



THE CIVIL WAR

A FILM BY KEN BURNS

LESSON

Grade Level: 7-12

Subject: History and Music

Estimated Time of
Required:
2 (50-60 minute) class
periods

THE CIVIL WAR CLASSROOM MATERIALS

LEE AND GRANT AT APPOMATTOX COURT HOUSE

OVERVIEW

"... then there is nothing left me but to go and see General Grant, and I would rather die a thousand deaths..."

—Robert E. Lee, April 9, 1865

The Civil War still holds the distinction of being the bloodiest in American History. It all came to an end, however, in the parlor of Wilmer McLean's home at Appomattox Court House, Virginia, in April, 1865.

While the war may have been bloody, the terms given by General Ulysses S. Grant to Robert E. Lee for the surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia were extremely generous. In this activity, students will analyze these terms, as well as the events leading to Lee's surrender, by investigating Grant's own memoirs of this time.

RELATED RESOURCES FOR THIS LESSON

Chapter LXVII of Ulysses S. Grant's memoirs

(<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/grant/broadband/memoirs.pdf>)

Episode 8 of *The Civil War* Series, highly recommended but not required.

RELEVANT STANDARDS

This lesson addresses national content standards established by the Mid-Century Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

(<http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks>).

History

- *Understands issues other than slavery that led to the Civil War (e.g., the appeal of the Northern "free labor" ideology in preventing the further extension of slavery in the new territories; cultural differences, conflicting economic issues, opposing constitutional perspectives)*
- *Understands the technological, social, and strategic aspects of the Civil War (e.g., the impact of innovations in military technology; turning points of the war; leaders of the Confederacy and Union; conditions, characteristics, and armies of the Confederacy and Union; major areas of Civil War combat)*
- *Understands the circumstances that shaped the Civil War and its outcome (e.g., differences between the economic, technological, and human resources of both sides; the impact of the Emancipation Proclamation on the outcome of the war)*

by Michael Hutchison

STRATEGY FOR THE LESSON

The teacher may wish to open with a discussion of the last days of the Civil War as well as Grant's strategy to defeat Lee. In order to enhance this, the teacher may wish to either show related scenes from the series, or utilize the companion book. (In the book, the end of the war and Lee's surrender to Grant are chronicled from pages 365 to 381.)

The teacher may also wish to discuss battle strategy with the students, and can utilize the maps on this site to do so. If the teacher has not noted to this point Grant's strategy of forcing the Confederates to lose men and material that they could not replace, that issue might be used to help explain why Lee decided to surrender.

(Note: as a historic side note, the teacher may wish to discuss the role of Wilmer McLean in the surrender, as well as in the Battle of Bull Run, which was the first major battle of the war. McLean's house was used as a headquarters during the Battle of Bull Run, and was damaged in the battle. McLean then decided to move, and his second home was used as the site of Lee's surrender to Grant.)

Next, the teacher might briefly discuss the surrender and its terms, noting the leniency Grant gave to Lee's army. Distribute copies of the pages of Grant's memoirs to the students.

Before distributing the question sheets, the teacher may wish to discuss the importance of primary historic sources with the students, and may also wish to discuss the idea of subjectivity of that source. The teacher might note that primary sources are especially important because they are from an eyewitness, someone who was actually present at the event. However, students and historians must also look at the source's bias... that is, whether their own personal views and opinions unduly flavor their account. The teacher may wish to have students specifically look for instances of Grant's bias, if any.

The teacher can then distribute the question sheets, directing the students to read through the chapter of Grant's memoirs and answering the questions. (Please note: two versions of the question sheet are posted. One with possible answers and one for student distribution.)

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- *Have the students discuss in class discussion the merits of "unconditional surrender". (The teacher may also wish to note that the Allies demanded unconditional surrender of the Axis Powers in World War II.) Did Grant follow through with this idea with his treatment of Lee, or did he abandon this idea? Have students take different sides on the issue and try to "win" the argument.*
- *Based on the memoirs, class discussions, and viewing the series, have students compare Grant to Lee in regard to the way they conducted themselves during the surrender. (For example, students might want to consider Grant's dress versus Lee's attire.)*

QUESTION SHEET FOR LEE AND GRANT AT APPOMATTOX COURT HOUSE

(with possible answers)

1. The selection you are reading is from US Grant's personal memoirs of the Civil War. What kind of perspective would you expect Grant to have regarding these events?

(Answers vary. Many might say Grant would have the perspective of the victor, and would explain what happened in terms of a victorious general. Others might look at Grant's gestures toward Lee as being compassionate, and might be likely to say he was relatively objective in his account.)

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2. Grant describes the events of the day before he and Lee meet. What illness or ailment did Grant have at this point? How did he try to cure it? How was it finally cured?

(Grant noted at several points in his memoirs that he was suffering “very severely” with a “sick headache”. He used what was probably the traditional remedy for that in the mid 19th Century, which included bathing his feet in hot water and mustard as well as putting mustard plasters on his wrists and back part of his neck.

Grant noted that as soon as he read Lee’s note suggesting they meet to formalize the surrender of the Confederate army, his headache disappeared.)

3. Grant also includes several excerpts of correspondence between he and General Lee. How would you describe the correspondence between the two?

