



Unit: Soldiers

Lesson 1.5: A Soldier's Life

Aim: To learn about the life of a Union soldier during the Civil War.

Objective: Students brainstorm questions about the experience of being a soldier during the Civil War and then read archival letters written by a soldier from Brooklyn to find answers.

Materials:

1. Shared reading on overhead about James Vanderhoef (see following page)
2. Vanderhoef letters (one letter per group):
 - 4th and 5th graders can read James Vanderhoef's letters to his family dated May 1, 1861 <http://www.brooklynpubliclibrary.org/civilwar/cwdoc022.html>, May 10, 1861 <http://www.brooklynpubliclibrary.org/civilwar/cwdoc023.html>, July 21, 1861 <http://www.brooklynpubliclibrary.org/civilwar/cwdoc029.html>, and June 27, 1865 <http://www.brooklynpubliclibrary.org/civilwar/cwdoc083.html>
 - 6th-8th graders can also read letters to the Editor of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* from the front, dated July 2, 1861 <http://eagle.brooklynpubliclibrary.org/Repository/ml.asp?Issue=BEG/1861/07/02&ID=Ar00202&Mode=Gif> and July 23, 1862 <http://eagle.brooklynpubliclibrary.org/Repository/ml.asp?Issue=BEG/1861/07/23&ID=Ar00203&Mode=Gif>
3. Chart paper

Procedure:

1. Shared reading on overhead about James Vanderhoef (see following page).

A note about shared reading: During a shared reading session, the whole class is on the same “page”—everyone’s attention is focused on the same overhead transparency. The teacher models the initial reading in several ways. In addition to simply reading the passage aloud, slowly and clearly, he or she reveals thoughts and reading strategies for the group. Be it visualizing, making connections, or noticing new or interesting vocabulary, these thoughts are shared so that students see and understand what goes on in the mind of a good reader.

2. Explain to the class that they will be reading some letters Vanderhoef wrote home. Divide the class into small groups.
3. Instruct groups to generate a list of questions about the soldier's life and experiences and record them on chart paper. Display chart paper with class questions so that they are visible to everyone.
4. Give each group a letter to read. What does the letter reveal about the soldier's life? About the war? What does it reveal about the time period? List the information in two columns: facts and opinions.
5. Groups read questions on chart paper and determine whether their letter answers any of them. Share answers with class and compare information.

James Wilson Vanderhoef enlisted in the Union Army with a group of friends from Williamsburg, Brooklyn, in 1861. Throughout his service, he wrote letters to his married sister, Mary Ann Guilan, also from Brooklyn.

When he first joined the Army as a 1st Sergeant, he was 24 years old. Within two years he had been promoted several times to the proud rank of Captain. After fighting in the First Battle of Manassas (Bull Run) and Chancellorsville, he was taken prisoner at Gettysburg on July 1, 1863. He spent a year in Libby Prison, followed by additional time in South Carolina and Georgia prisons. He was finally paroled and allowed to return home in March 1865.