

Antietam Primary Sources

SUBJECT	TEACHER	GRADE	DATE
American Studies Unit: Civil War Lesson: Antietam Surgeons	NMCWM	08	Drafted: 4/2/2020

OVERVIEW

What kinds of documents were produced by those serving in the Civil War and what do they tell us about the conflict?

Students shall use reading, writing, and thinking processes and skills to gain knowledge and understanding of political, historical, and current events using disciplinary and inquiry literacies.

When studying the Civil War, there are many kinds of sources that reveal what happened during the conflict. These were written by the people who participated in the great battles.

Many participants kept diaries, wrote letters home to family, and were obligated to write reports about their actions. One of the most written about battles of the war took place at Sharpsburg, Maryland on September 17, 1862 – the Battle of Antietam.

More than 23,000 casualties occurred during the bloodiest single day of the war. Each source has a unique perspective and was designed for a different purpose in highlighting what happened that deadly day.

PHASES

8TH GRADE

CURRICULAR STANDARDS	<p>SS.DL.10.01 Evaluate a variety of sources by identifying and defining the type, origin and authority of a source, examining the historical context and assessing the corroborative value of a source.</p> <p>SS.DL.20.01 Communicate and critique conclusions by constructing well organized arguments containing multipart theses supported by a variety of sources, utilizing historical reasoning skills and addressing opposing points of view/counterclaims and evidentiary weaknesses.</p> <p>SS.AS1.60.01.b Identify and explain the impact and significance of key events & figures of the Civil War.</p>
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PHASES

8TH GRADE

OBJECTIVE(S)	Students will be able to examine primary sources to determine its purpose and intended audience.
INFORMATION REQUIRED	Knowledge of Civil War conditions and the basics of battlefield chaos.
ACTIVITY	<p>Engage: <u>Watch clip from the Battle of Antietam (Glory, 1989)</u></p> <p>This clip shows the realities of Civil War combat but does not show the consequence of all those wounded in action during the heaviest fighting.</p> <p>Explore: Read these three primary sources in Appendices A, B, and C:</p> <p>Journal of Surgeon J. Frederick Dyer, September 23, 1862</p> <p>Letter of Surgeon William Child</p> <p>Excerpt from the report of Surgeon Jonathan Letterman</p> <p>These primary sources reveal the realities faced by the Civil War surgeons.</p> <p>Explain: What do these three different sources reveal? For what purposes were they written? What are the differences between the experiences of the Civil War soldiers, as we commonly think about, and the surgeons who cared for the wounded? How did they each experience the battle differently?</p>

PHASES

8TH GRADE

<p>EVALUATION/ CLOSING</p>	<p>Extend: Write three (separate) paragraphs, each describing what you did today during the COVID-19 shutdown.</p> <p>One should be as a diary/journal entry. What would you want to remember about this day in the future?</p> <p>One should be written as if you were describing your day to a friend. What do you want them to know?</p> <p>One should be written as if you were describing your day officially to your teacher for a grade.</p> <p>Evaluate: Why is the intended audience of a primary source important? How does the intended audience impact the content of a source?</p>
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REQUIREMENTS

- Which primary source of the three listed above do you believe is most valuable to understanding the battle? Why?
- How would you describe the experience of being a surgeon at the Battle of Antietam after reading these documents?
- What do you think these surgeons are leaving out of their accounts? Why?
- What do each of these sources tell us about the Battle of Antietam?

MATERIALS

- Glory movie clip
- Appendix A: Journal of Surgeon J. Frederick Dyer, September 23, 1862
- Appendix B: Letter of Surgeon William Child
- Appendix C: Excerpt from the report of Surgeon Jonathan Letterman

NOTES

Appendix A

Journal of Surgeon J. Frederick Dyer

Valley Mills, Antietam Creek

September 23, 1862

The wounded were fast coming in, and in an hour there were five hundred there. Remained there twenty-four hours, when Dr. Palmer... having arrived, I got relieved to go and collect together some of the wounded of my own regiment who were at other places.

Colonel Hinks, with three other officers, was at Mr. Pry's. Found him severely wounded, a ball having passed through the right forearm, shattering the radius, and passing through the abdomen, came out on the left of the spine. Surgeons who had examined his wound considered his quite hopeless, and very little had been attempted for his relief. Fixed him up comfortably as possible and then hunted up and got together as many more as possible...

I cannot say how many thousand wounded are in this vicinity, but every house and barn for miles is filled with them. All the churches and schoolhouses in Sharpsburg are used as hospitals, also those in Keedysville and Boonsboro. At Mr. Pry's house, where I now am, we have five of our wounded officers. The wounded are being removed from hospitals near the field, as the odor is horrible. Hundreds of horses were killed. They were generally burnt. Citizens have been flocking in by hundreds, not generally to render assistance, but to go over the battlefield and pick up mementos, such as broken muskets, etc., and some to steal what they can find.

Appendix B

Letter of Surgeon William Child

September 22, 1862 (Battlefield Hospital near Sharpsburg)

My Dear Wife;

Day before yesterday I dressed the wounds of 64 different men - some having two or three each. Yesterday I was at work from daylight till dark - today I am completely exhausted - but shall soon be able to go at it again.

The days after the battle are a thousand times worse than the day of the battle - and the physical pain is not the greatest pain suffered. How awful it is - you have not can have until you see it any idea of affairs after a battle. The dead appear sickening but they suffer no pain. But the poor wounded mutilated soldiers that yet have life and sensation make a most horrid picture. I pray God may stop such infernal work - through perhaps he has sent it upon us for our sins. Great indeed must have been our sins if such is our punishment.

Carrie I dreamed of home night before last. I love to dream of home it seems so much like really being there... That night had been away to a hospital to see some wounded men - returned late. I fastened my horse to a peach tree - fed him with wheat and hay from a barn near by - then I slept and dreamed of my loved ones away in [New Hampshire].

In this letter I send you a bit of gold lace such as the rebel officers have. This I cut from a rebel officers coat on the battlefield. He was a Lieut.

I have made the acquaintance of two rebel officers - prisoners in our hands. One is a physician - both are masons - both very intelligent, gentlemanly men. Each is wounded in the leg. They are great favorites with our officers. One of them was brought off the field in hottest of the fight by our 5th N.H. officers - he giving them evidence of his being a mason.

Now do write soon. Kisses to you Clint & Kate. Love to all. Yours as ever

W.C.

Appendix C

Excerpt from Report of Medical Director Jonathan Letterman

Early in the morning of the 17th of September, the battle of Antietam began, and continued until dark. No one engaged on that hotly-contested field can ever forget the intense interest with which he watched the progress of that battle, upon the issue of which the welfare of his country so much depended...

I received valuable aid on this occasion from Assistant Surgeon [Benjamin] Howard, U.S.A., who was busily engaged, while the battle was in progress, in riding to different parts of the field and keeping me informed of the condition of the Medical Department.

After night I inspected all the hospitals in Keedysville, and gave such surgical aid and instructions as were required. Medical and surgical supplies were, in this battle... matters of serious consideration...

The line of battle was between six and seven miles in length, the hospitals were therefore very numerous; but, though I was constantly occupied in visiting them, I did not find the stores exhausted.

Additional Resources from the National Museum of Civil War Medicine:

- [Compiled List of Civil War Medicine Primary Sources](#) - Organized topically, this list of primary sources covers all aspects of Civil War medical care
- [Voices of the Wounded](#) - Blog post detailing how soldiers described getting shot
- [What Did Civil War Surgeons Feel?](#) - This blog post uses primary sources to uncover how Civil War surgeons dealt with their job
- [The Medical Treatment of Private William McCarter](#) - Follow the journey of one Union soldier through the medical system through his own words

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