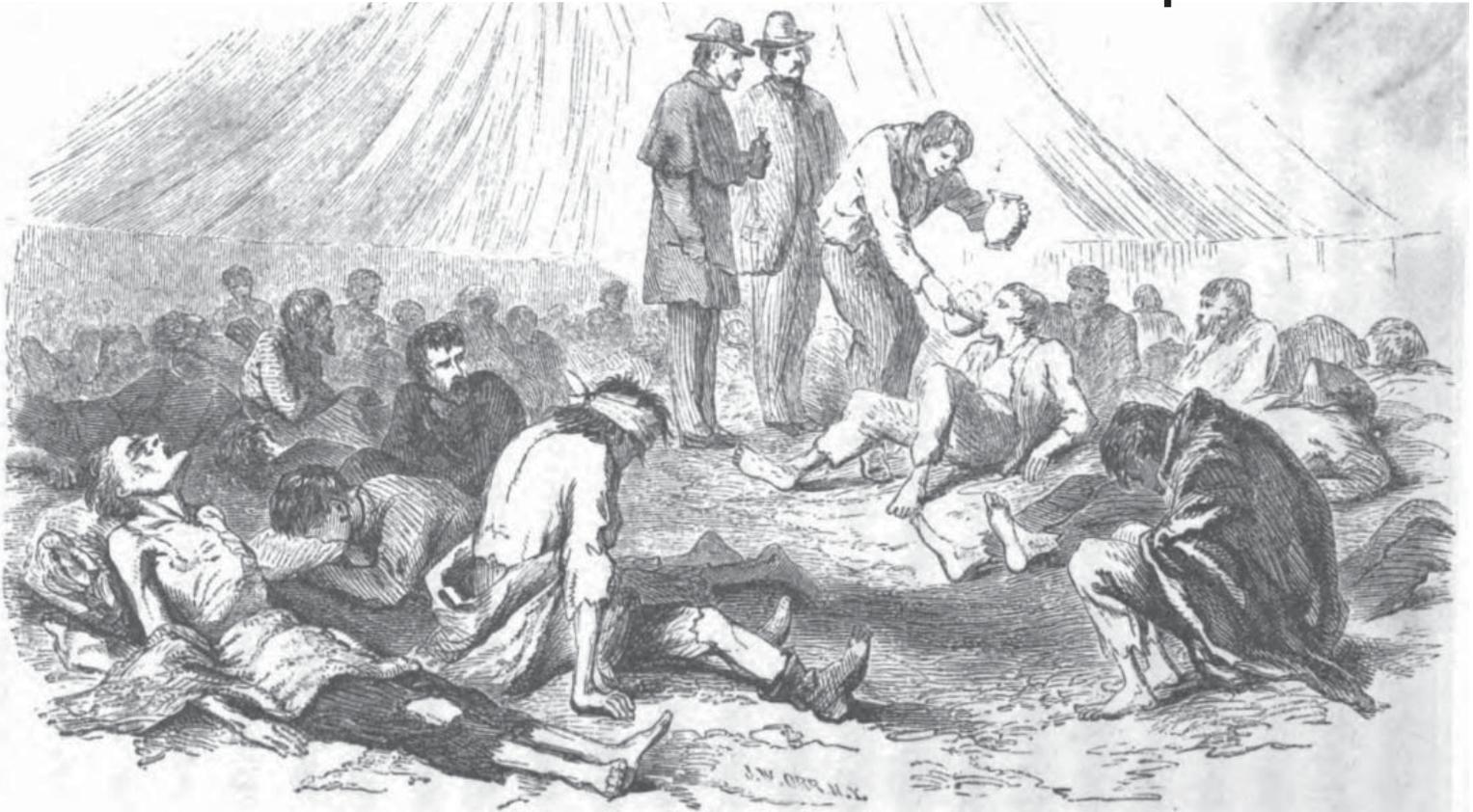




## Medical Conditions at Andersonville Prison Webquest



Medical science was just beginning to be understood at the onset of the Civil War. Germs were unheard of, and surgery techniques had not been improved since the early 1800's. Medicines were primitive and in many cases prescribed on an experimental basis. Nearly 13,000 prisoners died at Andersonville of disease and malnutrition.

This activity is designed to help students explore the medical conditions at Andersonville, and how those conditions contributed to a high rate of death. *Some of the content of this activity is graphic and may not be appropriate for younger students.*

**Suggested Age:**

8th-12th Grade

**Objectives:**

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

- Identify key diseases that were prevalent at Andersonville.
- Explain the causes for the spread of these diseases.
- Compare the treatments of these diseases at Andersonville to their modern treatments.

**Materials:**

Provided by Teacher – Photocopies of the material included with this lesson.

**Applicable Georgia Performance Standards**

*High School (United States History)*

SSUSH9 The student will identify key events, issues, and individuals relating to the causes, course, and consequences of the Civil War.

- f. Explain the importance of the growing economic disparity between the North and the South through an examination of population, functioning railroads, and industrial output.

