

Curriculum Connections

An American Story: The Knapsack

- Background information for the educator

Learning by Doing: A Day in the Life of a Knapsack

- Classroom activities based on the object

Interdisciplinary Content Standards

- WR 3 - use critical thinking and problem-solving skills
- VPA 1.3 - utilize arts elements to produce artistic products
- LA 3.1 - speak in a variety of contexts
- LA 3.2 - active listening, interpreting, responding
- LA 3.3 - compose texts for real and varied purposes
- LA 3.5 - view, understand, use non-textual information
- M 4.4 - develop reasoning ability/logical thinking skills
- M 4.7 - apply spatial and geometric models to physical world
- M 4.9 - develop understanding of measurement
- S 5.2 - develop problem-solving skills, formulate hypotheses, interpret data
- SS 6.2 - learn citizenship through humanities
- SS 6.3 - acquire historical understanding of political ideas/forces
- SS 6.4 - acquire historical understanding of societal ideas/forces
- SS 6.6 - acquire historical understanding of economic ideas/forces
- SS 6.8 - acquire geographical understanding through human systems

Learning Styles & Multiple Intelligences

kinesthetic
visual
linguistic
logical-mathematical

Related Subject Areas

weight
human needs and wants
war
empathy
living conditions



An American Story

The Knapsack explained

This knapsack belonged to Sergeant Charles Carrel of New Jersey, who fought in the Civil War for the Union Army, serving in Company B of the Second New Jersey Cavalry. Carrel's knapsack is made of canvas, leather, and metal, and his name is stamped and penciled on it. It was given to the New Jersey Historical Society by his family in 1983.

Knapsacks were standard issue for troops on both sides of the war. When full, they often weighed up to fifty pounds. Some knapsacks were covered with a black paint that melted in the sun and soiled everything it came into contact with. A soldier's knapsack carried everything he needed for survival. Gear carried by troops might include a change of clothes, underwear, coat, cap, photographs, letters, stationery, Bible, tobacco, pipes, comb and brush, shaving tools, sewing kit, soap, food rations, and whatever mess (eating) equipment did not hang from his belt. In addition, troops carried muskets in hand, swords on their belts, and possibly a blanket for sleeping.

Mobility, so important to survival in the war, was greatly impaired under such weight. Infantrymen had to walk, often as much as 20 to 30 miles per day, carrying this weight all the while. Not surprisingly, more seasoned soldiers pared down their belongings to the bare essentials. Some preferred in the end not to carry a knapsack at all. Later in the war, troops often opted for haversacks – satchel-type bags with shoulder straps that rested on the opposite hip that were smaller than knapsacks.

What became of Sergeant Carrel?

Carrel's volunteer regiment fought in several of the famous battles of the war – those of Bull Run, Virginia (July 21, 1861); Gaines Farm, VA (June 27, 1862); and Malvern Hill, VA (July 1, 1862). Carrel was one of about 10,000 men who volunteered to fight when President Lincoln requested volunteers from New Jersey. He died shortly after the Malvern Hill battle, having contracted typhoid fever in the swamps of the Chickahominy River.

It was not until the following year that his father, John L. Carrel, was able to travel to Maryland to collect his son's body and personal belongings. Typhoid, called "Camp Fever," was one of the perils faced by the soldiers. Typhoid is caused by ingesting water or food containing the *Salmonella Typhi Bacterium*; it caused a high fever that lasted for weeks, followed by delirium, dehydration, and death. Typhoid's symptoms do not appear until two weeks after exposure, making early detection and treatment very difficult. Typhoid caused about one-fourth of all deaths from disease in the Civil War. Today, typhoid is treatable and not fatal.

How did soldiers survive?

The lack of sleep, stress of war, and poor diet that soldiers endured over long periods of time made even the youngest and sturdiest soldiers easy prey for disease. It was not uncommon for a soldier to lose 20 to 25 pounds in the first few months of service. For the Confederates, the diet staple was cornbread; for the Union soldiers, it was “hardtack,” a rock-hard bread that had to be soaked in order to be edible. In addition, they had rations of salt pork, other meats, an occasional onion and dried fruit. More often than not, however, there was no more than the cornbread or the hardtack, carefully concealed in the knapsack. One soldier boiled his greasy haversack to make a soup broth when he ran out of food. On both sides of the war, and for the United States in general, the Civil War devastated a generation.





