The Civil War: An Online Unit

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Abstract
For my final project, I decided to do an online unit for middle school students on the Civil War (Appendix). My reasoning was twofold: I am very interested in online learning and the possibilities that it holds for students, and I saw a need for additional information on this particular subject matter in the middle school where I currently teach. In the social studies department at this particular school lecture and textbook readings are the predominate form of instruction. Because the Civil War is such an interesting topic and there is plenty of information available that includes music, poetry, diary entries, virtual tours, and photographs, just to name a few, it seemed as though students interest would be piqued. As Tally suggests (2000) students interest increases when they can get emotionally involved. The Internet gives them the opportunity to get information in a variety of formats instead of just a textbook. Middle school students participating in this class will have the opportunity to use the computer for the class to search for information, correspond with other students about the class, and work at their own pace. One amusing thought by Kearsley (1997) about online education is that it can succeed in spite of an ineffective teacher.
This project by: Liz Walgamuth
Titled: The Civil War: An Online Unit

Has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts

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Introduction

For my final project, I decided to do an online unit for middle school students on the Civil War (Appendix). My reasoning was twofold: I am very interested in online learning and the possibilities that it holds for students, and I saw a need for additional information on this particular subject matter in the middle school where I currently teach. In the social studies department at this particular school lecture and textbook readings are the predominate form of instruction. Because the Civil War is such an interesting topic and there is plenty of information available that includes music, poetry, diary entries, virtual tours, and photographs, just to name a few, it seemed as though students interest would be piqued. As Tally suggests (2000) students interest increases when they can get emotionally involved. The Internet gives them the opportunity to get information in a variety of formats instead of just a textbook. Middle school students participating in this class will have the opportunity to use the computer for the class to search for information, correspond with other students about the class, and work at their own pace. One amusing thought by Kearsley (1997) about online education is that it can succeed in spite of an ineffective teacher.

Methodology

When I first sat down to begin creating an outline of the unit, I didn’t know where to begin. The topic of the Civil War is enormous with so many different political and social issues surrounding it. I consulted a book entitled The Civil War by Geoffrey C. Ward. This is a very comprehensive book on the subject of the Civil War. I have read sections of this book in the past and have found it to be a valuable resource. As I was reviewing this book, I began to formulate in my mind what I felt were the major topics. Along with deciding on topics for the project, I also wanted to read some research on the topic of online education and web design. For this purpose, I researched and found articles by Kearsley, Tally, and Williams.

The Project

I chose to begin with life before the Civil War to give some background to what was about to take place in history. The other main topics were slavery, north and south at war, the participation of women in the war, famous people, and postwar. The unit is laid out as a web site. There are links to other web pages that correspond with the topics. Along with the web links there are questions, and projects.
Sources

After deciding on these topics, I began searching the Internet for sites that could be used by the students during the class to study each area. The Civil War has been a “hot” topic for several years now and the Internet resources reflect that. I found a plethora of sites to review. I did searches on Yahoo, Ask Jeeves for Kids, and Infoseek, and Dogpile, but I found my most useful sites on Lightspan and The Scholastic Network. These two sites have located hundreds of sites about the Civil War for students. I went through each site and read its contents; if I felt that it fit my topic, and was appropriate reading for a middle school student, I pasted the address into a webpage that I had begun. It was during the wading through sites that I decided to add the topic of women during the war. I had not found anything about that subject when I was doing my preliminary readings, but found some good sites on it.

Issues

I found that some of the sites that dealt with slavery might not be appropriate for all students. There were graphic details of abuse, rape, and neglect. Although, I felt it was appropriate to include some of this information. As Tally (2000) suggests, it is important to keep communication open with students when reading sensitive material. Regular conversations about the discomfort some students might be experiencing during reading, giving students the option to read the material or not, and making sure that there are other sides of the issue available to be read so they can compare and contrast can be helpful to students.

With communication in mind, I thought that it would be very useful and educational for students in different areas of the country to take the class at the same time and to have a chance to correspond with through email about the class. Getting different perspectives from students living in different parts of the country can bring another dynamic to online learning. I added to my web site directions for teachers on how to find other classes with which to correspond and study the lessons. As Kearsley states (1997) using email as a form of correspondence can change the social dynamics of education. It seems to put everyone on the same footing; everyone has the same opportunity to post or communicate and gives people a chance to think about their responses. Even though the class is to be taken predominately online and there is the opportunity for email communication, there is plenty of opportunity for teacher and class participation that
takes place face to face in whole or small group discussions and project groups. The great thing about a topic this broad is you never know where it will lead you and where you will find yourself at the end.

