

A Community Divided

Big Idea

Primary source documents help us learn about people, places, and events from the past.

Background

At the time of the Civil War, Tennessee was the 2nd most populous state in the South and supplied more soldiers for the Confederacy than any other state, except Virginia.

Tennessee also furnished more men for the Union than all other Southern states combined. In 1860, the state's slave population made up 24.8% of the population.

This terrible conflict would divide families, separate former friends, and open rifts in communities all over the country, just like Collierville. The primary sources included in this lesson show the variety of people who lived in Collierville during the Civil War.



In this lesson

Students examine primary source documents to reconstruct the history of Collierville between 1850 and 1865.

Collierville, A Divided Community

Tennessee State Standards:

5th grade: 5.2, 5.7, 5.14, 5.18

8th grade: 8.77, 8.78, 8.79

Objectives:

- Look at changes over time
- Think critically about primary sources
- Explore the strengths and limitations of primary sources

Materials:

- 6 Character Packets with primary sources
- Clothing and personal items from the Traveling Trunk. See Object Inventory.

Characters:

- Civilian Doctor in Collierville
- Confederate Soldier
- Sister of a Confederate Soldier
- Slave
- Union Soldier
- US Colored Troop Unit Soldier

Pre-lesson:

Review how to read a primary source with students. *Optional: "Analyzing Primary Sources" from the Library of Congress (provided).*

Review any primary source materials included in packet that may be unfamiliar with students. *Optional: "What's in a Census?" (provided).*

Image: Williams Gun Cast Iron Cannonballs (left) and bullets found in Collierville, TN (right). In the background, a medical kit, ca. 1840s-1860s, used by Dr. E. K. Leake in Collierville.

Notes About the Lesson

The primary source materials in the student packets have been transcribed to help students read the information.

You can remove primary sources from each Character Packet to shorten the lesson. Students only need one or two resources in each packet to practice analyzing a primary source and learn a few facts about each person.

Information about each person is summarized on the back cover. This information is drawn from primary and secondary sources. *Optional:* share this information after the lesson to discuss the limitations of an individual primary source and what can be gleaned from looking at a variety of sources.

Lesson Plan

Part 1

Divide students into groups and give each group a Character Packet. Don't tell them in advance what person they have.

Ask students to make a list of the things they can learn about their person (slave, civilian, soldiers, etc.). Their list may include some fictional elements to round out their character based on their reading of the primary sources and knowledge about the period

learned in class. *Optional: Use the Character Investigation Worksheet to guide information collection.*

Each group should pick items out of the Traveling Trunk that represents their character. Students should be prepared to tell why those items are appropriate based on reading of the primary sources.

Part 2

In front of the class, ask the student groups to introduce their character to the class. Next, interview another group's character. These questions can get students thinking about the various opinions that people held during the war according to their position in society and pull out larger social, political, or economic issues. *Optional: Use the prompt questions provided to get started.*

Prompt Questions

- What was your experience of the Civil War?
- What was the hardest thing you faced before or during the war?
- If you're fighting in the war, why did you join?
- How do you think your life will change now that the war has ended?
- Did your views change after the war?

Student Character Packets

Character 1 Asa Stratton, civilian doctor from Collierville

1850 Free Inhabitants Census

1850 Slave Schedule

1860 Free Inhabitants Census

1860 Slave Schedule

1870 Census

Picture, Stratton House at 198 Natchez St., Collierville, built in the early 1850s

Character 2 Confederate soldier

Recollections of Capt. James Dinkins, 1897, pages 112-115.

Character 3 Sister of a Confederate Soldier

Letter from a sister to her brother who details the Battle of Collierville on October 11, 1863.

Character 4 Slave(s) owned by Davis Biggs

1860 Slave Schedule (owner, Davis Biggs)

Picture, Slave cabins at Belle Meade Plantation, Nashville, TN

1860 Agricultural Census (Davis Biggs)

Character 5 Union soldier

Letter from Jeremiah Hall to brother, James Hall, October 20, 1863

Character 6 Harry Biggs, US Colored Troop Unit Soldier

Emancipation Proclamation, 1863

1870 Census, which lists Harry Biggs and family

Harry Bigg Pension Application, 1901

Deposition of Benjamin Biggs, 1913 (Harry's son)

Picture, unidentified African American soldier in Union uniform with family.

