



## Supplemental Lesson Plan: Investigating Wartime at Somerset through Primary Sources

In this lesson for grade 8, students will investigate the cultural climate of the Civil War and will gain insight into the wartime experiences of the Collins family, the plantation employees, the enslaved community and their neighbors. This lesson plan is a useful tool for learning about plantation and slave life at Somerset during the Civil War and for learning how the war permanently changed the plantation structure.

### Competency Goals

This lesson can be used in partial fulfillment of the following:

NCSCOS Social Studies Grade 8: 4.02; 4.03;

NCSCOS English/Language Arts Grade 8: 1.02 1.04 2.01; 2.03; 4.01

### Objectives

After classroom discussion, historical background reading and examination of the primary source documents, students will:

- compare and contrast life on the plantation at Somerset for both free and enslaved residents before and during the war, to gain insight about the social climate during the war.
- discuss the differences between their preconceptions of plantation life and actual circumstances revealed in the documents.
- use critical thinking and writing skills to analyze primary source documents to learn about circumstances at Somerset Place during the war.
- Understand the Emancipation Proclamation and its impact on the cultural and economic environment for Somerset Plantation residents.

## Teacher Planning

Provide the following materials either through web access to *The North Carolina Civil War Experience* or through downloaded handouts.

***North Carolina Civil War Experience: The Road to Secession and Wartime North Carolina.***

**Site Narrative** – The Civil War Experience at Somerset Place

Copies of the primary source documents pertaining to Somerset

Computer and printer

Internet access

Glossary of primary source terms

## Time Requirement

There are five activities in this lesson that will require multiple class periods to complete. Some can be assigned as homework, allowing for shorter classroom time in preparation for discussions.

## Bell Ringer Activity

Have students write on a piece of paper their preconceived ideas of plantation life for both free (white and black) and enslaved people who lived there.

## Teacher Input

Introduce the students to the concept of how to study a specific time period by examining documents that were written during that time period. The National History Day website defines a primary source as:

*...a piece of information about a historical event or period in which the creator of the source was an actual participant in or a contemporary of a historical moment. The purpose of primary sources is to capture the words, the thoughts and the intentions of the past. Primary sources help you to interpret what happened and why it happened.*

Examples of primary sources include documents, letters, journals, artifacts, historic sites, songs, or other written and tangible items created during the historical period you are studying.\* Ask students to think about what items

someone 100 years from now would examine to understand our world. What would be considered a primary source today?

\* <http://nationalhistoryday.org/ConductingResearch.htm>

## **Classroom Activities: Guided Practice**

### **Activity #1: The War's Progression**

1. Have students read a copy of the original letter that was written to Josiah Collins III on March 11, 1863 from Henry G. Spruill. Spruill, a planter, was a neighbor and the mayor of the Town of Plymouth. The letter comments on the progression of the Civil War in the county and the immediate area surrounding Somerset Place.
2. Instruct students to read the letter as it was written and attempt to transcribe the letter (make their own copy). This will allow students to think critically to discover the importance and meaning of the document on their own. Students may work in groups and compare notes to decipher the handwriting. This is not an easy task and may take some time depending on student ability. Explain to students that not every word will be transcribed, as even experts have blank spaces in their transcriptions.
3. Have students answer the following questions either independently or as class discussion:
  - a. Why do you think a bank draft was "safer" during the Civil War?
  - b. What did the Union troops do to the bridges and fording places? Why?
  - c. "All the men, those who had taken the oath were arrested." What oath do you think they were referring to? Why were they arrested?
  - d. What did the Union troops do with the prisoners? Why?
  - e. William Adkinson took some of the planters' property for his own use. Would you consider him to be a Unionist or Confederate sympathizer or simply an opportunist? Why?

## Activity #2: Union Troops Visit Somerset Place

1. Have students read the report written by the Rev. George Patterson on July 21, 1862. Patterson was the minister of the Lake Chapel on the plantation and was one of the men left behind to look after the plantation after the Collinses left for safer ground near Hillsborough. The report is an account of the incidents that took place on the plantation when Union troops arrived.
2. Have students answer the following questions:
  - a. The Union troops visited Somerset Place on July 21, 1862. Why do you think the coast of North Carolina was more vulnerable to the Union attacks than inland areas?
  - b. Why was it important for the Union Navy to occupy the coastal areas?
  - c. Where does the letter indicate that Reverend Patterson was suspicious of George Spruill's loyalty to the Southern Confederacy?
  - d. Why do you think George Patterson feared the Union troops were going to "carry away" the enslaved people from Somerset Plantation, even after Captain Woodward told Patterson Union troops had not come for them?
  - e. How did the enslaved man, Fred Littlejohn, change his behavior toward George Patterson after the Union troops arrived? Why?
  - f. Why did the enslaved people choose not to leave with the Union troops?
  - g. What examples in the letter refer to the kinds of problems people at home were facing during the Civil War?
  - h. Why did the Union Navy guard the mill at Somerset Place?
  - i. **Critical Thinking:** Do you agree with the statement made by Mr. Charles L. Pettigrew, "that no Government could prosper which took away the property of the people against all law & order, & that whilst he did not blame Capt. W., for obeying the order of his Superior officers, yet he did very much blame any Government that resorted to any such, means to establish itself..."? Why or why not?

