



# THE CIVIL WAR

A FILM BY KEN BURNS

## LESSON

Grade Level: 7-12

Subject: History, Geography,  
and American Studies

Estimated Time of  
Required:  
1 (50-60 minute) class  
period

## THE CIVIL WAR CLASSROOM MATERIALS

### THE UNION'S "GRAND STRATEGY"

#### OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students will interpret a map highlighting the "Grand Strategy" of the Union in fighting against the Confederacy. The strategy, designed by General George McClellan, included overland thrusts by the Union in the East, toward Richmond, the central area of the Confederacy, in the Tennessee Valley, and in the west, along the Mississippi River.

Students will study the map, answer questions, and make conclusions about the strategy and its effectiveness.

#### RESOURCES FOR THIS LESSON

"Grand Strategy" Map (<http://http://www.pbs.org/civilwar/war/map2.html>).  
Episode 1 of *The Civil War* series, highly recommended but not required.

#### RELEVANT STANDARDS

This lesson addresses national content standards established by the  
**Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning**  
(<http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/>).

#### History

- Understands military events that influenced the outcome of the Civil War (e.g., the "hammering campaigns" of Generals Grant and Sherman, the wartime leadership of Jefferson Davis and Abraham Lincoln).
- Knows the locations of the southern and northern states and their economic resources (e.g., the industries and small family farms of the industrial North, the agricultural economy and slavery of the South).
- 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).

#### Geography

- Knows the geographic factors that have influenced people and events in the past (e.g., the effects of the site of a Civil War battle on the course of the conflict.)

by Michael Hutchison

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**PROCEDURE**

The teacher should introduce this lesson with a short overview of the early days of the war, especially the period immediately after the First Battle of Bull Run (Manassas), when both sides became more aware that the war would not be won quickly.

At this point, the teacher should make the map available to students, either by pausing the video or DVD, by projecting the Web link, or by distributing copies of the map to students.

Once students either have copies of the map or can see the map, the teacher should distribute the question sheet. (Please note: two versions of the question sheet are posted. One with possible answers and one for student distribution.) Have students answer the questions based on the information on the map, as well as information from the book, series, or student textbook.

**QUESTION SHEET FOR THE UNION'S "GRAND STRATEGY"**  
*(with possible answers)*

**1. Which states made up the Confederacy at the time the strategy was devised?**

*(Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, Arkansas, and Tennessee)*

**2. What significance did the Union navy play in this strategy?**

*(Since the Confederacy had little industry, it was required to import most of what war materiel it needed. The Union navy provided a blockade that made it difficult for the Confederates to get the goods they needed from foreign nations. In addition, the navy could pressure the southern coast and force the Confederacy to place men and supplies along the coast that might be more effectively used against the Union in other areas.)*

**3. Explain the significance of the Union campaign in the western part of the Confederacy.**

*(The significance might be described in several ways. First, the Union wanted to gain control of the Mississippi River, and thereby split the Confederacy. Second, to gain control of the Mississippi would be a good way to stop goods from being shipped to the Confederacy, and a good way to get Union supplies and men to the fighting more in the interior areas. Third, if the Union captured New Orleans, it would control one of the largest cities in the Confederacy.)*

**4. Why would the Union exert pressure into Tennessee?**

*(By exerting pressure on Tennessee, the Union might be able to strike at the heartland of the Confederacy, as well as control two major rivers, the Tennessee and Cumberland. In addition, if the Union controlled this area, that might protect border states —Kentucky, Missouri, Ohio, and West Virginia— from attack by Confederate forces. In addition, Nashville and Memphis would be two large cities whose loss, if captured by the Union, would further cripple the Confederacy.)*

**5. What appeared to be the main focus of the Union strategy in the East?**

*(The Union strategy in the East revolved around the capture of the city of Richmond. Not only would this disrupt the Confederate government, it would be a major psychological victory for the Union.)*

**6. The Union strategy is often called the "Anaconda" strategy. Why would this strategy have that nickname?**

*(Answers will vary. However, if the student knows an Anaconda is a large snake that kills its prey by wrapping itself around its victim and squeezing, the student might be able to deduce that the Union strategy was designed to accomplish the same... by applying pressure along various frontlines, the Union could force the Confederacy into submission.)*

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7. Even with this strategy, it took the Union four years to actually subdue the Confederacy. In your view, why do you think this was so? (Hint: this strategy was developed by General George B. McClellan.)

*(McClellan was a master tactician and strategist, but he had a difficult time actually implementing strategies. He was painfully slow in advancing. Students may take that into account when answering this question. In addition, they may also note that Confederate generals, especially in the early days of the war, were more effective in battle. Finally, they may note that while the western strategy was very effective and New Orleans was captured early in the war, the war in the east tended to bog down, and McClellan spent a great deal of time protecting Washington, D.C., from Confederate attack.)*

8. If you were a Union general, what changes or additions would you make in this strategy? Explain your choices.

*(Most students might look at the Union's lack of pressure on some major cities or areas. For example, in the map, there is no mention of an attack on Atlanta or Charleston, two of the Confederacy's most major cities. In addition, while the Mississippi was a major target, there is no major action contemplated west of the Mississippi, in states such as Arkansas and Texas. Nor was any action, other than the blockade and the capture of New Orleans, targeted along the Atlantic or Gulf Coast.)*

9. Presume you're a Confederate General, asked by President Jefferson Davis to develop a Southern strategy to combat McClellan's. What advice could you give the Confederate leadership in developing a battle strategy of its own?

*(Answers vary. Some students may note that one way to eliminate pressure in various parts of the Confederacy would be to put pressure on Washington, D.C. Others may note that as long as the Confederacy maintained a defensive strategy (kept an army in the field), they could maintain resistance to the Union and possibly get foreign recognition. Still other students may note that Lee invaded the North twice (Antietam and Gettysburg), and while both are considered defeats for his forces, they may note that "the best defense is a good offense".)*

10. Based on what you've researched and know about the Civil War, which particular aspect of the Union strategy do you feel was the most effective in ending the war? Explain your answer.

*(Answers vary. Depending on the level of research into the war students may have completed, some may say the blockade was most important because of the lack of southern industry. Since a great deal of what the South needed had to be imported, the blockade significantly limited the South's ability to make war.*

*Other students may look at the Eastern strategy, noting the small number of miles separating Washington, D.C. from Richmond. It would be imperative for both sides to keep their capitals free from harassment and possible capture, so that part of the strategy may have been significant.*

*Others may look at the Western strategy because that's where Union forces were most effective in the early days of the war, and where Union generals such as US Grant became commonly known.)*

*This lesson was written by Michael Hutchison.*

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1. Which states made up the Confederacy at the time the strategy was devised?
2. What significance did the Union navy play in this strategy?
3. Explain the significance of the Union campaign in the western part of the Confederacy.
4. Why would the Union exert pressure into Tennessee?
5. What appeared to be the main focus of the Union strategy in the East?
6. The Union strategy is often called the "Anaconda" strategy. Why would this strategy have that nickname?
7. Even with this strategy, it took the Union four years to actually subdue the Confederacy. In your view, why do you think this was so? (Hint: this strategy was developed by General George B. McClellan.)
8. If you were a Union general, what changes or additions would you make in this strategy? Explain your choices.
9. Presume you're a Confederate General, asked by President Jefferson Davis to develop a Southern strategy to combat McClellan's. What advice could you give the Confederate leadership in developing a battle strategy of its own?
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