Unit Title: The Civil War Experience

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Grade Level: High School

School: Fauquier High School
Fauquier County Public Schools

Time Estimate: 10 days (90 minute periods)

Overview:
Students will have been following the development of the nation as it defined its cultural identity. They should understand how nationalism, borne of relative success in the War of 1812, and nurtured through expansion gave way to intense sectional conflict. Although political and economic differences fueled sectionalism, it became further entrenched in issues of morality and practicality as reform movements embraced the concept of abolition of slavery. Students should have an understanding of how black congregational communities and groups committed to temperance and women’s rights eventually brought abolition to the national forefront in the mid-nineteenth century. Likewise, students will have covered individual approaches to eradicating slavery as well as public policy aimed at appeasing pro-slavery forces in the United States. They will approach this unit with the knowledge of specific abolitionists, violent episodes that defined this struggle, public policy aimed at appeasing anti-slavery and pro-slavery forces, political debate and compromises and public reaction to each of these.

In this unit, students will first use primary source documents to reinforce their understanding of the major causes of the Civil War following their earlier study of events that had increased feelings of economic and cultural sectionalism. They will examine the Civil War in terms of major battles, leaders, major documents, and the changes that occurred as a result of these events. Students will examine the impact of the war on individuals through letters and primary source documents. Each student will contribute to the formation of a “museum exhibit” in order to create a comprehensive view of the Civil War.

Historical Background: As the nation expanded, the issue of equal representation between slave and free states in the Senate became a focal point. The North and South had begun developing major differences in economics and culture since the colonial period. Tariff issues, a source of contention between these two sections since the early nineteenth century, had threatened secession by South Carolina long before 1861. What North considered protective to the merchant economy, South considered destructive to crop profit margins. Because of its reliance on cash crop agriculture, the South did not develop a balanced economy, but instead, much of the region’s capital was invested in land and slaves. Between slaves and poor farmers, few southerners had much purchasing power. Its lack of true industry left it lagging behind the North’s network of roads, canals and railroads. The availability of economic opportunity in the North and of cheap land in the West prompted immigrants to populate those areas. While the emerging factory system and small homesteads in newly settled territory made slave labor obsolete in the North and West, the invention of the cotton gin and the expansion of southern land made
slavery imperative to preserving “King Cotton” in the South. For this reason, slaves comprised nearly half the population in many areas of the South. Therefore, this region developed an attitude that slavery was a benevolent institution that provided the basic needs of this large black population. Furthermore, the potential power of such a large group if freed, presented a threat to white dominance in the South.

The first test of representational balance was temporarily settled by the Missouri Compromise in 1820. The 36 30’ line was later challenged by the acquisition of land from the Mexican War. In the Compromise of 1850, the issue of popular sovereignty emerged in an attempt to determine the status of Utah and New Mexico territories. As an added appeasement to pro-slavery forces, a tougher fugitive slave law was enacted. An uneasy peace ensued until1854 when Kansas sought admission to the Union. Violence between anti-slavery and pro-slavery groups in Kansas began an unofficial civil war as a result of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which nullified the Missouri Compromise. The murderous revenge on slaveholders by John Brown and the landmark Dred Scott Decision revealed the depth of the crisis over expansion of slave or free territory. Abolitionists such as Frederick Douglass and William Lloyd Garrison continued to publish and circulate anti-slavery literature. Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* strengthened abolitionist resolve and other northerners struggled to restrict the success of fugitive slave catchers. The Underground Railroad operated despite dangers, ushering runaway slaves to freedom. Although the issue of black rights in the United States was not on the agenda of free states, the issue of preventing the spread of slavery resulted in the emergence of political parties such as the Free Soilers and the Republicans, with strong support in that region. In the South, resistance to abolition had for many years forbid the circulation of such literature. Slave codes had been issued to quell rebellion, and literacy had become taboo for slaves. To the South, slavery was its “peculiar institution” over which the federal government had no jurisdiction. Southerners would eventually become divided over the issue of secession versus remaining in the Union. Many believed strongly in their status as voluntary members of the Union but others feared the repercussions of secession. The split in their Democratic Party would have grave consequences for the South.

