person back home. His writing revealed a human side to the war. Pyle risked his life as he not only talked to the soldiers but also dug ditches with them, shared rations, and dove for cover when enemy planes flew overhead. For his wartime stories, Pyle won a Pulitzer Prize in 1944. One of his best known works, “The Death of Captain Waskow,” was made into a movie, *The Story of G.I. Joe*. Thousands of Americans mourned when the beloved and brave correspondent was killed by enemy fire on the Japanese island of Ie Shima near the end of World War II.

In this lesson students will read *The Soldier’s Friend: A Life of Ernie Pyle* by Ray E. Boomhower (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society Press, 2006) and complete multidisciplinary activities that provide cross-curricular options in history and literature.

Academic Standards for Social Studies

- **Indiana Standards:** USH.5.3, USH.5.6, USH.9.2, LIT.3.2, LIT.3.3
- **National Standards (National Council for Social Studies Standards):** I Culture, II Time, Continuity, and Change, V Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

Social Studies/Historical Concepts

World War II, conflict, courage, heroism, patriotism, democracy, civic responsibility, culture

Learning/Instructional Objectives

Students will:

- read and discuss the book, *The Soldier’s Friend: A Life of Ernie Pyle* by Ray E. Boomhower
- evaluate Pyle’s role in providing news about World War II through his newspaper columns
- examine copies of primary source documents and distinguish between a primary and secondary source
- interpret primary source history documents
- complete a written document analysis worksheet
- define and identify situational irony examples in Pyle’s work. (Situational irony occurs when something unexpected happens or something seems inappropriate for the situation.)
- create a chronological time line of main events and accomplishments in Pyle’s life
- create a chronological time line of key events from the beginning to the end of World War II in Europe and the Pacific region
- locate and analyze primary and secondary sources presenting differing perspectives of events and issues of the past
- locate and utilize sources found at archival collections and electronic sites
- create a travel brochure that incorporates research skills
- listen to an audio recording of Pyle’s work and discuss the column

Time Required

Multiple class periods depending on the classroom needs and the activities selected. Teachers may select from one or more of the following activities described below.

Materials Required

- Copies of *The Soldier’s Friend: A Life of Ernie Pyle*
- Student handouts: KWL chart, lyrics to the Alanis Morissette song “Ironic,” written document analysis worksheet, copies of Pyle’s column,

“A Dreadful Masterpiece,” and Pyle scavenger hunt questions

- “Ironic” song from the Alanis Morissette CD *Jagged Little Pill* or the song can be downloaded from iTunes at www.itunes.com (as of 5/15/2008).
- Whiteboard or projector and transparency sheet for introducing lesson
- Paper and pencils or pens for taking notes
- 8.5 x 14 inch white paper for creating time lines; colored paper for travel brochures; markers or colored pencils
- Computers with Internet access

Background/Historical Context

For millions of Americans during World War II who read his newspaper stories, journalist Ernie Pyle provided a human touch to the conflict as he wrote about the soldiers’ everyday lives and the realities of war. Pyle’s correspondence covered the daily life of the individual soldier rather than the “big picture.” He lived among the troops in the mud and rain, the snow and slush, and the heat of the North African desert. Like the soldiers, he risked his life in order to provide readers an accurate portrayal of the life of the American GI during the war. He saw the suffering of many and the corpses of thousands. Pyle’s willingness to suffer alongside the soldiers he wrote about won him their undying respect. At the time of his death, Pyle’s popularity was worldwide and his column appeared in 400 daily and 300 weekly newspapers.

Pyle was born in Dana, Indiana. His father was a farmer and carpenter, but Pyle knew at an early age that he did not want to follow in his father’s footsteps and that small town life was not for him. “Anything was better than looking at the south end of a horse going north,” Pyle said about his career choice. He attended Indiana University in Bloomington, where he worked on the school newspaper and found that journalism offered him “an escape from farm life and farm

animals.” However, Pyle dropped out of IU during his senior year when he was offered a job as a reporter with the *LaPorte Herald* for \$25 per week. His career at the *Herald* was short lived, however, as the *Washington Daily News* offered him a job at its Washington, D.C. newspaper four months later. He wrote a popular aviation column for four years before he became the newspaper’s managing editor.

