



Siege

Jacqueline Pearce

Reading level: 2.8

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Book Summary

When Jason agrees to go camping with his cousin Sean, he doesn't picture two weeks at a War of 1812 reenactment camp. But that's where he ends up. The historically accurate camp bans all trappings of modern life, like cell phones and electricity. Jason is not impressed, but they do get to fire muskets, and he secretly likes that, despite the general dorkiness of the camp. And then there's the cute girl, Nicola, who works in the mess tent. And the sneaking around at night getting into trouble, which is fun—until Jason and his friends keep running into a camp counselor who is clearly up to no good. They resolve to find out exactly what the counselor is up to, but they may have taken on more than they can handle.

Author Biography

Jacqueline Pearce grew up on Vancouver Island. She has always been fascinated with local history and her first three novels are stories about Vancouver Island's past. Her interest in other countries and cultures, nature and animals also makes its way into her novels and short stories. Jacqueline has degrees in English literature and environmental studies. She currently lives in Burnaby, British Columbia, on the edge of a ravine with her husband, daughter, dog and two cats.

Connecting to the Text

Character Study

To engage students with the characters and themes in *Siege*, use the following as group discussion topics, individual novel study or paragraph-writing exercises:

1. Jason sometimes jumps to conclusions about others and lets his imagination get the best of him. Invite students to consider these scenes, following his assumptions through. In the end, were Jason's assumptions true?
 - ♦ Jason meets Nicola, the cute girl who smiles and ladles soup into his bowl.

Do I have black on my face too? Is that why the girl was laughing at me? (ch. 2)

He then continues to imagine about what she may think of him.

Is she back home, maybe texting her friends about all the nerdy idiots at reenactment camp? (ch. 4)

The dimple is still in her cheek, and I'm pretty sure she's silently laughing at us. (ch. 4)
 - ♦ Jason and Sean see Major Helston standing on shore watching the border patrol boat cruising back upriver (ch. 11).

Sean: *You mean like he doesn't want the border patrol to discover his illegal plot?*

Jason: *Exactly.*
2. In chapter 1, Jason wishes he could turn around and go back to his home, where he has access to the Internet, electricity, his cell phone and "real" games. He can't imagine fun and adventure while he's "dressed like an idiot and sweating like a pig." But in the novel's last scene, he says, "A week ago, I didn't want to be here. Now I'm sorry to leave."
 - ♦ Imagine it's now a week later and Jason is back in Syracuse. What do you think Jason will remember most vividly about camp?
 - ♦ What skills does Jason learn at camp that he can carry with him to his high school life? Consider Jason's self image, confidence and interpersonal skills.
 - ♦ In chapter 17, how do you think Jason feels when Major Helston tells him that Jason "turned out to be a fine soldier"?
3. Jason learns a lot about the War of 1812 and has powerful experiences at camp. Ask students to reflect on these scenes from chapters 7 and 14. What impact did these have on Jason? Do you think he'll remember these experiences next time he's in History class?
 - ♦ Jason aims his musket at Sean and says, "Some guys would have been firing at their own cousins in this war. It's weird to imagine. What would I have done if I was a real soldier back then and I recognized someone I was shooting at?" (ch. 7)
 - ♦ Jason learned that the siege lasted almost two months and 3500 men were injured, dead or missing. "I try to picture [the field] littered with real bodies. Real people." (ch. 7)
 - ♦ At the final reenactment, after the fireworks, Jason says, "The flames die away,

and smoke billows across the fort...I see bodies littering the ground below the north bastion...We stare into the smoke for a moment, not saying anything. I think back to earlier in the week when we laughed about the headless ghost and the handless ghost. It doesn't seem funny anymore." (ch. 14)

Vocabulary

- Imagine you were a soldier or sailor during the War of 1812. Write a letter home or a diary entry that describes a "day in your life," using words from this list or others from the novel.

artillery	breeches	marching	mess hall	sleeping tents
barracks	campfires	kitchen	officers' quarters	stone wall
battalion	command	main gate	palisade	surgery
battlefield	fort	major	parade ground	uniform

Examples, to get students started, are below.

- ♦ *There is a kitchen where food is made and we eat in the mess hall. The food is...*
 - ♦ *There is a surgery in the fort and it's pretty scary. That's where...*
 - ♦ *We sleep in tents. The officers sleep in... and the First Nations warriors sleep in...*
- Make a list of words from the novel based on a theme that interests you, such as life as a soldier or sailor, weapons used, people in the war, their uniforms and flags, or the juxtaposition of Jason's life at home and at camp. Once you have your list of words, create a word cloud, which is a style of text art.

For educators: Present a few examples or use the one below so students get the idea of the exercise. Some students may wish to use their word clouds to make a statement about the brutality of war, racism or the number of soldiers killed in the War of 1812.

Invite students to share their word clouds with the large group, describing why they chose their theme. Encourage them to make connections to the novel.

Free websites, like wordle.net and textisbeautiful.net produce word clouds when users supply text. It may take a few tries for students to achieve the look and affect they want. As with all websites, preview terms of use and gallery before using in classroom.



The Writer's Craft

Writers choose descriptive words carefully and purposefully so readers will be engaged and interested in their characters and stories. To illustrate this, ask students to reflect on how the two characters below are introduced in *Siege*. Consider, too, the characters' names. What do they suggest to readers about the characters?

- Major Helston: *There he is, stepping out of the smoke like a devil in his red British officer's uniform. His rust-colored cheek whiskers flare out like flames on either side of his face...He lifts a beefy finger and points right at me, "You're dead!"* (ch. 1)
- Lieutenant Gunner: *He's tall, lean and way younger than Major Helston. He actually looks good in his tight-fitting red jacket and tall black hat with its shiny plate and white plume. He looks like an officer in a movie about the War of 1812.* (ch. 2)

Connecting to the Curriculum***Language Arts***

Part of the fun for Jason and Sean while at the reenactment camp was learning authentic terms from 1812. They learned what "flash in the pan" (ch. 1) and "west sally port" (ch. 3) mean. Ask students to research terms and idioms that come from war or military life, such as those below. What do they mean now, and where did they originate?

band of brothers	lock, stock and barrel
bite the bullet	over the top
diehard	snafu
flying colors	whole nine yards

History

1. While participating in the reenactment, Jason and Sean learned a lot about the War of 1812. Encourage students to explore eighteenthelvet.ca, developed by L'Institut Historica, The Royal Canadian Geographical Society and Parks Canada. Here, students will find an interactive timeline, artwork, songs, trivia contests and more. See their Teacher Resource section under Learning Resources, for fact sheets, classroom activities and lesson plans.
2. While Jason is at camp, he longs for fast food. At camp, they eat Cock-a-leekie soup, slices of bread and stew. Invite students to learn about the foods that soldiers and sailors ate during the War of 1812, and try a simple recipe. Examples could be Lemon Snow and Hardtack (or Ship's Biscuit).
 - ◆ Imagine cooking with a campfire instead of an oven and eating out of a tin mug. How would that change how you cook?
 - ◆ How would they store ingredients and keep them pest-free?
 - ◆ What is the advantage of a food like Hardtack and dried beef over fresh foods?

More Orca Currents Novels to Enjoy

1. In *Siege*, Jason isn't excited about going to camp, but it turns out to be a real adventure. Invite students who connect with this theme to read *Camp Wild* by Pamela Withers. In this novel, Wilf rebels and escapes camp by canoe. When a

younger camper follows Wilf and his bunk mate, they all end up in a fight for their lives with an unforgiving river.

2. Jason and his pals solved a crime while away from home and in a unique environment. These titles utilize a similar theme.

In *Alibi* by Kristin Butcher, Christine spends the summer helping out in her eccentric great aunt's antique store in the quaint town of Witcombe. When a pickpocket starts victimizing tourists, Christine is determined to find out who is behind the thefts.

In *Caught in the Act* by Deb Loughead, Dylan and his friends become suspects in a number of cottage robberies. Dylan learns everything he can about the robberies while trying to clear his name, but he finds himself in some sticky situations in the process.

Connecting to the World—Ideas for Discussion

In *Siege*, Jason is introduced to military life during the War of 1812. He learns that soldiers take orders from others of higher rank, like Major Helston or Lieutenant Gunner. Consider the structure of military service, which includes a strict chain of command.

Prompt: Draw comparisons from movies, TV, gaming, other novels, the news, and from other organizations like police, fire or government.

- For a soldier, what are the advantages and disadvantages of a chain of command?
- Do you sometimes feel like there is a chain of command in your life now?

Web Resources

<http://1812.gc.ca>

www.eighteentwelve.ca

www.warof1812nb.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Teachers-Guide-En-Final-AH.pdf