

## Questions to Link Letters to WWI Topics

### Letter #5

#### Topics:

*Signal training*

*Drills (marksmanship and chemical warfare)*

*Financial Situation*

*Training Life*

Lesson idea: Have students write back to Max as if they were Rose or Marcus. This activity can be done to this letter or any other. They can give Max news of the home front during different times while Max is away.

Lesson idea: Discuss or have the students research gas warfare of WWI, army training in WWI, the purpose of insurance, different gases used/technical names, different sections in the division, what the different signals they learned in training were and the importance/purpose of these signals.

Question: Why are Max and his friends upset/against the “drafted” or “select men”? Explain.

Question: What is the allotment, and its purpose? Why did Max do this?

Question: Are there some words or phrases in the letter that are slang or have a different meaning than the original? What are these words and compare Max’s and your definitions?

### Letter #6

#### Topics:

*Drills*

*Hiking*

Lesson idea: Talk about new inventions of the early 1900’s starting to be more accessible to middle class families, or the impact these inventions had on the war. (The telephone, the automobile.)

Question: Why did soldiers take their pictures so often? Explain.

Question: What would be the concerns of his parents? Why are they asking when he’s going to be moving next? Why did Max and his company move around a lot? From the Jefferson barracks to Camp MacArthur to the next place?

Question: What is a Pathe machine? Why is it so “classy”? What were some other new inventions in the early 1900’s? (The Pathe is a type of phonograph. This website can be helpful to students: <http://library.thinkquest.org/CR0210321/inventions.htm> )

### Letter #8

#### Topics:

*Trench Training*

*Sleeping Arrangements*

*Food*

*Avoiding Work*

Lesson idea: Show items in History Trunk from First Division Museum. Max talks about some of the things he is carrying, and with the trunk students will be able to see and hold these items.

Lesson idea: Have students write the end of the letter.

Lesson idea: Describe the trenches of WWI, and the nature of trench warfare. What was the purpose of training in the trenches? Have the students write three letters home as if they were in the trenches of WWI.

Question: Hike-The infantry men did a lot of hiking during their training, what was the purpose? What do you think you'll see later in the letters when he arrives in Europe and the Front line?

Question: Tents-why did they have to pitch tents in pairs? Why did the government do it that way? Could you be on your own like Wallie? Which would you have preferred?  
(Photo)

Question: From reading this letter, when Max went to the trench-training session, do you think he spent his time wisely, working diligently, or do you think he *fooled around*? Do you think it was a good idea, why or why not? Give examples for your reasoning.-How much "work" did Max actually do?

Question: Describes his sleeping conditions. What would be your night time experience?

### **Letter #13**

#### **Topics:**

*New York*

*List of Clothing and Equipment*

Question: Hiking nine miles is quite a distance. Why are the men taking such long hikes? What is the purpose?

Question: What are your impressions of Max's trip to New York City? If you took a day trip to NYC, what would you do? (use internet, Online newspapers, personal experiences)

Question: Of the list of items that was issued to Max, in your opinion, which items are necessary and which can be let go? Explain your reasoning.

### **Letter #16 EXAMPLE OF CENSOR'S WORK**

#### **Topics:**

*Censors*

*Trip across ocean*

*Red Cross Women*

*Women and boys working in Europe*

*Currency Exchange*

Lesson: Talk about the Lusitania. Discuss the reasoning behind the German U-boats sinking vessels. Discuss the secret purpose of the voyage. Why was the US involved? Was there an economic, political, or social benefit or drawback to this activity? Explain.

Question/Lesson: pay rate- what do you think about it? What's today's minimum wage? Was there a minimum wage back then, if so, what was it? What were some of the prices back then? Do you think his amount of pay was considered "good" back then? Why? Explain.

Question: What was the job of the censors? Why was it important for the soldiers not to write about specific matters? (The part the censors crossed out is the length of the boat ride and the date of their arrival.)

Question: Why were English women and boys working hard labor and odd jobs? Was it normal for women and boys to be working outside the home in the 1910's-1920's? What kind of work was "normal" for a woman or a boy to do?

Question: What were the Red Cross women doing when the soldiers boarded and exited the boat? How did other women contribute to the war effort? Were women allowed on the front? What was the purpose of the Red Cross women?

Question: Since Max didn't send a card, how do you think his mother reacted when the other parents received cards from their sons, but she didn't? Explain her reaction and possible consequences of the "unsent" card.

