

The Civil War: Up Close and Personal “I Have a Story to Tell”

Grade level: Late elementary

Estimated time: Two class periods

Specific topic: Journal writing and the Huff Diary

Subtopic: Civil War perspectives

Teacher background information

The following Civil War Unit is based on a diary written in pencil by Private William D. Huff. It begins after Huff was captured at the Battle of Chickamauga, fought September 18–19, 1863. In the diary, Huff narrates his harrowing experiences at Camp Douglas, Chicago’s Confederate prison camp. The diary contains more than thirty detailed drawings and descriptions of life in the prison camp. Topics include escape attempts, harsh punishments, and disease. Huff ends the diary by describing his parole and return to his hometown of St. Mary’s Parish, Louisiana.

Prior to teaching this lesson, students should have a general understanding of both sides of the Civil War, including the reasons for dividing, seceding, and fighting, as well as the strategies, relative strengths, and major victories of both the North and the South. As preparation for teaching this lesson, refer to the lesson “Who is William Huff? Blueback or Grayback?” The lesson helps students analyze the Huff diary, introduces them to period slang terms, and provides them with the basic knowledge needed to write their own Civil War diary entries (the activity of this lesson).

Key concepts

Injustice, loneliness, communication, division, loyalty, creativity, and self-expression

Key questions

If you lived during the Civil War, how would your perspective about the war change? How would you see things differently? Does this perspective change the way you think about your own life?

Goals of this lesson

1. To see that people involved in history, in this case the Civil War, are much more than two-dimensional names in textbooks. To understand that people in history are real people with real emotions and not so different from us.
2. To gain a new perspective by looking at the Civil War through the eyes of a person who lived through it, and realize that everyone who lived at the time of the Civil War lived through the Civil War.

Objectives

1. Students will gain a deeper historical perspective of the Civil War.
2. Students will learn develop their research skills.
3. Students will apply historical knowledge to journal writing.

Materials

Master copies of the Civil War character cards are provided.

1. Civil War character cards (one card per student)
2. Examples of Civil War diaries for students needing additional guidance (see the “Recommended Resources” of this lesson)
3. Books on the Civil War for student research
4. Paper and pens or pencils

Procedures

1. During this lesson (and the lesson “Look out my Window. What do you see?”), students should work independently until the unit is completed.
2. Distribute a Civil War character card to each student. Instruct students that they will each be writing a diary entry from the perspective of their assigned Civil War identity. Instruct them to write in a style similar to Huff.
3. Explain to students that an exceptional diary will include slang, drawings (see the lesson “Look out my Window. What do you see?”), personal thoughts and feelings, and historical research.
4. Remind students to be creative. When writing their diary entries, they should use their imaginations to combine details from their factual research with creative elements. Their goals should be to complete original work that is convincing to the reader.
5. Allow students time to do their initial research. If there are no available research materials in the classroom, schedule time at a library or in the computer lab.
6. Allow students time to create their diary entries.
7. Once completed, have students read their diary entries aloud. Ask the rest of the class to guess the presenters’ general identities.

Suggestions for student assessment

The diary should be judged similar to other writing samples and should meet the following standards: appropriate (meets assigned) length, correct spelling and punctuation, knowledge of research, and understanding of the material. Complete entries should also include slang terms and at least one illustration (see the lesson “Look out my window. What do you see?” for an in-depth illustration activity). You may want to create a rubric and share it with the class when explaining the assignment.

Recommended resources

Beatty, Patricia. *Charley Skedaddle*. New York: Troll, 2002.

— — —. *Jayhawker*. New York: Beach Tree, 1991.

Collier, James Lincoln and Christopher Collier. *With Every Drop of Blood*. New York: Delacourte Press, 1994.

Hunt, Irene. *Across Five Aprils*. New York, NY: Berkley Jam Books, 2002.

Murphy, Jim. *The Boy’s War: Confederate and Union soldiers talk about the Civil War*. New York: Clarion Books, 1990.

Reeder, Carolyn. *Shades of Gray*. New York: Aladdin Paperbacks, 1999.

Examples of Civil War diaries entries can be found at www.civilwarletters.com.

Extension activities

1. Write a script from a diary and present it in a Reader’s Theatre.
2. Write a piece of historical fiction based on a diary.

This lesson fulfills the following Illinois Learning Standards:

English Language Arts

State Goal 3: Write to communicate for a variety of purposes.

State Goal 5: Use the language arts to acquire, assess, and communicate information.

Social Science

State Goal 14: Understand political systems, with an emphasis on the United States.