Pyle grew restless and wanted to see the country so he persuaded his bosses to allow him to be a roving reporter. Pyle and his wife Jerry embarked on a five-year road trip across the United States and also traveled to Central and South America. They traveled by automobile, train, airplane, boat, and horse. Unlike many journalists at the time, Pyle preferred to write about ordinary people leading ordinary lives—the common person. Pyle always seemed to be able to uncover interesting things about these ordinary people to entertain his readers. His simple stories attracted a loyal readership across America. When he finished his columns on the road, he would mail them back to the *Daily News* office in Washington, D.C.

In 1940 Pyle traveled to England to report on the Battle of Britain. Over the next three years he journeyed to North Africa, Italy, and France to cover America’s involvement in the war. The army placed few restrictions on Pyle. He could talk to whomever he wanted—infantrymen, artillerymen, tank crews, doctors, nurses, etc. Pyle would visit a particular unit, live with the men, share their struggles, and talk to them about their experiences in and out of combat. He became used to going for weeks without a bath or shaving, washing his feet in his steel helmet, and sleeping on the ground. Pyle’s favorite topic was the everyday lives of the soldiers. For his war correspondence Pyle was awarded a Pulitzer Prize and also received a Purple Heart from the army. Readership of his column soared. By April 1943 his column appeared in 122 newspapers with a total circulation of nine million readers. In addition, during this time Pyle had three books published: *Ernie Pyle in England*, *Here is Your War* and *Brave Men*. One of his most famous stories,

describing the death of an officer named Captain Henry T. Waskow, was made into a movie, *The Story of G.I. Joe*. This film was released shortly after Pyle's death in 1945. Besides writing about the soldiers, Pyle also lobbied for them. On Pyle's suggestion, Congress passed a bill, nicknamed the "Ernie Pyle Bill" granting soldiers more pay for combat service.

After covering the war in Europe for several years and barely escaping death, Pyle traveled to the Pacific for his last assignment. Despite Pyle's initial reluctance, he agreed to go with the troops to capture Okinawa. Pyle wrote to a friend, "I've got a spooky feeling that I have been spared once more and that it would be asking for it to tempt fate again. . . . Didn't write a line for five days—just lay on my cot and let my imagination run wild about my own probable, personal fate in this war."

Pyle's worst fears were realized on April 18, 1945, when he was killed by Japanese gunfire on the island of Ie Shima, located just west of Okinawa. America's favorite war correspondent was dead, but his portraits of American soldiers during World War II continue to live on for readers today.

Source: *The Soldier's Friend: A Life of Ernie Pyle* by Ray E. Boomhower (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society Press, 2006)

Procedure for all activities

- Before reading the book, distribute a copy of the KWL chart (sample attached) to each student and make a transparency of the chart to show on an overhead projector when beginning the lesson (or create a similar chart on a whiteboard).
- The *K* column is used to show what students already know about a topic, the *W* column is used to show what students want to know about the topic, and the *L* column shows what they learned from an investigation of the topic.
- Inform students that they are going to read a book about the famous journalist Ernie Pyle.

- Ask if they know anything about him already and record these answers in the *K* column.
- Next, ask students for a minimum of five questions that they would like to know about Pyle. Have them record these questions answers in the *W* column of their KWL charts.
- Ask students to look for answers to their questions as they read the book.
- Explain that they will revisit the KWL charts after finishing the book and will then complete the *L* column indicating what they have learned.
- Provide students with some background/historical information about Pyle.

