Overview:

In this unit, students will learn about the Civil War and Reconstruction period through a variety of resources, including photographs, primary documents, maps, websites, and feature films. By the end of the unit, they will be familiar with important battles of the war, key figures of the conflict, documents related to the era, and amendments to the Constitution that are added as a result of the war. The lessons are intended for students who have already learned about the causes of the war during the turbulent 1850s. The unit can be taught to both average and special education students, especially in a co-taught situation in which these two groups are mixed.

Historical Background:

Ever since the country’s creation, the issues of slavery and states’ rights had been major points of contention between differing sides (Virginia & Kentucky Resolutions, Hartford Convention, nullification crisis/tariff). Compromises had worked in the past to attempt to resolve these differences, but the issue of slavery and its expansion into new territories became too divisive for any compromise to succeed. Instead, the intense debate over this issue led to the secession of numerous southern states and a subsequent civil war. After four years of war and over 600,000 deaths, the debate over slavery and secession was resolved. As a result, during the Reconstruction period, the federal government asserted its power to guarantee freedom for African Americans and rebuild the former Confederacy.

Throughout the 1850s tension was building in the United States over the issue of slavery. There were those who wanted to expand the institution of slavery into new states, those who wanted to limit slavery to where it already existed, and those who wanted to completely abolish it. Numerous compromises were proposed based on geography and popular sovereignty, but passions were too intense over this issue for any of these efforts to succeed. The polarizing Election of 1860 was the flashpoint that marked an end to any attempt at compromise or unity. Despite the fact that he had never called for abolition, several southern states perceived the victor, Abraham Lincoln, as a threat to their economic way of life and felt that seceding from the Union was the only way to preserve an institution that had been in place for over two hundred years. Soon after states began to secede, military conflict broke out just outside of Charleston, South Carolina at Ft. Sumter. Following this shocking rebel victory, more southern states seceded and the War Between the States was fully underway. The Union would have to quickly develop a war
plan to quell this rebellion. Neither side believed the war would last more than a few months. Instead the war lasted four deadly years.

Following another defeat at Bull Run, the Union realized that a much longer and deadlier war was at hand. More violent days were ahead, including September 17, 1862 at Antietam, the single bloodiest day of the war. The Union strategy throughout the war was based around the Anaconda Plan, a three-part plan designed to cut off supplies and communication throughout the Confederacy. It included a blockade of Confederate ports, Union control of the Mississippi River, and occupation of Richmond, the Confederate capital. In the eastern theater of the Civil War, General Lee’s Confederate forces remained dominant. They made it into the border state of Maryland and eventually into the heart of Union territory. President Lincoln struggled to find a general strong enough to counter Lee’s continuing success. Lee’s momentum finally ended in a little Pennsylvania town called Gettysburg. There, after a three-day bloodbath in July of 1863, Union forces put a halt to further Confederate advances and sent them back into their own territory. More good news came the following day from the western theater. General Ulysses S. Grant led his men to an important strategic victory at Vicksburg, allowing the Union further control of the Mississippi River. After hearing of Grant’s successes in the West, Lincoln made Grant the commanding officer of Union forces.

After the turning point at Gettysburg, the scales began to tip in favor of the Union who had more men and more resources available. The Union supplemented their white manpower with that of African-Americans once the Emancipation Proclamation was issued. While this document primarily addressed freeing slaves in rebelling areas, it also permitted African-Americans to enlist in the U.S. Army. Thousands of African-Americans served in the United States Colored Troops and played a crucial role in the Union’s ultimate success. African-Americans eventually served in the Confederate military as well.

After four bloody years, the Civil War finally drew to a close in April of 1865. This was a pivotal month for America, as crucial decisions had to be made by leaders on both sides of the conflict. While passions were high on both sides, General Lee and General Grant were able to reasonably and respectfully communicate with one another, ending with the so-called “Gentlemen’s Agreement” at Appomattox. This would not be the end of the war, but over the next few months other leaders on both sides would come to similar agreements, putting an end to the possibility of a prolonged guerilla war. Just as it seemed like the country was getting ready to settle down, however, turmoil struck again with the assassination of President Lincoln. This brought more despair and confusion to the country, but it also had a significant political effect as it allowed the Radical Republicans to take over Reconstruction efforts. Where Lincoln had urged America to re-unite “with malice toward none” in his famous second inaugural speech, Radical Republicans sought to punish the South for their role in causing the Civil War. This led to much resentment in the South as well as the impeachment of President Johnson as he continually clashed with Radical Republicans in Congress.
Reconstruction had some important achievements such as securing the right for African-Americans to vote and serve in Congress, and guaranteeing them equal protection under the law. Once federal troops left the South through the Compromise of 1877, however, these valiant efforts were overturned by many former Confederates. They held racist views about the new roles for African-Americans in the South and were fearful of a social and economic system in which Africa-Americans were now free. Intimidation through violence emerged throughout the South to keep African-Americans from experiencing their full rights of citizenship. It would take another 100 years for the goals of Reconstruction to be fully and permanently realized.

Many valuable resources remain to help students of history understand this time period through the eyes and minds of those who experienced it firsthand. The development of photography during this era helps capture the spirit of this great struggle. In the 21st century we can still see how war affected those who lived through it. Just looking at before and after photographs of Abraham Lincoln offer us a glimpse into the incredible toll these few years took on American leaders. Any number of photographs of veterans with missing limbs shows us the cost of war for those who fought it. Images of cities like Richmond and Atlanta illustrate the effects of the war on civilians. To study the Civil War without this valuable resource would not capture the true essence of this period. Numerous documents remain from the era as well, most importantly the Gettysburg Address and the Emancipation Proclamation. These documents highlight how America’s great principles of freedom and liberty were called into question in this violent conflict. Letters written by those who lived through the Civil War are also helpful in understanding the war from the perspective of the average citizen. They can be used to supplement what we may read in modern secondary sources.

Major Understanding(s):
Since the country’s creation, slavery and states’ rights had been issues that threatened the unity of the young nation. After years of compromise proved unsuccessful, the country turned against itself to solve these divisive issues once and for all. Our founding principles of freedom and liberty lay in the balance and ultimately prevailed, however different interpretations of these principles would continue to cause debate and conflict as America tried to rebuild from its civil war.

Objectives: The student will:
1. Understand the causes of the Civil War.
2. Interpret primary sources to understand the impact of the war on the average soldier and analyze how people of the era interpreted the events they were living through differently.
3. Interpret primary sources to understand how the founding principles of this country were challenged and defended during the Civil War.
4. Analyze maps and facts to understand the military strategies and ultimate victory of the Union Army during the Civil War.
5. Learn about the contributions of African-Americans during the Civil War.
6. Analyze primary sources to understand how the federal government planned to reconstruct the American South following the Civil War.
7. Analyze the problems the country faced once the war came to an end and had to be reconstructed.

**Standards of Learning:**

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

**Content:**
VUS.7 The student 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 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 Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address

c. Examining the political, economic, and social impact of the war and Reconstruction, including the adoption of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the Constitution of the United States of America