As the abolition movement gained momentum in other nations, it became clear that the preservation of the institution of slavery was to be the issue that finally caused the secession of eleven southern states, resulting in a civil war. The election of Republican Abraham Lincoln reinforced Southern fears that slavery would be eradicated. In December of 1860, South Carolina seceded, to be followed soon after by Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Texas and Mississippi. After drafting a constitution for the Confederate States of America, they elected Jefferson Davis as their president and began seizing federal properties. The first military conflict between Union and Confederacy was to be at Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor. This was Lincoln’s first real challenge as a wartime president because his actions could easily be interpreted as recognition of their independence (weakness) by negotiation or aggression by reinforcing Fort Sumter with military aid. Lincoln chose to reinforce Major Anderson with food supplies, and as this was met with Confederate resistance, the responsibility of aggression fell on Jefferson Davis. The fort was surrendered on April 13, 1861, giving the Confederate States its first
victory. Following this event, Arkansas, North Carolina, Virginia and Tennessee seceded, providing the lower South with needed industrial resources and geographic security.

The war would be waged on various fronts, but a major avenue of activity would be the area between Washington, D.C. and Richmond, VA. The Union employed the Anaconda Plan, a three-pronged strategy to defeat the South by cutting off its lifelines. A blockade of the coast disrupted British and Confederate trade, while battles fought along the Mississippi sought to split the Confederacy into east and west. The Union was much less successful in its attempt to capture Richmond until the end of the war, but its efforts to do this kept Robert E. Lee and his Army of Northern Virginia confined mostly to Virginia. Overly cautious Union generals protected the nation’s capital, but failed to capture Lee’s army on several occasions.

The first true battle was at Manassas Junction or Bull Run in July of 1861. A Confederate victory elevated General “Stonewall” Jackson’s status to that of a legend and demonstrated that the war was to be longer than first predicted.

Early Confederate victories encouraged General Robert E. Lee to invade northern soil. At Antietam, in September, 1862, the bloodiest single day of the war was fought. Although the battle was a draw, Lee’s retreat was interpreted by the union as a victory. This event gave President Lincoln the opportunity for which he had been waiting. In an effort to deprive the Confederate States of their labor force, as well as to deter the anti-slavery British from aiding them, Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, freeing slaves in states under rebellion. Although slaves remained in bondage in the border states, there were strong emancipation movements in these areas. The Civil War became a war to liberate slaves and create a new union. Adding to the anti-slavery sentiment was Frederick Douglass, who convinced Lincoln to recruit black men to fight for the Union army. Although they were initially thought of as being only suitable for manual labor in army, black soldiers would distinguish themselves for bravery in battle.

1863 would be a year of high tide as well as of setbacks for the Confederacy. In the West, Union forces under General Ulysses S. Grant had defeated Confederate forces in several battles, conquering state capitals and taking control of major river and railroad transport centers. These victories would later convince President Lincoln to place General Grant in command of the Union forces after being frustrated by a succession of cautious but popular generals. Winter and springtime defeats in Virginia had severely lowered Union morale, inspiring General Lee to attempt another attack on Union soil. The three-day battle in July at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania was the turning point of the Civil War. Casualties were heavy on both sides, but for the Confederacy the losses were beyond recovery. This was Lee’s last attempt to invade northern soil, and it was met with defeat. What later immortalized the Battle of Gettysburg beyond the staggering carnage was President Lincoln’s brief but powerful Gettysburg Address in November of that year. Lincoln’s speech was a call to all Americans to honor sacrifices made by soldiers who had fought and died in the war, as well as to envision a unified nation that embodied the ideals of its founding fathers.

At the same time that the Union had achieved its Gettysburg victory, Grant’s army had
laid siege to Vicksburg, a city whose high bluffs had given Confederates an opportunity to prevent the Union from completely controlling the Mississippi River. With the fall of Vicksburg, Confederate hopes for victory in the war were shattered, but the battles continued for another two years. Union troops led by General Sherman, ravaged the southern countryside by attacking the very will of the people to fight. Sherman’s March to the Sea is considered the beginning of modern warfare as it destroyed crops and burned properties throughout Georgia and South Carolina. In the spring of 1865, Grant had begun to encircle Lee’s army around Richmond and Petersburg. Lee and his army headed west over the Appomattox River, but their supplies had been captured by General Sheridan’s cavalry. After a final, futile assault on Yankee forces, Lee agreed to the generous terms of surrender offered to him by Grant. At Appomattox Court House, on April 12, Lee formally surrendered and the Army of Northern Virginia was fed and paroled. In the weeks and months to follow, battles were fought in the east and west by the remaining Confederate forces resulting in their eventual surrender.

Although the South lay in ruin, it would have faced a fair plan of reconstruction had Abraham Lincoln been alive to see it through. The entire economic structure of the South had been devastated. It was a land of widows, orphans and displaced people, many of whom bordered on starvation. Thus far, the terms of Southern surrender had had been incredibly fair, with few imprisonments; reconciliation guided post-war policy. On April 14, 1865, Lincoln was assassinated, placing reconstruction in the weaker hands of his successor, Andrew Johnson, who was unable to carry out his policies against the powerful Radical Republicans in Congress. Although the Radical Republicans sought to protect the fledgling rights of the newly freed blacks in the South, there was often violent resistance by southern whites to changes in the traditional social structure. The additional placement of the South under martial law, although necessary to enforce Reconstruction policy and protect black male suffrage, caused a backlash that would only worsen once the United States Government turned its attention to other issues of national concern. Although not the sole cause, the events of the next decade contributed to bitterness that delayed a complete healing and hindered the progress of black Americans in the South for almost a century. As the nation industrialized, the South would gradually increase its economic diversity, but would cripple its own progress by its insistence on maintaining two societies separated by race.

The War Between the States had several major battles that shaped government policy, influenced foreign relations and produced lasting documents that define American ideals. The length of the war, spanning four years, had devastating consequences for many people in this nation as well as for the entire region of the South. Despite the terrible consequences, the war answered Constitutional questions about states’ rights and led to the abolition of slavery in the United States. Most importantly, the Civil War preserved the Union.

**Major Understanding:**

Students will understand the American Civil War as a conflict with deep-rooted Issues that began developing even before the American Revolution. Students must evaluate the
Civil War as an ideological conflict which motivated both Union and Confederate Individuals to make painful choices between nationalist and sectional allegiance. The War between the North and South was characterized by patriotic division within families, intense economic and emotional hardship, a transition to modern warfare, and defining battles. Students should come out of this unit with a basic chronology of major events with an emphasis on battles such as Fort Sumter, First Manassas, Antietam, Gettysburg and the surrender of Robert E. Lee at Appomattox Court House. Students will recognize the impact of individuals such as Abraham Lincoln, Robert E. Lee, Ulysses S. Grant and Frederick Douglass, and their actions in determining the outcome of the Civil War. Students will understand that the legacy of this conflict lies not only in famous documents such as the Emancipation Proclamation, the Gettysburg Address, and Lincoln's Second Inaugural Speech, but in the letters of ordinary American civilians and soldiers who shared in this experience. Following completion of Individual activities, students will synthesize Information by creating "museum exhibits" for assigned topics and be able to present these.

**Objectives:** Students will:

1) Read and analyze primary documents such as Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation, Gettysburg Address and Second Inaugural Speech in order to understand his goal of preserving the Union by emphasizing the ideals of the founding fathers

2) Read and analyze wartime letters of officials such as Robert E. Lee, as well as the diaries and letters of civilians and common soldiers in order to view the Civil War beyond the textbook factual format

3) Utilize selected websites, documents, films, and other resources to develop a solid background of war chronology, impact of geography and the relationship between the war effort and government policy through the completion of notes, maps, and questions in a variety of formats

4) Develop an awareness of the role of personal narratives and primary sources in the telling of an event by recognizing the impact of bias in primary documents such as diaries and letters but also be able to describe their value as a source of insight into the voices of those who lived through the event

5) Be able to pull from their completed work in order to create a museum exhibit, individually and with a small group in order to complete this final task.

**Standards of Learning:**

**Skills**

VUS 1. The student will demonstrate skills for historical and geographic analysis, including the ability to

a) identify, analyze and interpret primary and secondary source documents, records and data, including artifacts, diaries, letters, photographs, journals, newspapers, historical accounts, and art to increase understanding of events and life in the United States;

b) formulate historical questions and defend findings based on inquiry and observation;
d) develop perspectives of time and place, including the construction of maps and various time lines of events, periods and personalities in American history
e) communicate findings orally;
f) develop skills in discussion, debate and persuasive writing
h) interpret the significance of excerpts from famous speeches and other documents.

Content

VUS. 7a The students will demonstrate knowledge of the Civil War and Reconstruction Era and its importance as a major turning point in American history by
a) identifying the major events and the roles of key leaders of the Civil War Era, with emphasis on Abraham Lincoln, Ulysses S. Grant, Robert E Lee and Frederick Douglass
b) analyzing the significance of the Emancipation Proclamation and the principles outlined in the Gettysburg Address
c) examine the political, economic, and social impact of the war… (lesson will cover to immediate aftermath)