Top: The Noncommissioned staff of the 15th New Jersey Volunteers, 1864

Bottom: Second New Jersey Cavalry, Civil War. Lt. Carrel (whose knapsack is featured) was part of this unit. Collections of the New Jersey Historical Society, Newark

Learning by Doing

A Day in the Life of a Knapsack

OBJECT: *The Knapsack*

SUMMARY:

Students explore the living conditions and hardships of Civil War soldiers through a series of discovery activities based on the artifact – a knapsack – belonging to a soldier who lived in New Jersey and fought in the Union Army. Students read, observe, and analyze the knapsack; create a chart of a soldier’s personal belongings to uncover clues to the life of a soldier; and compare life today to life during the Civil War. They then write a narrative, perform a skit, or write a song about a day in the life of a knapsack.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

Students will:

- Observe and analyze the role of a soldier’s knapsack used during the Civil War.
- Compare the life of a Civil War soldier to life in the present day.
- Sharpen creative thinking, writing, and oral presentation skills.
- Gain a greater understanding of the daily life, living conditions, and hardships of a Civil War soldier.

MATERIALS:

Paper
Pencils
Color photocopy of the soldier’s knapsack

Learning by Doing

A Day in the Life of a Knapsack

PROCEDURE

INTRODUCTION

WR 3 - use critical thinking and problem-solving skills

LA 3.1 - speak in a variety of contexts

LA 3.2 - active listening, interpreting, responding

Begin this activity with a discussion about the bags students use to carry their books and personal belongings to school. Students will also discuss the advantages and disadvantages of using backpacks. These questions will prepare the students for their subsequent discussion of the soldier's knapsack.

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS:

- What do you use to carry your books and personal belongings to school?
- What parts of your body do you use to carry a schoolbag and a backpack?
- What is the advantage of carrying a bag on your back?

READING AN OBJECT

WR 3 - use critical thinking and problem-solving skills

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LA 3.3 - compose texts for real and varied purposes

LA 3.5 - view, understand, use non-textual information

M 4.7 - apply spatial and geometric models to physical world

M 4.9 - develop understanding of measurement

The following discussion questions will help students “read” (observe and analyze) the object – the soldier's knapsack. These questions will introduce students to the needs, daily life, and hardships of a Civil War soldier.

The materials and function of the object

Discuss the materials, age, condition, and use of the object. Students “read” the object and try to guess what the object is, how it was used, and who used it.

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS:

- What materials were used to make the object? (*Leather, canvas, and metal*)
How was the object made? (*Sewn*)
- Describe what the object looks like when it's open and when it's closed.
- What do you think the object was used for?
- Are there marks or letters on the object? What do they say?
- How was it carried? How can you tell?
- Who might have needed to use it? How can you tell?

The daily life of a soldier

After the students discover who would have used the knapsack and how it was probably used during the Civil War, these questions help students to explore the life of a soldier through continued observation and analysis of the object and the belongings it might have held.

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS:

- **How did most soldiers travel during the Civil War? Why do you think a soldier used a knapsack?** *(On foot; to carry belongings leaving hands free)*
- **What do you think a soldier needed to carry inside the knapsack to survive? Think about food, shelter, clothing, communication, health, and personal objects.** *(Brainstorm a list)*
- **How heavy do you think the knapsack was with all those items?** *(To explore this idea further, see activity idea below)*
- **What did a soldier need to carry that might not fit in the bag? How might he have carried these belongings?**
- **How might the soldiers have felt carrying all these belongings on their backs?**

Carrying the Load

Students can experience the weight of knapsacks carried by the Civil War soldiers by comparing weight carried on their backs, over one shoulder, and in their arms. Since fifty pounds, the typical weight of a soldier's knapsack, is too heavy for most students to pick up, experiment with items and a collection of objects from home or school, that weigh a total of ten pounds. Examples include a stack of textbooks, reams of paper, and two five pound bags of flour. Experiment with weight on the back, put ten pounds of flour in a knapsack and then over one shoulder. Which way feels lighter? Which is more comfortable? How does this compare to carrying the weight in your arms?

