Lesson Plan
Southern Society during the Civil War: Plantation Society

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 wealthier white section of society.

Materials
Reading material for research, videos, and storytelling

Objectives
At the end of the activity, students will be able to:
- *Analyze the changes in southern family life.*
- *List characteristics of life in three categories: pre-war, war, post-war.*
- *Demonstrate an understanding of the economic pressures on a wealthy family to keep cheap labor that would enable them to continue in their way of life.*
- *Compare and contrast life as a common white family with life as a wealthy planter's family and with life as a slave family (based on study of set of three lessons).*

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Pre-War: Although people traditionally think about plantations when discussing the pre-Civil War South, in reality plantation owners in Tennessee were fewer in number than the common farmers and did not dominate the economy of Middle Tennessee as they did elsewhere in the South.

Everyone, who lived on the plantation, black or white, was affected by the institution of slavery. For white families, most of the interaction with black individuals came through the giving of orders and the work relationship. Most white southerners were not exactly afraid of black slaves, but a common school of thought was that blacks were "child-like" and unable to take care of themselves. It was a common practice to discipline blacks for minor incidents quite severely. Some plantation owners believed that blacks were quite happy to be slaves, especially if they were well treated and loved by their families. Many whites in the south expected deference from any black person, as they believed that blacks were basically inferior.

As long as everyone fulfilled the role they were given, the social and economic structure of life for those living on the plantation remained stable.

War: In many cases, the men enlisted in the army, leaving women in charge of all aspects of plantation life. In order for the system to function, women had to keep the slaves working to ensure the plantation's survival. For many women, this was a new role for which they were unprepared and in which they were uncomfortable.

Once the war started, many slaves ran away to Union forces, seeking protection and freedom or joining as soldiers. Some slaves simply walked away from the plantation to try to begin a new life. Others remained on the plantation and some of these stopped working altogether. When the Northern armies came through the area, crops were destroyed and passing troops burned homes. In combination, the absence of the men, the destruction of the crops, and the lack of slave labor destroyed the foundation of plantation society.

Post-War: By war's end, plantation society no longer existed in the same fashion as it had before the War. From an economic perspective, although plantation owners lost a portion of their wealth, in general they remained fairly stable and at the top of southern society. However, from their personal perspective, their lives were forever changed and there was no way to return to the style of life they had known before the War. With the institution of slavery destroyed, the plantation system could no longer function.

ACTIVITIES

• Share stories, videos, reading material, research antebellum life styles, share pictures of plantation homes, discuss importance of slaves in maintaining life styles

• Discuss life before, during, and after the war, sharing stories, videos, reading material

• Prepare charts indicating differences in three time periods

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

• Small groups portray a plantation white family living during one of these three time periods through role-play

• Research a real family's life during these three periods

• Write a story about a fictional family during these years incorporating the information on the chart.

• Make a model of the plantation indicating changes during these time periods

• List the duties of the family members indicating how these duties might change in the different years: 1858, 1862, 1866.

RESOURCES

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

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

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.