



Eighth Grade Social Studies



There will be a short video lesson of a Knox County teacher to accompany this task available on the KCS YouTube Channel and KCS TV.

8th Grade Social Studies

prepared by Karen Peterman, West Valley Middle School

Daily Life of a Civil War Soldier

8.65 Describe African American involvement in the Union Army, including the Massachusetts 54th Regiment at Fort Wagner and the 13th U.S. Colored Troops in the Battle of Nashville.

8.66 Analyze how the writings of Sam Watkins and Elisha Hunt Rhodes illustrated the daily life of the common soldier.

Materials:

- 1863 recruitment poster
- excerpts from Sam Watkins' *Company Aytch or, A Side Show of the Big Show* and *All for the Union: The Civil War Diary & Letters of Elisha Hunt Rhodes*
- copy of PowerPoint presentation

Background: Following the Emancipation Proclamation, issued on January 1, 1863, thousands of free black men and former slaves joined the U.S. army. The 54th Massachusetts Regiment formed in Boston in 1863 and shipped out to fight in South Carolina. The 13th U.S. Colored Troops, formed in Tennessee, was instrumental in the Battle of Nashville. The bravery of these fighting men won the respect of their fellow soldiers. The words of Sam Watkins, a Confederate soldier, and Elisha Hunt Rhodes, a young Union officer, provided a unique perspective of a soldier's life. In 1990, their words were widely heard as a result of Ken Burns' PBS documentary, *The Civil War*.

Activities: Read and analyze the 1863 recruitment poster and the excerpts from *Company Aytch*.

Extension: Soldiers stationed far from home wrote letters to their parents, friends, wives and children. Reflect on what you have learned about Civil War soldiers. Assume the identity of a soldier serving with the 54th Massachusetts Regiment, the 13th U.S. Colored Troops or with either Sam Watkins or Elisha Hunt Rhodes. Now, write a letter to someone back home. Be sure to give them details of your daily activities and experiences.

Conclusion: Civil War soldiers joined the war effort for many different reasons. Regardless of their reasons for joining, their daily experiences were very similar.

TO COLORED MEN!

FREEDOM, Protection, Pay, and a Call to Military Duty!

On the 1st day of January, 1863, the President of the United States proclaimed FREEDOM to over THREE MILLIONS OF SLAVES. This decree is to be enforced by all the power of the Nation. On the 21st of July last he issued the following order:

PROTECTION OF COLORED TROOPS.

“WAR DEPARTMENT, ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE,
WASHINGTON, July 21.”

“General Order, No. 233.

“The following order of the President is published for the information and government of all concerned:—

EXECUTIVE MANSION, WASHINGTON, July 30.

“It is the duty of every Government to give protection to its citizens, of whatever class, color, or condition, and especially to those who are duly organized as soldiers in the public service. The law of nations, and the usages and customs of war, as carried on by civilized powers, permit no distinction as to color in the treatment of prisoners of war as public enemies. To sell or enslave any captured person on account of his color, is a relapse into barbarism, and a crime against the civilization of the age.

“The Government of the United States will give the same protection to all its soldiers, and if the enemy shall sell or enslave any one because of his color, the offense shall be punished by retaliation upon the enemy's prisoners in our possession. It is, therefore, ordered, for every soldier of the United States, killed in violation of the laws of war, a rebel soldier shall be executed; and for every one enslaved by the enemy, or sold into slavery, a rebel soldier shall be placed at hard labor on the public works, and continued at such labor until the other shall be released and receive the treatment due to prisoners of war.

“ABRAHAM LINCOLN.”

“By order of the Secretary of War.

“E. D. TOWNSEND, Assistant Adjutant General.”

That the President is in earnest the rebels soon began to find out, as witness the following order from his Secretary of War:

“WAR DEPARTMENT, WASHINGTON CITY, August 8, 1863.

“SIR: Your letter of the 3d inst., calling the attention of this Department to the cases of Orin H. Brown, William H. Johnston, and Wm. Wilson, three colored men captured on the gunboat Isaac Smith, has received consideration. This Department has directed that three rebel prisoners of South Carolina, if there be any such in our possession, and if not, three others, be confined in close custody and held as hostages for Brown, Johnston and Wilson, and that the fact be communicated to the rebel authorities at Richmond.

“Very respectfully your obedient servant,

“EDWIN M. STANTON, Secretary of War.

“The Hon. GIDEON WELLES, Secretary of the Navy.”

And retaliation will be our practice now—man for man—to the bitter end.

LETTER OF CHARLES SUMNER,

Written with reference to the Convention held at Poughkeepsie, July 15th and 16th, 1863, to promote Colored Enlistments.

BOSTON, July 13th, 1863.

“I doubt if, in times past, our country could have expected from colored men any patriotic service. Such service is the return for protection. But now that protection has begun, the service should begin also. Nor should relative rights and duties be weighed with nicety. It is enough that our country, aroused at last to a sense of justice, seeks to enrol colored men among its defenders.

“If my counsels should reach such persons, I would say: enlist at once. Now is the day and now is the hour. Help to overcome your cruel enemies now battling against your country, and in this way you will surely overcome those other enemies hardly less cruel, here at home, who will still seek to degrade you. This is not the time to hesitate or to higggle. Do your duty to our country, and you will set an example of generous self-sacrifice which will conquer prejudice and open all hearts.

