

“Citizenship: Untold Stories from the Battle of Gettysburg”

Pre-Visit Lessons and Activities

LESSON 1: Class Discussion and Definition of “Citizenship”

Step #1: Write the word CITIZENSHIP on the board and, as a class, brainstorm every word or phrase that comes to mind.

Step #2: In small groups of 3 to 5 students, formulate a sentence definition for CITIZENSHIP, using words from your list and words in the word bank below.

Step #3: Each group can share their definition with the whole class. Then, combine the best parts of the group definitions to create one class definition of the word, or vote on the best small group definition.

Step #4: Memorize or write down your class definition and bring it along with you on your field trip to Gettysburg where you will be visiting the homes and learning more about the stories of Abraham Bryan, Lydia Leister, and Elizabeth Thorn, three people who did not have all of the rights of citizenship even though they sacrificed a great deal for the country.

Citizenship Word Bank

**rights, responsibilities, government, protection,
allegiance, faith, defend, support, duty, service, law**

LESSON 2: Elizabeth Thorn, Lydia Leister, and Abram Bryan and the Battle of Gettysburg

Step #1: Review the Gettysburg Campaign and Battle with your class. A summary can be found online within the Snyder Family Farm program guide, pages 11-14, at: https://www.nps.gov/gett/learn/education/upload/Slyder_Farm_Guide.pdf.

Step #2: Next, whether in small groups or individually, have your students read the following short biography of Elizabeth Thorn and the following excerpts from her account of the battle. While they read, ask them to identify some of the ways in which Elizabeth helped the Union army and how she and her family were impacted by the battle.

Who Was Elizabeth Masser Thorn?



Peter and Elizabeth Thorn

Elizabeth Masser Thorn was born in Germany on December 28, 1832. Having immigrated to the United States she became an American citizen by the time of the American Civil War. Several years prior to the outbreak of war, she married Peter Thorn, the caretaker of the Evergreen Cemetery. In 1862, however, Peter Thorn enlisted in the Union army and it was then Elizabeth's responsibility to not only look after and care for the cemetery, but also her aging parents, as well as her three children: Fred (age 7), George (age 5), and John (age 2). All the while Elizabeth was six months pregnant with her fourth child.

July 1

During the morning on the first day of battle, Elizabeth was baking bread, which she gave to Union soldiers as they rush toward battle. She and her parents and children were also keeping many tin cups filled with water from the pump for the soldiers as they rushed past. Everyone goes to the cellar of the gatehouse, except Elizabeth, who convinced an officer to let her show him the countryside, to better help the army fight the battle; she stays on the “safe side of the [officer’s] horse” for protection as they ride around the area.

***Elizabeth Thorn:** I told my father and mother what I had done and they were afraid I would get into trouble and I sat with them awhile to quiet them. I could not remain still long as I wanted to know what was going on. So I went upstairs. On the steps I tramped in plaster and looking up I saw where a shell had entered the room. It was one of the few shells fired from Benner’s Hill on that day and had bursted outside.*

Later, Elizabeth cooked dinner for Union Generals Oliver Howard, Daniel Sickles, and Henry Slocum.

***Elizabeth Thorn:** I had put some meat for safe keeping down at the [Myers’s] home. . . and I went down there about dark to get some of it. There was four hams and a shoulder there. The house was filled with wounded soldiers and none of the family was about. I saw a lot of men lying in rows and six of them did not move and that scared me and I took a nervous chill and hurried home without any meat.*

Upon arriving home, General Howard told her to pack up her things, and she began putting some items in the cellar for safekeeping. At 6 a.m. on July 2 an officer burst in and ordered that they evacuate immediately and move south along Baltimore Pike for their safety. With shells bursting around them, the family moved to the Musser’s farm near Rock Creek.



As caretakers of the Evergreen Cemetery, the Thorn family resided in this home, which was also the cemetery gatehouse. This photograph shows some of the damage done to the home by the battle. (Library of Congress)

July 2

Elizabeth and her father were worried about their home and they tried to get back to check on the hogs around midnight.

Elizabeth Thorn: Father and I went out to go home. We came to a guard who did not want to let us through but I told him we had left our place and all our things in a hurry and Mother wanted a pillow and he let us go then. As we came to the cemetery we heard the groans of the wounded. Father went down to let out the hogs but he could not find them. The old stable, pig pen and all wood had been used by soldiers to make fires to cook by. Even six scaps of bees were gone.

Father and I tried to go into the house but we were stopped. We were told wounded men were inside and that we should make no light as it might make the wounded soldiers restless. We said we would get what we wanted without light and we felt around. Father got a shawl and I a quilt.

Elizabeth and her father decided then to move the family further away from the Musser's home for better safety.

