

Lesson Title: Primary Sources a Window into the Past
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Teaching Traditional American History Program
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Lesson Overview:

Students will use civil war primary source documents to understand the importance of the written word in recording history and in reflecting on what we learn.

Essential Question(s):

What is a primary source?

How would you feel if you were watching a Civil War battle take place right outside your home?

How do diaries from long ago let us see into a “window of the past”?

Objectives: (CA 2,3,7) (1.5,1.6) (MO-GLE Tools of Social Science inquiry #7A1)

- understand the definition of a primary source document, be able to assess the validity of primary sources, and describe how they can influence historical thought
- be able to compose a narrative diary entry regarding witnessing a Civil War battle based on knowledge of the Civil War and on the example given in class

Assessment:

Students will then be asked to write their own diary entry (about a page long) from the perspective of a person looking out the window at a Civil War scene. It does not necessarily have to be about a specific battle... the main purpose is to have the students write a descriptive first person narrative that when it is read out loud, it really puts you where the action is taking place. Students will then read aloud their narratives to their group, practicing with oral speaking skills and dramatization.

Materials:

At Gettysburg, WHAT A GIRL SAW AND HEARD OF THE BATTLE by Mrs. Tillie Pierce Alleman a diary written by 15 year old, detailing her first hand account of a Civil War battle being fought right in her hometown. Also a print out of paragraph 47 of a soldiers' journal which can be found at <http://www.bartleby.com/43/3502.html>

Class Time: 45 minutes to one hour

Teacher Input:

The teacher will read excerpt of At Gettysburg, WHAT A GIRL SAW AND HEARD OF THE BATTLE by Mrs. Tillie Pierce Alleman, a diary that depicts her first hand account of Civil War skirmishes that took place outside her home in Gettysburg, PA.

Activities:

The lights will be turned off as the students file into the classroom, and the teacher will tell them to all come to sit on the floor around her. The teacher will ask the children to close their eyes and imagine, in their minds, the scenes that she is about to read. The teacher will read the diary excerpt and immediately following this activity student will go back to their desks and they will jot down a few notes on paper about their thoughts and feelings regarding the reading. After everyone has had ample time to write, the teacher will initiate a discussion about what the students wrote about. How did you feel as I read this to you?

Questions for review:

- How do you think you would feel if the battle was happening right outside your own home?
- What do you think you would have done in this type of situation?

These are just some questions that can be used to prompt students, but the main idea is to just let students talk about what they wrote, and about what they thought about as the diary excerpt was read to them.

Closure:

The teacher should also bring up the fact, to the students, that she was reading a diary excerpt... this was real. The term primary source will be discussed as the students construct a meaning of the term from the diary example and with the teacher's help. Teacher will read paragraph 47 from soldier Haskell's account of Gettysburg. Teacher will along with how these types of sources play a large role in the interpretation of history. Students can compare and contrast viewpoints shown in primary sources.

Extension:

Students can construct their own Civil War journals and portfolio covers. In order to make the journal students will each need a brown paper bag, some twine and some lined paper. Students will be arranged in groups of 4 and each group will share the hole punchers and charcoal. Students can be as creative as they want to with this, but the basic plan is that they will cut out two rectangular shapes from the paper bag and string them together using the hole puncher, the paper (about 20 sheets that will in the middle), and the twine. The teacher will allow the children to illustrate their journal with either a north or a south perspective, in relation to the Civil War time period. Then they can bring their finished design to the teacher who will help them put hair spray on it to set the charcoal.

References:

<http://www.bartleby.com/43/3502.html>