

Running the Blockade

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Read the “Directions” sheet for step-by-step instructions.

SUMMARY

In this group activity, children will play a game loosely based on Civil War signaling and naval strategy.

WHY

Physical activity can be a great way for children to have fun and experiment with bringing ideas to life through play. Sometimes ideas like signaling and strategy make the most sense when children can try them out in a game scenario.

TIME

- 5 minutes for instructions and set up
- 3-5 minutes for each round, depending on number of players

RECOMMENDED AGE GROUP

This activity will work best for children in 1st grade through 6th grade.

CHALLENGE WORDS

- **blockade**: an act of war in which one side uses ships to stop people or supplies from reaching the other side

GET READY

- Read *Seven Miles to Freedom* together. *Seven Miles to Freedom* is a biography of Robert Smalls, a brave man who used his boat-piloting skills to escape slavery and help the Union navy during the Civil War. For tips on reading this book together, check out the Guided Reading Activity (http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/pdf/smalls/smalls_reading.pdf).
- Read the *Step Back in Time* sheets.

More information at <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/smalls/>

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YOU NEED

- *Directions* sheet (attached)
- *Step Back in Time* sheets (attached)
- *Play Together* sheets (attached)
- 3 or more players
- Open space (at least 10 feet by 10 feet) free of tripping hazards

More information at <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/smalls/>

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For more information, visit the National Museum of American History website <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/smalls>.

About the Civil War

In the middle of the 1800s, the United States was splitting apart. Factories and business were bringing wealth to the North while the South depended on an economy based on plantations farmed by **slaves**. In the North, most people wanted to stop the spread of slavery, and **abolitionists** wanted to end it altogether. In the South, slaveholders and small farmers feared that their way of life would disappear under the power of the North.



Robert Smalls lived in South Carolina, which was a Confederate state. He escaped and helped fight for the Union.

Image from *Seven Miles to Freedom*.

In 1860 Abraham Lincoln was elected president and seven southern states **seceded** from the United States, creating the Confederate States of America. When President Lincoln refused to remove U.S. troops from Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina, Confederate guns fired on the fort. Then four more states **seceded** and joined the Confederacy.

A long and bloody war followed between the South (the Confederacy) and the North (the Union). In 1865, after five years of fighting, the North won the war, slavery ended, and the country was reunited.

For more information on the Civil War, visit the exhibition *The Price of Freedom: Americans at War* (www.americanhistory.si.edu/militaryhistory/).

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About the Navy during the Civil War

The Union and the Confederacy had different ways of using their navies. The Union's main goal was to **blockade** Confederate ports to keep the South from getting supplies. The Confederate navy's major goal was keeping supplies moving by sea, using fast ships called "**blockade runners**" to speed past the Union **blockade**.

About Robert Smalls

Robert Smalls (1839–1915) was born a **slave** in Beaufort, South Carolina. He became a skilled boat pilot and on May 12, 1862, he used his skills to steal the ship *CSS Planter* with his boat crew and family, who all were **slaves**. Once his ship reached the Union **blockade**, he offered the Union navy the *CSS Planter*. Having escaped into Northern territory, he was no longer a **slave**. He fought alongside the Union navy until the end of the Civil War. After the war, Robert Smalls worked for the South Carolina state and national governments, and represented South Carolina in the U.S. Congress for five terms.



Robert Smalls learned to navigate the waters near Charleston, South Carolina by studying maps.

Image from *Seven Miles to Freedom*.

abolitionist: a person who wants to stop or abolish slavery

blockade: an act of war in which one side uses ships to stop people or supplies from leaving or entering the other side

seceded: separated from a nation and became independent

slave: someone who is owned by another person and is forced to work for that person without pay

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For adults and kids to follow together.

1. Review the names of the two sides in the Civil War (the Union and the Confederacy). If children need additional background on the Civil War, consider reading the Step Back in Time sheets aloud, especially the sections on the Civil War and the navies during the Civil War.