Letter #17

**Topics:**

*Censors*

*English Camp*

*Casual Camp Duties*

Lesson: Discuss censorship and propaganda in the United States during WWI.

Questions: What are some examples of topics that Max cannot write about to his parents because the censors will mark them out? What is the significance of the topics? Why is it important not to write about these topics? What kind of job did the Censors have? Would you have liked to do their job? What are the pros and cons of it?

Questions: Define Casual Camp/Company in your own words. Can you give some other examples of jobs the men might do as a "casual company"?

Question: Why is it important to Max that Wally and Jake are in the same barracks and next to him at the Camp? Explain your thoughts.

Question: Do you think that this is what Max expected of war in Europe to be like? He seems upbeat and patriotic in this letter when he describes his working assignment. Can you explain his behavior?

Letter #18

**Topics:**

*Permanent Detail*

*Difference between regular army camp and hospital food*

*Winchester, England*

Question: What kind of work are the company men being assigned to do on permanent detail? (cooking, driving, and clerks) Is this strange considering they were trained to fight or do special duties, like Max and Signal training? What is the purpose? Why aren't the townspeople doing this menial/basic jobs instead of the company men?

Question: Why is there a curfew in Winchester, England? Who does it apply to? Just citizens or the soldiers too?

Question: The men are allowed to visit this town and as Max describes the town, he is amazed at the history of the town and buildings. Are you surprised at his amazement? Did many American families travel to other continents back then? What kind of people

did extensive traveling back in those days? How does Winchester and England and its culture compare to the experiences of Madison, WI and the USA?

Letter #19

**Topics:**

*Winchester, England*

*English Girls*

**Question:** What do you think about the detail that Max and his friends are on now? Is this the job that they were trained for? Why are they not on the front doing the communication work?

**Question:** Why is Max asking for photos of his family and pet? Why is it important to him? Explain. Do you think other guys did the same?

**Question:** When did the troops expect to get paid and when did they actually receive their money? What kind of problems could this present for soldiers?

Letter #32

**Topics:**

*Camp Life*

*Signal School- detailed explanation*

*Fourth of July*

*New Supplies*

**Lesson:** Discuss the importance of communication in war. Max uses telephones in the Signal Section. What are some of the important responsibilities in this job.

**Question:** What are some of the requirements in order to graduate from signal school? What happens if a person does not pass?

**Question:** Was anything special done for the 4<sup>th</sup> of July? What do you think about Max's statement about the 4<sup>th</sup>? Did only the Americans celebrate the 4<sup>th</sup> of July? Explain your answers.

Letter #37

**Topics:**

*Max's angst because of Signal School final examinations, possible transfer to the frontlines, and what he is going to do with his stuff.*

*Asks about home life*

**Question:** Max refers to his brother and sister, Marcus and Rose, and asks how they are doing and what they are up to. Is he just trying to keep up with the news back home or is he missing home? What do you think?

**Question:** Who do you think Violet is? Why are souvenirs important and what kind of souvenirs is Max collecting?

**Question:** What is the main problem that Max is writing about in this letter? How does he solve it?

Letter #40

**Topics:**

*Being gassed and in the hospital*

*Signal Work*

*Censors*

*Stars and Stripes mentioned briefly*

Lesson/Research idea: How does someone earn the Medal for Bravery? What are some other American awards and how do the men earn them?

Question: Refer to the first paragraph, and the end of the letter including the part about his birthday. How do you suppose Max is feeling right now? Can you explain how you would feel if you were in this situation?

(If students need more direction, you could add: Take into consideration that he has been away from home since Nov-Dec 1917, in a foreign country, and hasn't received any letters from home in almost 3 months.)

Question: Refer to the second paragraph. Would you have been this happy/peppy/upbeat if you were in the hospital and had been gassed recently? Why is Max? Do you think that is unusual? What is his intent, what is he trying to portray? Then in the last couple of sentences of this second paragraph, Max changes his manner and adds his final thoughts about war. What do you suppose is going through his mind? (Keep in mind that this is the only time in his correspondence home that he speaks of the true horrors of war.)

Question: What is meant by a "soft" job? In paragraph 3 Max refers to the "soft" job of the telephone men, is he being literal or sarcastic? Explain your reasoning.

Question: Max's letter location is titled "Somewhere in France". Usually he is good about naming the places where he is, why is he not doing it in this letter, this time?

