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DISCUSSION GUIDE

#1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Monuments Men*

ROBERT M. EDSSEL



Grades 3-7

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The Common Core State Standards addressed by the discussion questions and activities in this guide are listed below. For more information on the Common Core, visit corestandards.org.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.3.1-7-1;

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.1-7-1;

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.2-7-2;

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.3-7-3

THE GREATEST TREASURE HUNT IN HISTORY

THE STORY OF THE MONUMENTS MEN

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ACTIVITIES FOR STUDENTS

- Captain Walter “Hutch” Huchthausen worked diligently to restore the Aachen Cathedral, a German cultural landmark. A reporter wondered why an American Monuments Man would focus his efforts on saving a German church. On pages 184–185, reread Hutch’s response to the reporter. Do you agree or disagree with his stance on saving the German landmark? Write an opinion piece that presents your point of view on the topic. Include reasons and examples to support your opinion. Incorporate a counterargument in your essay.
- The Monuments Men were consumed with locating, protecting, and safely returning specific pieces of art, including *The Last Supper* by Leonardo da Vinci, the Ghent Altarpiece, *The Astronomer* by Johannes Vermeer, the *Madonna* of La Gleize, and the Bruges *Madonna* by Michelangelo. Select one of these masterpieces and research it. What made the piece so significant? Compile your research into a poster report that can be shared with others in your class.
- What gives a piece of art significance? Why do we attach meaning to an object or place? Consider these questions as you select a piece of art, object, building, or landmark that is important to *you*—something from your daily life or something special and out of the ordinary. Write a personal narrative that describes what you’ve chosen and that explores why it’s meaningful to you. Include an image or illustration of your significant artwork or landmark.
- People served in many different capacities during World War II. The Monuments Men had a unique mission, as did Code Talkers, the USO, WASPs, Dog Handlers, and the Ghost Army. Select one of these groups and write a report about how it contributed to the war effort.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Describe Adolf Hitler’s connection to art and how this connection influenced some of his goals during the war.
- To preserve art during the war required specialized knowledge and talent. Read through the descriptions of the Monuments Men’s training and education listed on page xi. What were some of the jobs this group of people held prior to joining the military?
- The Monuments Men consisted of a small group of people in an army of more than two hundred thousand soldiers. What other obstacles made it difficult for the group to locate and secure missing works of art?
- It seemed that the Nazis had a shopping list of which works of art to loot from museums and private collections. The Monuments Men also composed a list

that prioritized works of art that they felt needed to be saved. How did General Eisenhower's order (see page 29) support the Monument Men's goals?

- When Monuments Man Lieutenant James Rorimer finally reached the Louvre Museum in Paris in August of 1944, he was shocked to discover how different it appeared. What had changed inside the museum since Rorimer had last seen it full of precious works of art and tourists? How did these changes to the museum come about?
- What did the term "safeguarding" mean to the Nazis (see page 104)? How did their definition differ from the Allies' view of the Nazis and their actions?
- Who was Rose Valland and how was she central to Rorimer's investigation into where the art masterpieces in the Louvre and the Jeu de Paume museum had been taken?
- The wealth of art treasures in France provided the Nazis with "a vast and inexhaustible hunting reserve." What was the purpose of the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg, or ERR, in occupied Paris? What role did Nazi Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring play in the "hunting" of famous works of art? Whom did the Nazis target when they stole more than twenty thousand pieces from private collections?
- What styles of art did the Nazis want to save, and which did they deem "degenerate"? On July 23, 1944, a German military truck made a delivery to the interior gardens of the Jeu de Paume museum. What events transpired that fateful day that caused Rose Valland to state, "Nothing could be saved" (see page 166)?
- Though the Monuments Men were focused on locating and preserving the cultural heritage of Europe, they were doing their jobs in the middle of a very dangerous war zone. Describe how Major Ronald Balfour and Captain Walter "Hutch" Huchthausen gave their lives in pursuit of their mission.
- Who was Hermann Bunjes and how was he surprisingly helpful to the Monuments Men in search of the artwork stolen from France by the Nazis? What was Bunjes's true motive in helping the Monuments Men? What priceless works of art were discovered in the salt mine in Altaussee, Austria, when the Monuments Men were finally able to reach it?
- What did Monuments Men Posey and Kirstein discover once they arrived at the Merkers salt mine? How did this discovery give the Western Allies an advantage over their enemies? What types of artwork were discovered in the mine?
- Why did US General Eisenhower order nearly every unit of Allied soldiers not on the fighting lines to tour the recently liberated forced labor camp at Ohrdruf? What did Monuments Man Captain Walter Hancock do to give hope to the survivors of the Buchenwald concentration camp?
- What was discovered at Neuschwanstein Castle and how did the discovery help the Monuments Men complete their mission?
- Do you think the work of the Monuments Men was necessary? Why or why not?

THE GREATEST TREASURE HUNT IN HISTORY: The Story of the Monuments Men By Robert M. Edsel

As the most destructive war in history ravaged Europe, many of the world's most cherished cultural objects were in harm's way. *The Greatest Treasure Hunt in History* recounts the astonishing true story of eleven men and one woman who risked their lives amidst the bloodshed of World War II to preserve churches, libraries, monuments, and works of art that for centuries defined the heritage of Western civilization. As the war raged, these American and British volunteers—museum curators, art scholars and educators, architects, archivists, and artists, known as the Monuments Men—found themselves in a race against time to locate and save the many priceless treasures stolen by Adolf Hitler and the Nazis.

Shauna Carranza



Robert M. Edsel is the author of three books about the Monuments Men, including the #1 *New York Times* bestseller *The Monuments Men*, which Academy Award recipient George Clooney adapted into a feature film in 2014; and *Saving Italy*, also a *New York Times* bestseller. Mr. Edsel has received numerous awards for his work honoring the Monuments Men and Women and his advocacy of art preservation. He has served as a trustee on numerous not-for-profit organizations, including The National WWII Museum.

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★ "These amazing stories from history not only depict true heroes but encourage readers to question the value of art throughout humanity and civilization. Monumental, indeed." —*Booklist*, starred review



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