



Lesson Plan

Dreaming of Home: Personal Narratives from the Battle of Stones River

Grades

4, 5, 6

Subjects

Language Arts, Social Studies, Writing

Time Allotted

1 hour

Setting

Classroom, (enhanced with a visit to the Stones River National Cemetery)

Group size

30 students

Skills

Listening, organizing information, creative writing

Methods

The students will listen to letters written by Civil War soldiers to their wives. They will then describe each setting using their five senses and write a poem or letter to correspond with the scene.

Materials

Paper, pencil, and copies of letters by Arza Bartholomew and Christian Nix. Optional for diorama: construction paper, shoebox, glue, crayons and scissors.

Objectives

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

- Describe the settings of home and battle as described in the letter.
- Use a graphic organizer to categorize descriptive words according to the five senses.
- Write a poem or letter using the descriptive words about the battle or home.
- Draw a sketch or create a diorama depicting a battle scene or home life.



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Christian Nix was a German immigrant who enlisted in the Union army June 6, 1861, two days after he married Maria Kasper. He joined the 24th regiment of the Wisconsin volunteers, which brought him to the Battle of Stones River. He wrote a letter to his wife from Murfreesboro, which included his poem "The Soldier's Dream of Home." He was shot at the Battle of Stones River on December 31, 1862, and died on January 3, 1863. He is buried in the Stones River National Cemetery. Also included with this lesson is a letter sent to his wife from Captain A. Philbrook expressing his condolences.

Immigrants were a very important part of the military during the Civil War. There were entire regiments of immigrants from Germany, Italy, etc. Many joined the cause to prove their loyalty to their new nation.

Arza Bartholomew enlisted with the 21st Michigan. In a letter to his wife "Frank" he gives a very descriptive account of the Battle of Stones River. He is also buried at the Stones River National Cemetery.

ACTIVITY

- Students will create two graphic organizers by drawing five columns on their paper and heading them with the five senses: hear, see, taste, touch, and smell. They will title one "Description of the War" and the other "Description of Home."
- Read Christian's and Arza's letters and have students listen carefully for descriptive words about home life and the battle at Stones River.
- List descriptive words from the letters under the appropriate sense and have students add other descriptive words for the two settings.
- Discuss the differences in the two settings.
- Write a poem or letter home to a loved one using descriptive words from graphic organizer charts.
- Draw a sketch to illustrate the poem or letter.
- Read aloud the letter informing Maria of Christian's death.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

- Create a diorama. Cover the inside of a shoebox with background. Create three-dimensional figures to go inside depicting a battle scene or home life.
- Find Wisconsin on a map of the U.S. Determine approximately how far away Christian was from home using a map scale.
- Locate Christian's homeland, Germany, on a world map. Why would he want to fight for the U.S.? Discuss immigration to the United States and how to become a citizen.
- Find the percentage of men lost during the battle from Arza's regiment according to the figures in his letter.
- Stop by the Visitor Center for a self-guided tour of the National Cemetery to help you locate Christian's and Arza's graves.

APPENDIX
Christian Nix's letter home

January 14, 1863

Mrs. Lieutenant Nix,

It becomes my unpleasant duty to inform you of the death of your husband and our much esteemed friend and comrade. He fell on the 31st of December while repelling an attack of Rebel forces and died like a true soldier doing his duty to his country. He was shot through the body and was taken to our Hospital which was soon after, taken by the enemy, who held it until the evacuation of Murfreesboro. He died on the 5th or 6th and was buried by Lieutenant Chase of our company with military honors. I have his effects in my possession and shall forward them to you the first opportunity. I have his revolver, sword and money and other things belonging to him. You have lost your best friend of Earth, and we deeply feel with you in this sad bereavement, for we too have lost an Esteemed Friend and a true soldier. He did his duty up to the time he fell and was loved, and his true Qualities were appreciated by all that knew him. His Name and deeds will always be held in sacred remembers by me and the members under my command.

Yours Respectfully,
Captain A. Philbrook

APPENDIX
Captain Philbrook's
letter to Maria

Dear Mari,

I answered your last letter and pointed out to you the support you can get. Turn to your cousin Willi, because he will provide it certainly—if possible. I have included a letter for Willi in which I asked him to help you. Dear Mari, I have sent you in this letter, the “Soldier’s Dream of Home.”

*The Earth lies peacefully in the dark night.
The stars shine in the sky.
I stand on my watch far away from you.
When the Fatherland called,
I, too, grasped the musket.
In a rush, I hugged my crying fiancée.
Who knows if ever my eye again sees whom I loved
And when I stand so alone
Away from you in a far distance
During the quiet night and moonshine,
Then I think of you with pleasure.
When I lie down to sleep,
Tired from the day’s burden and misery,
A dream comes up to me—
A picture from my home valley.
There I dreamed I returned back to my love. Gladly I embraced my wife,
And was glad that I had not stayed.
But, the drum beats and I awake.
Gone are the dreams,
Which in a quiet summer’s night
Brought delight to my heart,
While the moon was shining.*

From the one who loves you very much.

I will thank God if I can come home, even in three years, but we don’t want to think that. Therefore, I feel obliged for your benefit and advantage to take trouble to get you support from the city and the State of Wisconsin, because one does not know, dear Mari, how things will be with me. Then you will thank me for it when I am no longer alive. And if I should return is good also, because one does not know how I will return. Therefore, take this letter which is enclosed as soon as possible to Willi. He will certainly take care of everything and you will let me know about it. I will close and I wish you a good-night. I have a cold. The nights here are already very cold in tents or under the sky.

Your loving spouse,
Christian Nix

APPENDIX
Arza Bartholomew's
letter to Frank

Murfreesboro, TN
January 5, 1863

Dear Frank,

It is with heartfelt thankfulness that I have been spared to write you another letter. We met the enemy last Wednesday. We were in it from daylight until dark. When we came off that night, we had only 85 men remaining out of 300 men engaged. A good many of our men ran off and did not come back for three or four days. William and I came off without a scratch. I took a ball in the blanket, but wasn't hurt any. About 10 o'clock in the morning, our captain took a ball in the arm, which exited through his shoulder. I am afraid he was taken prisoner.

We have nothing to brag of in this battle. I think they killed more of us than we did them. The rebels drove us in all the time until noon. We were pretty whipped, but in the afternoon we held our own. The first fire was on our right, and before we knew it, they drove the brigade we were supporting. A regiment ran right through our ranks and broke us all to pieces. When we reformed, we were nearly surrounded, so we gave them one last volley and fell back twenty rods to a fence. Every man fought on his own hook to the best advantage until they drove us into a swamp. Our unit was nearly surrounded and cut to pieces. They fired into us from front and rear and piled our men in heaps. The balls were thick as hail. Shot and shells cut down trees like scythes cutting grain. It was awful to see trees falling and riderless horses running around. I hope never to see such a desperate time again.

We are having a special dinner this evening, pot pie made with mutton, and I don't want to lose out, so I must bid you goodbye for the present. I dream of you every night. Take care of yourself and our newborn baby.

Your affectionate husband,
Arza Bartholomew