

The Angel of the Battlefield: Clara Barton and Responsibility

- **Compelling Question**
 - How can you help others by acting responsibly?
- **Virtue:** Responsibility
- **Definition –** Responsibility is accountability to myself and others.
- **Lesson Overview**
 - In this lesson, students will learn about how Clara Barton dedicated herself to the responsibility for caring for others throughout her life and how they can act responsibly in their own lives.
- **Objectives**
 - Students will analyze Clara Barton's efforts to act responsibly during her life.
 - Students will apply their knowledge about acting responsibly to their own lives.
 - Students will determine ways in which they can act responsibly.
- **Background**
 - Clara Barton was a woman on a mission—a mission of humanitarianism. This mission began at a young age. She understood what it was like to feel helpless and mistreated. She lived through the humiliation of having been teased about a lisp as well as living in a tumultuous home with a mentally unbalanced mother.

Although timid and prone to illness, Clara proved herself to be a very responsible young woman. At the tender age of ten, she helped nurse her severely injured brother, David, for over two years even when doctors had given up hope. As Clara grew into womanhood she was encouraged to become a teacher—a profession in which she excelled. Even with her timid personality, she proved herself a responsible and capable teacher with large classes of young men and women. Thus began a lifelong career helping others. Humanitarianism and responsibility were traits of a young Clara Barton that would continue to grow throughout her life.

- **Vocabulary**
 - Humanitarianism
 - Humiliation
 - Prone
 - Timid
 - Ambitious
 - Groundbreaking
 - Tremendous
 - Harassment
 - Malaria
 - Idleness
 - Paramount
 - Profound
 - Empathy
 - Compassionate
 - Underprivileged
 - Mantra
 - Determination
 - Red Cross
- **Introduce Text**
 - Have students read the background and narrative, keeping the “Walk-In-The-Shoes” question in mind as they read. Then have them answer the remaining questions below.
- **Walk-In-The-Shoes Questions**
 - As you read, imagine you are the protagonist.
 - What challenges are you facing?
 - What fears or concerns might you have?
 - What may prevent you from acting in the way you ought?

- **Observation Questions**
 - Who was Clara Barton? Why was her life significant?
 - What was Clara Barton's purpose?
 - How did Clara Barton act responsibly in her life?
- **Discussion Questions**
 - Discuss the following questions with your students.
 - What is the historical context of the narrative?
 - What historical circumstances presented a challenge to the protagonist?
 - How and why did the individual exhibit a moral and/or civic virtue in facing and overcoming the challenge?
 - How did the exercise of the virtue benefit civil society?
 - How might exercise of the virtue benefit the protagonist?
 - What might the exercise of the virtue cost the protagonist?
 - Would you react the same under similar circumstances? Why or why not?
 - How can you act similarly in your own life? What obstacles must you overcome in order to do so?
- **Additional Resources**
 - Barton, Clara. *The Story of My Childhood*. New York: Arno Press, Inc., 1980
 - Clara Barton Birthplace. <http://clarabartonbirthplace.org/site/?q=node/15>
 - Goodwin, Joan. "Clara Barton." November 5, 2003. <http://uudb.org/articles/clarabarton.html>

Handout A: The Angel of the Battlefield: Clara Barton and Responsibility

Background

Clara Barton was a woman on a mission—a mission of humanitarianism. This mission began at a young age. She understood what it was like to feel helpless and mistreated. She lived through the humiliation of having been teased about a lisp as well as living in a tumultuous home with a mentally unbalanced mother.

Although timid and prone to illness, Clara proved herself to be a very responsible young woman. At the tender age of ten, she helped nurse her severely injured brother, David, for over two years even when doctors had given up hope. As Clara grew into womanhood she was encouraged to become a teacher—a profession in which she excelled. Even with her timid personality, she proved herself a responsible and capable teacher with large classes of young men and women. Thus began a lifelong career helping others. Humanitarianism and responsibility were traits of a young Clara Barton that would continue to grow throughout her life.

Narrative

Born December 25, 1821, in New Oxford, Massachusetts, Clara Barton grew up as a very quiet and introspective young girl. Her childhood could be described as tumultuous with a mentally unbalanced mother and being teased for her lisp. Despite these issues, young Clara was a very bright but timid young girl who learned quickly and proved to be academically talented.

Prior to the outbreak of the Civil War, Clara Barton was already breaking boundaries. Clara worked successfully as an educator, and she also held a position of a clerk in the Patent Office—the first woman to do so! In these positions she displayed an ambitious work ethic. Clara experienced tremendous success as well as frustration. While it was groundbreaking that she, as a female, held a position equal to that of men, Clara also experienced harassment from her male co-workers. Because of a strong work ethic, she worked harder to overcome this mistreatment. Because of the stress of her job and treatments, her health declined until eventually she became ill with malaria. When James Buchanan was elected president, he eliminated Clara's position in the Patent Office. Thus, she was out of work.

Clara stayed home for a period of time after losing her job and continued to study. Attempts to find employment were unsuccessful, and sitting in idleness was not for Clara! Her need to help others and be useful was always paramount in her mind. It wasn't until the election of President Lincoln in 1860 along with the help of other local family friends that Clara was able to once again work in the Patent Office. She served as a copyist for a reduced salary but she felt needed, she was working, and she helped to break barriers for women even with a reduced salary.

The Civil War had a profound impact on Clara Barton's life. During that period Clara would come into her own by combining her education, teaching experience, empathy toward others pioneering spirit, as well as a need to be useful to others. From the beginning of the war to the end, Clara served others as a compassionate nurse and champion of the underprivileged. Working in the field hospital in Washington, D.C. during the early years of the war Clara recognized some of her former students among the wounded. This pushed Clara to work even harder at helping these young men. Clara worked diligently to help ease their suffering. It was said that, "Barton arrived with her supplies and skills on battlefields from Manassas to Antietam and Fredericksburg, considering herself part of the Army of the Potomac. The Twenty-first Massachusetts held a dress parade in her honor and made her a daughter of the regiment." Clara felt a strong sense of responsibility for the soldiers. She ate what they ate and lived among them. Even though the work was tiring and seemingly unending, Clara forged on in her desire to help others. She truly earned the name, "Angel of the Battlefield".

As the Civil War came to a close, President Lincoln put Clara in charge of finding missing soldiers. Clara still felt a responsibility to these soldiers and their families. Following her mantra of helping others, she performed this task with the same determination and enthusiasm that she had in helping soldiers on the battlefield. She answered letters by the hundreds and made requests to the government on behalf of families as she worked to overcome a great deal of the confusion in the bureaucracy that came about following the war.

In 1868, Clara traveled to Europe to rest, but she once again found people in need of her help. Europeans introduced Clara to the International Red Cross. Clara saw their work helping the families affected by the Franco Prussian War. She realized the Red Cross could provide essential civilian disaster relief as well as wartime aid. She returned home in 1873 and worked ardently to convince her fellow Americans of the organization's merits. Although it took several years, mismanagement issues, and rival organizations, Clara Barton finally accomplished her goal of establishing the American Red Cross in 1881. And as she thought, the Red Cross would be instrumental in giving aid to people in need as it did when Johnstown, Pennsylvania flooded in 1889.

Throughout her life Clara Barton lived and felt the greatest sense of responsibility when helping others. Teaching, advancing the role of women, nursing soldiers during the Civil War were all brought together with her ardent work in establishing the American Red Cross. Her role in life was one of responsibility. In these accomplishments and her sense of responsibility Clara Barton is truly the angel of the battlefield and the ultimate humanitarian.