



**1863 CIVIL WAR JOURNEY: RAID ON INDIANA  
EXPLORING CIVIL WAR SOLDIERS' LETTERS: AN EXERCISE WITH  
PRIMARY DOCUMENTS  
RECOMMENDED FOR GRADE 8**

During the American Civil War, soldiers had a lot of free time in-between marching and fighting. Many soldiers used this free time for things such as foraging, washing clothes, gambling, or playing games. They also spent much of their free time reading and composing letters to be sent back home to loved ones. Letters were an important tool for soldiers to fend off loneliness and boredom. Letters helped soldiers keep in touch with loved ones even though they were many miles from home. Much of the time letters were the only source of information the soldiers had about life outside of the war.

Letters are one of the best sources of information we have about what life was like for soldiers. In their letters, they told their families of battles, life in camp, and the long marches in between. Now we use these primary documents to help us understand their experiences.

**OBJECTIVES:**

After doing this activity, students will be able to:

- Compare and contrast Civil War letters and modern methods of communication.
- Understand a soldier's life and the kinds of things they talked about, worried about, and lived with.
- Draw conclusions using primary sources and support their conclusions with evidence.

**ADDITIONAL SOURCES:**

- U.S. Civil War Resources at Ball State University's Digital Media Repository  
<http://libx.bsu.edu/cdm4/collection.php?CISOROOT=/LSTACivWar12>
- The Civil War Archives  
<http://www.civilwararchive.com/LETTERS/letters.htm>
- Indiana Soldier's letters  
[http://www.indiana.edu/~imaghist/online\\_content/vcsfrmpst/voices\\_cvlwr/index.html](http://www.indiana.edu/~imaghist/online_content/vcsfrmpst/voices_cvlwr/index.html)

## **IN ACADEMIC STANDARDS**

### Social Studies

- 8.1.25 Identify the factors and individuals which influenced the outcome of the Civil War and explain the significance of each.
- 8.1.30 Using primary and secondary sources, analyze an issue confronting the United States from colonial times through the Reconstruction period.

### English/Language Arts

8.RN.1 Read a variety of nonfiction within a range of complexity appropriate for grades 6-8. By the end of grade 8, students interact with texts proficiently and independently.

8.RN.2.1 Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what a text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

### Common Core

- 6-8.RH.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.
- 6-8.RH.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.
- 6-8.RH.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.
- 6-8.RH.6 Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g. loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).

## EXPLORING CIVIL WAR SOLDIERS' LETTERS: AN EXERCISE WITH PRIMARY DOCUMENTS

**Primary documents are written records that were created at the time of the events they describe. Letters from Civil War soldiers are primary documents. They are one of the best sources we have about what life was like for soldiers. In their letters, they told their families of battles, life in camp, and the long marches in between. Now we use these primary documents to help us understand their experiences.**

**Read the following letters from real Civil War soldiers, written between 1861-1865. Then answer the following questions.**

**Note: The letters are transcribed from the original documents. Because of inconsistencies in the rules of grammar and spelling in the past, some words may appear to be misspelled or punctuation written incorrectly. The letters are written as they appear in the original letters.**

Port Royal Island

Beaufort, South Carolina

April 9, 1862

Very Esteemed Father,

I again take up the pen to write you a few lines and to let you know through the Lord's blessing I am still in good health and to let you know that I received your letter of March 22 in good health. Only I was a little bit wet, because this morning I had to stand guard and it rained a bit, but that means nothing. Dirk, he fortunately can take it, because I am not made of salt. The corn will now begin to grow fast with such a pleasant rain. I have also learned from your letter that you are still in good health and I hope that you may receive these few lines in health.

I am also letting you know that we again have sent a letter to A. Plugger. I have to keep 15 dollars. This time I did not dare enclose 20 dollars, because you don't know what might happen, because I don't want to starve as long as I am here. I cannot understand that you did not receive a letter from me for a month, because most of the time I do write one each week, if not more than that. But I think that it is mostly caused by the irregular departure of the mail. I think that I write enough but I might be wrong. But I have the right solution, why don't you write me how much I should write in one week, because it doesn't make any difference to me even if I had to write one every day, because writing isn't difficult for me and I presently have time enough also.

Our drill has also been changed again. In the morning we have bayonet exercises. We start at 7 o'clock and at 8 o'clock we are done, because near 9 o'clock it gets already very warm and then in late afternoon we have earned our day's pay again. We sometimes have a lot of fun during drill. Our good Colonel comes up with such funny jokes that if you would see us in action once, you would have to hold your stomach from laughing. We are very lucky here to have a good Colonel. He makes it as easy for us as he can.

Father, I cannot write you any news. Everything is still the same. The Holland boys here are all still in good health. You still have to have a little patience with my portrait, because it is not easy to get one.

