



Lesson Plan

Care of Prisoners during the Civil War

Grades

4, 5, 6

Subjects

Language Arts, Social Studies, U.S. History

Time Allotted

30–45 minutes

Setting

Classroom

Group Size

25 students

Skills

Writing and collaborating

Methods

The students will reenact a battle scene to capture prisoners and decide what care will be provided to the captives.

Materials

Rope for picket line, paper and pencils

Keywords

N/A

Objectives

At the end of the activity, students will be able to:

- *Identify the basic needs of prisoners.*
- *Negotiate common terms for the care of prisoners.*
- *Recognize the Civil War documents relating to the care of prisoners.*



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

While being a prisoner of war presented many physical and psychological problems to the individual, prisoners also presented problems to the individuals and governments responsible for their security, care, and feeding.

The first large surrender in the war occurred at Ft. Donelson, Tennessee. General U.S. Grant took custody of over 15,000 prisoners of war. The problem of security and care of these prisoners had no precedent in the United States because never before had there been such large numbers of prisoners.

A cartel of exchange could only be made between existing governments, and President Lincoln did not want to recognize the Confederate government. Eventually an agreement was reached by the United States Army and later by the Confederate Army to follow certain regulations. Basically the regulations required that the prisoners' personal property was not to be taken and that they were to be provided with the same rations and medical treatment as that provided to the soldiers who captured them. Unfortunately, the practice of seizing personal property became more common on both sides as the war progressed.

Prison camps generally consisted of four types of compounds based on the kind of shelter they provided. The most common contained barracks or buildings to house the prisoners. Some camps only had temporary shelter and a few relied on tents. The fourth provided no shelter at all and left prisoners to fend for themselves.

ACTIVITIES

- Divide the students into two groups. One group will represent the Union Army and the other group will represent the Confederate Army. (If possible, have the students' wear appropriate colors with caps or sashes.) Have the groups face each other and play "Paper, Rock, Scissors". The loser of each round gains one step each time. Have a picket (boundary) line between each side. The first one of the twosome to lose ground to the boundary line becomes a prisoner of war.
- After all prisoners have been captured, each side should elect a General and staff to negotiate terms. Lead a discussion about their potential fate by asking such questions as: What do you plan to do with the prisoners? Where will the prisoners be kept? What clothing and health care will be provided? What will they be fed?
- Explain to the students that each side must agree to specific regulations for treatment of prisoners. Have the students write their own regulations for prisoners in small groups remembering to include provisions for food, health care, shelter, and personal belongings of the prisoners. Next each group is to collaboratively compile one list of regulations. After completion of the student-made lists, both sides negotiate to reach a satisfactory agreement for all.
- At this time, share the regulations of the US Army and the Confederate Army. Compare this list to the lists made by the class. Discuss the differences and similarities between the lists.

RESOURCES

Denney, Robert E. *Civil War Prisons and Escapes: A Day-by-Day Chronicle*. New York, Sterling Publishing Company, Inc.1994.

APPENDIX
Article XXXVI of U. S. Army
Regulations

745. Prisoners of war will be disarmed and sent to the rear and reported as practicable to the headquarters. The return of prisoners [report of prisoners taken] from the Headquarters of the Army to the War Department will specify the number, rank and corps.
746. The private property of prisoners will be duly respected, and each shall be treated with the regard due his rank. They are to obey the necessary orders given them. They receive for subsistence one ration each without regard to rank, and the wounded are to be treated with the same care as the wounded of the Army. Other allowances to them will depend on conventions with the enemy. Prisoners' horses will be taken for the Army.
747. Exchanges of prisoners and release of officers on parole depend on the general commanding-in-chief under the instructions of Government.

An Act Relative to Prisoners of War

Approved May 21, 1861

The Congress of the Confederate States of America do enact, That all prisoners of war taken whether on land or at sea during the pending hostilities with the United States shall be transferred by the captors from time to time and as often as convenient to the Department of War; and it shall be the duty of the Secretary of War with the approval of the President to issue such instructions to the Quartermaster-General and his subordinates as shall provide for the safe custody and sustenance of prisoners of war; and the rations furnished prisoners of war shall be the same in quantity and quality as those furnished to enlisted men in the Army of the Confederacy.

Sec. 2. That the eighth section of the act entitled "An act recognizing the existence of war between the United States and the Confederate States, and concerning letters of marque, prizes and prize goods," shall not be so construed as to authorize the holding of prisoners of war the officers or crew of any unarmed vessel, nor any passengers on such vessel, unless such passengers be persons employed in the public service of the enemy.

Sec. 3. That the tenth section of the above-recited act shall not be so construed as to allow a bounty for prisoners captured on vessel of the enemy and brought into port unless such prisoners were captured on board of an armed ship or vessel of the enemy equal or superior force to that of the private armed vessel making the capture.