“Very faithfully yours,

“CHARLES SUMNER.”

Use the recruitment poster titled “To Colored Men” to answer the following questions:

1. Who do you think is the intended audience for the poster?
2. What does the Government hope the audience will do?
3. What references to pay do you find in this document?
4. What references to treatment of prisoners of war do you find in this document?
5. What evidence of discrimination during the Civil War do you find in this document?
6. What evidence of Government efforts to improve conditions for black soldiers do you find in this document?
7. What purpose(s) of the Government is/are served by this poster?

**Excerpts from *Company Aytch or, A Side Show of the Big Show* by Sam Watkins
(1882)**

A private soldier is but an automaton, a machine that works by the command of a good, bad, or indifferent engineer, and is presumed to know nothing of all these great events. His business is to load and shoot, stand picket, videt, etc., while the officers sleep, or perhaps die on the field of battle and glory, and his obituary and epitaph but "one" remembered among the slain, but to what company, regiment, brigade or corps he belongs, there is no account; he is soon forgotten.

After the fighting was over, where, O where, was all the fine rigging heretofore on our officers? They could not be seen. Corporals, sergeants, lieutenants, captains, all had torn all the fine lace off their clothing. I noticed that at the time and was surprised and hurt. I asked several of them why they had torn off the insignia of their rank, and they always answered, "Humph, you think that I was going to be a target for the Yankees to shoot at?" You see, this was our first battle, and the officers had not found out that minnie as well as cannon balls were blind; that they had no eyes and could not see. They thought that the balls would hunt for them and not hurt the privates. I always shot at privates. It was they that did the shooting and killing, and if I could kill or wound a private, why, my chances were so much the better. I always looked upon officers as harmless personages.... If I shot at an officer, it was at long range, but when we got down to close quarters I always tried to kill those that were trying to kill me.

We march on. The scene of a few days ago comes unhidden to my mind. Tramp, tramp, tramp, the soldiers are marching. Where are many of my old friends and comrades, whose names were so familiar at every roll call, and whose familiar "Here" is no more? They lie yonder at Perryville, unburied, on the field of battle. They lie where they fell. More than three hundred and fifty members of my regiment, the First Tennessee, numbered among the killed and wounded—one hundred and eighty-five slain on the field of battle. Who are they? Even then I had to try to think up the names of all the slain of Company H alone. Their spirits seemed to be with us on the march, but we know that their souls are with their God. Their bones, today, no doubt, bleach upon the battlefield. They left their homes, families, and loved ones a little more than one short twelve months ago, dressed in their gray uniforms, amid the applause and cheering farewells of those same friends. They lie yonder; no friendly hands ever closed their eyes in death; no kind, gentle, and loving mother was there to shed a tear over and say farewell to her darling boy; no sister's gentle touch ever wiped the death damp from off their dying brows. Noble boys; brave boys! They willingly gave their lives to their country's cause. Their bodies and bones are mangled and torn by the rude missiles of war. They sleep the sleep of the brave. They have given their all to their country. We miss them from our ranks. There are no more hard marches and scant rations for them. They have accomplished all that could be required of them. They are no more; their names are soon forgotten. They are put down in the roll-book as killed. They are forgotten. We will see them no more until the last reveille on the last morning of the final resurrection. Soldiers, comrades, friends, noble boys, farewell! we will meet no more on earth, but up yonder some day we will have a grand reunion. (after the Battle of Perryville, 1862)

Excerpts from *All for the Union: The Civil War Diary & Letters of Elisha Hunt Rhodes* Edited by Robert Hunt Rhodes (1992)

It has rained for a week and the roads are muddy. After marching for twenty miles it is not pleasant to lie down at night in the wet without any cover. I am tired - in fact I never was so tired in my life.

Just as we reached Gen. Meade's Headquarters, a shell burst over our heads, and it was immediately followed by showers of iron. More than 200 guns were belching forth their thunder, and most of the shells that came over the hill struck in the road on which our brigade was moving. Solid shot would strike the large rocks and split them as if exploded by gunpowder. The flying iron and pieces of stone struck men down in every direction. It is said that this fire continued for about two hours, but I have no idea of the time. We could not see the enemy, and we could only cover ourselves the best we could behind the rocks and trees. Oh the dead and dying on this bloody field. (a description of the fighting at Gettysburg, 1863)

....a suit of citizen's clothes for the first time in over four years. Thank God it is over and that the Union is restored. And so at last I am a simple citizen.

Use the excerpts from the writings of Confederate soldier Sam Watkins and Union Soldier Elisha Hunt Rhodes to answer the following questions:

1. What do these excerpts tell you about the realities of war?
2. Based on Rhodes' diary entries, why did he join the fighting?
3. Watkins wrote his story nearly twenty years after the end of the War. Do you think that an account written directly after the events occurred would have been different?

If you want to further explore the lives of Civil War soldiers, check on the following:

A Civil War battle in virtual reality via YouTube: https://youtu.be/xuVHe-0r-BE?list=PLZrhqv_T1O1vuZmied86yukQIDG6yplxY

Gettysburg National Military Park Visitors Center Collection:
<https://www.nps.gov/museum/exhibits/gettex/index.htm>

Andersonville Prison virtual tour:
<https://www.gpb.org/education/virtual/andersonville>