

A Window into the War: Analyzing Primary Sources

Class time: 50 minutes

Instruction level: Grade 6 History/Social Studies

Materials used: Brandeis University collection of Michael Lally letters
(<http://ir.brandeis.edu/handle/10192/28550>)

Objectives:

1. Students will learn and define the term Primary Source.
2. Students will read and analyze Primary Source material.
3. Students will be able to describe the use of equipment, uniforms, weapons, and other items that soldiers carried.
4. Students will learn about the day-to-day life of the soldier's families and life back home ("over there/over here" vs. back at home).
5. Students will be able to identify and discuss hardships soldiers faced during the Civil War.

Massachusetts curriculum framework standards:

This exercise meets the following standards for **Literacy in History/Social Studies**, grades 6-8:

Standard 1: *Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.*

Standard 2: *Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.*

Standard 6: *Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).*

Lesson Components and Methods:

1. Review the time period with a basic timeline of events; hand out the Civil War Timeline so that they can follow along individually.
2. Explain to students that they will be reading letters written by a soldier during the civil war. Explain that a letter is considered a Primary Source, and define the term for them: *Primary sources provide first-hand testimony or direct evidence concerning a topic under investigation. They are often created by witnesses or recorders who experienced the events or conditions being documented. Often these sources are created at the time when the events or conditions are occurring, but they can also include memoirs, autobiographies, and oral histories recorded later.*
3. Ask students if they can give some examples of different types of Primary Sources. Use the whiteboard/blackboard/overhead to generate a list of their responses.

4. Before handing out the letters, tell students that as they are reading the letters, they should be thinking about what a soldier might do on a day-to-day basis during the Civil War. Were soldiers always fighting battles? What did soldiers do when they weren't fighting battles? Was life difficult or easy for a soldier during the Civil War?
5. Hand out the 2 letters (transcriptions of **May 8, 1862** and **May 21, 1862**) and the worksheet; tell students that after they read the letters, they can begin answering the questions on the worksheet. Students will be working on this activity individually.
6. Remind students that as they are reading the letters, they should be underlining/highlighting key passages.
7. If students do not complete the worksheet during class, it should be completed as homework.