

**DUEL OF THE IRONCLADS: THE MONITOR VS. THE VIRGINIA  
BY PATRICK O'BRIEN**

**Louisiana Young Readers' Choice Award Nominee 2006  
Grades 3-5**

Submitted by Martha Jordan, Children's Services Coordinator  
Ouachita Parish Public Library, Monroe

**Title: Duel of the Ironclads: The Monitor vs. the Virginia**

**Author/Illustrator: Patrick O'Brien**

**Publisher: Walker & Company, 2003**

**Pages: 40**

**Summary**

O'Brien brings to life one of the most important sea battles in history. The *Virginia* was originally a wooden Union battleship named the *Merrimack*. The Confederates salvaged and reworked the ship by plating it with iron to make it less vulnerable to Union cannon fire. As they labored to convert the ship, the Union navy got word of their activities and decided they needed their own ironclad. Inventor John Ericsson was recruited to design and build such a ship as quickly as possible, since the Confederates already had a head start. Ericsson's ship was unlike any ship ever seen. It was small, powered only by engines and completely covered with iron. It sat very low in the water with only the turret and pilothouse visible during battle. He called it not a ship, but a "fighting machine." The turret was an original design. While most ships had cannons facing outward from their sides, the *Monitor's* turret revolved, so that its two cannons could fire in any direction without the ship itself having to turn. The *Virginia* and the *Monitor* revolutionized the conduct of war at sea. When they met on March 9, 1862 in a battle that lasted only four hours and ended in a draw, it was clear "that all the navies of the world were suddenly out-of-date." O'Brien tells the story of this historic battle in lively prose which captures and holds the reader's attention from the first sentence. His masterful paintings, rendered in watercolor and gouache, capture all the drama of the battle. Booklist starred review.

**Author/Illustrator's Biography**

O'Brien is the author and illustrator of nine nonfiction books for children and the illustrator of many more. He specializes in historic and prehistoric subjects. As a child, O'Brien loved reading about adventure and exploration. After earning a degree in biology from the University of Virginia in 1982, he went to art school at Virginia Commonwealth University. He has been a freelance illustrator since 1986 and has done work for National Geographic, Newsweek, the Discovery Channel, the Smithsonian, the American Museum of Natural History and others. His art has appeared in magazines and newspapers, on posters, video slipcases, greeting cards, and even billboards. Most of the original art for his books is available for sale through

galleries. Some of his art is also housed in the esteemed Mazza Museum of International Art from Picture Books, a museum devoted to literacy and the art of children's picture books at the University of Findlay, in Findlay, Ohio. He lives in Maryland with his wife and two cats.

### **Other Titles by Patrick O'Brien**

*Fantastic Flights: One Hundred Years of Flying on the Edge.* Walker & Co., 2003  
*Mammoth.* Henry Holt, 2002  
*The Great Ships.* Walker & Co., 2001  
*Megatooth.* Henry Holt, 2001  
*The Hindenburg.* Henry Holt, 2000  
*Steam, Smoke, and Steel: Back in Time with Trains.* Charlesbridge, 2000  
*Gigantic! How Big Were the Dinosaurs?* Henry Holt, 1999  
*The Making of a Knight: How Sir James Earned His Armor.* Charlesbridge, 1998

### **Related Titles**

*Ironclads and Blockades in the Civil War* by Douglas J. Savage  
*The Monitor: The Iron Warship That Changed the World* by Gare Thompson  
*The Monitor vs. the Merrimack* by Bruce L. Brager  
*U.S.S. Monitor* by Gare Thompson

### **Classroom Connections**

- **Art:** Construct a model of the Monitor and/or the Virginia.
- **Language Arts:** Write an essay in first person as if you were one of the characters in this book – a shipbuilder, a Union or Confederate soldier or sailor, President Lincoln, John Ericsson, Captain John Worden, Captain Franklin Buchanan, Lieutenant Catesby Jones, a spectator who watched the battle from the shore, etc.
- **Science:** Study the dynamics of ships, how and why they stay afloat. Learn about the steam engine and its use in ships and other ways ships are powered.
- **Social Studies:** Students can examine the history of warships from ancient through modern times, looking at the various types of ships that have been used for battle. They can also look at the impact of ironclads on sea battles of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and how their influence is still seen today.

## Web Sites

Patrick O'Brien Studio

<http://www.patrickobrienstudio.com/>

The author web site offers information about himself and his work.

Brooklyn in the Civil War

[http://www.brooklynpubliclibrary.org/civilwar/lesson\\_plans/cw\\_lesson1\\_11.doc](http://www.brooklynpubliclibrary.org/civilwar/lesson_plans/cw_lesson1_11.doc) (MSW)

[http://www.brooklynpubliclibrary.org/civilwar/lesson\\_plans/cw\\_lesson1\\_11.pdf](http://www.brooklynpubliclibrary.org/civilwar/lesson_plans/cw_lesson1_11.pdf) (pdf)

Includes lesson plans to go along with the topic of the book.

NOVA: Lincoln's Secret Weapon

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/monitor/>

Site is about the NOVA television program, Lincoln's Secret Weapon. It includes a virtual tour of the *Monitor*, eyewitness accounts of the battle, information about the television show and how it was produced, and information about the steam engine. There's a link to the next site listed below.

NOVA Teachers – Lincoln's Secret Weapon

[http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/teachers/programs/2710\\_monitor.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/teachers/programs/2710_monitor.html)

This teacher's guide can be used with the NOVA television program, Lincoln's Secret Weapon. It includes an overview of the show, viewing ideas, classroom activity and more.

CSS Virginia Home Page

<http://cssvirginia.org/>

This site dedicated to the Confederate ship *Virginia* has useful information and lots of links to related sites.

The Mariner's Museum

<http://www.mariner.org/>

The Mariner's Museum in Newport News, Virginia has a *USS Monitor* Center. The web site about the *Monitor* is fantastic: with an interactive reenactment of the battle, plus information about life aboard the *Monitor* and what needs to be done to preserve the salvaged ship.

Web Currents: Weekly Online Lessons: Raising Civil War Ships

<http://www.learneronline.com/weekly/archive2K/week28/>

Discussion of the *USS Monitor* with web links.

National Port Columbus Civil War Naval Museum

<http://www.portcolumbus.org/>

The Civil War Naval Center in Columbus, Georgia has an excellent site and includes links to information about ironclads.