(Because salutations and letter writing in the 19th Century differed from that of the 21st, it might be difficult for students to specifically note instances where Grant was cordial to Lee, forceful, etc. However, some might look at Grant’s note of April 9 where he states that by the South laying down their arms, they will hasten “that most desirable event, save thousands of human lives, and hundreds of millions of property not yet destroyed.” He then closes the letter with “Sincerely hoping that all our difficulties may be settled without the loss of another life...”

Other students may look at Grant’s mention in this note that the “meeting proposed for ten A.M. today could lead to no good” as being proof that Grant was unwilling to negotiate with Lee unless Lee surrendered his army.)

4. Some of Grant’s commanding officers believed that Lee did not intend to surrender at all, but had an alternative purpose. What did they believe Lee planned to do?

(They believed Lee had planned the meeting to stall Grant while Lee’s army escaped, hooked up with General Johnston, and then fight a guerilla war. Grant’s men wanted to launch an attack to defeat Lee’s army.)

5. Finally, Lee and Grant met in the McLean home. Had they met each other before? What did Grant recollect about this? According to Grant, how were he and Lee dressed?

(Grant wrote that he had known General Lee in the “old army”, and had served with him in the Mexican War. He added that because of the difference in age and rank, he didn’t think Lee would remember him. (Lee mentioned he did, but Grant suspected that he mentioned that as a courtesy.)

6. Grant noted that he did not expect the meeting to take place so soon, so he was dressed in “rough garb”, without a sword, and he wore a ‘soldier’s blouse’ for a coat, with shoulder straps of his rank to indicate to the army who he was.

(Grant noted that General Lee was dressed in a full uniform that was entirely new, and was wearing a sword of “considerable value, very likely the sword which had been presented by the state of Virginia”.

Grant also noted “in my rough traveling suit, the uniform of a private with the straps of a lieutenant general, I must have contrasted very strangely with a man so handsomely dressed, six feet high and of faultless form. But that was not a matter that I thought of until afterwards.”)

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7. At a couple of points during the meeting between the two men, Grant notes that at different points in their conversation, they entered into “small talk”, and it was Lee who had to remind Grant why they were meeting. What conclusions can you make regarding this?

(Answers vary. Some might note that Grant did not want to make the situation difficult for Lee, and it was hard for him to bring up the subject of surrender, so Lee had to do it.)

8. Describe the surrender terms to which Lee and Grant agreed.

- *Rolls of the all the officers and men were made in duplicate. One list was given to an officer designated by Grant, the other list to an officer designated by Lee.*
- *The officers were given individual paroles not to take up arms against the Government of the United States until “properly exchanged.”*
- *Each company or regimental commander would sign a like parole for the men of their commands.*
- *The arms, artillery, and public property to be parked and stacked, and turned over to the officer appointed by me (Grant) to receive them.*
- *Officers were allowed to keep their side arms, personal horses, and baggage*
- *Each man was allowed to return to his home, not to be disturbed by US authorities so long as they observed their paroles and the laws “in force where they may reside”.)*

9. In your view, were these terms harsh or lenient on the South? Explain your answer.

(Answers vary. Most may state that they believe Grant was easy on Lee. No one was arrested, nor was there any attempt by the North to seize arms owned by the Confederates. Grant mentions in the memoir that a rumor had spread that Lee offered Grant his sword as a formal surrender. Grant discounts this, but notes that if Lee had offered the sword, Grant would not have accepted it because of how the terms of the surrender had been written. Students may also note that Lee mentioned to Grant that his men were in need of provisions, and Grant made arrangements to take care of Lee’s estimated 25,000 men.)

10. After the surrender was concluded, Union soldiers began to celebrate Lee’s surrender. How did they celebrate? What did Grant do regarding this celebration?

(The Union men commenced in firing a salute of a hundred guns in honor of the victory. Grant immediately ordered it stopped, noting “the Confederates were now our prisoners, and we did not want to exult over their downfall.”)

11. Grant notes at several points after the surrender, his officers and Lee’s met together. How does Grant describe these meetings? In your view, what message does this send regarding the men who fought each other during the war?

(Grant notes that some of his officers “seemed to have a great desire to go inside the Confederate lines”, and adds that they finally asked Lee’s permission to do so, to see some of their old army friends. Grant writes that they had a “very pleasant time with their old friends”, and brought some of them back when they returned. Grant also writes of his own pleasurable conversations with Lee after the surrender.

Regarding the message send, answers vary. However, many students might note, as is highlighted frequently in the series and the book, that both Union and Confederate soldiers saw themselves as friends although they’d fought a war against one another.)

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3. Grant also includes several excerpts of correspondence between he and General Lee. How would you describe the correspondence between the two?
4. Some of Grant's commanding officers believed that Lee did not intend to surrender at all, but had an alternative purpose. What did they believe Lee planned to do?
5. Finally, Lee and Grant met in the McLean home. Had they met each other before? What did Grant recollect about this? According to Grant, how were he and Lee dressed?
6. At a couple of points during the meeting between the two men, Grant notes that at different points in their conversation, they entered into "small talk", and it was Lee who had to remind Grant why they were meeting. What conclusions can you make regarding this?
7. Describe the surrender terms to which Lee and Grant agreed.
8. In your view, were these terms harsh or lenient on the South? Explain your answer.
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