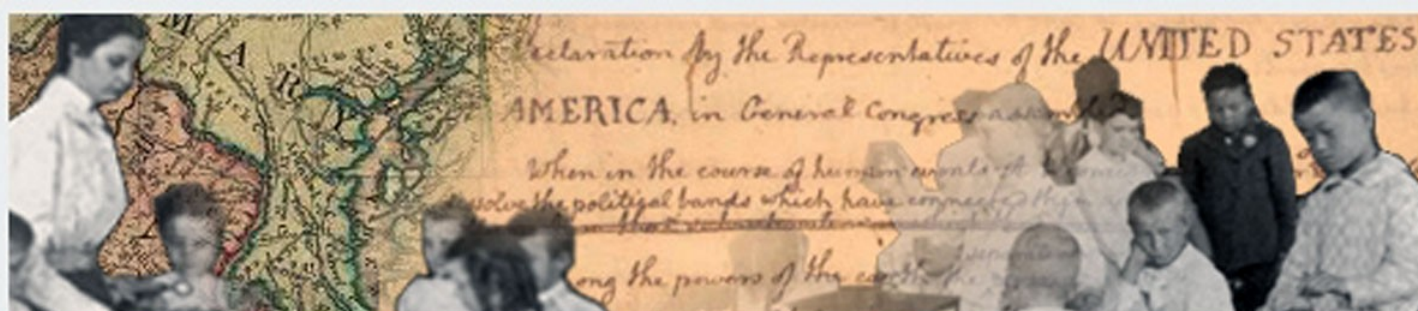


# The Teaching with Primary Sources Journal

Strategies and resources for K-12 classrooms from the Library of Congress



## The Civil War Across Disciplines

Vol. 5, No. 1, Winter 2012

**This issue explores how teachers can use Civil War - era primary sources in various subject areas to help students better understand the scope of this conflict's lasting impact.**

In this issue, we explore how teaching about the Civil War with primary sources—original documents and objects which were created at the time under study—provides opportunities for expanding this well-known lesson in history into subject areas as varied as geography, language arts and science. War knows no boundaries, then or now. Civil War - era primary sources reflect this reality, giving students unique opportunities to discover how this epic struggle bled into nearly every aspect of American life.

### About *The TPS Journal*

*The Teaching with Primary Sources (TPS) Journal* is an online publication created by the Library of Congress Educational Outreach Division in collaboration with the TPS Educational Consortium.

Published quarterly, each issue focuses on pedagogical approaches to teaching with Library of Congress digitized primary sources in K-12 classrooms. *The TPS Journal* Editorial Board and Library staff peer review all content submitted by TPS Consortium members and their partners. Please email questions, suggestions or comments about *The TPS Journal* to Stacie Moats, Educational Resources Specialist, at [smoa@loc.gov](mailto:smoa@loc.gov).

### [The TPS Journal Archive](#)

Previous issues of *The Teaching with Primary Sources Journal*, formerly known as *Teaching with Primary Sources Quarterly*, are found at [www.loc.gov/teachers/tps/journal/archive.html](http://www.loc.gov/teachers/tps/journal/archive.html).

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## Teaching About the Civil War with Primary Sources Across Disciplines

By Carroll Van West

The Civil War was a transformative event in American history, costing hundreds of thousands of lives, leaving cities, towns, and the countryside in ruin, and abruptly changing the meaning of citizenship and freedom in the United States. The war led to the Constitution's 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments, which further shaped the relationships between citizens and their government, and abolished forever the inhumane practice of slavery in our nation. This bloodbath of almost unfathomable proportion fundamentally changed nearly every facet of American life.

For many years, the Civil War story was told as an authoritative narrative of battles, troop movements and generals who won or lost. But in the last 50 years, our understanding of the Civil War has changed dramatically. No doubt the battles and generals still matter. But today's K-12 curriculum standards, and more importantly our students, demand a more inclusive story.

Using primary sources available from the Civil War era, students can delve into this topic from several different angles, from social studies to language arts; from geography to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics). For example, how did geographic location affect the food, clothing, media, and other goods and services available to civilians? What new technologies developed for military use during this conflict had widespread applications later? How did artists depict wartime experiences in popular music and print publications? What educational and employment opportunities did former slaves create for themselves following Emancipation?

Primary sources—original letters, diaries, maps, photographs, sheet music, and more—support a multidisciplinary approach to learning about this defining period in our nation's history, which continues to shape and influence our lives. This article explores how primary sources can inspire students to ask and investigate questions about aspects of the Civil War that interest them the most.

