

### Four Seasons Of Work And Play: Two Civil War Families Take Children Through A Year Of Activities

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## Review

### FOUR SEASONS OF WORK AND PLAY

#### Two Civil War families take children through a year of activities

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**King, David C.** *Civil War Days: Discover the Past with Exciting Projects, Games, Activities, and Recipes.* John Wiley & Sons, ISBN 471246123

Feel the past come alive and discover what it was like to grow up during the Civil War. David C. King's **Civil War Days** follows two families during 1862: the Parkhursts, a white family living in Charleston, South Carolina, and the Wheelers, a black family who escaped slavery and made their way to New York City.

But King doesn't simply provide general family portraits, he fills their home lives with an assortment of projects and activities.

These are well developed and easy to follow, clearly illustrated, and, most importantly, varied -- perfect for 8- to 12-year-olds of today. A pressed-flower scrapbook, toy parachute, gingerbread recipe, yarn doll, jarabadash, a game of strategy, dried apple rings, and potato-print wrapping paper are just some of the featured activities. Interspersed throughout are short articles that put all this fun in perspective -- offering historical background -- as well as a glossary and bibliography.

Activity, not history book

**Civil War Days** is essentially an activity and not a history book. The activities tend to overshadow the history presented, and readers might find it difficult to follow the events that led to the Civil War and those that added to its tension. (The events surrounding the formation of the 54th Massachusetts Regiment that Solomon Wheeler joins are especially confusing.) A detailed map and timeline would have helped readers develop a clearer sense of Civil War history.

Readers also might find it difficult to relate to both families, especially the children. The Parkhursts and Wheelers are not based on real people. Their joys are not felt, and their struggles are solved too easily. Their situations are not believable.

The Parkhursts, whose shipping business is closed down because of the war, are able to open a mill in their warehouse with about 20 helpers. They even manage sometimes to get a ship out of the blockaded Charleston harbor.

The Wheelers, who do not experience any tension in the North, find work on the docks and in a general store, sell newspapers, and live somewhat comfortably in a small three-room apartment.

The black-and-white drawings that illustrate the families' lives and the historical prints that accompany some of the short articles do little to bring the past to life. But **Civil War Days** does offer its readers a different perspective of the Civil War. Readers catch a glimpse of life off the battlefield and can actively participate in that life.

**Civil War Days** is part of the *American Kids in History Series*. Other books in the series include *Colonial Days*, *Pioneer Days*, *Wild West Days*, and the soon-to-be-released *Victorian Days*.

*Carolyn P. Yoder is senior editor of history at Highlights magazine and executive director of the New Hampshire Antiquarian Society.*