Design

When I had finished gathering the sites that I would use as resources. I began the process of actually creating my site. I used Pagemill for the editor. While I was out looking for information on the web, I also gathered backgrounds and graphics that I thought would aid in the design of the web page. With so much information, I wanted to keep the online class as organized and easy to understand as possible. As Williams states (2000) “The most important aspect of web design is to communicate effectively. The information should be easy to read, the background should not interfere with the text, navigation buttons should be easy to find and understand how to use, the page should download quickly, the page should not be cluttered with graphics.”

I decided to start with an overview page that provided background for the Civil War and explained the class for the students, and then added links to the other topics from this page. I also added a section for teachers to read to help them better organize the class. From past experience, I have learned to locate information together that goes together on the page and makes links back to main pages for ease of use.

Once the design of my web page was done with my sites linked on each page, I went back to each site and read each in more detail to begin picking up ideas for questions and projects. I organized these under the site that corresponded with them. I also decided that some sites were so complete and full of useful information that I made them required reading.

Conclusions and Recommendations

I have learned a great deal about the Civil War from developing this class. I have also learned to check my links often. In the amount of time that I spent working on this project three of the links that were on my web page became inactive. I then had to go out and search for suitable replacements. I now know that when I put this class on our server, the links will have to be checked on a regular basis, as there is no certainty on the web. My main concern through the development process was ease of use. I learned that sometimes just having a link is not enough. The student needs to know what to do when he/she gets there. In a hope to ease frustration, I sometimes added instructions of how to get to certain areas after getting to a site.
I envision this type of project being done by teachers in stages. It is an awesome task to undertake on your own. I think many teachers like the idea, but lack the time to do all facets of it. For development of this type of class, there needs to be an outline of ideas formulated, time to search for information on the web, development of questions and projects, and then the actual design of a web page. I envision teachers getting into teams and each person, or group developing one part of the project. I can also envision this type of project to encompass all areas of education. Teachers working in groups could incorporate math, science, industrial technology, cooking, and obviously reading and history. Schools that have block scheduling could easily have the time to do this. The possibilities are endless. I look forward to student feedback when the class is actually taken this fall. I will use this feedback to revise this class and for future classes that I develop.
References


Appendix
Exploring the Civil War Era

The War Between the States, the War Against Northern Aggression, the Second American Revolution, the Lost Cause, the War of the Rebellion, the Brothers' War, the Late Unpleasantness, the War of Attempted Secession, the War Against the States. These are just some of the other names for the Civil War, an event that lasted 4 years and will define us as a people forever.

The Civil War was fought in 10,000 places. More than 3 million Americans fought in it, and over 600,000 men, 2 percent of the population, died in it. Over fifty thousand books have been written about the Civil War. People are still looking for answers to the questions; Why did Americans kill each other? How did it happen? Who were the people who fought and killed, marched and sang, wrote home, deserted, died, nursed and lamented? What was it like to be in that war? What did it do to America and Americans? What happened to the movement that freed blacks from slavery? What did it mean that the Union won? What does it mean to be a Union? Why are we still so drawn to this tale of suffering, catastrophe, valor, and death? (The Civil War by Geoffrey C. Ward)

This class will give you a chance to explore these questions and more. Not only will you follow the footsteps of the soldiers who were at war, but you will learn about the history of slavery, read interviews taken with former slaves, discover the role women played in the conflict, learn about the lives of Americans who became famous because of their involvement during that period, and finally find out how the country began to rebuild.

This will be quite a journey filled with excitement, astonishment, disbelief and sadness. After reading information about different aspects of the war, you will get a chance to complete projects to show what you have learned and how it has affected you. You will get opportunities to journal about your thoughts and discoveries, as well as share your reflections and questions with others who are taking this journey with you.

Overview

Life before the War
Slavery

North and South at War

Post War Reconstruction

Notable People

Cumulative Questions

Acknowledgments
Life Before the War

Until that first shot at 4:30 AM on the 12th of April, 1861, America had been, as Bruce Catton wrote, "small enough to carry in the mind and in the heart, and a young man's fatherland was what he could see from his bedroom window."

Objectives/Focus

Your journey begins before the Civil War. You will discover what life was like for people living at the time.

Readings

Origins of War

Assignment Choices

1. When people think of the Civil War, many automatically think of slavery as the cause. There were other tensions between the northern and southern states. List the other reasons the northern and southern states were dividing.

