



THE CIVIL WAR

A FILM BY KEN BURNS

LESSON

Grade Level: 7-12

Subject: History,

Estimated Time of
Required:

2 (50-60 minute) class
periods

THE CIVIL WAR CLASSROOM MATERIALS

SHERMAN'S MARCH TO THE SEA

INTRODUCTION

"You cannot qualify war in harsher terms than I will. War is cruelty, and you cannot refine it; and those who brought war into our country deserve all the curses and maledictions a people can pour out."

—William Tecumseh Sherman
Letter to the city of Atlanta, 1864

This activity highlights one of the more controversial aspects of the later phases of the Civil War, the Union's "March to the Sea". Sent by Ulysses S. Grant "create havoc and destruction of all resources that would be beneficial to the enemy," Sherman began his "Atlanta Campaign" in May 1864.

After capturing Atlanta, Sherman marched his army to the sea, capturing the city of Savannah in December, and then marching through South Carolina into North Carolina.

In this activity, students will analyze two sources. First, they will look at a letter written by Sherman to Grant as Sherman's army approached Savannah. Second, they will review the lyrics to the popular song of that period, *Marching Through Georgia*.

RESOURCES FOR THIS LESSON

Episodes 6 and 7 of *The Civil War* series, highly recommended but not required.

Letter from Sherman to General Grant (<http://www.cviog.uga.edu/Projects/gain-fo/shrmltr.htm>).

The lyrics to *Marching Through Georgia* (<http://users.erols.com/kfraser/union/songs/marchga.html>).

*(Note: the lyrics are printed as they originally were written, and contain one racial epithet that may be considered objectionable by today's standards. The teacher should prepare students for this.) The lyrics page for *Marching Through Georgia* also contains a link to a MIDI file of the song. If the teacher has suitable computer hardware, the file can be played so students can listen, sing along, and so on.*

RELEVANT STANDARDS

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

History Standards

- 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 the economic, social, and cultural differences between the North and South (e.g., how the free labor system of the North differed from that of the South)

by Michael Hutchison

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- *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)*

STRATEGY FOR THE LESSON

The teacher might open the lesson with a discussion of what would become “total war”, which was first implemented with Sherman’s March, but became even more common in World War I and World War II. The prevailing view regarding total war was that soldiers in the field were backed up by civilian populations providing them with food, supplies, morale, and monetary support. To eliminate this support would affect soldiers as much as a military battle.

Next, the teacher can enter into a discussion regarding why Grant sent Sherman into Georgia, and discuss the extent of the campaign. Many have believed that Sherman’s March was overly brutal, and he was wrong for inflicting such destruction in the South. Photos in The Civil War series might be used to highlight the level of destruction in the South. Several photos in the Library of Congress’ Selected Civil War Photograph Collection (<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/cwphtml/cwphome.html>) also show the effects of the march.

Next, the teacher can distribute photocopies of the two sources, or direct students to access them online. The teacher should also distribute the question sheets, and direct students to complete them. (Please note: two versions of the question sheet are posted. One with possible answers and one for student distribution.)

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- *Suggest to students that they are writers or editors for Civil War period newspapers (both North and South). Have them write editorials regarding the march, either as editors of Northern newspapers or Southern newspapers.*
- *Have students compare Sherman’s march with other instances of total war in World War I or World War II. (Some examples the firebombings of Hamburg and Dresden during World War II, as well as the London Blitz or bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.)*
- *Students may also either debate the issue of total war (regarding whether it is humane or inhumane) as a class, or may wish to conduct a “mock trial” of Union officers who were engaged in the practice, such as Sherman.*

QUESTION SHEET FOR SHERMAN’S MARCH TO THE SEA (with possible answers)

Note: These questions deal with General Sherman’s letter to General Grant.

**Where does Sherman report to Grant that he is located at the time the letter is written?
Approximately how many men does Sherman have under his command?**

(At the time the letter was written, Sherman was outside Savannah. Under his command were 50,000 to 60,000 men.)

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How does Sherman describe how he has provisioned his men? Describe the kinds of food his men had. Why did the army have more food at this point in the march compared to when the march began?

(The army had various kinds of livestock, including cattle, turkeys, chickens, sheep, hogs, as well as poultry, potatoes, bread, and sweet potatoes. The men were able to forage by taking supplies from farms they passed on their way to Savannah.)

Sherman also describes how he will demand Savannah's surrender. In his letter, how does he plan to subdue the city if it doesn't surrender? Why did he plan this way?

(His plan was to bombard the city because he "will not risk the lives of our men by assaults across the narrow causeway by which alone I can now reach it.")

How does Sherman describe the situation in Tennessee? What does he write about General Thomas?

(Sherman notes, "I myself am somewhat astonished at the attitude of things in Tennessee." He added that he was concerned about Thomas because of Thomas's lack of action against Hood in Tennessee. He notes that he knows "that General Thomas is slow in mind and action, but he is judicious and brave, and the troops feel great confidence in him".)

How does Sherman describe the Confederate forces in Savannah?

(He believes (General) Hardee "has good artillerists, some 5,000 or 6,000 infantry, and it may be a mongrel mass of 8,000 to 10,000 militia.")

The next few questions focus on the lyrics to the song *Marching Through Georgia*.

How does the writer of the song describe (in the first stanza) the events of Sherman's march?

(The events of the march are described in past tense, but also in a patriotic tone.)

How does the song corroborate Sherman's remarks about foraging through Southern farms?

(The lyrics say... "The turkeys gobbled which our commissary found... how the sweet potatoes even started from the ground...")

How does the song describe people Sherman's men encounter in the South?

(Answers vary. Students may note that the song seems to focus more on "union men", that is, those who are living in the path of Sherman's march who are still loyal to the union. However, the lyrics do also mention "saucy rebels", and "Treason".)

If you had to make a determination about why the Civil War was fought based on the lyrics on the song alone, what conclusion would you make? Why?

(Answers vary. Some may note the word "freedom" mentioned and it may be concluded that the war was fought to end slavery. Others may note the use of the word "union" and "rebels", and may conclude that the war was fought to save the union.)

Many have noted that they thought Sherman's march was too severe. Others have noted that it was the only way to subdue the South and win the war as quickly as possible. In your own words, discuss which view you believe is correct. Explain your answer.

(Answers vary.)

QUESTION SHEET FOR SHERMAN'S MARCH TO THE SEA

Note: These questions deal with General Sherman's letter to General Grant.

1. Where does Sherman report to Grant that he is located at the time the letter is written? Approximately how many men does Sherman have under his command?
2. How does Sherman describe how he has provisioned his men? Describe the kinds of food his men had. Why did the army have more food at this point in the march compared to when the march began?
3. Sherman also describes how he will demand Savannah's surrender. In his letter, how does he plan to subdue the city if it doesn't surrender? Why did he plan this way?
4. How does Sherman describe the situation in Tennessee? What does he write about General Thomas?
5. How does Sherman describe the Confederate forces in Savannah?

*The next few questions focus on the lyrics to the song *Marching Through Georgia*.*

6. How does the writer of the song describe (in the first stanza) the events of Sherman's march?
7. How does the song corroborate Sherman's remarks about foraging through Southern farms?
8. How does the song describe people Sherman's men encounter in the South?
9. If you had to make a determination about why the Civil War was fought based on the lyrics on the song alone, what conclusion would you make? Why?
10. Many have noted that they thought Sherman's march was too severe. Others have noted that it was the only way to subdue the South and win the war as quickly as possible. In your own words, discuss which view you believe is correct. Explain your answer.