Traveling Trunk Items

Soldiers' Clothing

US and CS Kepi
(soldier hat)
US and CS Jackets
White Shirt
US and CS belt buckles

Soldiers' Personal items

Canteen
Haversack
Knap sack
Mucket
Folding Candle Lantern
Quill Pen
US and CS money

Weaponry

Bullet
Silver Minie-balls
Cannon ball piece

Civilian Personal Items

Woman's Apron (2)
Bonnett
Crocheted Gloves
Mortar and pestle
Bandages
African Spiritual Sheet
Music

Detailed description of each item is included in Traveling Trunk.

Background: Confederate Camp in Pensacole, Fla. Company B of the 9th Mississippi, ca. 1861-1865. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Character Background Information for Educator

Asa Stratton, civilian doctor from Collierville

Asa Stratton and wife, Mary, arrived in Collierville as early as 1850. Because censuses were recorded by hand, you will see variations in the last name and place of birth: Stratton and Stratten; MS and MA. Prior to 1870, the Stratton's owned 2 slaves as recorded on the 1850 and 1860 Slave Schedules. He lists his occupation as a doctor. Dr. Asa Stratton was one of the original aldermen of Collierville. Mary operated a schoolhouse on their property. The cornerstones of that building still stand at 198 Natchez St., built in the early 1850s. A modern day picture of the house is included.

Confederate soldier

James Dinkins was born on April 18, 1845, in Madison County, Mississippi. As a teenager, he was sent to the North Carolina Military Institute in Charlotte. When the Civil War started, he returned to Mississippi and joined the Confederate Army, Company C of the 18th Mississippi Infantry. After two years, he received a lieutenant's commission and served in the 18th Mississippi Cavalry. Dinkins was present at the Battle of Collierville on October 11, 1863 and recounts his experience in "Personal Recollections and Experiences in the Confederate Army," pages 112-115. A picture of Dinkins is included when he was a student at the North Carolina Military Institute. He is wearing his cadet uniform.

"Sister E." of a Confederate Soldier

Letter from a sister to her brother who details the Battle of Collierville on October 11, 1863. A note about the battle is recounted on page 3. The writer of the letter, "Sister E.," indicates she has another sister, "Sister S.," whose family was recently attacked by "Yankee robbers."

Enslaved persons owned by Davis Biggs

Davis Biggs owned 34 slaves according to the 1860 Slave Schedule Census. Slave schedules were produced in 1850 and 1860 to record slave populations. Enumerators listed the names of slaveholders with a description of each enslaved person according to age, gender, and color. No picture of slave cabins in West Tennessee is known to exist, so included is a picture of the slave cabins at Belle Meade Plantation, Nashville, TN. Courtesy of Tennessee State Library and Archives. Also, included is the 1860 Agricultural Census with Davis Biggs highlighted, so one can get a sense of the size of his farm.

Background on slavery in this area: The railroad's arrival in 1853 rapidly transformed Collierville. The population grew from approximately 246 free citizens and 36 slaves in 1850 to roughly 1,700 people in 1860, which included 1,000 slaves. Slaves played an essential role in Collierville's growing economy. Farmers raised livestock and produced a wide variety of crops, including cotton, corn, oat, and wheat, that were extremely labor-intensive. The majority of slaveholders in Collierville listed farming as their occupation and owned more than ten slaves.

During the Civil War, many enslaved people claimed their freedom within Union lines, and a state constitutional amendment abolished slavery before the war ended.

Union Soldier

A letter from Jeremiah Hall to his brother, James Hall, written on October 20, 1863 in Collierville. Jeremiah Hall served in the 67th Ohio Infantry Regiment of the United States Army from 1861 to 1865. The letter probably refers to the skirmish caused by Confederate Brigadier General James Chalmer's raid on Collierville on October 11th 1863. General Chalmer's troops were engaging the Union forces stationed in Collierville when General Sherman's troops arrived, moving east toward Chattanooga. Letter archived at the University of Alabama. URL: <http://purl.lib.ua.edu/20750>

US Colored Troop Unit soldier

After the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, African Americans were able to enlist and fight on behalf of the Union.

Harry Biggs was born a slave in North Carolina in 1839 or 1840. He came with his owners, Davis and Martha Biggs and their three children, to Collierville in 1843. Not much is known about Harry Biggs until his enlistment in the 11th United States Colored Troop Unit in Memphis on November 19, 1863, one month after the Battle of Collierville. The 11th USCT mustered in Fort Smith, Arkansas, in December 1863. Harry's pension record states he was honorably discharged on January 12, 1866.

Pictures of USCTU soldiers are very rare. No picture of Harry Biggs before or after the war has been found. Included is a picture of an unidentified African American soldier in Union uniform with wife and two daughters. Courtesy of the Library of Congress. URL: <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/ppmsca.36454>