2. With a partner, take the position as either a northerner or southerner and side on one of the issues of the time.

Free Blacks

Assignment Choices

1. Write a journal entry about the reading "Free Blacks". Include what surprised you, and what you would like to know more about.

2. Freedom's Journal was a newspaper owned by blacks living in the north. What affect do you think this type of newspaper had on black people living in the north at the time? How about the south.

Harper's Ferry

1. Conduct a mock trial in which John Brown is charged with plotting to arm slaves and start rebellion.
North and South at War

Objectives/Focus

The links on this page will take you up close to the battles and the lives of soldiers during the war as well as how life went on for those not fighting the war.

Required Readings

This site is divided into chapters, but don't be scared off. The chapters are only about one page long. It gives you a good quick overview of the war. Keep notes of the areas you would like to research more.

1. Do you think that states should have the right to secede from the United States if they choose to do so?

Virtual Tours

Tour 1 Scroll down to the middle of the page and click on Interactive Battle Tours

Tour 2

Tour 3

Readings

1. What are the main differences between the two cities during the war?
2. Which one do you wish you were a part of?

Naval War Explain the impact of the naval portion of the war. What difficulties had to be overcome? How would the war have been different without it?

Civil War Medicine

1. Describe the differences in medical treatment between the Union and the Confederacy. Each side had different doctors in charge of care. What were their philosophies on medical care?
2. Explain the impact that women had on the care of soldiers.
3. Do further research on one of these women: Louisa May Alcott, Jane Stuart Woolsey, or Datharine Prescott Wormeley. What was the woman's contribution and impact the war?
3. What were some of the most common diseases and illnesses? What were the treatments?

4. Describe how soldiers were taken care of when they received treatment or were sent to a "hospital" after being wounded in battle.

The Battles

1. Choose two battles. Describe each and compare the strategies and results of each.

2. Compare and contrast a union and confederate general or other leader involved in one of the battles. How are they alike and different.

3. List some advantages the north and south had over each other.

Letters from an Iowa Soldier

1. These letters add a personal touch to the battles and illnesses as seen through the eyes of a young man. What were some aspects of the war that made the largest impact on him? What new information have you learned about the war through his eyes?

Narrative of Gettysburg

1. What was the girl's involvement in the Civil War?

2. How did the war affect her?

3. Why was she seen as a hero?

4. In what ways does this narrative make you look at the war differently?

5. Compare this account with other diaries or narratives that you have read including Carrie Berry, or Alice Williamson. How do they differ?

Civil War love letters

1. Take notes on new information that you learn reading these personal letters. Is there a common theme?

Maps These maps are a good resource for research on battles or strategies

Blacks in the Civil War Make sure to read all three sections of part 1. The links can be found at the top.

1. How were black soldiers looked upon?

2. What were their contributions to the war effort?
Civil War

Emancipation Proclamation

Homelife

1. During the Civil War, what was life like back at home. Use this site as a jumping off point to do your own research on American life during the Civil War.

Music/Poetry

Poetry

1. Choose some of your favorite poetry to read aloud to a small group.

2. Write a Civil War poem of your own based on the information that you have acquired during this class. Incorporate aspects that have affected you the most.

Music

1. Compose your own music that is reminiscent of the time period.

Images

Image site 1

Image site 2

1. These photographs will give you yet another "look" at the war. Choose one that moves you and share your thoughts about it with the class.
Slavery

"In thinking of America, I sometimes find myself admiring her bright blue sky-her grand old woods-her fertile fields-her beautiful rivers-her mighty lakes and star-crowned mountains. But my rapture is soon checked when I remember that all is cursed with the infernal spirit of slave-holding and wrong; When I remember that with the waters of her noblest rivers, the tears of my brethren are borne to the ocean, disregarded and forgotten, That her most fertile fields drink daily of the warm blood of my outraged sisters, I am filled with unutterable loathing." Frederick Douglass

Objectives/Focus

Slavery was at the heart many debates and disagreements between northerners and southerners. The following readings will give some insight into how slavery began, the lifestyle of slaves, and the tragedy of it all.

Required Readings

Slavery When you get to this site, click on Judgment day and then click on Narrative. Read through the narrative. This will take you to just part of this site. There is extensive information available on the other pages of this site about the aspects of slavery.

The Peculiar Institution

Assignment Choices

Research one of these people. Explain why they were important to the time and present to the class your findings.

