

United States Colored Troops (U.S.C.T.) Lesson Plan

BLACK SOLDIERS IN THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

BY THE CIVIL WAR PRESERVATION TRUST

Grades: 6-8

Length of Time: 3-4 class days

Goals:

1. To learn about the role African American soldiers played in the Civil War.
2. To learn about the similarities and differences between the U.S. Colored Troops and other U.S. forces.
3. To learn about the long-lasting impact African American men in uniform were to have upon the Civil Rights movement in the United States after the war.

Objectives:

1. Given dates and events students will be able to create a timeline and fill in events in chronological order.
2. Students will be able to compare and contrast life experiences for historical individuals.
3. Given the situation of a historical character the students will write a letter from a point of view other than their own.
4. Given historical images students will be able to correctly answer comprehension questions.
5. Give historical images the students will be able to discuss the situations of the historical characters.

Materials Used:

1. Paper
2. Pencils

3. Joseph Logan's "Volunteer Enlistment" papers
4. Illustration of black recruits in Charleston from the April 1, 1865 issue of *Harper's Weekly Glory* (optional)

Anticipatory Set/Hook:

Introduction

On January 1, 1863, Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation declaring that all slaves in parts of the country controlled by the Confederacy were now free. The Emancipation Proclamation also included a paragraph in which Lincoln welcomed slaves to serve in the Union army and navy.

Black troops had been fighting as state militia and serving in support positions since early in the war. What was it about Lincoln's call for regular troops that was significant?

Frederick Douglass, an ex-slave and a prominent abolitionist, believed that allowing black men to fight as soldiers was the first step in getting them equal rights. He said, "Once let the black man get upon his person the brass letters 'US,' let him get an eagle on his button and a musket on his shoulder and bullets in his pockets and there is no power on earth which can deny that he has earned the right to citizenship in the United States." Fighting for their own freedom and for that of their families, there was nothing that gave more hope to a slave or caused more rage in the heart of a Confederate soldier than the sight of black men in Federal uniforms. Their influence was greater than the simple addition of 180,000 troops to the Union army and 10,000 sailors to the Union navy.

Procedure:

Activity 1

Create a timeline either on the board or each student individually. Fill in the events and dates listed below.

- Civil War begins, April 12, 1861
- First official authorization to use black men in the military-but not as armed soldiers (Second Confiscation and Militia Act), July 17, 1862
- Emancipation Proclamation (freeing slaves and authorizing use of black men as soldiers), January 1, 1863
- U.S. Bureau of Colored Troops established, March 22, 1863
- First regiment of U.S. Colored Troops mustered into service, June 30, 1863

- Equal pay granted for black soldiers who had been free before the war began, June 22, 1864
- Equal pay for all black soldiers, March 8, 1865
- Robert E. Lee surrenders to U.S. Grant at Appomattox Court House, effectively ending the Civil War, April 9, 1865
- Last U.S.C.T. regiment mustered out of service, December 1867

To create a better context for these dates, fill in other events of significance, or that you have been studying that happened during these years.

Activity 2

Have the students read Joseph Logan's "Volunteer Enlistment" papers.

From these papers, what do we know about Joseph Logan? What does he look like? How old is he? Where was he born? What did he do for a living before enlisting in the army? Is he an educated man? Note on Joseph Logan's enlistment papers that the word "colored" has been inserted in the eighth line where the pay, rations, and clothing of the soldier are discussed. This was an important distinction. A private in the U.S. Colored Troops received \$10 month with \$3 taken out of that for clothes. White privates received \$13 month with an additional allowance of \$3.50 for clothes. Not until June 22, 1864 was an order issued ensuring equal pay regardless of race (it was made retroactive to Jan. 1, 1864). But this only applied to soldiers who had been free men before April 19, 1861. It was March 8, 1865- barely a month before the end of the war--when all black soldiers were finally guaranteed equal pay with white soldiers of the same rank. Ask them to compare Joseph Logan to the typical Union soldier described below:

The Union Soldier

Most of the Union Army was made up of young white men. Although soldiers generally ranged in age from 18 to 45, boys as young as 12 (and a few even younger) often served as cavalry buglers or drummer boys, and some men in their fifties, sixties, and seventies enlisted as privates. Most of the Union soldiers were under 30.

While almost half of the Union soldiers had been farmers before joining the Army, the others represented a wide variety of expertise and occupations. Hailing from the industrial cities of the North, they ranged from unskilled laborers to engineers, to hairdressers, to mechanics, to college professors. Their education and schooling was just as diverse. Soldiers with university degrees marched beside men who could neither read nor write. In general, however, most of the Union forces had had at least some schooling.

Overwhelmingly, Union soldiers were white. It was not until May 22, 1863 that the U.S. War Department established the Bureau of Colored Troops enabling black men to serve as soldiers though some African-American units in Kansas and Louisiana had already seen combat. (Black men had been assisting the army in other official capacities such as constructing entrenchments or performing camp duty or other labor since the Second Confiscation and Militia Act of July 17, 1862.) By the end of the war, 178,975 enlisted men served in the U.S. Army as members of the U.S. Colored Troops and 9,695 served in the U.S. Navy. In addition, three regiments of Native Americans, the Indian Home Guard, fought for the Union in the western theater of the war.

Have students write a letter in the voice of Joseph Logan. This letter could address any number of topics and could be directed towards family or friend.

Activity 3

After the Emancipation Proclamation, broadsides were posted by abolitionists in cities throughout the North calling for "Men of Color" to enlist in the Union army. Discuss with the class why abolitionists might have felt it was important for black men to become soldiers. Have the class look at the illustration of black recruits in Charleston from the April 1, 1865 issue of Harper's Weekly.

What differences do they see between the recruits (probably runaway slaves) on the left and the U.S.C.T. soldiers on the right? Is there a difference in attitude? Why? Have them look at the August 5, 1865 illustration entitled "Franchise" from Harper's Weekly.

The image shows a black man in a United States uniform, obviously wounded in defense of his country, and there is a caption in the original that reads, "and not this man?" What point is the artist trying to make?

After the Civil War, many black leaders were former soldiers in the U.S. Colored Troops - 41 delegates to state constitutional conventions, 60 legislators, 3 lieutenant governors, and 4 congressmen had served in the Union army. In what ways did the establishment of the U.S. Colored Troops help to achieve civil rights for black men? Ask your students to research and write brief biographies of black leaders in the Reconstruction government such as Hiram Revels, Blanche Bruce, or Pinckney Pinchback.

Notice that there is no mention here of black women. Some advocates of equal rights for women felt that they had been abandoned when the abolitionist movement focused on black men and what they had done as soldiers to "earn" citizenship. Discuss with the class if they

think citizenship and equal rights are things that can be earned? Can they be bought? Do you feel that illegal immigrants to the United States today should have the same rights as taxpayers? Why or why not.

Have the student “Jump into the picture.” Have them take a role as one of the people in these pictures, they can either write about what is happening or they can discuss aloud.

Optional Activity

Watch the movie, *Glory* and discuss the way black soldiers and white officers are portrayed. It was very important to U.S.C.T. soldiers to prove that they were not cowards because they were representing the rest of their race before the world. Do you think this contributed to their valor at **Fort Wagner**?

Closure:

Go to the [African American Civil War Memorial Website](#) to view more 19th century images of African American troops.

Assessment:

Go back to the objectives, and make sure that each student has met these objectives.