July 3

Early morning, July 3,

Elizabeth Thorn: *I carried the smallest boy and the (Baltimore) Pike being jammed with soldiers and wagons of all kinds, it was hard to move. We reached the White church and was a lot of town people there. Some of us made up our minds to go over to Henry Beitler's and walked there. When we reached the Henry Beitler place, Father said he was getting weak, we had nothing to eat and drink that day.*

Mrs. McKnight was then with us. She and I agreed we would hunt through the house for something to eat like the army men. We went into the cellar and found a barrel. While I held the lid up, Mrs. McKnight ran her arm in almost to the elbow and brought it out covered with soft soap. That was the first laugh we had that day. After washing the arm, we went hunting again and found two crocks of milk, and helping ourselves we softened the crust of our loaf of bread, and it was soon eaten and we were still hungry.

There were some soldiers in the front part of the house and Mrs. McKnight and I went around to the front and rapped at the door. An officer came out and asked us what we wanted. He had been in town and said to us, 'Did you know Jennie Wade?'¹ I said I knew her, that she lived near my home. He then told us she got killed.

July 7

Four days after the battle ended, the Thorn family returned to their home, which had been ravaged by the battle.

Elizabeth Thorn: *We saw some of our furniture going by on some wagons and my boys wanted me to go out and stop it.*

Everything in the house was gone except three feather beds and a couple of pillows. The beds and a dozen pillows we had brought from the old country were not fit to use again. The legs of six soldiers had been amputated on the beds in our house and they were ruined with blood and we had to make way with them.

It was a busy time for father and me when we got back. We would get orders to dig graves and father and I dug 105 graves for soldiers in the next three weeks. When I left home the first time I had put on a heavier dress than usual and when we got back there wasn't a single piece of our clothing left. I lived in that dress for six weeks.

¹ Mary Virginia "Ginnie" or "Jennie" Wade was a neighbor of the Thorn's and was the only civilian killed during the three day Battle of Gettysburg.

Sixteen soldiers and one colored man had been buried in the garden near the pump house. In one field lay fifteen dead horses and in the other field nineteen dead horses. They were right beside the cemetery and were not buried and the stench was awful. For days I could hardly eat because of the disagreeable odor.

For all the extra work of burying the soldiers we never received any extra pay from the cemetery or from any other source, only the monthly salary of \$13.00.

After the battle: Elizabeth Thorn told of the days surrounding the battle to a local newspaper in 1905. Peter survived the war, then resigned as Cemetery keeper in 1874. The family moved to a farm down the road. Peter died in January of 1907, and that October, Elizabeth died as well. They are both buried at Evergreen Cemetery, near the soldiers that Elizabeth had buried years before.

Step #3: Learn About Lydia Leister and Analyze a Photograph of her Home

Whether in small groups or individually, have your students read the following short biography of Lydia Leister and then have them analyze the accompanying photographs taken of her home and farm in the days following the battle. As they do so, have them identify at least two ways the battle impacted her life

Who Was Lydia Leister?

Born in 1811, Lydia Leister was 52 years old at the time of the Battle of Gettysburg in the summer of 1863. She was also a widow; her husband, James Leister, passing away in 1859, leaving Lydia alone to continue raising her six children, several of whom were still quite young. In March 1861, Lydia purchased a small clapboard home which was situated on a nine-acre farm just to the south of Cemetery Hill. A hard-working, industrious woman, Lydia immediately went to work improving the farm; planting crops and vegetables, building fences, and caring for her farm animals. Then, suddenly, on July 1, 1863, and just two years after purchasing the property, Lydia was told to leave her home. A dust-covered Union officer gruffly told her that for her own safety and for the safety of the children who were still residing with her that they needed to vacate their home. Unfortunately for Lydia, her home was now centrally located behind the

Union battle line forming on the hilltops and ridges around her farm. And as it turned out, her home would be used by Major General George Meade, commander of the Union Army of the Potomac, as the Headquarters of the entire Union army.

Several days after the battle, Lydia and her children returned home and found almost total ruin and devastation. Speaking to a traveling journalist in 1865, Lydia remembered: "I owed a little on my land yit [yet], and I didn't get nothing from it. The fences were all tore down. . .and the rails burnt up. There was seventeen dead horses on my land. They burnt five of 'em around my best peach tree and killed it; so I had no peaches. They broke down all my young apple trees for me. The dead horses spoiled my spring, so I had to have a well dug. . . .One shell came into the house and knocked a bedstead to pieces for me. The porch was all knocked down."

Having read and learned a little about Lydia Leister and her experiences at Gettysburg, analyze the two images below of her home and farm taken soon after the battle.



Lydia Leister Farm and Home (Library of Congress)

Leister Home With Unknown Figure Standing on Porch. Lydia Leister's home was used as Headquarters of General George Meade during the Battle of Gettysburg. (Library of Congress)



Step #4: Learn about Abraham Bryan

Look closely at 1860 Census Record of Abraham (misidentified as Abram on Census). What can be learned about the Bryan's and their home/property on the eve of the American Civil War? (Hint: He and his family are found near the bottom of the census image).

