

Civil War Medicine: Fact or Fiction

By P. Suzanne Smith

Winner, 2nd Place, 2012-2013 Civil War Trust Best Lesson Plan Contest

Grade Level: Middle and/or High School

Approximate Length of Time: 3 50-minute class periods.

Goals: Students will analyze fictional and nonfictional texts about Civil War medical care. Using a graphic organizer, students will differentiate facts from fiction regarding care for wounded soldiers during the Civil War.

Objectives:

1. Students will be able to identify facts and myths regarding Civil War medical.
2. Students will identify the ways authors use history to inform their writing.
3. Students will gain a better understanding of medical techniques used during the Civil War.
4. Students will be able to identify the major causes of death related to Civil War battle wounds.
5. Students will gain an understanding of how the use of credible evidence can support or discredit and author's claims.

Materials Used:

Venn Diagram – example: <http://www.studenthandouts.com/Assortment-01/Graphic-Organizers/Blank-Venn-Diagrams-Instructions.html>

Fictional passage from *Gone With the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell

Novel *A Soldier's Heart* by Gary Paulsen

Nonfiction sources

Suggested Nonfiction Resources :

<http://www.civilwarmed.org/> - videos

<http://ehistory.osu.edu/uscw/features/medicine/cwsurgeon/introduction.cfm>

<http://ehistory.osu.edu/uscw/features/medicine/cwsurgeon/amputations.cfm>

<http://ehistory.osu.edu/uscw/features/medicine/cwsurgeon/statistics.cfm>

http://www.medicalmuseum.mil/index.cfm?p=exhibits.nationswounds.page_02

<http://www.rochestergeneral.org/about-us/rochester-general-hospital/about-us/rochester-medical-museum-and-archives/online-exhibits/civil-war-medicine-and-the-rochester-city-hospital/>

<http://www.utoledo.edu/library/canaday/exhibits/quackery/quack8.html>

Suggested Fictional Sources:

Grades 7 and 8

Soldier's Heart - Chapter 8, pages 86 – 89

Paulsen, Gary. *Soldier's Heart*. New York: Random House, 1998. Print.

Grades 9 and 10

Gone with the Wind excerpts <http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks02/0200161.txt>

Mitchell, Margaret. *Gone With the Wind*. Project Gutenberg. Nov. 2010. Web. 24

June 2013

Chapter 8

“Certainly there was nothing romantic about nursing. To her, it meant groans, delirium, death and smells. The hospitals were filled with dirty, bewhiskered, verminous men who smelled terribly and bore on their bodies wounds hideous enough to turn a Christian's stomach. The hospitals stank of gangrene, the odor assaulting her nostrils long before the doors were reached, a sickish sweet smell that clung to her hands and hair and haunted her in her dreams. Flies, mosquitoes and gnats hovered in droning, singing swarms over the wards, tormenting the men to curses and weak sobs; and Scarlett, scratching her own mosquito bites, swung palmetto fans until her shoulders ached and she wished that all the men were dead.

Melanie, however, did not seem to mind the smells, the wounds or the nakedness, which Scarlett thought strange in one who was the most timorous and modest of women. Sometimes when holding basins and instruments while Dr. Meade cut out gangrened flesh, Melanie

looked very white. And once, after such an operation, Scarlett found her in the linen closet vomiting quietly into a towel. But as long as she was where the wounded could see her, she was gentle, sympathetic and cheerful, and the men in the hospitals called her an angel of mercy. Scarlett would have liked that title too, but it involved touching men crawling with lice, running fingers down throats of unconscious patients to see if they were choking on swallowed tobacco quids, bandaging stumps and picking maggots out of festering flesh. No, she did not like nursing!"

-Chapter 17

"Yes, she was sick of the hospital, the foul smells, the lice, the aching, unwashed bodies. If there had ever been any novelty and romance about nursing, that had worn off a year ago. Besides, these men wounded in the retreat were not so attractive as the earlier ones had been. They didn't show the slightest interest in her and they had very little to say beyond: "How's the fightin' goin'? What's Old Joe doin' now? Mighty clever fellow, Old Joe." She didn't think Old Joe a mighty clever fellow. All he had done was let the Yankees penetrate eighty-eight miles into Georgia. No, they were not an attractive lot. Moreover, many of them were dying, dying swiftly, silently, having little strength left to combat the blood poisoning, gangrene, typhoid and pneumonia which had set in before they could reach Atlanta and a doctor.

The day was hot and the flies came in the open windows in swarms, fat lazy flies that broke the spirits of the men as pain could not. The tide of smells and pain rose and rose about her. Perspiration soaked through her freshly starched dress as she followed Dr. Meade about, a basin in her hand.

Oh, the nausea of standing by the doctor, trying not to vomit when his bright knife cut into mortifying flesh! And oh, the horror of hearing the screams from the operating ward where amputations were going on! And the sick, helpless sense of pity at the sight of tense, white faces of mangled men waiting for the doctor to get to them, men whose ears were filled with screams, men waiting for the dreadful words: "I'm sorry, my boy, but that hand will have to come off. Yes, yes, I know; but look, see those red streaks? It'll have to come off."