### Language Arts

Historic print collections, particularly those from period newspapers and broadsides, document how the issue of ending slavery became central to the northern war effort. Such text-based primary sources offer unique and compelling opportunities for students to practice reading and writing skills and strategies, essential to a language arts curriculum. For example, select articles from the historic newspaper database, *Chronicling America* and challenge students to identify persuasive writing techniques evident in each. Or have students analyze the articles to establish a timeline demonstrating how public opinion on the issue of slavery evolved over the course of the war.

Students may be surprised to discover that while slavery was central to the sectional differences leading to the Civil War, many northern citizens were like their President—initially willing to consider keeping slavery legal if that meant the Union could be restored. As the fighting and dying intensified between 1861 and 1863, so too did the calls for an end to slavery.

Consider another language arts lesson that compares the texts of Lincoln's draft Emancipation Proclamation with that of the final version. Invite students to explore how even subtle differences in wording or tone can fundamentally influence a reader's response to a text. Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 changed what the fighting was all about, and soon led to the formation of the U.S. Colored Troops, groups of former slaves and free blacks who fought for their freedom and citizenship until the war was over.

The story told through primary sources is messy and complicated, and not always heroic; the bigotry and racial stereotyping of that era may be shocking. Reading documents from this time period is



requiring further research: What chemical process captured the images? What equipment, supplies and procedure did photographers need to produce images in what they considered to be their "mobile" studios? How did the available technology limit what journalists could cover in the war?

### Visual Arts

What about student interest in the experiences of the common soldier on both sides of the conflict? For a visual arts lesson, guide students to more accurately "read" Civil War photographs and consider the artistic conventions of mid-19th century American culture. Historical photographs, such as the *Liljenquist Family Collection of Civil War Portraits*, are excellent resources for explorations into the attitudes and dress of the ordinary Civil War soldier, many of whom are nameless today. The collection may shock students into wanting to know more—some portraits are of painfully young men, no more than teenagers—enabling students to literally look into the eyes of those who fought and died in the war. The photographs are powerful documents of soldiers who came to the fields of battle both hopeful and fearful of what they would find.

Consider using these portraits to challenge students' preconceptions—few soldiers look like the sharply tailored, standardized uniforms of toy soldiers, paper cut-out books, or museum exhibits prevalent in American popular culture. What details do students observe, and what inferences and questions arise from such observations? Through the great diversity of military dress and arms, the images also document the local nature of this national struggle. Many soldiers look as if they had just walked away from the farms and factories, brought their guns, and gone into battle.

### Music

Hundreds of songs were composed and published during the war; sheet music collections provide opportunities for students to perform those songs and hear their messages. They can find lyrics of hope mingled with worry, of outrage mixed with determination, and of joyous celebration and sad commemoration. The Civil War created human drama at its most intense. The music of those times gives students a chance to capture and express some of that emotion through their own voices and instruments.

Have students use the musical expressions of the 1860s as primary sources to explore the meaning and values of that time for America compared with those of the 21st century. *Civil War Music*, a set of Library of Congress primary sources on this topic, offers background information and teaching ideas along with PDF versions of sheet music and other formats.



*When Johnny comes marching home / Louis Lambert [notated music]. 1863 Performing Arts Encyclopedia. Library of Congress.*

### Conclusion

Teaching America's Civil War through primary sources touches several subject areas beyond history and social studies, including language arts, geography, STEM, visual arts, and music. This primary source-based approach allows for teaching about the Civil War across the curriculum. The wealth of digitized images and documents, now available online, creates multiple avenues for students to explore this event that profoundly changed our nation. The evidence left behind by those who fought and survived those traumatic years can still captivate and enlighten students of today.

*Carroll Van West is the director of the Teaching with Primary Sources program at Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) and is the director of MTSU's Center for Historic Preservation at Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU). He is the co-chair of the Tennessee Civil War Sesquicentennial Commission and director of the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area.*

## Research and Current Thinking

For each issue, Teaching with Primary Sources Consortium members submit summaries of and links to online resources—articles, research reports, Web sites, and white papers—that provide research and current thinking relating to the theme. This issue's Research & Current Thinking focuses on helping teachers to use primary sources to teach about the Civil War across disciplines.

### The Civil War

Developed by the National Park Service in celebration of the war's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary, this website provides information on Civil War-related national parks, a Civil War timeline, events, and other educational resources. <http://www.nps.gov/civilwar/index.htm>

### The Civil War: In the Classroom

PBS created this website of educational resources to accompany its landmark nine-part series, *The Civil War: A Film* by Ken Burns. Teachers can access primary sources, learning activities, discussion questions, video excerpts, timelines, bibliographies, and guides for classroom use. <http://www.pbs.org/civilwar/classroom/>

### A Civil War Soldier's Everyday Life

This website offers Civil War-era Library of Congress primary sources organized by battle, historical content, an all-learner curriculum for reading printed texts and a bibliography. <http://tps.nl.edu/CivilWar.htm>