SCHEDULE 1.—Free Inhabitants in Township of Cumber in the County of Adams of Pennsylvania, enumerated by me, on the 32nd day of June, 1860. Sum Sheet
 Post Office Gettysburg, Pa.

Dwelling-houses— numbered in the order of visitation.	Families numbered in the order of visitation.	The name of every person whose usual place of abode on the first day of June, 1860, was in this family.	DESCRIPTION.			Profession, Occupation, or Trade of each person, male and female, over 15 years of age.	VALUE OF ESTATE OWNED.		Place of Birth, Naming the State, Territory, or Country.	Married within the year.	Attended School within the year.
			Age.	Sex.	White, black, or mulatto.		Value of Real Estate.	Value of Personal Estate.			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
		Mary Thompson	16	f.					Pennsylvania		1
		John	12	f.					Do.		1
		George	14	m.					Do.		1
		John Wilson	24	m.		Day Laborer			Do.		
533	578	Levy Jones	38	m.	M.	Coach Smith		75	Pennsylvania		
		Lydia	28	f.	M.				Do.		
		Eliza	12	f.	M.				Do.		1
		Mary	9	f.	M.				Do.		1
	574	Alfred Palm	28	m.	B.	Bricklayer			Do.		
		Margaret Smith	24	f.	M.	Mistress - Household			Do.		
		Joseph F. Palm	1	m.	M.				Do.		
534	578	Abraham Bryan	53	m.	B.	Farmer	1,400	250	Maryland		
		Elizabeth	50	f.	B.				Pennsylvania		
		Francis	11	m.	B.				Do.		1
		William	14	m.	B.				Do.		1
535	576	Samuel Williams	35	m.	B.	Day Laborer			Do.		
		Elizabeth	30	f.	M.				Do.		
		Veronica Bellis	28	m.	B.				Maryland		

Who Was Abraham Bryan?

Abraham Brian was born in Maryland in 1804, although it is not known whether he was born a free person or born into slavery. By 1840, however, he was residing in Gettysburg with his wife, Harriet, and their five children. Sadly, Harriet Brian passed away in 1847. Abraham remarried to a woman named Catherine Payne but, tragically, she died a short time later. Sometime during the 1850s, Abraham Brian, who was living in town and working as a laborer, married for a third

time. In 1857, Abraham and Elizabeth Brian moved out of town to a twelve-acre farm atop what would later be known as Cemetery Ridge. There, the Brian's grew wheat, barley, and hay, and had both a fruit orchard and a vegetable garden. Neither Abraham nor Elizabeth could read or write, but their children were attending school. The Brian family worked hard at home and on their land and by 1860, the total value placed on their farm was \$1,400.00. But like most property owners in Gettysburg, Abraham Brian would suffer heavy damage as a result of the battle. His home and land would be near the center of the Union battle line during the second and third days of battle, and would be swept up in the battle's final attack—the famed Pickett's Charge. The ground was trampled, his house and barn tore apart by shot and shell; his fence lines destroyed. The Brian family had fled their home before the battle; when they returned they were no doubt stunned by the damage. Abraham tallied the cost of all the damage, which he placed at a little over \$1,000.00, thus nearly *all* of the total value of his land (\$1,400.00). Despite Union soldiers using his fence lines for protection and despite the fact that a Union general used his home for a headquarters, and even though over 100 slain soldiers would be buried on his property, Abraham Brian would receive only \$15.00 (fifteen dollars) from the government to help him rebuild. Still, the Brian family would rebuild and replant their land, continuing to reside there until 1869 when Abraham Brian sold his home and land and moved back into town. Abraham Brian passed away at age 75 in 1879 and his remains were buried in the Lincoln Cemetery in Gettysburg.

Post-battle photograph of the Bryan Home/Farm showing damage done by battle. (Library of Congress)



Lesson 3: Exploring the Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship

Step #1: Explain that on the field trip, students will visit the homes of these three individuals, learn about a day in their lives, and begin to understand the sacrifices each had to make before, during and after the battle of Gettysburg.

Step #2: Ask if they feel the three individuals fit within their class definition of citizenship. Which individual had the most rights? The least? Who sacrificed the most for the country, in your opinion? Ask the students to develop questions that they hope are answered during their field trip.

Step #3: Review the Amendments to the U.S. Constitution concerning citizenship, especially the 13th, 14th, and 15th that were passed as a result of the Civil War, and the 19th Amendment which gave women the right to vote.

Step #4: If time, log onto a practice citizenship test and take together as a class. (One can be found [at www.citizenshipstudyguide.com](http://www.citizenshipstudyguide.com).)

Step #5: Discussion questions: Should ALL citizens be required to take a citizenship test, or just NEW citizens? What would you include on a Citizenship Test? Are there any groups fighting for the rights of citizenship today? What kinds of people make the best citizens? Support your answer.