### **Activity # 3: A Soldier's Experience**

1. Have the students read the transcribed letter written to Josiah Collins of Somerset Place by George Patterson, who eventually joined the 3<sup>rd</sup> Regiment of North Carolina Troops. This letter was written to Collins while Patterson was stationed near Richmond, Virginia in May of 1863. The original letter is provided, but is probably not legible enough for a transcribing activity.
2. After students have read the Patterson letter, conduct a class discussion comparing and contrasting his experiences with those of soldiers we see on television in the current conflicts around the world. Use a flip chart to list how his experiences are similar and how they are different. Have students use critical thinking skills to determine why the similarities or differences.

### **Classroom Activities: Independent Practice**

#### **Activity #4: The Emancipation Proclamation**

The Emancipation Proclamation was issued by President Lincoln on January 1, 1863. This activity challenges students to research information about the proclamation, why it was issued, and the ramifications on the cultural climate in eastern North Carolina after it was issued. By reading primary source accounts, students will understand how the Emancipation Proclamation and the Union occupation of coastal North Carolina affected residents of Somerset Place and their neighbors in 1863.

1. Have the students use the internet to research the Emancipation Proclamation. Students can visit the Somerset Place website <http://www.nchistoricsites.org/somerset/emancipation.htm> to read the document. They can also access the National Archives [http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured\\_documents/emancipation\\_proclamation/](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured_documents/emancipation_proclamation/) for background information on Lincoln's motivation for issuing the proclamation.
2. Divide the class into small groups. Have each group read one of the five letters designated for Activity #4. These letters were written to Josiah Collins in the spring and summer of 1863 by his cousin (William A. Eaton), his neighbors (R.B. Ainsley and Girard W. Phelps), and the Somerset Plantation doctor (Hardy Hardison). Have the students take notes about the personal accounts of what was happening around Somerset at this time. Have students analyze the information to reveal

what it says about the quality of life during this time for the Somerset residents.

3. Bring the class together to discuss the information they learned from the letters. Discuss the various circumstances the Somerset residents encountered. Ask students to discuss the following questions:
  - a. What was the *Emancipation Proclamation*?
  - b. What effect did the *Emancipation Proclamation* have on Somerset Place plantation and eastern North Carolina? On other southern states? On northern states? On the outcome of the Civil War?
  - c. Why did the North enter into the Civil War?
  - d. Did the war reunite the nation and end slavery?
  - e. Why do you think a newly freed enslaved person might stay or, if they left, might return to his or her former plantation?

## Closure

### Activity #5: When George Comes Marching Home Again

1. Have students read the letter from George Collins to his wife Annie written on May 26, 1865. Annie was in Hillsborough and George had returned to Somerset Place. His mission was to reclaim his property that was taken at the end of the war.
2. Have students write a letter in return to George Collins, considering what it must have been like to wait for news from Somerset.

## Assessment

- A. Have students write a journal or blog entry, expressing what their feelings might have been at the end of the war, as well as what they have learned in this study of life at Somerset Place.
- B. Have students read the site narrative of [Stagville Plantation](#). Have students compare and contrast the experiences on each of those plantations during the Civil War. What were the main differences in these experiences?

## Resources

1. "First Visit of the Yankees to Somerset Place, Lake Scuppernong, N. Carolina. July 21<sup>st</sup> 1862", Reverend George Patterson, Josiah Collins Papers (417.4 - 4.17.14), p. 267 North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh.
2. "Second Visit of the Yankees to Somerset Place, Lake Scuppernong, N. Carolina, July 27<sup>th</sup>, 1862. p.1-3, Josiah Collins Papers , North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh.
3. "Hardy Hardison to Josiah Collins, Sr., March 27,1863", Josiah Collins Papers, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh.
4. "G. P. Collins to Anne Collins, at Hillsborough, N. Carolina. May 26, 1865" Collins Papers #3838, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill.
5. "George Patterson to Josiah Collins, Camp near Chancellorville, 3<sup>rd</sup> Reg. N. Ca. Troops, Richmond, Va., May 19, 1862", Josiah Collins Papers, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh.
6. "H.G. Spruill to Josiah Collins, March 11, 1863", Josiah Collins Papers, North Carolina Papers, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh.
7. " R.B. Ainsley to Josiah Collins, May 4, 1863", Josiah Collins Papers, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh.
8. "Girard W. Phelps" to Josiah Collins, March 14, 1863", Josiah Collins Papers, North Carolina Papers, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh.
9. " W. E. Eaton to Josiah Collins, June 2, 1863", Josiah Collins Papers, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh

## For Further Study

View the Somerset Place website: <http://www.somersetplace.nchistoricsites.org>  
Read: "Somerset Homecoming: Recovering a Lost Heritage", by Dorothy Spruill Redford