

Civil War A to Z: A Young Readers' Guide to Over 100 People, Places, and Points of Importance

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Review

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Bolotin, Norman *Civil War A to Z: A Young Readers' Guide to Over 100 People, Places, and Points of Importance*. Dutton Children's Books, \$19.99 ISBN 525462686

An alphabet book

Succinct guide to the War for young readers

Most reference books — encyclopedias and dictionaries — tend to be too long, too dry, and not very appealing to the eye. Norman Bolotin's **Civil War A to Z**, billed as a handy reference book, is none of these things. Each entry is short and sweet and most are accompanied by a historical print, painting, or photograph.

Norman Bolotin knows the Civil War well. He and his wife, Christine Laing, have developed and edited many books on the war for Dutton Children's Books and Puffin Books.

Bolotin's goal in this text is to introduce young readers, ages 9 and up, to the Civil War as well as to the causes leading up to the war and the problems faced by the country afterwards. But Bolotin does not simply highlight the battles and well-known generals. Many of the war's unknown players — women, black soldiers, politicians, abolitionists, and writers, to name a few — are featured. Important cities and places are also given their due. Atlanta, Richmond, Charleston, Libby Prison, Appomattox Court House are just some of the places young readers will see.

Bolotin never claims to cover all aspects of the war. The format doesn't lend itself to that. He points out in his introductory note that he hopes the reference book will encourage more research on the war — that it becomes the impetus for studying a battle more fully, for reading the New York or Atlanta newspapers from the war years, or for looking into biographies, diaries, letters, and other materials that bring this tumultuous time in our history to life.

Civil War A to Z contains over 100 references to people, places, and points of interest. Bolotin tries to balance all this coverage and presents the war from the northern, southern, and western points of view. Readers will meet Confederate and Union soldiers and officers as well as some of the most vocal politicians.

Besides the more than 100 self-contained entries, sidebars filled with interesting tidbits dot the text — covering everything from war statistics to quotations from newspapers, diaries, speeches, and letters. In one, Bolotin offers young readers an opportunity to comprehend how many people died during the battles — to understand just how enormously tragic the war was. The Union and Confederate dead would fill 2,000 theaters, 13 major-league baseball stadiums, 10 typical pro football stadiums, six Super Bowl stadiums, or more than 1,000 elementary schools.

The only place within the text where I became confused was under the V entry. Bolotin includes an image of a veteran parade and a spot image of two veterans but there is no entry for veterans. The only V entry is the Battle of Vicksburg with no image provided.

Minus this exception, careful attention is paid throughout to the book's images. Bolotin has not only selected photographs, prints, and paintings but also artifacts, broadsides, and newspapers. Readers can see a medical kit, a handbill, a campaign ribbon, lucifers, tokens, and a soldier's letter. Even though the book is printed in black and white, the simple design and clear images make it appealing, inviting, and easy to use. A detailed timeline, glossary, bibliography, and maps also help to define the Civil War era more clearly.

Carolyn P. Yoder is the editor of George Washington: The Writer published by Boyd's Mills Press, February 2003.