

Lesson Plan: Black Confederate Pensioners After the Civil War

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OVERVIEW

Gathering data on the services black noncombatants performed for the Confederate army effort has been hampered by the lack of reliable information. Fortunately some Confederate states, including Mississippi, have archived pension applications from Confederate war veterans. Mississippi was the only Confederate state to include the soldiers' personal servants who were disabled as a result of war wounds in its pension program from the beginning in 1888. The applications are now on file in the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, where they can be viewed on microfilm. Other southern states did not include African Americans in Confederate army pension programs until the 1920s. Confederate pension applications provide a much clearer picture of what black southerners did during the war. In this lesson, students will examine this little-known aspect of the American Civil War.

CONNECTION TO THE CURRICULUM

Mississippi Studies Framework: competencies 1 and 3
TEACHING LEVELS

Grades 4 (with modification) through 12
MATERIALS AND EQUIPMENT

- * Mississippi History Now article, "Black Confederate Pensioners After the Civil War"
- * Butcher paper and markers (optional)
- * Anticipation Guide transparency, or copies

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

1. Explore the roles played by black combatants in the Confederate war effort of the American Civil War;
2. Examine the service of black noncombatants from Mississippi in the Confederate army; and,
3. Evaluate the significance of pension applications as primary resources.

OPENING THE LESSON

Ask students to consider the services rendered to this country by its military veterans, especially those who have served during times of war. Lead them to discuss the compensations and benefits soldiers receive from the government. Looking at the Social Security and the Veterans Today websites could be helpful. (Both sites accessed April 2008.)

Ask students to recall their studies of the Civil War and to speculate on the benefits available to veterans of that conflict. Additionally, encourage students to discuss whether or not African Americans played any role in the Confederate war effort, and if they did, ask if their services entitled them to benefits once the war was over. This lesson will enable them to learn more about the presence and service of African Americans in the Confederate war effort.

DEVELOPING THE LESSON

Teacher will begin the lesson by administering the Before and After exercise printed below. Teacher will provide a copy for each student, or students can copy the exercise into their notebooks.

Have students respond to each statement by marking "T" for True or "F" for False by each statement, using a colored pencil. If teacher wishes, they may then compare and discuss their responses with a partner.

Check to determine that students know certain words that are important to the topic: noncombatants; pensions; anecdotes; indigent. Help them write an accurate definition in their notebooks.

Before and After

Mark each statement T (True) or F (False)

___ 1. Although African American slaves provided crucial services to the Confederate Army, few accompanied their owners into actual battle zones.

___ 2. By the later years of the war, most black noncombatants had already been sent back home.

___ 3. African American noncombatants were limited in their service to areas along the Mississippi River.

___ 4. After the Civil War, Mississippi provided pensions for disabled or indigent veterans but not for their slaves who accompanied them into military service.

___ 5. The most important source of information regarding the service of African Americans during the Civil War comes from anecdotes, which rarely can be documented.

Now, ask students to read the Mississippi History Now article, focusing on information that confirms, rejects, or elaborates upon the statements in the Before and After exercise. At the teacher's discretion, students may work individually, with a partner, or in small groups. (Article can be found at <http://mshistory.k12.ms.us/articles/289/black-confederate-pensioners-after-the-civil-war>)

Students will again indicate T or F after each statement — this time with a pencil in a different color — and be prepared to participate in a class discussion, and/or writing activity, to explain how their Before and After answers changed as a result of new information provided in the reading.

The teacher will lead a discussion, using the lesson's three objectives as a guide.

CONCLUDING THE LESSON

- Several options can be used to ascertain student learning. The teacher may wish to post several pieces of butcher paper around the room.

1. Using the carousel technique, students in small groups will rotate to each paper and write a SURPRISE or NEW LEARNING regarding the lesson. They must write something different each rotation.

2. Teacher may decide to have students individually compose a cluster (bubble) map /web detailing facts they've learned about the topic.

3. Students may compose a text message to a friend telling them how history sometimes surprises them.

- As a final activity, have students respond in some way to this quote from the author's full article published in The Journal of Mississippi History:

“As slaves, African Americans were an integral part of the southern way of life before the war, and the Confederate army reflected the society from which it had come.”

ASSESSING THE LESSON

- Participation in small/large group activities and discussion
- Completion of Anticipation Guide
- Completion of concluding activity
- Response to quote

EXTENDING THE LESSON

Students may wish to explore why Mississippi willingly offered pensions to African Americans. Explore the reasoning behind this action.

Additional resource:

Hollandsworth Jr., James G. “Looking for Bob: Black Confederate Pensioners After the Civil War.” *The Journal of Mississippi History*, Vol. LXVIX, No. 4, Winter 2007.