Civil War Diaries and Letters
Michelle Diethorn

Overview:

During this lesson the students and teacher will be using the inquiry-based model. This model includes: asking, investigating, creating, discussing, and reflecting. Through this model it is important for students to know about how the Civil War affected the lives of people living at the time. Many people were involved with various ages and cultural backgrounds. It is important for students to read about this time and the hardships all the people involved went through. Following an introduction of photographs and letter/diary entries, the students will reveal their understanding through writing their own letter/diary entry through the eyes of someone involved in the Civil War.

Goal:

Students will learn about the various affects that the Civil War had on people. They will explore how it did not just affect people fighting in the war, but the families left at home and the general atmosphere of life during the time. I want the students to really think about how people lived during this time period by writing about it.

Objectives:

1. The students will read diary entries to use in their letters/journals.
2. The students will write a small letter or journal entry from the perspective of someone involved in the Civil War.
3. The students will construct a letter/diary using the components on the rubric.

Investigative Question:

“Consider what it must have been like to be alive during the Civil War. There were a lot of people involved. Which do you most identify with? Pick a person, either male or female, someone from the North or South, someone directly involved in the War or someone who stayed at home.”

Time Required: 1 hour

Grade Range: 6-8

Subjects: The primary subject of this lesson is Social Studies because of the lesson content. The secondary subject of this lesson is Language Arts because the students will be writing a letter/journal entry as part of their evaluation.
Standards:

1. **1.4.8.B.** Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening
   - Write multi-paragraph informational pieces

2. **1.5.8.B.** Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening
   - Write using well-developed content appropriate for the topic

3. **8.1.6.D.** History
   - Describe and explain historical research (primary sources)

Credits:

Michelle Diethorn

PREPARATION

Materials:

Children’s book *Charlie Skedaddle*

Paper

Pencil

Diary of A Confederate Woman: Betty Herndon Maury

Washington During the Civil War: The Diary of Horatio Nelson Taft, 1861-1865

Civil War: The Diary of Charles Whipple Hadley

PowerPoint Presentation including Civil War photographs

Rubric for letter/diary writing

Primary Resources:


http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3b31235


http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/treasures/trm135.html
PROCEDURE

Description of Procedure

“Consider what it must have been like to be alive during the Civil War. There were a lot of people involved. After listening to Charlie Skedaddle and reading various diary entries from the Civil War time period, think about which type of person you would most identify with.” (This section covers the asking portion of the inquiry-based model.)

Reading: (~10 minutes)

- Read story about a child’s experience during the Civil War. This will be used to put them in the mood of thinking about how one’s life can be during that time.
- Pass around Civil War photographs.
- They will then receive a diary entry from the Civil War time period.
- The students will be told to read the entry and underline or highlight anything about it that is historically relevant. For instance, they would underline if a battle is mentioned or even if they refer to something like a carriage or words used such as “Master” or “Yankee.” (This portion covers the investigating portion of the inquiry-based model.)
- When they are finished, explain to the students that they are going to write their own letter/diary entry from a person’s perspective of their choice who would have been involved in the Civil War. Explain that they will use the type of language and findings that they already read in their diary entries from earlier.

Diary/Letter

- Explain what assignment will be about—reading from the rubric as it’s being handed out.
- “Which person do you most identify with? Pick a person, either male or female, someone from the North or South, someone directly involved in the War or someone who stayed at home, and write a letter or diary showing ‘your’ experience in the Civil War. You could have been a soldier, a nurse, a Slave, or even a woman left to defend her home.”
- “You will need to write 2-3 paragraphs in complete sentences. On the top of your paper write down who you are writing about. Ex. Female Southerner who is a nurse. Do this so you can remind yourself who you are writing about. You will show what you have
learned so far about the Civil War by writing what it would have been like to be alive at
this time.” (This portion covers the creating portion of the inquiry-based model.)

- Make sure they identify their character clearly—ex. Elizabeth: female, north, white, in
  war. If this would be the setting, they would likely write about being a nurse in the Civil
  war.
- Students may make up a name for the character they are writing about.

Extensions:

This assignment will be turned in as a grade. When time allows, the students will share what
they wrote to the class through a presentation. During the presentation the students will address
the following: what they chose to write about and why they chose that person and making sure
they connect it back to the Civil War. After each student shares what they wrote, the teacher will
allow time for reflection by the students who are listening to the presentation. Allow time for
questions and comments from the other students. (This portion covers the discussing and
reflecting portion of the inquiry-based model.)
### Civil War Diaries and Letters

**Teacher Name:** Ms. Diethorn

**Student Name:** __________________________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sentences &amp; Paragraphs</td>
<td>Sentences and paragraphs are complete, well-constructed and of varied structure.</td>
<td>All sentences are complete and well-constructed (no fragments, no run-ons). Paragraphing is generally done well.</td>
<td>Most sentences are complete and well-constructed. Paragraphing needs some work.</td>
<td>Many sentence fragments or run-on sentences OR paragraphing needs lots of work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Length</td>
<td>The letter/diary is 2-3 paragraphs.</td>
<td>The letter/diary is 1-2 paragraphs.</td>
<td>The letter/diary is 1 paragraph.</td>
<td>The letter/diary is 5 sentences or less.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ideas</td>
<td>Ideas were expressed in a clear and organized fashion. It was easy to figure out what the letter/diary was addressing.</td>
<td>Ideas were expressed in a pretty clear manner, but the organization could have been better.</td>
<td>Ideas were somewhat organized, but were not very clear. It took more than one reading to figure out what the letter/diary was about.</td>
<td>The letter seemed to be a collection of unrelated sentences. It was very difficult to figure out what the letter/diary was about.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identification of your Character</td>
<td>Character was clearly identified at the top of paper including: name, male or female, someone from North or South, directly involved in war or stayed at home.</td>
<td>Character was identified at the top of paper including: male or female, someone from North or South, directly involved in war or stayed at home.</td>
<td>Character was vaguely identified at the top of paper including: 2 out of 4 of the components required.</td>
<td>Character was vaguely identified at the top of paper including: 1 out of 4 of the components required.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grammar &amp; spelling (conventions)</td>
<td>Writer makes no errors in grammar or spelling.</td>
<td>Writer makes 1-2 errors in grammar and/or spelling.</td>
<td>Writer makes 3-4 errors in grammar and/or spelling.</td>
<td>Writer makes more than 4 errors in grammar and/or spelling.</td>
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</tbody>
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