

Publishers' Bindings Online, 1815-1930: The Art of Books
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Sample Lesson Plan: Civil War Literature
Grades 4-12

Objectives:

Students will learn that the Civil War has been the topic of many different books, encompassing fiction and non-fiction, poetry and prose.

Materials:

- 1) A computer with an Internet connection and a large screen or other capability to display the teacher's actions to the entire class.
 - 2) **For 4-8 only:** Lined paper and pens or pencils (or computer terminals where students can work individually). *Alternatively, the activity may be completed as a homework assignment.*
 - 3) **For 9-12 only:** Copies of the book list and book report handout for each student.
- * For the 9-12 assignment, students must have access to a library or other collection of books containing novels with Civil War themes. They will complete an out-of-class assignment to be turned in at a later class session.

Lesson

Background

Although it amounts to only a fraction of American history in terms of years, the Civil War is largely responsible for defining the nation as we know it—and for creating a plethora of literature in numerous genres. In fact, some have called it the most written-about war in history.

The reasons that the Civil War has resulted in such a large and varied body of work are numerous. One is that it was such a momentous occasion—composed of so many different important figures, places, and events—that historians have penned academic works on nearly every conceivable facet. Another is that many who lived during the war era have produced personal narratives of their experiences.

However, historian Jim Cullen points out that most of the American public has been exposed to the Civil War not through academic work but through popular culture. Americans continue to be moved by the romanticism of the era, absorbing the Civil War via motion pictures and television mini-series. During the publishers' bindings era, the war served as the basis for hundred of novels, poems, songs, humorous writings, and children's stories.

Non-fiction

A great many historians are interested in studying the Civil War, and thousands of non-fiction books have been published that deal with Civil War subjects.

Because the Civil War was in fact an armed conflict, in which numerous regiments fought hundreds of battles, military histories make up a majority of the Civil War literature published between 1860 and 1930.

[Teacher's Note: Go to <http://bindings.lib.ua.edu/sitesearch.html>, select the "Search by Keyword" link, and click on "Guided Search" at the top of the page. In the first search box, type in pba01020. Click on the thumbnail of the book cover, then enlarge the illustration by clicking on the largest of the three boxes under it.]

These works encompass a variety of topics. Many histories of entire military branches and specific regiments exist. This 1905 book, titled *The War between the Union and the Confederacy and its Lost Opportunities*, is a history of the 15th Alabama regiment and the forty-eight battles in which it was engaged.

[Click on "Guided Search" at the top of the page. In the first search box, type in pba01008. Click on the thumbnail of the book cover, then enlarge the illustration by clicking on the largest of the three boxes under it.]

Another type of Civil War military history includes details of major battles and campaigns. This book, published in 1907, describes the 1863 Campaign at Chancellorsville, Virginia. Lasting from April 26 to May 6, this campaign represented the greatest Confederate victory of the war. It also was significant because famous Confederate General Stonewall Jackson died May 10 from pneumonia while recovering from wounds sustained on the battlefield.

[Click on "Guided Search" at the top of the page. In the first search box, type in pba01045. Click on the thumbnail of the book cover, then enlarge the illustration by clicking on the largest of the three boxes under it.]

The battles had tragic results for many soldiers, some of whom were taken prisoner and others of whom were killed or injured. Many military histories deal with these consequences of war by describing conditions and experiences in military prisons and hospitals. This book provides a history of the military prison at Elmira, N.Y., from July 6, 1864, to July 10, 1865. It was published in 1912.

[Click on "Guided Search" at the top of the page. In the first search box, type in pba01041. Click on the thumbnail of the book cover, then enlarge the illustration by clicking on the largest of the three boxes under it.]

Biographies and personal narratives detail the stories of individual soldiers, both Union and Confederate. Some of these books have been written either by the soldiers themselves or their family and friends. Many also were written by strangers who heard

about a soldier's story, became interested in it, and did research to provide as accurate an account as possible of that person's Civil War experience. This book, called *Thirteen Months in the Rebel Army*, was written by a veteran named William Stevenson. It was published in 1862, while the war still was going on.

[Click on "Guided Search" at the top of the page. In the first search box, type in pba01998. Click on the thumbnail of the book cover, then enlarge the illustration by clicking on the largest of the three boxes under it.]

The biographies of "great men" involved in the war, both in the military and in high political office, such as Abraham Lincoln, Ulysses S. Grant, and Robert E. Lee. This book, published in 1890, is about the life of Confederate President Jefferson Davis.

[Click on "Guided Search" at the top of the page. In the first search box, type in pba00995. Click on the thumbnail of the book cover, click on the spine, and enlarge the illustration by clicking on the largest of the three boxes under it.]