ACTIVITY 1:

Identify situational irony in Pyle's works

(two class periods)

First, ask students to define the word "irony." Write their answers on a whiteboard or use a transparency sheet and overhead projector. Then write Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary's definition for irony at www.m-w.com/dictionary/irony (as of 5/15/2008): "The use of words to express something other than and especially the opposite of the literal meaning." Explain that irony is a literary device and that Pyle used irony in some of his works, and that situational irony occurs when something happens that we would not expect or that seems inappropriate in a situation. For example, does the ending introduce a twist or surprise of any kind? The unfortunate irony of news is that war often generates "good stories," and famous journalists such as Pyle built their reputations on their reporting of war. Give students a few examples of irony such as the ones below or provide others:

- In Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Romeo drinks poison in Juliet's tomb because of his deep sadness without her, but viewers know that Juliet is deeply sleeping, not dead.
- A soldier is killed in action after the war has

already been declared over.

- A guy breaks a date with his girlfriend so he can go to the ballgame with his friends. Then he runs into his date at the concession stand who is with another guy.
- A student stays up all night studying for an important test. When he goes to class, he finds out the test has been postponed until the next day.

Ask students if they can think of any examples of irony from movies, television shows, books, etc. Next, distribute copies of the lyrics to Alanis Morissette's "Ironic" at www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/alanismorissette/ironic.html (as of 5/15/08). Play the song for students and have them follow the written lyrics. Ask them to underline or highlight instances of situational irony in the song. Discuss as a class examples of situational irony from the song.

Explain to students that Pyle used irony in many of his columns. Distribute copies of Pyle's column titled, "A Dreadful Masterpiece" to students at www.journalism.indiana.edu/resources/erniepyle/wartime-columns/a-dreadful-masterpiece/ (as of 5/15/2008).

Provide students with some historical context to the story. Pyle wrote this column nearly a year before the United States entered World War II. Pyle described the awe he felt as he watched the German air attacks on London.

Have students work with a partner to find at least three examples of irony in this story and then discuss as a class the ironies. Notice how the title itself is ironic.

Also, you may want to discuss the irony in Pyle's death. The infantrymen who retrieved Pyle's body after his death found in his pockets a draft of a column with many references to dead men that he intended to release when the war in Europe ended. In this column Pyle wrote that he would not forget the "unnatural sight of cold dead men scattered over the hillsides and in the ditches along the high rows of hedge throughout the world. . . dead men

by mass production—in one country after another—month after month and year after year. Dead men in winter and dead men in summer." Shortly before his death, Pyle wrote a letter to a friend stating, "You begin to feel that you can't go on forever without being hit. I feel that I've used up all my chances, and I hate it. I don't want to be killed. I've got a spooky feeling that I've been spared once more and that it would be asking for it to tempt fate again." Ask students if they think Pyle had a premonition about his own death.

ACTIVITY 2:

Analyzing a Primary Source Document: Pyle's "The Death of Captain Waskow"

(two class periods)

Perhaps the most famous and widely reprinted of Pyle's columns was "The Death of Captain Waskow," which was written in January 1944 at www.journalism.indiana.edu/resources/erniepyle/wartime-columns/the-death-of-captain-waskow/ (as of 5/15/2008).

- Distribute copies of this story to students.
- Ask students if they know what a primary source is?
- Explain to students that a primary source is a document or other material that was created at or near the time being studied by an authoritative source, usually one with direct personal knowledge of the events being described. It is distinguished from a secondary source, which is a work, such as a scholarly book or article, created from primary sources.
- Explain to students that their history textbook is a secondary source. Diaries, letters, official reports, audio/video recordings, eyewitness accounts (as by a journalist who was there), newspapers, magazines, maps, posters, paintings, and photographs are examples of primary sources. Primary sources can help us learn what people were thinking and doing at a particular period in time, and are useful links to the past.

They help us understand events from the perspective of someone who was there to experience the event.