### Civil War Soldiers and Sailors System

The searchable database, maintained by the National Park Service, has information from over six million Confederate and Union records housed at the National Archives. The site has three sections: "Education" offers information on database use, curriculum materials and Civil War-related National Parks; "New Stories" features essays on the war's social, economic, political, and military aspects, and; "Black History" provides information on African Americans who served in the Union Army. <http://www.itd.nps.gov/cwss/index.html>

### History Blueprint: Civil War Unit

This Civil War unit "combines historical investigation, carefully selected primary sources, activities to strengthen reading and writing, and practice evaluating arguments based on historical evidence." It is aligned with the Literacy in History/Social Studies section of the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts. <http://historyblueprint.org/site/unit/>

### Civil War Trust

The website's "Education" section provides resources for both students and teachers, including essays, lesson plans, glossary, interactive features, and primary sources. Information is available about conferences and teacher institutes that explore Civil War topics in multi-disciplinary ways. <http://www.civilwar.org/education/>

### The Gilder-Lehrman Institute of American History: The Civil War Era

Dedicated to creating programs and resources for teachers of American History, this site offers curriculum on the topics of slavery, coming of the Civil War, Civil War and Reconstruction. Modules contain resources such as primary sources, learning tools and podcasts. [http://www.gilderlehrman.org/institute/era\\_civilwar.php](http://www.gilderlehrman.org/institute/era_civilwar.php)

### Shades of Gray and Blue

This website shares personal stories of the Civil War in Tennessee through art and artifacts. Themes such as "Holding Fast to Beauty," "Making Music," and "Building a Future," use diverse sources to cross disciplinary boundaries and view the Civil War from different perspectives. <http://www.civilwarshades.org/>

### The Valley of the Shadow

Follow the stories of two communities from the eve of the Civil War, the war years and aftermath as told through diverse sources such as maps, diaries, newspapers and photographs. <http://valley.lib.virginia.edu/>

### With Malice Toward None: The Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Exhibition

This Library of Congress exhibition features primary sources around the themes of Lincoln's rise to national prominence, his presidency, and the assassination. A special "Learn More" section highlights additional related exhibitions, Webcasts, a brief bibliography and resources for teachers. <http://myloc.gov/exhibitions/lincoln/Pages/default.aspx>

To access links to resources cited above visit the online version of this issue of *The Teaching with Primary Sources Journal* at <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/tps/journal>.



Lee, Russell, 1903-1986, photographer *Children at the blackboard. Lake Dick Project, Arkansas Prints and Photographs. Library of Congress*

## Learning Activity - Elementary Level

### CIVIL WAR MAP ACTIVITY: BATTLE OF NASHVILLE

#### Overview

Students work in pairs to analyze an 1863 map of the Battle of Nashville, created by the Union army, for clues about its purpose. They form a hypothesis about why someone needed this map, support their hypothesis with detailed observations, and develop their own questions about the map. Finally, each student writes a paragraph demonstrating how a soldier may have used a map like this one before or during battle.

#### Objectives

After completing this learning activity, students will be able to:

- Observe a map's details to identify basic elements
- Analyze a map to determine its purpose
- Form hypotheses based on observations
- Develop questions stemming from primary source analysis.

#### Time Required

Two 45 minute class periods

#### Grade Level

3 - 5

#### Topic/s

Maps

#### Subject

Geography

**Standards** McREL 4<sup>th</sup> Edition Standards and Benchmarks

#### Geography

Standard 1. Understands the characteristics and uses of maps, globes, and other geographic tools and technologies  
Standard 17. Understands how geography is used to interpret the past

#### Credits

Adapted from "Battle of Nashville: Map Activity," created by the TPS program at Middle Tennessee State University

#### View and download the complete learning activity:

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/tps/journal/civilwar/pdf/ElementaryLevelLearningActivity.pdf>



*Nashville—Tenn. and vicinity 1863/  
G.H. Blakeslee, Topo Eng. Geography  
and Map Division. Library of Congress*

## Learning Activity - Secondary Level

### A HOUSE DIVIDED: THE CIVIL WAR HOMEFRONT

#### Overview

Students work in small groups to analyze sets of Civil War—era primary sources, including photographs, manuscripts and sheet music. They make inferences about the short-term and long-term consequences of the Civil War for those left behind on the homefront based on primary source evidence. Students synthesize and express their learning by writing a letter from the perspective of a civilian during the war.