Political causes and effects of the war also have been subjects of non-fiction books. Slavery and its abolition are the most popular topics. Published in 1912, this book, *The Abolition Crusade and its Consequences*, covers the anti-slavery movement from the early antebellum period through Reconstruction.

Fiction

[Click on "Guided Search" at the top of the page. In the first search box, type in pba00718. Click on the thumbnail of the book cover, click on the spine, and enlarge by clicking on the largest of the three boxes under the image.]

Fictionalized accounts of wartime began to appear soon after the war began. Contemporaries and later authors swept up in the romanticism of the time produced numerous novels that dramatized battles. Other exciting Civil War themes such as espionage appeared in books, including this 1866 novel, *The Confederate Spy: A Story of the War of 1861*.

[Click on "Guided Search" at the top of the page. In the first search box, type in pba01338. Click on the thumbnail of the book cover, and enlarge the illustration by clicking on the largest of the three boxes under it.]

Romance is another theme of Civil War fiction, describing love affairs between soldiers and various women. The full title of this 1922 book is *Colonel Bob and a Double Love: A Story from the Civil Side behind the Southern Lines*.

[Click on "Guided Search" at the top of the page. In the first search box, type in pba01223. Click on the thumbnail of the book cover, and enlarge the illustration by clicking on the largest of the three boxes under it.]

Many novels dramatize the hardships faced by soldiers' families and other civilians living under conditions of war. *In war times at La Rose Blanche*, published in 1888, is a fictional account of war time at a southern plantation, encompassing both the white owners and their black slaves.

[Click on "Guided Search" at the top of the page. In the first search box, type in pba00503. Click on the thumbnail of the book cover, and enlarge the illustration by clicking on the largest of the three boxes under it.]

Although the names, places, and events are largely fabricated, Civil War fiction enables readers to get a sense for the time. Therefore, many stories have been written to teach children about the war, including this collection called *Among the Camps; or, Young People's Stories of the War*, from 1892.

[Click on "Guided Search" at the top of the page. In the first search box, type in pba01351. Click on the thumbnail of the book cover, and enlarge the illustration by clicking on the largest of the three boxes under it.]

Civil War themes also found their way into poetry and songs. Because soldiers and their families are responsible for much of this work, readers can get a sense for the individuals who endured the crisis through verse. Nineteenth-century poet Orion Dozier included poetry on Civil War subjects in his 1894 collection *Foibles of Fancy and Rhymes of the Times*.

[Click on "Guided Search" at the top of the page. In the first search box, type in pba00736. Click on the thumbnail of the book cover, and enlarge the illustration by clicking on the largest of the three boxes under it.]

Despite the solemn subject, Civil War themes found their way into humorous works as well. This was particularly true in the South, which lost the most over the course of the conflict. Some scholars posit that this work follows a time-honored tradition of converting true experiences via exaggeration, boastfulness, and whimsy. Others point out that satire was a popular genre for the treatment of all subjects, particularly politics, during the 19th century. One example of this type of work is *Campfires of the Confederacy*. Published in 1899, the collection carries the subtitle *A Volume of Humorous Anecdotes, Reminiscences, Deeds of Heroism, and Thrilling Narratives*.

Activities

Activity 1 (Grades 4-8)

We learned that some people wrote Civil War stories for children to help them learn about the war. Other children's war stories were written by children who wanted to share their experience. Imagine that you are a child during the Civil War. Write a short story describing what your life might be like.

[All students, or those who volunteer, should have an opportunity to read their stories in front of the class.]

Activity 2 (Grades 9-12)

For this activity, each student will choose a Civil War novel to read. Instructors may distribute “Booklist: Civil War Fiction for Young Adults” or amass a list of their own from which students may select titles.

After reading their books, students will write a book report about their selections. Distribute “Guidelines for Book Reports” for students to follow.

Students should be given at least a week to read their books and write their reports. The instructor may choose to set aside a class period for students to discuss what they reported.

For additional teaching resources on Civil War literature, see:

Civil War (Ken Burns on PBS): In the Classroom (Contains a unit called “Walt Whitman, Patriot Poet” and an activity on Civil War music, including lyrics.):

<http://www.pbs.org/civilwar/classroom/index.html>

Civil War Literature Circles Virtual Museum: Teacher’s Guide:

<http://www.sdcoe.k12.ca.us/score/civwnov/civilwar18.htm>

Discovery Education: War Literature:

<http://school.discovery.com/lessonplans/programs/redbadge/>

Library of Congress (The Learning Page): The Civil War through a Child’s Eye:

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/ndlpedu/lessons/99/civilwar/overview.html>

Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute: Literature of the Civil War:

<http://www.yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/units/1997/2/97.02.02.x.html>