- Ask students to explain why “The Death of Captain Waskow” is a primary source?
- Why are primary sources valuable in the study of history?
- Ask students what they think is the value of collecting stories from people who participated in World War II?
- How do they think Pyle enabled people on the home front to understand the soldiers’ viewpoints concerning the reality of the war?
- Why do they think many of the soldiers in World War II considered Pyle a hero?
- Do they think Pyle’s style of reporting would be successful today if he was reporting from the Middle East, for example?
- Ask students what kind of primary sources will we have from military conflicts today? Do they have any relatives or know someone serving in the military? How do these soldiers stay in touch with their families? What are the advantages of today’s means of communications compared to how communication was during World War II? Can they think of any disadvantages to communication today?
- Have students discuss historical evidence in their daily lives. For example, have them think about any primary source documents they created themselves—a diary, a letter to a friend or relative, an e-mail message, a picture of a friend, a voice mail, etc. These are all examples of primary sources.
- Next, distribute copies of a “Written Document Analysis Worksheet” at www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/written_document_analysis_worksheet.pdf (as of 5/15/2008) and complete the worksheet using Pyle’s column, “The Death of Captain Waskow.”

ACTIVITY 3:

Ernie Pyle Time Line

(homework assignment)

Using facts obtained from their reading, have students create a chronological time line of important events and accomplishments in Pyle’s life (1900–45). Students can discuss their work and display time lines around the classroom.

ACTIVITY 4:

Ernie Pyle–Information Scavenger Hunt

(one class period)

Students enjoy searching for answers and constructing their knowledge of the subject. This scavenger hunt will also aid as a review and informal assessment once students have completed reading *The Soldier’s Friend: A Life of Ernie Pyle*. Give students the option of working individually or with a partner. (Sample student hand-out and teacher’s answer key are provided.)

ENRICHMENT ACTIVITIES:

World War II time line

(homework assignment)

Using facts obtained from reading the book and the classroom history textbook, students will create a time line of key events from the beginning to the end of World War II in Europe and in the Pacific region.

Ernie Pyle trivia bulletin board

(one class period)

Have student volunteers create a bulletin board in the classroom. This bulletin board could contain copies of some of his well-known columns, pictures found on the Internet, Pyle quotes or quotes about Pyle, or the Ernie Pyle G.I. Joe D-day action figure (sold by Hasbro in 2002; may now be purchased on eBay). For a *Peanuts* cartoon featuring Ernie Pyle, go to www.awon.org/

pyle.html (as of 5/15/2008).

C. Travel brochure activity

(homework assignment)

During the 1930s, Pyle was a roving reporter and traveled all over the United States. He did not purchase a home until 1940 since he was on the road so much. “My home is where my extra luggage is, and where the car is stopped, and where I happen to be getting mail this time. My home is America,” said Pyle. Have students create a travel brochure about their favorite city or a city they would like to visit in the United States.

Topics to include in a travel brochure:

- Brief summary of the setting, with highlights of important places
- Location, including a map
- Historic sites and landmarks
- Recreation and entertainment activities
- Climate and overall weather conditions
- Arts and culture, including museums, theaters, places to visit, etc.
- Food that is a specialty of the area
- Pictures/illustrations

Listen to an audio recording of one of Pyle’s columns

(one class period)

This is a good activity for auditory learners. Have students go to the Indiana University journalism department’s Ernie Pyle Web page:

www.journalism.indiana.edu/resources/erniepyle/wartime-columns/german-supermen-up-close/
(as of 5/15/2008).

As a class, listen to an audio recording of Pyle’s column, “German Supermen Up Close.” Afterwards, discuss the column. Suggested questions:

- What happens to improve the American soldiers’ morale?

- What was Pyle’s main impression of the German prisoners of war?
- What kind of comparisons does Pyle make about winning a battle?

Student Handout - KWL Chart

The “K” column is used to describe what you already know about a topic, the “W” column is used to list what you want to know about the topic, and the “L” column will be used to describe what you learned from an investigation of the topic.

K-What I Know	W-What I Want to Know	L-What I Learned

ACTIVITY 4:

Student Handout—Ernie Pyle Information Scavenger Hunt

Please answer all of the questions listed below. You may use the book, *The Soldier's Friend: A Life of Ernie Pyle*, your class notes, as well as the Web sites listed below to find the answers. Happy hunting!

