# The Angel of the Battlefield: Clara Barton and Responsibility

## Full Lesson Plan

**COMPPELLING QUESTION**

How can you help others by acting responsibly?

**VIRTUE**

Responsibility

**DEFINITION**

Responsibility is accountability to myself and others.

**LESSON OVERVIEW**

In this lesson, students will learn about how Clara Barton dedicated herself to the responsibility for caring for others throughout her life and how they can act responsibly in their own lives.

**OBJECTIVES**

- Students will analyze Clara Barton's efforts to act responsibly during her life.
- Students will apply their knowledge about acting responsibly to their own lives.
- Students will determine ways in which they can act responsibly.

[https://voicesofhistory.org](https://voicesofhistory.org)
Clara Barton developed responsibility from a young age as she understood what it was like to feel helpless and mistreated. She faced constant teasing about a lisp she had when speaking, and lived in a tumultuous home with a mentally unbalanced mother.

Although timid and prone to illness, Barton proved herself to be a very capable young woman. At the age of ten, she helped nurse her severely injured brother, David, for over two years—even after doctors had given up hope. As Clara grew into womanhood, she was encouraged to become a teacher—a profession in which she excelled. Despite her quiet personality, she proved herself to be capable when teaching large classes of young men and women. Humanitarianism and responsibility were traits that the young Clara Barton would continue to develop throughout her life.

**VOCABULARY**

- Humanitarianism
- Prone
- Timid
- Harassment
- Malaria
- Introspective
- Empathy
- Determination
- Red Cross
- Bureaucracy

**INTRODUCE TEXT**

Have students read the background and narrative, keeping the Compelling Question in mind as they read. Then have them answer the remaining questions below.
**WALK-IN-THE-SHOES QUESTIONS**

- As you read, imagine you are the protagonist.
  - What challenges are you facing?
  - What fears or concerns might you have?
  - What may prevent you from acting in the way you ought?

**OBSERVATION QUESTIONS**

- Who was Clara Barton? Why was her life significant?
- What was Clara Barton’s purpose?
- How did Clara Barton act responsibly in her life?

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

Discuss the following questions with your students.

- What is the historical context of the narrative?
- What historical circumstances presented a challenge to the protagonist?
- How and why did the individual exhibit a moral and/or civic virtue in facing and overcoming the challenge?
- How did the exercise of the virtue benefit civil society?
- How might exercise of the virtue benefit the protagonist?
- What might the exercise of the virtue cost the protagonist?
- Would you react the same under similar circumstances? Why or why not?
- How can you act similarly in your own life? What obstacles must you overcome in order to do so?

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

- Clara Barton Birthplace. http://clarabartonbirthplace.org/site/?q=node/15
The Angel of the Battlefield: Clara Barton and Responsibility

Handout A: Narrative

BACKGROUND

Clara Barton developed responsibility from a young age as she understood what it was like to feel helpless and mistreated. She faced constant teasing about a lisp she had when speaking, and lived in a tumultuous home with a mentally unbalanced mother.

Although timid and prone to illness, Barton proved herself to be a very capable young woman. At the age of ten, she helped nurse her severely injured brother, David, for over two years—even after doctors had given up hope on his condition. As Clara grew into womanhood, she was encouraged to become a teacher—a profession in which she excelled. Despite her quiet personality, she proved herself to be capable when teaching large classes of young men and women. Humanitarianism and responsibility were traits that the young Clara Barton would continue to develop throughout her life.

NARRATIVE

Born on December 25, 1821, in New Oxford, Massachusetts, Clara Barton grew up as a very quiet and introspective young girl. She was a very bright but timid young girl who learned quickly and proved to be academically talented. Prior to the outbreak of the Civil War, Barton was already breaking boundaries. She worked successfully as an educator and also held a position as a clerk in the Patent Office—the first woman to do so. Of course, Barton experienced harassment from her male co-workers, but this challenged her to work even harder to prove them wrong. Due to the stress caused by her job and how she was treated, Barton's health declined until she eventually became ill with malaria. When James Buchanan was elected president, he eliminated Barton's position in the Patent Office, putting her out of work.

The Civil War provided Barton with a chance to combine her skills in education and empathy and put them toward a higher purpose as a nurse. Working in a field hospital in Washington, D.C. during the early years of the war, she recognized some of her former students among the wounded, a painful experience that pushed her to work even harder at helping the injured. Barton worked diligently to help ease their suffering, as she felt a strong sense of responsibility for the soldiers. She ate what they ate and lived among them. Even though the work was tiring and seemingly unending, Barton forged on in her desire to help others, earning the nickname “Angel of the Battlefield”.

As the Civil War came to an end, President Lincoln put Barton in charge of finding missing soldiers, a task she worked on with the same determination and enthusiasm that she had when helping soldiers on the battlefield. She answered letters by the hundreds and made requests
to the government on behalf of families, diligently working to overcome the confusion in the federal bureaucracy that came about following the war.

In 1868, Barton traveled to Europe to rest, but within a few years she once again found people in need of her help. There, she saw the affect that the Franco-Prussian War had on civilians. She discovered an organization called the Red Cross, which provided medical aid to soldiers during wartime. She returned home in 1873 and worked ardently to convince her fellow Americans of the organization’s merits. Although it took several years, Clara Barton finally accomplished her goal of establishing the American Red Cross in 1881.

Throughout her life, Clara Barton felt a great sense of responsibility to help others. She was a teacher, a nurse, and a humanitarian who dedicated herself to assisting humanity. Her accomplishments made her a celebrity during her time, and they continue to positively impact the world in the modern day.