#### Objectives

After completing this learning activity, students will be able to:

- Analyze primary sources in different formats
- Draw conclusions using evidence from primary sources
- Synthesize information to create a letter or diary entry from a civilian's perspective about life during the Civil War

#### Time Required

Two 45-minute class periods

#### Grade level

7–8

#### Topic/s

Civil War, Homefront

#### Subject

U.S. History

**Standards** McREL 4<sup>th</sup> Edition Standards and Benchmarks

#### Language Arts

Standard 1. (Writing) Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process

Standard 2. (Writing) Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing

#### United States History

Standard 14. (Era 5—Civil War and Reconstruction (1850-1877)) Understands the course and character of the Civil War and its effects on the American people.

#### Credits

Adapted from "A House Divided: The Civil War Home Front in Tennessee," a lesson plan created by Rebecca Byrd, New Center School, Sevier County, Tennessee

#### View and download the complete learning activity:

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/tps/journal/civilwar/pdf/SecondaryLevelLearningActivity.pdf>



*View in the "Burnt District," Richmond, Va., showing two women dressed in black approaching shell of four-story building, gutted by fire [1865] Prints and Photographs Division. Library of Congress.*

## Teacher Spotlight

**Rebecca  
Byrd**



**In each issue, we introduce a teacher who participated in Teaching with Primary Sources (TPS) professional development and successfully uses Library of Congress primary sources to support effective instructional practices.**

This issue's Teacher Spotlight features middle school Social Studies teacher Rebecca Byrd. The TPS program at Middle Tennessee State University nominated Rebecca for her effective classroom use of primary sources to teach about the Civil War. A 16-year teaching veteran, she currently teaches at New Center School in Sevierville, Tennessee. In this interview, Rebecca discusses teaching strategies and her favorite Library of Congress online resources.

**Tell us about the first time you tried using primary sources in the classroom.**

When I began teaching, I often tried to incorporate primary sources into lessons. However, I was always disappointed with the results. Students seemed bored and I did all the talking. Using the inquiry method with primary sources transformed the experience. I have learned that in the beginning of the school year, I need to directly teach students how to break down the analysis of primary sources and consider each aspect of the source. Once they grasp the basics of analysis, they literally use primary sources to teach themselves. No matter how much I study the sources while preparing a lesson, students consistently notice a detail or make some connection that I have not seen myself. Those are my favorite moments, when the barrier between teacher and student falls away and we are a room of people excited about history.

**How do you use primary sources to teach about the Civil War?**

In popular culture, the Civil War is often portrayed as simply a fight over slavery or battle for state's rights. It was both, but it was much more. Primary sources help students grasp the enormity of change that the Civil War wrought in America and the complexity of the issues involved. When students read letters of Civil War soldiers, they realize that "good" guys were not always good and "bad" guys were not always bad. Primary sources help students understand a war that holds center stage in America's collective memory and continues to incite controversy.

Because Tennessee played a major role in the war, there are many photographs and documents about Tennessee available from the Library of Congress. I was able to incorporate a number of these into a lesson plan I created called *A House Divided: The Civil War Home Front in Tennessee*. I love to see students' reactions when distributing materials and they realize that they are looking at photographs or reading about places that are familiar. Having that personal connection to the past helps bring the war to life. By 8<sup>th</sup> grade, most students are already familiar with names like Grant, Lee or Gettysburg. In order to make the war real to them, I take a "bottom up" approach and emphasize the war experiences of common soldiers. I engage students with diverse learning styles by doing a number of experiential activities. Students sing Civil War songs, try on reproduction clothing, eat hardtack, and march around a parking lot carrying backpacks to recreate a sense of what Civil War soldiers and civilians experienced. Finally, I try to make connections between experiences of U.S. military personnel in Afghanistan and Iraq with experiences of their Civil War counterparts.

**What is your favorite resource available on the Library of Congress Web site?**

A favorite collection for teaching about the Civil War is the *Liljenquist Family Collection of Civil War Photographs*. The summative activity in the *House Divided* lesson plan asks a student to assume the role of a Civil War soldier writing home about experiences in the war. I assign students a photograph from the collection to inspire creativity and to help them empathize with soldiers, many of whom were not much older than they are. Last year, I discovered the collection *Poet at Work: Walt Whitman Notebooks 1850s-1860s* to incorporate into my Civil War unit. It has amazing accounts of the war based on Whitman's visits with wounded soldiers in Washington.

**What advice do you have for teachers who have never tried teaching with primary sources, especially in subjects other than social studies?**

Because the Civil War touched every facet of American life, teachers of any subject can find ways to engage students in a study of the Civil War using materials from the Library of Congress. A Language Arts teacher can use a recruitment poster from the collection *An American Time Capsule: Three Centuries of Broadpapers and Other Printed Ephemera* to analyze persuasive writing techniques. A math teacher might use the same poster and have students calculate what a Civil War bounty would be worth in today's dollars. Science teachers could explore the chemistry of developing a daguerreotype or the changes in technology that made photographing Civil War battlefields possible.