State Goal 16: Understand events, trends, individuals, and movements shaping the history of Illinois, the United States, and other nations.

State Goal 18: Understand social systems, with an emphasis on the United States.

***History Lab* is made possible through a generous grant from the Polk Bros. Foundation.**

These materials were researched and written by Elizabeth Nessner. Images used in this lesson are from the Chicago Historical Society’s collection. *History Lab* coordinated by Heidi Moisan of the Chicago Historical Society. The Chicago Historical Society gratefully acknowledges the Chicago Park District’s generous support of all of the Historical Society’s activities.

CIVIL WAR CHARACTER CARDS

PROFILE 1

Male, 21 years old. You volunteered to become a Union soldier. Before the war you worked on your family farm in Iowa.

PROFILE 2

Male, 34 years old. You are originally from St. Louis, Missouri. You are a wounded Union soldier at a feild hospital.

PROFILE 3

Female, 58 years old. You live in Chicago, Illinois. You have two sons both of whom are serving in the Union Army.

PROFILE 4

Male, 44 years old. You are a Union general from Pennsylvania. You have a wife and two children at home.

PROFILE 5

Female, 11 years old. You live in Massachusetts. Your father is serving in the Union army.

PROFILE 6

Male, 16 years old. You are from New York. Your father and brother are serving in the Union army. While they are gone, you are the man of the house.

PROFILE 7

Female, 26 years old. You live in Ohio. Your husband was killed in battle fighting for the Union.

PROFILE 8

Male, 26 years old. You are a Confederate soldier from Alabama but are currently being held in a Union prisoner-of-war camp.

PROFILE 9

Male, 21 years old. You serve in the Union army. You miss your fiancée who is waiting for you at home in New York.

PROFILE 10

Male, 26 years old. You are a slave from Mississippi and are working as a personal servant for your owner who is fighting in the Confederate army.



CIVIL WAR CHARACTER CARDS

PROFILE 11

Male, 28 years old. You serve in the Confederate army. You miss your wife of five years. She is your childhood sweetheart and waits for you at home in North Carolina.

PROFILE 12

Female, 20 years old. You are a slave who lives and works on a large Virginia plantation. Your owner is fighting for the Confederacy.

PROFILE 13

Male, 32 years old. You are from Pennsylvania and are a Union soldier held prisoner in a Confederate prison camp.

PROFILE 14

Male, 43 years old. You are originally from Louisiana. You work as a cook in a Confederate prison camp.

PROFILE 15

Female, 16 years old. You live in Mississippi. Your brother has just volunteered for the Confederate army.

PROFILE 16

Male, 19 years old. You work as a slave in Jefferson Davis's home in Mississippi.

PROFILE 17

Male, 51 years old. You are a general of the Confederate infantry.

PROFILE 18

Female, 28 years old. Your husband is in the Confederate army. While he is gone, you are running your family plantation in South Carolina.

PROFILE 19

Female, 22 years old. You are an African American living in the South. You are serving as a Union spy and working in the home of a Confederate general.

PROFILE 20

Male, 36 years old. You are a Union soldier from New Jersey living in a prison camp in the South.



Please take a few minutes to give us your *History Lab* feedback!

After reviewing and using this *History Lab* lesson, please send us your feedback. Your ideas and honest assessment will ensure that these lessons keep improving and provide us with useful insight for future teacher fellows.

First name:

Last name:

School:

Grade you teach:

E-mail:

Are you a CHS member? (circle one): yes no

Name of unit you are evaluating (check one):

America's Documents of Freedom

Chicago's World's Fairs

African American Life in the Nineteenth Century

Face to Face with the Great Depression

The Civil War: Up Close and Personal

America and Protest

Name of lesson you are evaluating:

Evaluation questions:

1. On a scale of one to five (with five being the best) rate this lesson in terms of the quality of the student learning experience it provides (circle one):

5

4

3

2

1

2. What were the strengths of this lesson?

3. What aspects of this lesson needed additional fine-tuning?

4. Would you use this lesson, or some variation of it, again? Why or why not?

5. What advice, tips, or suggestions would you give to future users of this lesson?

6. Where does this lesson fit in your course of study (scope, sequence, unit)?

7. If applicable, how did the use of primary sources impact student learning?

8. Additional comments? (Use other side if necessary.)

Thank you for your time. Please send the completed form via mail or fax to:

Chicago Historical Society, 1601 N. Clark Street, Chicago, Illinois, 60614-6071, Attn: History Programs

Fax: 312-799-2452