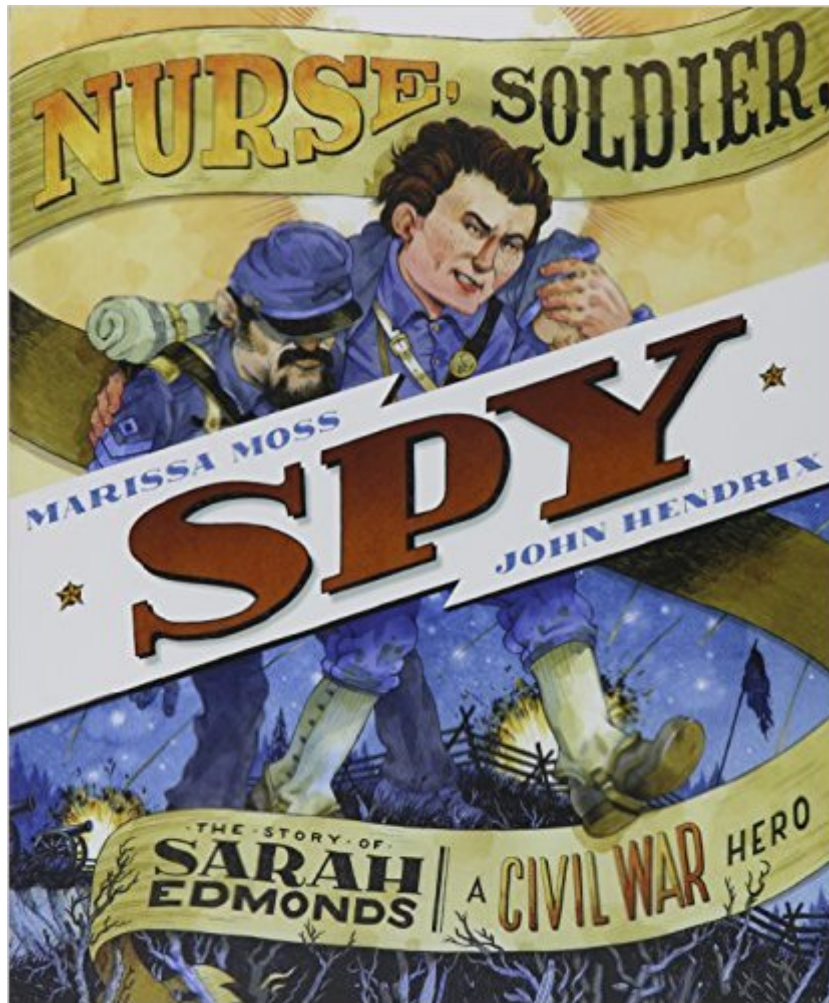


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# Nurse, Soldier, Spy: The Story Of Sarah Edmonds, A Civil War Hero



## Synopsis

This is the incredible true story of Sarah Emma Edmonds, who dressed as a man and fought in the Civil War. When she was 19, Sarah cut her hair, donned her brother's clothes, and fled from Canada, where her father wanted her to marry an elderly gentleman. In the U.S., she went by the name Frank Thompson and joined the Army to fight the Confederates. She was a nurse working on the battlefield when, because of her heroism, she was asked to serve as a spy. At her death, Edmonds was buried in a military cemetery, in a plot reserved for Civil War veterans—the only woman to have this honor.

## Book Information

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Grade Level: 1 - 4

## Customer Reviews

Did you know that during the American Civil War, hundreds of women secretly disguised themselves as men to help fight on both sides? One of them was named Frank Thompson. Only her real name was Sarah Emma Edmonds. She had begun dressing as a man at age sixteen and lived on the run, escaping from Canada to the United States in order to escape an arranged marriage. At age nineteen, Frank decides to enlist in the Union Army during the Civil War. At first, Frank is rejected as being too young but on the second try is accepted as a private into Company F, Second Michigan Volunteer Infantry of the Army of the Potomac. Frank can outshoot and outride many of the country boys, but due to her small boots other soldiers call her "our little woman." Little do they know! Then after serving as a nurse in the battles of Bull Run, Fair Oaks, and Williamsburg, Frank is

