

OH, COULD THEY BUT SPEAK!

The MGTV Civil War Battle Flags Project

Comprehensive Lesson Plans
to
Introduce the Middle School Student
to
Michigan's Role in the Civil War

The Big Questions:

What was Michigan's role in the Civil War? What was the war really like? What made the battle flags so important? How have the flags lived through history and what is their symbolic meaning today?

Purpose:

Our purpose is not to bring into the classroom abstract facts and distant figures of a war which was fought between the North and the South, but rather to bring to each student the stories of the people of Michigan who served and fought, triumphed and died, waited at home, believed in and honored their country and their state. This unit is about Michigan stories, Michigan heroes, and Michigan history.

One wouldn't need to open a history book if the battle flags of Michigan's regiments could talk. Battle flags were proudly made and given to Michigan regiments as they started off to war. These flags became the symbol of all that the men were fighting for. They were carried into every battle, they inspired every man, and they literally held the armed forces together. The flags embodied the American spirit and the personal pride that it took to fight the Civil War. It is the stories of these flags that we wish to tell. We wish to let the evidence of the blood and smoke stained battle flags speak.

Our purpose is not to listen to the winner's conception of history, but to hear the people's voices - to walk through Michigan in the 1860's and discover for ourselves what life was like and how the Civil War changed everything.

A Note to Teachers:

We are assuming some prior knowledge of the Civil War era in the creation of this unit. For this reason, we have not included review material or information regarding the general issues of the Civil War. We believe these things will naturally appear throughout discussion and lecture. We intentionally designed this unit to build upon itself so that it will be flexible for your needs. If you only have time for a short unit on the Battle Flags themselves, you may use lessons one, four, and nine, and have a solid presentation. Add those three days to the rest of the Michigan unit and you have a complete unit with a Michigan focus. You could also add general Civil War material to the material presented in this packet, and have a complete curriculum for this era. This unit could easily be incorporated into the Language Arts curriculum.

The Benchmarks targeted for each lesson are taken from the Michigan Department of Education's Social Studies Standards and Working Draft Benchmarks.

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Activities, Assignments and Unit Daily Overview

Activities:

- Create a personal flag.
- Cooperatively create a "news reporter" style presentation.
- Create journals, letters, and poems.
- Conduct an historical letter investigation.
- Research an area of interest in the Civil War.
- Participate in the reading of a young adult novel.
- Discuss opinions and ideas.
- Participate in a review game called "Capture the Flag".
- Research facts and ideas and publish papers on the MGTV web site.

Overview:

- Day One: Introduce the concept of flags.
- Day Two: Create a timeline and discover facts about Michigan during the Civil War.
Assignment: Create a running fact sheet about Michigan in the Civil War.
- Day Three: Investigate history through a poem.
Assignment: Write a letter or a poem stanza in the voice of a minority.
- Day Four: Watch first half of the MGTV video, class discussion.
Assignment: Research reports.
- Day Five: Investigate facts from historical letters.
- Day Six: Read a tragic, true story of a Civil War battle.
- Day Seven: Watch a section of a History Channel video
(obtained by contacting www.historychannel.com).
Assignment: Write a "senses" poem.
- Day Eight: Discover the effects of the Civil War.
Assignment: Complete a higher level thinking activity sheet.
- Day Nine: Watch the second half of the MGTV video, class discussion.
- Day Ten: Play "Capture the Flag".

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Optional Research Assignment

Overview/Objectives:

Students will engage in an independent inquiry and prepare a two-page paper on some aspect of Michigan's involvement in the Civil War, or on a specific Michigan regiment. Students in small groups will present their research findings in a news reporter style. The students will successfully express knowledge learned about the Civil War. The students will creatively and cooperatively present their research findings to the class.

