



Civil War Sesquicentennial Project

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LESSON PLAN FOR PRIMARY SOURCES: UNPUBLISHED DOCUMENTS

OBJECTIVES:

- 1.) To define primary sources.
- 2.) To define secondary sources.
- 3.) To identify types of primary sources.
- 4.) To analyze primary documents.
- 5.) To write one's own journal entries.
- 6.) To determine when the document was written.
- 7.) To distinguish a document's trustworthiness.
- 8.) To compare and contrast a primary source with a secondary source concerning a specific event in United States history.
- 9.) To explain the importance of primary sources in the study of history.

MATERIALS AND TIME NEEDED:

- 1.) Visit <http://visions.indstate.edu/visions/partners/civilwar/civilwar.html> and locate an unpublished document such as a letter, journal, diary, wills, minutes from meetings, speeches, oral histories, etc.
- 2.) It is highly recommended to give students at least part of a class period to look through the site to select an unpublished document. This could also be a homework assignment.
- 3.) Have students spend part of a class period examining and reading the selected document. Have them answer the following questions either in writing or as part of a classroom discussion:

QUESTIONS:

- 1.) What type of primary document was chosen?
- 2.) When was it written or created?
- 3.) What point of view is reflected in this document?
- 4.) Based upon previous study and knowledge of an event, is the document reliable?

- 5.) What does the document look like (if the document is not a transcript)? What color is the paper? Are there holes? Is the ink fading? Are there doodles or drawings? Is the document signed by someone?
- 6.) What was the original purpose of the document?
- 7.) What in this document makes this event in history come to life for you?
- 8.) Do you think the author/recorder of this document ever meant for it to become public?

ACTIVITIES:

- 1.) Have the class select a current event (this can be something happening at school, in the community or at the state, national or international level) and have the students write a letter to someone about it. Students may also write a journal entry about the event. To utilize technology, students may write an e-mail to someone or post a blog. (**NOTE:** This introduces another topic for discussion. What will we leave our descendants? Will what we leave be as personal as what was left to us? How will advances in technology help or hinder what we leave behind for future generations? How does the manner in which we write using technology going to affect how later generations interpret what we have left for them — i.e., emoticons, text messages, abbreviations, etc.?)
- 2.) With their parent's or guardian's permission, have students bring a primary document from home to share with their classmates. Is there a family history/story about the document? (**NOTE:** This introduces a topic of how documents should be handled. If the piece is a family document, it should be protected in an envelope and possibly handled only with gloves. Keep the document out of direct sunlight or harsh fluorescent lighting.)