Chloroform was so scarce now it was used only for the worst amputations and opium was a precious thing, used only to ease the dying out of life, not the living out of pain. There was no

quinine and no iodine at all. Yes, Scarlett was sick of it all, and that morning she wished that she, like Melanie, had the excuse of pregnancy to offer. That was about the only excuse that was socially acceptable for not nursing these days.”

Anticipatory Strategy/ Hook:

Essential Questions: How can you recognize the truth?

Allow students to share and discuss their answers.

1. Tell students you want them to view a brief video clip and decide whether or not the clip is based on the truth.
2. View a portion of the Civil War field hospital reenactment at the link below.
Caution: Some scenes may be too graphic for younger students. However, the opening minutes should be enough to engage their interests.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kdo2p-5uMRI>

3. Ask students if they feel the video was a factual reenactment. What is the difference between fact and fiction? How does fiction mistakenly become accepted as fact?
4. As a whole group activity, create a two column fact and fiction list based on Civil War medicine and post the list in the room.
5. Show video clip, “The Truth about Civil War Medicine”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QlqlCmgaD10>

Procedures:

Activity One: Fictional Text Analysis

1. Show video clip “Why Care About Civil War Medicine?”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ES0wQVTKITw>
2. Students may work in pairs for this activity. Give each pair a Venn Diagram. Ask students to label one side fictional text and the other informational text.
3. As appropriate for grade level, students will read one fictional passage from either *Soldier’s Heart* or *Gone with the Wind*. As they read, students will list all the facts about Civil War medicine, wounds, and care identified in the passages. Students will list these claims in the part of the Venn Diagram labeled fictional text.
4. Show video clip “Africans, Women and War Medicine”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6k6YkedoVFU>

Summarizing Question: Does the fictional passages and video evidence support each other? Discuss.

Activity Two: Informational Text Analysis

1. Ask student pairs to label the other side of the Venn Diagram informational text.
2. Students will choose from the suggested informational links above to investigate claims made in the fictional text. Students will attempt to confirm or deny claims made in the fictional passages. Any evidence found in the informational text should be listed on the side of the Venn Diagram labeled informational text.
3. Show video clips on Civil War Medicine myths
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UJCuzXubP-E>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UJCuzXubP-E>

Summarizing Question: Does the informational text and video evidence support each other? Discuss

Activity Three: Compare and Contrast

1. Ask students to review the evidence listed in the fiction and informational texts sides of the Venn Diagram.
2. Are any pieces of evidence listed on both sides? If so, move that evidence to the center, or common section, of the overlapping circles.
3. View video “Myths About Antiseptics and Camp Life”.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pSR1L3RurlA&list=PL65370B6F90E8C6CC>
4. Based on the student’s analysis, have them draw conclusions and answer the following questions. Give students a few minutes to reflect and answer these questions individually.
 - A. What is a myth about Civil War medicine?
 - B. What is one medical fact we know and practice today that wasn’t known or used during the Civil War? Is there evidence of this fact in the fictional texts? Informational texts?
 - C. How do myths become accepted as facts in our society?
 - D. Discuss how student findings impact our understanding of history?

- E. After conducting this investigation, what do students understand to be the role of historical fiction?

Closure:

How do students distinguish fact from fiction?

1. Using their Venn Diagrams, students will play a brief game of “Two Truths and a Lie.”
2. Each student pair will write down three sentences on a slip of paper. Two of the sentences will be truths about Civil War medicine and one sentence will be a lie.
3. Other groups will use their Venn Diagrams as evidence to determine which sentence is the lie.

Assessment:

Students will create a 1 minute video clip, poster, or skit demonstrating one of the following topics.

- A. The way to determine fact from fiction.
- B. How do myths become accepted as fact?

Modification Ideas:

1. Teacher may need to create a small group and shorten reading passages.
2. Teacher may use audiobooks for fictional reading.
3. Teacher may use on videos for informational text.

Standards:

Middle School -

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.7.9](#) Compare and contrast a fictional portrayal of a time, place, or character and a historical account of the same period as a means of understanding how authors of fiction use or alter history

- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.7.8](#) Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient to support the claims.

- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.7.9](#) Analyze how two or more authors writing about the same topic shape their presentations of key information by emphasizing different evidence or advancing different interpretations of facts
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.8.7](#) Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of using different mediums (e.g., print or digital text, video, multimedia) to present a particular topic or idea.
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.8.8](#) Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; recognize when irrelevant evidence is introduced.
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.8.9](#) Analyze a case in which two or more texts provide conflicting information on the same topic and identify where the texts disagree on matters of fact or interpretation

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.8.5](#) Compare and contrast the structure of two or more texts and analyze how the differing structure of each text contributes to its meaning and style

High School -

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.8](#) Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is valid and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; identify false statements and fallacious reasoning.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.9](#) Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare).