

## **Civil War Camp Life**

### **Traveling Trunk Lesson #2**

#### **ESSENTIAL QUESTION**

Camp life was a large part of each soldier's experience with the Union and Confederate armies. How did soldiers pass the time when they were not in combat or on the march?

#### **OVERVIEW**

Civil War soldiers often marched many miles each day. Moving such large armies was time consuming and often slow. They were tasked with carrying their belongings which could total over fifty pounds. Soldiers only carried essential items as this would help keep the weight off of their backs. Personal items for many soldiers included a tin cup and silverware, toothbrush, comb, prayer book, and for some soldiers, a housewife.

The average soldier spent more time marching and in camp than they saw action on the front lines. When the armies would set up camp, soldiers were tasked with pitching their tent, building a fire, practicing drills, writing letters home, eating and relaxing. In their haversack or knapsack, soldiers would often carry playing cards, small dice, and other small games such as cup and ball, and Jacob's Ladder. Sitting around the campfire would afford them the opportunity to gamble, sing and play music, and ultimately form bonds with their comrades.

Students will experience personal hygiene items such as a toothbrush and comb. They will also be provided the opportunity to gain insight on what a housewife is, as well as a prayer book, tin cup, and silverware. Games that soldiers often played while in camp included playing cards, cup and ball, and a Jacob's Ladder.

PRESERVE. EDUCATE. INSPIRE.

#### **OBJECTIVES**

Upon completion of this lesson, the students will be able to:

1. Knowledge
  - Describe personal items included in many soldiers haversacks and knapsacks.
  - Describe games that soldiers would often play while in camp.
2. Comprehension/Application/Analysis
  - Identify and appropriately discuss items common to soldiers from the North and the South.
  - Read and discuss primary source documents.
3. Evaluation
  - Evaluate and discuss the importance of the issued items for soldiers during the Civil War.

#### **TRUNK MATERIALS**

→ Tin cup

- Silverware
- Prayer book
- Housewife
- Toothbrush
- Comb
- Jacob's Ladder
- Playing cards
- Cup and Ball

## ACTIVITIES

### Motivational Activity:

1. Begin with the haversack filled with the trunk items listed above. If you taught *Lesson #1-Civil War Soldier*, students will be familiar with a haversack and its purpose.
2. You may choose to fill the haversack prior to class. At the beginning of class, empty the haversack and have the students discuss and explore the contents.
3. Some items will be identifiable and familiar to students while other items will spark discussion and further exploration.
4. Next, show the [Civil War Life In4 video](#) (2:52)

### Procedure:

1. After reviewing the items, pass out ***Handout #1-Civil War Letters***. This handout includes copies of various letters that soldiers would have written home.
  - a. You may choose to give each student one letter to review or all letters to compare.
  - b. There are two letters written by soldiers from the North and two letters written by soldiers from the South.
  - c. The first two letters focus on food and rations. The second two letters focus on uniforms.
2. Allow students to discuss with a partner or small group what was included in the letter(s). You may choose to have students highlight specific items discussed, appropriately cite items used, or compile a list to then share with the class.
3. Reconvene the class and discuss if any of the items in the haversack were mentioned in the letter that they read and explored. You may choose to compare letters written by soldiers from the North to those written by soldiers of the South. This will allow students to begin to develop an understanding as to what camp life was like for both armies.
4. Give your students a graphic organizer and have them individually fill them out. You can encourage your students to think about the following questions.
  - a. How was the day's march or drill?
  - b. What is camp like?
  - c. How is the food and coffee?
  - d. How do you fill your time while in camp?

- e. Is anyone singing or playing instruments around the fire?
- f. Did you gamble or play games with your fellow soldiers?

**Summary Activity:**

At the conclusion of this lesson have students share their Graphic Organizers and the ‘Things they Still want to Know’.

**Homework/Assessment:**

Students should choose one of the items they ‘Still want to Know’ to research and answer. They should consider how they might find the answer or information - “What might be the answer and where might I find it.”

**Writing Prompt:**

Students should take one of the things they “still want to learn” and answer their question. They should find a cite a primary or secondary source to answer their question.

**Extensions:**

Personal items found in the haversack of a Civil War soldier are still used in some form today. Have the students choose an item and research it further. They can explore the maker/manufacturer, when the game or item was invented, or if it has evolved into something we still use today.

**STANDARDS**

**Common Core State Standards- ELA & History/Social Studies**

- Key Ideas and Details:
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1
    - Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.
- Craft and Structure:
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.4
    - Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.
- Integration of Knowledge and Ideas:
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.8
    - Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text.