Charles Ball
John Brown
Anthony Burns
Pierce Butler
Frederick Douglass
William Lloyd Garrison
Harriet Jacobs
Fanny Kemble
Nat Turner
David Walker

2. Make a list of new information that you have found out about slavery from these two sites. Write down two more aspects that you would like to know about and conduct research on your own. Use the Internet and printed material.
Other Readings

The following two sites have extensive narratives and interviews with former slaves and slave traders covering a wide variety of topics. A large amount of time could be spent reading the information on an individual basis and discussing and journaling, or if time does not permit, the class could be divided up so different groups could explore one area and report their findings to the rest of the class.

Slave Interviews

Slave Narratives

1. As you read selections from the following sites, take notes about what you have learned, what surprised you, and how you have changed as a result of reading the information. Discuss in small groups your findings and feelings.

2. Many slaves suffered greatly from their living conditions. Putting all other aspects of slavery aside and just concentrating on living conditions, if in today's world you were responsible for housing 600 people who would work for you on a daily basis, develop a presentation that details the accommodations that would have to be made. Include housing, medical care, food etc... Taking this one step farther, how could you create a living environment where these people could live in harmony.

Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation

1. Write a conversation that Frances Anne Kemble may have had with a friend about her visit to the plantation when she returned to England.

Underground Railroad

1. Write a journal entry as a historical figure, or a made up character that was involved in the underground railroad. You can take the perspective of a sympathizer that helped slaves or a slave on the run.

2. If you lived in the North and found a runaway slave, do you think you would have obeyed the Fugitive Slave Law and returned the person the slavery?

Abolitionists

Abolitionism

1. After reading the two selections on Abolitionist. Describe some of the main people involved and what their impact was on the time.
Women and the Civil War

Objectives/Focus

Women played important roles in the outcome of the Civil War. You will learn about how women helped slaves to freedom, nursed the sick, and even spied for the north and south.

Readings

Ladies Union and Aid Society

1. Describe the work of LUAS. What risks, and suffering did they endure? What do you think drove women of the time to endure such difficulties to volunteer in the war effort?

Diary of Carrie Berry

1. This is part of a diary written by a ten year old girl. Continue on with more journal entries describing how the family began to rebuild their life.

Sarah E. Thompson Papers

Alice Williamson Diary

1. From reading this diary, what were Alice Williamson's feelings about the Civil War?

2. Describe General Paine. What role did he play in the war? What hardships did the towns people endure because of him?

Rose O'Neal Greenhow

Women as spies

1. Why would women make such good spies during the Civil War?

2. Describe how women helped the cause of the north or south by spying. Choose one of the women to research further on the Internet and libraries.
Post War Reconstruction

Objectives/Focus

Putting the pieces back together and figuring out how the nation would heal itself took years of struggle. You will learn about some of the efforts to put the war behind the United States.

Required Readings

Reconstruction

More on Reconstruction

Reconstruction Abandoned

1. Read over parts one and two. How did the end of the war immediately affect black people? Why do you think attitudes began to slip backwards?

2. Why do you think it has been so difficult for black people do obtain equal rights and full citizenship?
3. What were the results of the Civil War?
Overview

There is no one way to progress through the topics that are covered in this class. If time permits, you can start at the beginning with "Life before the war and progress through the pages. However the topics can be covered by themselves to fit into shorter time periods, to break up the information, or to add information to a unit that is already in progress or is finished. While reading about one subject, you may find a topic that really interest you, feel free to break away from the readings and assignments and search the web or library for more information on the topic. Sharing this information that you find with other students in the class will enrich the experience for everyone. Throughout the course students will be asked to journal about their feelings, an electronic journal would work nicely since it is possible to have "course buddies" that students can correspond with during the class. (Read more about course buddies under Teacher's Notes). Many of the links and assignments can be used as jumping off points for students to do more research on the web or in libraries. There is a massive amount of information available on this topic. The information found on this online course should give students a good overview of the Civil War era.

Teacher's Notes

You may wish to participate in this course with another class. You can invite other local schools that you are familiar with, or send emails to schools around the country to invite opinion from different geographical areas. The global Schoolhouse has an area to list projects and invite others to participate. Also, some of the readings are of a sensitive nature and may not be appropriate for all students. Please read ahead and know what your students are about to read.

Cumulative Questions

Questions to consider at the end of this online class

1. Which person or place from the Civil War would you commemorate, or honor, with a monument? If you choose a person instead of an event, where would it be located, and why?

2. Why do you think the Civil War claimed more American lives than all other wars we have fought combined?