Benchmarks Targeted:

I.3.MS.4 V.1.MS.2 V.2.MS.2 V.2.MS.3 V.2.MS.4

Procedure:

- 1) As students learn more about the Civil War they will begin to ask questions. Encouraging this natural inquiry enables students to research different areas of Michigan's involvement in the Civil War. Potential research areas include Michigan regiments, women, African Americans, weapons, medicine, maps and borders, President Lincoln, and General Custer's Cavalry.
- 2) Use journal entries, free writing and "KWL" charts (a graphic organizer in the form of a three column chart to help students formulate "What I Know, What I Want to know, and What I've Learned") to assist students to explore their topics and develop thesis statements.
- 3) Provide media day(s) for research.
- 4) Develop rubrics to determine how quality research and presentations will look.
- 5) Once research is finished, have students break into small groups. Within these groups, students must prepare a news style presentation: a reporter in the field, a talk show, a news-anchor position, interviewing a soldier, a nurse, etc. All students must participate. Creativity is encouraged, costumes, music, different perspectives, etc.
- 6) Provide practice day(s) for performances.
- 7) Performances.

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Additional Project Ideas

Bull Run by Paul Fleischman

Benchmark Targeted: VII.1.MS.1

This is an excellent young adult novel that focuses on the many different perspectives of those who were involved in the Civil War. It looks at the similarities and differences between the North and the South, as well as looking at individuals and how the Civil War affected their lives.

There are many ways to approach this novel; here are three to consider:

Have students break into small groups of two or three people. Have each group select a character from the novel (there are sixteen), and study the character's story. Have students re-write or act out each of the stories and share them with the whole group. Artistic props, costumes, and music may be used. Two or three smaller groups may combine to present intertwining stories, or the whole class can combine the compacted stories to re-create the novel.

This novel is also available on cassette tape if books for the whole class are not available. It would probably take about three class periods to listen to the whole two-hour production. Encourage class discussion on the prominent themes as well as the smaller details that resemble our lives today. Ask students to place themselves back in time and try to understand the decisions that some of the characters were making who were not much older than the students themselves. Journal entries may also accompany this procedure.

Pass the book: Have each student take the novel home overnight and read a designated number of passages. It is their responsibility to report the next day about what they read and then to pass the book on to a new student who will read a new section of the book. Due to the book design, this will be particularly effective in that students will have to remind each other who each character is and what is happening in their scenes.

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QUOTES OF THE DAY

Taken from Civil War Quotations, by Darryl Lyman

- Day 1 “*Lay me down and save the flag!*”
James Mulligan, Colonel of the Irish Brigade July 23, 1864
Last command to his men before he was captured by the Confederates
- Day 2 “*A house divided against itself cannot stand.*”
Abraham Lincoln/Lincoln/Douglass debates 1858-61
- Day 3 “*The destiny of the colored American...is the destiny of America.*”
Frederick Douglass February 12, 1862
- Day 4 “*I tried with all my power to avert this war. We are not fighting for slavery. We are fighting for our right to govern ourselves and that, or extermination, we will have.*”
Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederacy July 17, 1864
- Day 5 “*A rich man’s war and a poor man’s fight.*”
Anonymous
- Day 6 “*Grief and pride rule the hour.*”
Ralph Waldo Emerson April 20, 1861
- Day 7 “*The Civil War grumbles and growls and gathers; but the storm clouds do not yet break...It is indeed a heavy atmosphere to breath – the impending doom of a nation.*”
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, author May 2, 1861
- Day 8 “*The soil of our beloved South will drink deep the precious blood of our sons.*”
Samuel Houston, well known Texan who sided with the North. March 31, 1861
- Day 9 “*The regrettable thing is that I am too old to shoulder a musket myself, and the joyful thing is that Julian (his son) is too young.*”
Nathaniel Hawthorne, author May 1861 letter
- Day 10 “*Tell my mother I die for my country.*” After being shot.
“*Useless, useless.*” Dying words.
John Wilkes Booth, assassin of President Lincoln April 26, 1865

AN INTERESTING WEBSITE:

<http://www.historychannel.com>

Select “This day in Civil War history”

Find out what happened on that particular day during the Civil War