

A Reading Group Guide for

***Sophia's War: A Tale of the Revolution***

By Avi

**About the Book**

In 1776, the War of Independence comes to New York City and to twelve-year-old Sophia Calderwood's family. William, her older soldier brother, has been missing since the defeat of George Washington's Army at the Battle of Brooklyn.

When the British occupy the city, Lieutenant John André of the English Army is boarded at the Calderwood home. He and Sophia develop a flirtatious friendship, which is tested when the girl discovers that William is being held in the Sugarhouse, a notorious British prison. She hopes André can help. When he chooses not to, Sophia struggles to save her brother herself.

Three years later, Sophia becomes a spy in the headquarters of the British Army. There she finds André, now a major, working to enable a highly placed American general to become a traitor, a treason that will endanger the whole American war effort. Deciding to stop the treason—and motivated by personal revenge—Sophia becomes desperate. However, as Sophia learns, desperation's other name is deception. Indeed, the desperate characters in this thrilling tale of spies and counterspies act out many acts of deception, not least by Sophia herself. Based on true tales of the Revolution, carefully researched, this story will shock and enthrall even those who think they know what happened during the American Revolution. *Sophia's War* is Avi at his best, a haunting historical thriller.

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**The Three Story Threads**

Avi has identified three "story threads" in *Sophia's War*:

Thread 1 is Part 1: The treatment of American prisoners by the British in New York City during the Revolution.

Thread 2 is Part 2: The true story is that of British Major John André and General Benedict Arnold.

Thread 3 is Sophia Calderwood's story: a tale of fiction and the link between these first two threads.

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**Part I: Text-Generated Questions**

1. When the story opens on September 22, 1776, Sophia is a surprise witness to a hanging. Explain Sophia's situation and that of her family. How does the hanging affect her?
2. What kind of man was young William Calderwood? What influence did he have on Sophia during his life?
3. In Chapter 4, Sophia's mother snaps, "Child, what we think and what we say can no longer be the same!" What has sparked this statement? Was Sophia's father right to sign the Oath of Allegiance to King George? Find another example of how "The war made deception our way of life." (Chapter 15)
4. How does the boarder, John André, compare to Lieutenant André? How did his presence affect Sophia and her family? Does she feel affection for him?
5. What dangers does Sophia face as she searches for William at King's College, then the Sugarhouse, and finally *The Good Intent*? What does her search show about her character?
6. How does Avi describe the conditions in the Sugarhouse? (Chapter 24) Who is responsible for these conditions?
7. Why would the British move American prisoners to a ship in the harbor and use it as their prison? In Chapter 27 Sophia says as she boards *The Good Intent* that "This was not mere disregard and ignorance. This, by multiple degrees, was murder." Explain her meaning.
8. Who is responsible for William's death? How does William's death change Sophia? Would this same change have happened if he had died in battle?
9. The ship named *The Good Intent* is an example of irony in this story. Irony is an incongruity between what actually happens and what might be expected to happen. Explain the irony in the ship's name.
10. What do we learn about Benedict Arnold in Part I?

## **Part II: Text-Generated Questions**

1. "To lose a loved one is but part of living life, whereas to have a loved one vanish is a living death." How does this apply to Sophia and her family? When Chapter 29 begins, how is the family changed by William's death? How has the war changed by 1780?
2. What part does Robert Townsend play in this story?
3. How has Major John André changed since he was last with Sophia, in Part I? How could his new position affect Sophia? How did the poem he wrote for Sophia lead to his undoing?

4. Explain the importance of each of these in *Sophia's War*:

- Culper
- HESH
- Reverend Odell
- West Point
- Tallmadge
- Anderson
- Mr. Moore
- Molly Saville

5. What would Sophia say was the key to her reaching the meeting place for André and Arnold?

6. How was the *Vulture* being fired upon and towed downriver a turning point in the meeting between André and Arnold?

7. What stands in the way of any adults believing Sophia and her story of Arnold's treason?

8. How does Mr. Paulding play a key role in the arrest of Major André? Why did Colonel Jameson send André to General Arnold? What motivates Major Tallmadge to intervene? How does Arnold incriminate himself?

9. Why does Sophia need to see André? What did Sophia accomplish in talking to him? How does his treatment as a prisoner differ from that which William received in the Sugarhouse?

10. Should André have been hung?

### **Beyond the Text**

1. In Chapter 2, Sophia mentions "the crimes the British had committed—as cited in our Independence Declaration". Read the Declaration of Independence <http://www.ushistory.org/declaration/document/>. Key in on the list of grievances listed against King George III. Which of these grievances are specifically parts of Sophia's story? How did each affect the people and the war?

2. Find an instance in Avi's writing of how his attention to detail and his research adds to our knowledge of the time and place.

3. In Chapter 17, Mr. Paine is quoted: "our new nation is a blank sheet for us to write upon." How does Sophia step out of her life to create her mark on this "blank sheet"?

4. In Chapter 2, William tells Sophia, "Liberty shall always triumph over tyranny." Was this quote proved or disproved in *Sophia's War*?

5. Research the following mentioned in *Sophia's War* and their importance in these times.

- Nathan Hale
- Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*
- John Locke, *Letter Concerning Toleration*
- Alexander Hamilton
- King George III and his Parliament
- Loyalists vs. Patriots
- Hessian soldiers
- General Washington

6. André tells Sophia in Chapter 22, "A promise to a girl is not a pledge to a lady. You are not yet a lady." Explain how André recognizes Sophia as a lady in Part 2.

7. *Deception* was the original title for this book. List all the ways deception was part of this story.

8. In Chapter 58, Avi writes, "In war, all are prisoners." What do you think he meant?

9. In what ways does telling the truth about herself embarrass and pain Sophia? Sophia says at the end of the story, "I no longer wish to be at war with myself." What does she mean?

10. Return to Sophia's "Dear Reader" letter at the beginning of the story. Was Sophia right to act in such a way? What did she contribute to the times? Write Sophia a letter in which you answer her.

### **Common Core Standards**

**R.CCR.1.** Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

**R.CCR.2.** Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

**R.CCR.3.** Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

**R.CCR.4.** Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

**R.CCR.5.** Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.

**R.CCR.6.** Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

**R.CCR.7.** Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

**W.CCR.4.** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

**W.CCR.5.** Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.

**W.CCR.7.** Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

*Guide written by Jan McDonald of Rocky Mountain Readers*

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*This guide was written to align with the Common Core State Standards ([www.corestandards.org](http://www.corestandards.org)).*