



1863 CIVIL WAR JOURNEY: RAID ON INDIANA DRUMMER BOYS RECOMMENDED FOR GRADES 3-5

The Civil War is sometimes called, “The Boys’ War” because so many of the soldiers were very young. Historians estimate that about 100,000 of them were 15 years old or younger. Of those, 300 were younger than 13, and 25 were younger than 10. Many of these young soldiers joined the army as musicians. The best known musicians were the drummers.

During the first few years of the war, there was no age requirement to become a musician in the army. One of the youngest boys to enlist was Edward Black, who joined the 21st Indiana Volunteer Regiment at age 8. In March 1864, the Union Army ruled that a musician had to be at least 16, but many boys lied about their age in order to enlist. Some ran away from home in order to join the army and others joined when their fathers or older brothers enlisted. They too were seeking adventure and a chance to do something to help support the Union.

Johnny Clem is the most famous Civil War drummer. He ran away from home to join the 22nd Michigan Volunteer Regiment in 1861 at the age of 9. During the Battle of Shiloh, his drum was smashed, and he became known as “Johnny Shiloh.” The members of his regiment made a shortened rifle for him, and he used it at the Battle of Chickamauga to kill a Confederate officer who demanded his surrender. After Chickamauga, he was promoted to sergeant. Clem finally retired from the army in 1915 as a Brigadier General.

Although the lives of drummers were portrayed to be very glamorous, most of them experienced the same tedious and monotonous camp life as all the other soldiers. They too helped dig trenches and pitch tents and marched long distances toward dangerous battlefields.

OBJECTIVES:

After doing this activity, students will be able to:

- Explain why they would want to join the army as a drummer boy or girl.
- Describe some of the reasons boys in the Civil War left home to join the army.
- Write a persuasive letter.

RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS TO EXPLORE:

- Examples of drummers’ letters from the Civil War.
 - The Letters of Felix Voltz
 - <http://spec.lib.vt.edu/voltz/voltz3.htm>

- “Letters of a Drummer Boy” edited by Don Russell, from the *Indiana Magazine of History*
 - <http://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/imh/view.do?docId=VAA4025-034-3-a08>
- *Children for the Union: The War Spirit on the Northern Home Front* by James Marten

WHAT TO DO:

- Select at least two letters from the above resources, and read them together as a class so that students can get an idea of why children in history wanted to join the war.
- Students should then take on the role of a drummer boy or girl in the Civil War. They should write a letter to their parents that explains why they want to join the army as a drummer boy or girl and persuades their parents to allow their enlistment.
- The letter should include things like their reasons for enlisting, what they expect life in the army will be like, what they will miss about home, etc.

TEACHING OPTIONS:

- Students may create collages of pictures that would represent what they believe life as a soldier would be like.
- Students may also search the internet for photographs and other images of Civil War drummer boys. One great example is Thomas Nast’s “Civil War Drummer Boy” illustration from *Harper’s Weekly*. More examples can be found through the Library of Congress website.
- Students may use this as a chance to practice their reviewing and revising skills by making multiple drafts of their letter. They may also look up unfamiliar words in the dictionary.

IN ACADEMIC STANDARDS

Language Arts:

4.W.3.1: Write persuasive compositions in a variety of forms...

4.RN.1: Read and comprehend a variety of nonfiction within a range of complexity appropriate for grades 4-5....

Social Studies:

4.1.8 Summarize the impact of Abraham Lincoln’s presidency on Indiana and describe the participation of Indiana citizens in the Civil War.

Common Core:

3.W.1 Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons.

- a. Introduce the topic or text they are writing about, state an opinion, and create an organizational structure that lists reasons.
- b. Provide reasons that support the opinion.
- c. Use linking words and phrases (e.g., because, therefore, since, for example) to connect opinion and reasons.
- d. Provide a concluding statement or section.

3.W.4 With guidance and support from adults, produce writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task and purpose.

4.W.1 Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.

- a. Introduce a topic or text clearly, state an opinion, and create an organizational structure in which related ideas are grouped to support the writer's purpose.
- b. Provide reasons that are supported by facts and details.
- c. Link opinion and reasons using words and phrases (e.g., for instance, in order to, in addition).
- d. Provide a concluding statement or section related to the opinion presented.

4.W.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

5.W.1 Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.

- a. Introduce a topic or text clearly, state an opinion, and create an organizational structure in which ideas are logically grouped to support the writer's purpose.
- b. Provide logically ordered reasons that are supported by facts and details.
- c. Link opinion and reasons using words, phrases, and clauses (e.g., consequently, specifically).

d. Provide a concluding statement or section related to the opinion presented.

5.W.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.