2. Introduce children to the rules of the game, as written on the *Play Together* sheets.

3. Play the game together, following the rules of the game.

4. Have children switch roles (rotating who is the signal corps at the start) and see which child is the best signal corps.

5. Discuss the game together.
 - In real life, the Union and Confederacy used secret codes to communicate with their own officers and troops. What are the good things about using a secret code? (The enemy can't understand your messages.) What are the bad things? (Everyone needs to remember the code which makes sensing messages time-consuming)
 - In the game, if a Union and a Confederate ship touched, the Union ship took over the Confederate ship. If Confederate ships had been carrying supplies for their army, the nurses, or the people living in the South, what would have been the bad thing about the Union taking over Confederate ships? (It would be demoralizing for the Confederacy, which couldn't use that ship again; supplies couldn't get to Confederacy and supplies onboard would get used by the Union.)

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1. Assign or allow children to pick roles:
 - a. A few players are the Confederate signal corps. The signal corps stands on one side of the bounded area that is a “safe shore.” They will give signals to the Confederate ships.
 - b. Some of the players are the Union blockade ships and scatter in a bounded area and stay in place. They will block the progress of the Confederate ships.
 - c. All other players become Confederate ships and stand on the opposite side of the bounded area from the Confederate signal corps. They will close their eyes and try to reach the Confederate signal corps.

<i>Group Size</i>	<i># Confederate Signal Corps</i>	<i># Union Blockade Ships</i>	<i># Confederate Ships</i>
3-9	1	1-4	1-4
10-15	2-3	4-5	4-7
16+	<i>About 1 of every 6 players</i>	<i>About 2 of every 6 players</i>	<i>About 3 of every 6 players</i>

2. To start the game, the signal corps says “All Confederate ships, GO!”
 - The Confederate ships close their eyes and blindly navigate their way about, attempting to reach the signal corps on shore. The Confederate ships must move continuously, never stopping, but can move at any speed.

Tip *The slower the Confederate ships move, the more successful they’re likely to be! Share this tip with the players before, during, or after play.*
 - The signal corps gives directions to the Confederate ships by saying a ship’s name and then giving the signal for right (R) or left (L) to help the ship avoid blockades. Example, “Jenny, - - —.” Each person on the signal corps can only give one signal at a time to one ship at a time, so they should pick the ship that is in the most danger of bumping into a Union blockade.
 - If a Confederate ship bumps into a Union blockade ship, both ships stay in place. The Confederate ship gets taken over by the Union and becomes part of a blockade.

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- The game ends when all Confederate ships have either reached the shoreline or have been taken over by the Union.

Tip *For more challenge, have the Confederate ships make their own code for right and left, and do not share the code with the Union blockade ships. The Union blockade ships keep their eyes open and can move one step (in any direction) for every two commands that the signal corps gives. (If the Union blockade ships can figure out the Confederate code, they can be more strategic in their movements.)*

Signals for R and L

R is - - -, or short-long-long, or high-low-low.

L is - - -, or short-short-long, or high-high-low.

Signals can be made with a whistle (if doing short and long whistles) or can be made with your voice (using a syllable such as “oh” or “ah,” if doing short and long sounds or high and low pitches).

More information at <http://americanhistory.si.edu/ourstory/activities/smalls/>

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Read the “Directions,” “Parent Guide,” and “Play Together” sheets for specific details on the activity.

OBJECTIVES

The students will be better able to:

- Use (and create) signals to convey messages.
- Describe a blockade.

STUDENT PERFORMANCE CRITERIA

- Discussion exhibits logical connections and comparisons.
- Student behavior exhibits willingness to work as a team.
- Student behavior exhibits willingness to follow rules.

STANDARDS

NCHS History Standards

K-4 Historical Thinking Standards

5A: Identify problems and dilemmas.

5-12 U.S. History Content Standards

Era 5: Civil War and Reconstruction (1850-1877)

2A: The student understands how the resources of the Union and Confederacy affected the course of the war.

21st-Century Skills

Learning and Innovation Skills

- Critical Thinking and Problem Solving
- Communication and Collaboration

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