*In addition, this lesson corresponds to numerous standards within Georgia's CTAE programs related to healthcare science.*

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## Procedures

This lesson plan does not develop specific activities for these works of fiction. Rather it is to provide you with suggestions of grade level appropriate books to recommend for your students and to provide you with copies of little published prisoner poetry for use in your literature class.

1. Distribute copies of Dr. Joseph Jones' letter to the Surgeon-General of the Confederacy.
2. Using Dr. Jones' letter, have students identify the important diseases prevalent at Andersonville and the mortality rate at Andersonville. (dysentery, gangrene, diarrhea, scurvy. Death rate approximately 30% - 13,000 died out of 45,000 total prisoners).
3. Break the students into groups and assign each group one of these four Andersonville diseases.
4. Students will use the internet and Dr. Jones' letter to prepare presentations (PowerPoint, posters, etc...) on their specific disease. Each group should identify for their assigned disease:
  - (a) A "definition" of the disease
  - (b) The medical cause of the disease
  - (c) Why was the disease so prominent in Andersonville (focus on conditions in the prison)
  - (d) How was the disease treated during the time of the Civil War. Why were these treatments not available or unsuccessful at Andersonville?
  - (e) How is the disease treated or prevented today?
  - (f) If possible, a photo of the disease or its symptoms (not recommended for diarrhea & dysentery)
5. Have students present their disease to the class.
6. While each group is presenting, students should complete the graphic organizer "Diseases at Andersonville"
7. Follow up discussion – Discuss with students why diseases were so prevalent at Andersonville, why so many of these diseases were fatal, even though they may have been treatable. What challenges or difficulties might doctors have faced at Andersonville? (too many patients, lack of sanitary conditions, not enough medicine/supplies)

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October 19, 1864  
Macon, GA

Surgeon General S.P. Moore  
Confederate Army  
War Department  
Richmond, VA

Sir: I have the honor to give the following brief outline of my labors, conducted in accordance with the orders of the Surgeon-General:

. . . I [visited] Camp Sumter, Andersonville, GA, and instituted a series of investigations upon the diseases of the Federal prisoners. There were more than 5,000 seriously sick in the hospital and stockade, and the deaths ranged from 90 to 130 each day. Since the establishment of this prison on 24th of February, 1864, to the present time over 10,000 Federal prisoners have died; that is, near one-third of the entire number have perished in less than seven months.

I instituted careful investigations into the conditions of the sick and well and performed numerous post-mortem examinations. The medical topography of Andersonville and the surrounding country was examined, and the waters of the streams, springs, and wells around and within the stockade and hospital carefully analyzed.

Diarrhea, dysentery, scurvy, and hospital gangrene were the diseases which have been the main cause of this extraordinary mortality. The origin and character of the hospital gangrene which prevailed to so remarkable a degree and with such fatal effects amongst the Federal prisoners engaged my most serious and earnest consideration. More than 30,000 men crowded upon twenty-seven acres of land, with little or no shelter from the intense heat of a Southern summer, or from the rain and from the dew of night, with coarse corn bread from which the husk had not been removed, with but scant supplies of fresh meat and vegetables, with little or no attention to hygiene, with festering masses of filth and the very doors of their rude dens and tents, with the greater portion of the banks of the stream flowing through the stockade a filthy quagmire of human excrements alive with working maggots, generated by their own filthy exhalations and excretions, an atmosphere that so deteriorated and contaminated their solids and fluids that the slightest scratch and even the bites of small insects were in some cases followed by such rapid and extensive gangrene as to destroy extremities and even life itself.

A large number of operations have been performed in the hospital on account of gangrene following slight injuries and mere abrasions of the surface. In almost every case the amputation for gangrene the disease returned, and a large proportion of the cases have terminated fatally.

I recorded careful observations upon the origin and progress of these cases of gangrene, and examined the bodies after death and noted the pathological changes of the organs and tissues. The results of these observations will be forwarded to the Surgeon-General at the earliest practical moment.

These active labors in the field will engage my attention for one or two months longer, and immediately after the close of the investigation (if Providence permits) I will prepare my full report upon hospital gangrene, which will embody the results of my investigations upon this disease in various parts of the Confederacy, in the general hospitals in Virginia, South Carolina, and Georgia, and will embrace also the more recent investigations at Andersonville, Macon, and Columbus, GA. I will spare no effort and no expenditure of time and labor in the preparation of this report, with the hope that it may prove of value to the medical department of the Confederate Army and worthy of the Considerations of the Surgeon-General.

If favored, I hope to be able to place this report in the hands of the Surgeon-General about the 1st of next May or June.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

JOSEPH JONES  
Surgeon, Provisional Army, C.S.

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## Diseases at Andersonville

	<b>SCURVY</b>	<b>DIARRHEA</b>	<b>DYSENTERY</b>	<b>GANGRENE</b>
<b>Definition</b>				
<b>Medical Cause</b>				
<b>Conditions at Andersonville that facilitated the disease</b>				
<b>How was it treated in the Civil War and at Andersonville?</b>				
<b>How is it treated today?</b>				

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