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## Lesson Plan

### *Southern Society during the Civil War: Common Folk of the South*

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#### **Grades**

4, 5, 6

#### **Subjects**

Language Arts, Tennessee History

#### **Time Allotted**

45 minutes

#### **Setting**

Classroom

#### **Group size**

Class for discussion, smaller groups for activities

#### **Skills**

Cooperation, organization, planning, writing, developing a sense of audience, following directions, research

#### **Methods**

Students will research and discuss the societal changes brought about by the Civil War on different parts of southern society (one of a set of three lesson plans.) This lesson will focus on the less wealthy white section of society.

#### **Materials**

Reading material for research, videos, and storytelling

#### **Keywords**

Exemption  
Military service  
Plantation  
Subsistence farmers  
Tenant farmers

#### **Objectives**

At the end of the activity, students will be able to:

- *Analyze the changes in family life of common people.*
- *List characteristics of everyday life in three categories; pre-war, war, post-war.*
- *Compare and contrast common life before, during and after the Civil War.*



### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

**Pre-War:** The great majority of southerners were of a lower social class than the plantation elite. They were common folk, usually yeoman (subsistence) farmers who owned some land or served as tenants on land owned by others. Very few of the common folk of the South owned slaves. In fact, most slave labor was rented when it was needed for extra hands in the field or in the household. The yeoman farmer and his family often worked side by side with the slaves.

For the common folk of the South, work was very important. Their lives revolved around their work activities on the farm. As subsistence farming families, they raised their own food and made their own clothes. Women and children would often work in the fields as well as in the household. Recreation activities would usually be work-oriented events such as barn raisings, hog killings, quiltings, log rollings, and corn shuckings.

**War:** Many of the South's common class were heavily affected by the Civil War. Although most sided with the Confederacy, some were loyal to the Union, as was the case with East Tennessee. When troops began to occupy their area, farmers suffered from pillaging and destruction of their crops and fields, which eliminated their primary source for survival. Their lives only became harder and more work oriented. To make their plight more difficult to bear, they could see the wealthier plantation families apparently maintaining their pre-war lifestyle. When the Confederacy passed the 20-slave exemption, which allowed any person owning 20 slaves to be exempted from military service, the perception of mistreatment and discontent grew. Many of the less wealthy inhabitants of the South nearly starved and lost everything as the war continued.

**Post-War:** After the war, the common folk were forced to simply rebuild with what was available. Extreme poverty was the rule and families continued to work hard without many able-bodied men. In addition, the slaves that were freed by the end of the war were now in competition with common folk for jobs. Bitterness toward Yankees was very evident in the years following the war.

### ACTIVITIES

- Discuss common life as it was pre-Civil War, during the war, and post-war.
- Share stories, videos, reading material, research antebellum life styles.
- Prepare charts indicating differences in three time periods.

### FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

- Small groups portray a white family living during one of these three time periods through role-playing
- Research a real family's life during these three periods
- Write a story about a fictional family during these years incorporating chart information

### RESOURCES

Ash, Stephen V. *Middle Tennessee Society Transformed. 1860-1870.* Baton Rouge, LA, Louisiana State University Press, 1988.

Clinton, Catherine. *Life In Civil War America.* National Park Civil War Series, Eastern National, 1995.

Marten, James. *The Childrens Civil War.* University of North Carolina Press, 1998.

Rable, George C. *Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism.* Urbana, IL, University of Illinois Press, 1989.

Wiley, Bell Irvin. *Plain People of the Confederacy.* Chicago, IL, Quadrangle Books, 1963.

Varhola, Michael J. *Everyday Life during the Civil War.* Cincinnati, OH, Writer's Digest Books, 1999.

### SUGGESTED READINGS AND VIDEOS

Herbert, Janis. *The Civil War for Kids.* Chicago, IL, Chicago Review Press. Inc., 1999.