1. In what Indiana town was Ernie Pyle born?
2. What university did Pyle attend?
3. In 1923 Pyle got his first reporter job with what small-town newspaper?
4. In what state is Pyle buried?
5. On March 26, 1928, Pyle began one of the nation's first columns devoted to _____?
6. During Pyle's days as a roving reporter, Pyle traveled by automobile, train, airplane, boat, and _____?
7. In June 1940 Pyle and his wife purchased land to build a home in what Southwestern American city?
8. What country did Pyle travel to in December 1940 that was under attack?
9. On December 7, 1941, Japanese planes attacked the American naval base at Pearl Harbor in this state.
10. One of Pyle's best known newspaper columns was about the death of Captain _____?
11. Name the island in the Pacific Ocean located 350 miles from the southern coast of Japan that was the location of a major World War II battle in 1945.
12. Name the U.S. president who died while in office on April 12, 1945.
13. Since 1948, Pyle's home in Albuquerque, New Mexico has served as a _____?
14. A few weeks after his high school graduation, Pyle enrolled in what branch of the military?
15. While in college, Pyle earned a varsity letter as manager of what sports team?
16. Where was Pyle on June 6, 1944, during the D-day operation?

For further exploration, visit these Web sites to answer the questions below:

<http://www.indianahistory.org/programming/erniepyle/ernie/introducing.html>

<http://www.journalism.indiana.edu/news/erniepyle/>

<http://history.sandiego.edu/gen/ww2timeline/erniepyle>

17. What was the name of the 1945 movie based on Pyle's newspaper columns?
18. In 1944 Pyle won a _____ prize for his stories about the ordinary soldiers fighting in World War II.
19. In 1925 who did Pyle marry?
20. Pyle wrote five books. Name two of them.

ACTIVITY 4:

Teacher Resource—Ernie Pyle Information Scavenger Hunt Answer Key

1. In what Indiana town was Ernie Pyle born? **Answer: Dana**
2. What university did Pyle attend? **Answer: Indiana University**
3. In 1923 Pyle got his first reporter job with what small-town newspaper? **Answer: *The LaPorte Herald***
4. In what state is Pyle buried? **Answer: Hawaii**
5. On March 26, 1928, Pyle began one of the nation's first columns devoted to _____?
Answer: Aviation
6. During Pyle's days as a roving reporter, Pyle traveled by automobile, train, airplane, boat, and _____?
Answer: Horse
7. In June 1940 Pyle and his wife purchased land to build a home in what Southwestern American city?
Answer: Albuquerque
8. What country did Pyle travel to in December 1940 that was under attack? **Answer: England**
9. On December 7, 1941, Japanese planes attacked the American naval base at Pearl Harbor in this state.
Answer: Hawaii
10. One of Pyle's best known newspaper columns was about the death of Captain _____?
Answer: Waskow
11. Name the island in the Pacific Ocean located 350 miles from the southern coast of Japan that was the location of a major World War II battle in 1945. **Answer: Okinawa**
12. Name the U.S. president who died while in office on April 12, 1945. **Answer: Franklin D. Roosevelt**
13. Since 1948, Pyle's home in Albuquerque, New Mexico has served as a _____? **Answer: library**
14. A few weeks after his high school graduation, Pyle enrolled in what branch of the military?
Answer: U.S. Naval Reserve
15. While in college, Pyle earned a varsity letter as manager of what sports team? **Answer: Baseball**
16. Where was Pyle on June 6, 1944, during the D-day operation?
Answer: Omaha Beach on the northern coast of France
17. What was the name of the 1945 movie based on Pyle's newspaper columns?
Answer: "The Story of G.I. Joe"
18. In 1944 Pyle won a _____ prize for his stories about the ordinary soldiers fighting in World War II. **Answer: Pulitzer**
19. In 1925 who did Pyle marry? **Answer: Geraldine Siebolds**
20. Pyle wrote five books. Name two of them.
Answer: *Home Country, Ernie Pyle in England, Here is Your War, Brave Men, and Last Chapter*