recruited as a spy. She darkens her skin with silver nitrate, dons a wig, dresses up like a freed slave, and makes her way to the nearby Confederate camp to find out the position of the Southern defenses. Will she be captured? And will her identity ever be found out? Author Marissa Moss's vivid storytelling join with illustrator John Hendrix's slightly caricatured but accurately detailed drawings to chronicle the work of this unsung hero of the American Civil War. Or is it heroine? In either case, *Nurse, Soldier, Spy* is a welcome addition to the reading lists of youngsters who are studying about the Civil War. The Author's Note at the end tells about the odd circumstances which happened to Frank/Sarah in 1863 and led to her leaving the army with a dishonorable discharge. It also records how Sarah went on to marry and then decided to write a book about her exploits and how, after several years of effort and two different acts of Congress, she became the first and only woman to be recognized as a veteran of the Civil War with an honorable discharge. A glossary which defines or describes many of the terms, places, and people mentioned in the book, a bibliography, and an index all increase the usefulness of this volume. I always enjoy reading well-written biographies, such as this one, for young people about interesting characters from history, not only those who are famous but also those who are lesser known.

If I want to depress myself on a given day I'll compare the list of biographical subjects that kids in school are handed to pick and choose from with the biographical subjects that I had to pick and choose from when I was a kid some twenty odd years ago. It's disheartening. Essentially, it's the same list. Teachers always include Edison, Einstein, Washington, Tubman, Keller, etc. Once in a while someone will fall out of favor (Benjamin Banneker) to be replaced with someone new (Matthew Henson) but that's just the way of things. How I long for the day when the core biographical subjects are thrown out the window and kids can take full advantage of the range of amazing stories in their libraries' biography sections. That'll be the day when a kid has an assignment to find a historical female hero who fought in a war and I can hand them "*Nurse, Soldier, Spy: The Story of Sarah Edmonds, a Civil War Hero*". Until then, I'll just have to hawk the book on its own merits. Fortunately, this is not too terribly difficult to do. I'm sure you've all heard stories of those women who cut their hair, donned men's clothes, and joined the armed forces during the Civil War. Many a woman did this, but few were as brave and inventive as Sarah Edmonds. Having run away from home at the age of sixteen to escape an arranged marriage, Sarah had been living as a man for three years when she returned to Michigan to join the Union cause. On the field she proved a brave nurse, soldier, and eventual spy. When told to spy on the enemy, Sarah became a believable black male slave and managed to extract some much needed information across enemy

lines. An Author's Note at the end explains how the rest of Sarah's life went and how she became "the only woman invited to join the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), the association for Civil War veterans of the Union Army." Marissa Moss is best known for her "Amelia's Notebooks" series, an early chapter book grouping of titles that served as the precursor to the current "Diary of a Wimpy Kid" journal boom we're now in. I was under the distinct impression that fiction was Ms. Moss's one and only bag, and this feeling was helped in no small part by the biographical sketch of her that appears on this title's bookflap. Dig a little deeper, however, and you see that Ms. Moss has a longstanding appreciation of history that has manifested itself in a variety of different ways over the years. Penning everything from historical novels like "Galen: My Life in Imperial Rome" to a journal series of different young American girls to other picture book biographies of too little lauded souls like Ida Lewis, Maggie Gee Jackie Mitchell, and Harriet Quimby, it's clear that Sarah Edmonds is just the latest in Moss's series of discoveries. As any author of picture book biographies knows, you have to decide right from the start how much of your subject you're willing to reveal. Do you want to encompass a person's entire life from birth to death or would you rather take a slice of their life and blow it up as representative of who they really were? Both techniques have their advantages and disadvantages, but in the case of Ms. Edmonds, Moss took the road less traveled. Though Edmonds had a hugely exciting life that ended with her burial in a cemetery reserved for Civil War veterans (the only woman to have that honor) Moss pinpoints the moment in the woman's life that contains the greatest dramatic flair. So it is that we see Edmonds enlist, fight, rescue, spy, and save the day in the end. Along the way she uses sources like Edmonds' own diary to allow her to say what Sarah feels or thinks at one moment or another. I've a real pet peeve of children's biographies that just assume that they know what their subjects were thinking from one moment to the next. However, if you've that person's diary in hand then you're clearly not making up those emotions. You're merely quoting what they say they felt. I've seen a lot of picture book biographies of too little known heroes in my day, but I'm fairly certain that this title marks the first time I've ever seen a Bibliography equally split between the author's sources and the illustrator's. In fact, the endmatter of "Nurse, Soldier, Spy" is remarkable in and of itself. Between the Author's Note, the Artist's Note, the Glossary, the two Bibliographies, photographs of the real Sarah Edmonds, and the Index, it seems petulant to ask for more. Still, I was a little surprised not to see a rudimentary Timeline anywhere in the front or back. School assignments where kids have to select their subjects and write about them usually ask that the kids refer to the Timelines of their subjects. Not having one in this book may, unfortunately, limit its school use, which is a crying shame because unless a kid knows to check the tiny type on the publication page, there's no other way for them to figure out facts like the one