Letter #45

**Topics:**

*Return to outfit*

*Lots of traveling and hiking*

*Armistice signed and his reaction*

*Radio Station work*

*Speaking German in Luxembourg*

*Stars and Stripes mentioned*

Lesson idea: Talk about the Stars and Stripes magazine. Have kids make up their own newsletter article/ or whole newsletter with small group.

Question/lesson: Who are the "Fritzs"? How did they get that nickname? Quick Essay: 3 paragraphs, Write down your own theory, research the correct answer and write it down, then summarize your findings.

Question/lesson: Why is it so difficult for the Europeans to believe how well Max can speak German? What makes his era different from ours? Explain. Ask parents about learning languages during their school years and compare/contrast their era and today's learning philosophies.

Question: Why do you suppose Max is not getting letters regularly from his family? What obstacles are blocking the messages?

Question: Give a description of radio duty.

Question: Why was it so strange for Max to sleep in a feather bed? Why was his experience so interesting to him?

Question: He missed celebrating his birthday at home? How do you suppose he felt? How would you feel? Write a journal entry describing your birthday as if you were Max during WWI.

Letter # 56

**Topics:**

*Christmas dinner*

*Stars and Stripes mentioned*

*Things are going back to prewar times (economy and society)*

Lesson: Find a first hand account of a currently deployed American soldier's Christmas experience. Compare this experience to Max's.

Question: Describe Max's Christmas. Think of your favorite holiday. What would you miss most if you were away from you family at that time? How would you feel if a family member was away at war during that time? What could you do?

Question: Max comments that he is glad that things are going back to "pre-war times" at home. What "things" are going back to pre-war times? Explain what changed from "war times" back to "pre-war times". How is this going to affect the social, economic, or political aspects of the United States?

Question: About how long does it take to send and receive a letter?

Letter #60

**Topics:**

*Sick and Medical Care*

*Not getting correspondence*

*Hospital Life- Visits from Jewish army chaplain*

*Fear of Influenza*

*Death of Ex-President Theodore Roosevelt*

Lesson: Talk about the Influenza pandemic during the years 1917-1918.

Question: Max is not getting mail from his family, why? What is taking so long? What is blocking the path?

Question: What are your thoughts about the medical attention Max received? Was this attention appropriate? Why did he insist that he should spend his recovery back at the Radio room? Explain your reasons.

Question: What does the Jewish Chaplain bring in for Max?

Letter #61

**Topics:**

*Armistice*

*Lack of food*

*Hospital Life- Suspect Diphtheria in ward*

Question: Do you think there is a genuine lack of food, or is this complaint more of an opinion of Max's? Explain your answer.

Question: Do you think "things" changed at home when the armistice was signed? Give examples and explain. (Things as in: the economy, social life, cooking, etc) See #56Q

Question: Why is Max so concerned about his mail not getting to him? Why is the mail important to him? Would you be reacting the same way if you were in his place?

Question: If nothing is happening at the hospital and there isn't any news to report, why is Max writing home?

Question: Why is there a lack of food in the hospital? Why isn't Max getting the same amount of food as he did when he was working at the hospital in Winchester, England? See #18Q

Letter #62

**Topics:**

*Nothing important to report, this shows the monotony of hospital life.*

*YMCA scandal*

Question: How bad do you think Max is missing his family right now? What can you tell from his letter? What feelings can you extrapolate from Max's letter?

Question: Max is writing a letter that doesn't contain much useful information, why is he writing to his family?

Letter #63

**Topics:**

*No longer ill, but still in hospital*

*Process getting discharged from hospital*

Question: What prompted the doctor to give Max "a raking over the coals"? What were the reasons that the doctor wanted Max to leave the hospital?

Question: Why was Max not given all of his clothes?

Question: Why did Max not ask for clothes himself?

Letter #64

**Topics:**

*Likely some of his mail was lost*

*Red Cross dance without enough women*

*Inquiries about home and military standing*

*Transferred to new hospital*

*Entertainment- Difference between German and American*

Question: Why are the soldiers shown movies at the hospital? What is the purpose?

What is the purpose of the soldiers being lectured on the history of France? Explain.

Why are the Red Cross, Y.M.C.A. and K.C. hosting shows, events, and trips for the soldiers?

Question: Describe the Y.M.C.A. dance. What was it like for the women?

Question: Is Max really in a hurry to get back to his outfit, what do you think? Explain your reasoning. (This also applies to letter #67.)

Question: Is the souvenir really a piece of jewelry that Rose would wear or more of a relic from an event in history?