WHAT'S INSIDE THE KNAPSACK? – Writing and Charting Activity

WR 3 - use critical thinking and problem-solving skills

LA 3.1 - speak in a variety of contexts

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M 4.4 - develop reasoning ability/logical thinking skills

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Learning by Doing

A Day in the Life of a Knapsack

Students create a chart and discuss the personal belongings found in a knapsack to further investigate and analyze the living conditions and needs of Civil War foot soldiers.

Students make a list of the belongings using the text and their observations from the “Reading An Object” activity. The list may also include personal belongings that were not in the sacks but were still carried by the foot soldier, such as his sword. For reference, a list is provided below.

1. Students write a very short description on how and why each item might have been used. For example, stationery – to write letters back home; sewing kit – to repair clothing; or cap—for warmth and protection from the sun.

Not in the knapsack – blanket, sword, musket.

In the knapsack – clothing, underwear, coat, cap, photographs, letters, stationery, Bible, tobacco, pipes, comb and brush, shaving tools, sewing kit, soap, food rations, eating and cooking equipment.

2. Conclude the activity by helping students understand the living conditions of a foot soldier during the Civil War and by comparing life today to life during the Civil War. What are the similarities and differences concerning food, shelter, clothing, protection, medical equipment, and communication?

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS:

- Based on the information gathered on the chart, how would you describe the living conditions of a Civil War foot soldier?
- Pretend you are a foot soldier. As you travel, the weight of the knapsack with all your personal belongings is too much to carry. What do you choose to drop? What can't you do if you don't have those items?
- If you were a foot soldier today, what would you include in a knapsack? Consider food, clothing, shelter, health, and communication. Why did you choose these items?
- How can you make your school knapsack lighter? For example, you might bring dried fruit instead of fresh fruit or a rain poncho instead of an umbrella.

WHAT'S INSIDE THE KNAPSACK? – Role-playing Activity

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Students pretend to be a Civil War knapsack

Students pretend to be a knapsack worn by a foot soldier in the Civil War. They write a diary entry, create a short skit, or write a song about “one day in the life of a knapsack” using the information from the previous chart activity and the “Reading An Object” activity. By personalizing and pretending to be a knapsack, students will increase their creative thinking skills and their understanding of life during the Civil War.

Students write a diary entry, create a short skit, or write a song from the point of view of the knapsack.

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS:

- **What would you see?**
- **What are you holding?**
- **Who is carrying you?**
- **Where is the soldier going?**
- **Where does the soldier sleep and eat?**

Learning by Doing

A Day in the Life of a Knapsack

WHAT'S INSIDE THE KNAPSACK? – Presentation

VPA 1.3 - utilize arts elements to produce artistic products

LA 3.2 - active listening, interpreting, responding

Students read the diaries, perform the skits, or sing the songs at a final class presentation. To conclude the presentation, a classroom discussion follows which helps students to summarize the information gathered in all the above activities.

SUGGESTED QUESTION:

- **Thinking about the diary entries, what are some of the common elements in all the presentations concerning the hardships and living conditions of the Civil War?**

ACTIVITY EXTENSIONS:

- Students make believe they are soldiers in the Civil War and write letters to friends back home in New Jersey. Describe the daily events, the hardships, and feelings of a soldier's life. Students read their letters to the class.
- Students design a knapsack to carry on a long hiking trip through New Jersey for one month. Make a list of the personal belongings and supplies that are needed for the trip and that will have to fit inside the sack. Draw the outside of the knapsack and the inside compartments.
- Students research the daily life of both Confederate and Union soldiers. Divide the class into groups responsible for individual research topics such as clothing, food, shelter, ranks and duties, recruitment, health and medicine, and daily life. Each group reports on its findings.