I finish by calling you my father,

Dirk Keppel

Do greet Mother and the whole family. Again greetings from me,

Dirk Keppel

*\*Dirk Keppel joined the 8<sup>th</sup> Michigan Infantry in September 1861 at the age of 18. He was killed in action in April 1862.*

Vicksburgh, Miss

Jan 28, 1865

Dear Father and Mother,

Having a few minutes to spare I thought I would write and let you know that I am all right & have had a good time coming down on the boat we landed in the famous city of Vicksburgh this morning it is a poor looking place hilly as you please I have been in one of the underground houses that the citizens of this place dug out time of the siege and I see some houses with the hind sides shot off I have seen where the gun boats have burnt the burley from off the plantations and where towns have been burned &c The weather is hot here I could go barefooted and not half try Contrabands are as thick as thick I could hire hundreds if I wanted them I have seen a good many negro soldiers they look sweet They put on a heap of style I have not the time to write much this time I just thought I would write and let you know that I am all right and tell you where I am I will leave here tonight I will write again when I get to the regiment Direct your letters to the 1st regt. heavy artillery Ind. Vol. New Orleans, La.

Nothing more at present

John

*\*John K. Ingle served in Company K of the 1<sup>st</sup> Indiana Heavy Artillery which was mustered in Indianapolis in July 1861. He drowned in Mobile Bay on March 15, 1865.*

Camp near Bunker Hill, October 24, 1862  
Dear Wife

With these few line I wish to let you know that I am well and hope that when these few lines will come to hands, may find you enjoying the same blessings. I arrived here yesterday morning safe. We had to walk from Staunton to this place, about one hundred and fifteen miles distant. It is the general opinion of the men and officers that we shall not stay here long, that we shall either advance again into Maryland or retreat back up the Valley on account that we are too far from any railroad branch, and can't get [means] for transportation. There is no yankee of any amount on this side of the Potomac.

I haven't any news to tell you at this time. I haven't been in the camp long enough to learn any. The boys here are as lively as crickets, just as lively as if it was in time of peace, or as if they were at home. There is thirty four men in our compnay fit for duty. Our company makes up near half of the regiment, it is no more than a good company the whole regiment. They nearly all deserted or went home on a French. There is some few sick and wounded but not many. There was only twelve in the Battle of Sharpsburg in Maryland out of our regiment. The balance remained behind, and the most of them never went across the river. Patrick [Hai----], that use to work up on the mountain is dead. He was wounded in the late battle of Manassas in one of his knees and died. Every thing is quiet here in the Camp. Dear I could not even buy me a sheet of paper in Winchester to write to you. There is none to be bought. The boys are writing on paper that they have captured on the battle field. When ever you write to me you must send me a blank sheet of paper in your letter. The boys say that we shall soon have our pay and if so, I will send you some. Dear I would like to see you, and feel lonesome for you. Give my best respects to mother, Russia, [illegible] and to all the enquiring friends. So nothing more at present but to reamin you affectionate husband untill death.

John Garibaldi.

*\*John Garibaldi enlisted in the 27<sup>th</sup> Virginia Infantry in May 1861. Despite being captured and imprisoned twice during the war, he survived, and lived until 1914.*

Morganizes [sic] Bend,  
May 29th, 1864

Dear sister Ann,

I now sit down to try to write you a few lines as we have lately come off of a very hard expedition of marching and fighting. We was skirmishing about 15 days all together and then after that 10 days hard marching, day and night both and very scarce of rations but it is all over now We are in camp close to the Mississippi River. It has been just one

week since we come here and we moved camp today. We was about a quarter of a mile from the river and today [Sunday] we moved down close to the river so we would be handy to watter. I went out this forenoon to get some brush to make a shade for my mess and it was about a mile to the woods where we went to get brush and it was very tiresome work and when we come back we got our dinners and then went out to get some green corn to make beds, we dont mind that in this country. We just use it the same as we do anything else for anything that we want it for. The weather here is very hot and dry. We have not had any rain of any account since the 23rd of April but the river has been very high but is falling now. We have fixed up Camp as if we was going to stay here some time but we dont know anything about it. I have a great deal of work to do now for I have to attend to beating all the calls. We; have ten drummers and ten fifers and I am put at the head of them all and have to boss them all and that is what makes the work. Our drum major has never come back yet since we have been back and dont know wheather he will or not. ...

[On the back of the same sheet on which the preceeding letter was written, was a short letter to the drummer's brother John.]

I now sit down to write you a few lines to lett you know that I am well as ever. I would like to see you now and be with you this summer and help you and pap tend corn but it is so that I cant but I think next summer the war will be over. I hope so anyhow.

We have a table fixed up to eat off of and to write on. There is three other boys writing letters on the same table. We have a nice camp now to what we have had in the last month. Mr. Paul and Ben-ton and Mr. Cope's all well now, I believe.

Henry L. Bert,  
Co. I, 47th Regt. Ind. V. V. Inf.<sup>13</sup>

*\*Henry Bert enlisted as a drummer in the 47<sup>th</sup> Indiana Volunteer Infantry in December 1861. He survived the war and lived until 1910.*