Letter #67

**Topics:**

*Been in hospital for two months*

*No mail while in hospital*

*Hospital light duty*

*Physical improvements*

*Trier, Germany*

**Question:** Referring back to the third paragraph, is Max really in a hurry to get back to his outfit, what do you think? (This also applies to letter #64.) Explain your reasoning.

**Question:** Why is Max writing a letter if he has no news to report?

**Question:** Max describes his trip to the Roman ruins in detail. How do you interpret his efforts to write elaborate descriptions of his impressions of the foreign countries he visits? Is he really fascinated with the new country/land/terrain, is he trying to fill up space in the letters, or is he hiding his war-experiences from his family?

Letter #68

**Topics:**

*Nothing new to report*

*Shows monotony of hospital life and end of war*

*Met a boy from his hometown and is anxious for news.*

**Question:** Describe Max's meeting with the boy from his hometown. How would you feel seeing someone from your hometown while away at war? What would you talk about, and want to know about?

Letter #69

**Topics:**

*Preparation for Pershing's visit to the hospital*

*Additional physical improvements*

**Question:** Max is now including another physical improvement, his nose, on the agenda before he leaves the hospital. Do you think it is absolutely necessary for Max's teeth and nose to be fixed before he heads back to his outfit?

Letter #70

**Topics:**

*Pershing's visit*

*Nose operation*

**Question:** Who is General Pershing? Give at least 5 facts about him.

**Question:** Max discusses his nose operation procedures in detail. He also discusses his predicament of having to move to a different building in order to complete the operation. Why does he spend so much time and paper on this subject?

Letter #76

**Topics:**

*Jewish Holiday*

*Seen lots of flu in hospital*

*Tells mother not to send money*

Question: Who are M.P.'s, and why is Max so disappointed to see lots of them?

Question: How is Max feeling right now? Pick out three sentences to quote and explain how they indicate Max's mood.

Question: Did you notice that Max takes off of work on Jewish holidays and accepts items from the Jewish chaplain, but he also writes home about missing Christmas in letter #60. Can you explain this?

Letter #82A

**Topics:**

*Family moved out of hometown*

*Finding work in Chicago*

*Family values*

*Look forward to coming home*

*Current switch board duty*

Lesson: In 1919 the maximum work day was supposed to be 9 hours. Do we have laws like that today? What are they? This website is one that students can go to in order to see the laws in their state: <http://www.ewin.com/articles/restper.htm>

Question: Explain how you reacted to Max writing: "I sure hate to think that I will have to come back to a place where I am a stranger." Would you feel the same if you were gone for so long? Why or why not?

Question: Do you see any family values in this letter? Are these values strictly related to the early 1900's, or do you see these values today? Explain.

Question: Max writes about there being a new law for maximum hours worked in a day. Why might Max's mother be working longer? Do you think that Max's prediction that they will make her work even more hours will come true?

Letter #84

**Topics:**

*Wait for Germans to sign peace agreement*

*Move out to neutral zone to prepare for the worst*

*Peace signed*

*General of First Brigade speech*

Question: How did Max feel about the proposition of going home?

Question: Why do you think they fired a 48 gun salute? How many states were part of the U.S. in 1919? Which ones were missing? (Hawaii and Alaska join in 1959)

Question: How many hours does Max's mom work per day now? Is there any backlash happening in the U.S.A. at this time to fight these working conditions? (Assign students to research strikes in 1919. For example the steel strike, coal strike, police strike, and soldier strikes.)

Letter #86

**Topics:**

*Celebration commemorating battle of Sissions*

*9 hour work day law*

Lesson/Question: What happened at the battle of Sissions?

Question: What kinds of activities were there for the soldiers during the day they remembered the battle of Sissions? Do you think these activities were appropriate? Explain your answer.

Question: Why does Max's mom have to work 12 hours a night when there is a 9 hour workday law? (The law only applies to day workers.)

Letter #87

**Topics:**

*Possibility of going home*

*Crime in Chicago*

*New recruits*

Question: What does Max think of the new recruits? Explain your answer.

Question: Do you think Max's skepticism about finally going home is reasonable or do you think he should be more excited?

Question: What is "pinched"?

Letter #91

**Topics:**

*Final Letter*

*Back in the United States*

Question: What is a "vaudeville show"?

Question: This is the last letter in the collection. Does it seem like a fitting conclusion to the detailed account of Max's life during WWI? Explain your answer.

Question: Max only refers to his more serious and horrific war experiences once (# 40) throughout all of his letters, why do you suppose that is?