**Social Studies - National Council for the Social Studies**

- Theme 1: Culture
- Theme 3: People, Places, or Environments
- Theme 4: Individual Development and Identity

- Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- Theme 7: Production, Distribution, and Consumption
- Theme 8: Science, Technology, and Society



AMERICAN  
BATTLEFIELD  
TRUST ★ ★ ★

---

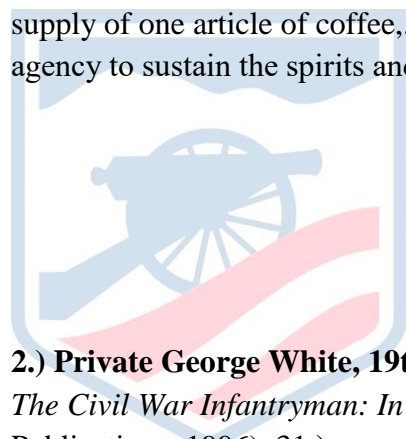
PRESERVE. EDUCATE. INSPIRE.

Lesson 2- Handout #1  
Civil War Letters

*Letter excerpts referring to food and rations:*

**1.) Confederate General E.M. Law's recollection of his men finding haversacks with food rations and coffee from the Federal dead after the battle of Fredericksburg. (from Coco, G. A. *The Civil War Infantryman: In camp, on the march, and in battle* (Gettysburg: Thomas Publications, 1996), 29.)**

“It was astonishing into what close places a hungry Confederate would go to get something to eat. Men would sometimes go out under a severe fire, in the hope of finding a full haversack. It may seem a small matter to the readers of war history; but to the makers of it who were in the trenches; or on the march, or engaged in battle night and day for weeks without intermission, the supply of one article of coffee,...was not a small matter, but did as much as any other material agency to sustain the spirits and bodily energies of the men,...”



**2.) Private George White, 19th Massachusetts, description ofhardtack. (from Coco, G. A. *The Civil War Infantryman: In camp, on the march, and in battle* (Gettysburg: Thomas Publications, 1996), 31.)**

“...round cakes about as large as a saucer and about half an inch thick; [and about 6” across] to break it was impossible; water made very little impression on it... The boys said that [O.H.] Perry [in 1853] carried it with him to Japan for balls for his cannon; as he had no occasion to use them, they were issued by mistake to the infantry when they were intended as balls for the artillery. Those who saw the boxes said they were marked B.C. 2400; that would bring it back to Noah's time. I cannot vouch for this.”

*Letter excerpts referring to uniforms:*


**3.) Corporal James Hosmer, 52nd Massachusetts, recalls his impressions of the Confederates Uniforms. (from Coco, G. A. *The Civil War Infantryman: In camp, on the march, and in battle* (Gettysburg: Thomas Publications, 1996), 38.)**

“Here they were, the real truculent and unmitigated reb, in butternut of every shade, from the dingy green which clothes the unripe nut, to the tawny brown and faded tan which it wears at other stages,- butternut mixed with a dull characterless gray. There was no attempt at uniform, yet something common, in the dress of the whole company,- a faded look, as if the fabric, whatever its original hue, had felt the sun until all like and brightness had wilted into the web and been killed out of the dye. Still the clothing was whole; and, upon closer inspection, looked strong and serviceable, though very coarse.”

**4.) Sergeant John Worsham, a private in the 21st Virginia, also talks about his comrades in butternut and gray. (from Coco, G. A. *The Civil War Infantryman: In camp, on the march, and in battle* (Gettysburg: Thomas Publications, 1996), 39.)**

“ At this time our army was in a sad plight as to clothing. Hundreds had no shoes. Thousands were as ragged as they could be- some with the bottoms of their pants in long frazzles; others with their knees out, others out at the elbows, and their hair sticking through holes in their hats. Some of the men patched their clothing, and it was usually done with any material they could get. One man had the seat of his pants patched with bright red, and his knees patched with black. Another had uses a piece of gray or brown blanket. There were, however, so few patches and so many holes that, when a Pennsylvania girl on the side of the road saw us pass and asked her mother how the officers were distinguished from the privates the mother replied that it was easy enough: the officers’ pants were patched, and the privates’ pants were not.”

Lesson 2-Handout #2  
**Daily Life in the Civil War**

<u><b>Topics:</b></u>	<u><b>What I Have Learned</b></u>	<u><b>What I would Still Like to Learn</b></u>
Marching and Drilling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>
Daily Camp Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>
 Food and Coffee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>
How the Soldiers Filled Their Time While in Camp	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>
The Importance of Letters Home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>