stating that Sarah Edmonds was born in 1841. John Hendrix is the kind of illustrator you don't forget easily. He started out slowly, illustrating books like "Abe Lincoln Crosses a Creek" then sort of burst full-throttle onto the scene with his infinitely gutsy "John Brown: His Fight for Freedom". With this, his third Civil War nonfiction picture book, Hendrix's challenge was not dissimilar from that of Ms. Moss. He needed to figure out how much to show, in addition to WHAT to show. For Sarah herself he only had a couple photographs to work off of. On top of that, he explains in his Artist's Note that every detail, from the soldier uniforms to the split-rail log fences had to be accurate to the times. Working with pen and ink and fluid acrylic washes, Hendrix fills his pages not just with images of the action, but also with an eclectic typography that's worth a second and third glance. Some of Ms. Moss's words sit lank upon the page, but other times Hendrix takes particular care to make them pop. Not even the lettering was allowed to be out of synch with the times, though. Nope, Hendrix takes his hand-drawn letters from the illustrated letterforms found on broadside posters from that era. So in a sense, Hendrix is utilizing the same method of advertising and promoting of the war effort to advertise and promote Sarah Edmonds herself. I love watching how Hendrix uses these words too. Sometime a person's sentences will burst out behind them, trailing off the page, as with a confederate soldier who challenges Sarah at the start. Other times they float above in space, drawing attention to themselves. Whatever the case, they're eye-popping, imaginative, and necessary. The universe likes to present unique children's books in pairs. That is why you'll see two picture book biographies of Jane Goodall come out at the same time or two about Althea Gibson. In the case of Ms. Edmonds, hitherto unknown to schoolchildren nationwide, this book by Ms. Moss comes out in tandem with the Carrie Jones title "Sarah Emma Edmonds Was a Great Pretender: The True Story of a Civil War Spy". So should you wish to bulk up your knowledge of this fine and outstanding individual, you have multiple options with which to do so. Regardless of what other books exist out there on the subject, however, this Moss/Hendrix title is a must-read and a must-add to any biographical collection. It's got war. It's got guts. It's got heroism. And it's got a woman that boys and girls alike will find fascinating. For ages 6-12.

Another unsung historical female figure who should be better known comes brilliantly to life in Marissa Moss' biographical tale. My family was riveted by the beautifully written drama capturing several episodes from this heretofore obscure soldier and hero. My husband, a Civil War buff, appreciated both the freshness of the story and the accuracy of the historical detail. The gorgeous illustrations enhance this timeless story. The author's note at the end provides valuable information, especially useful for students and history buffs.

DO NOT BUY THE KINDLE VERSION. I bought the kindle version and the print was small, words were toppled over each other, and the print was illegible. I was very upset over this. I tried contacting customer support but have not heard back yet. I needed this book for school paper this week. I had to re-buy it this time I bought it as paperback and it is much better. I am just upset that I had to purchase the book twice because the first time when i ordered the Kindle it was useless.

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