



Chicago Historical Society



CIVIL WAR PHOTOGRAPHY

Grade level: Late elementary through middle school

Estimated time: One to two class periods

Specific Topic: Civil War photography

Subtopic: Photograph analysis and interpretation

Teacher background information

The Civil War (1861–65) was the first American war to be photographed extensively.

For the first time in history, the American public could observe the realities of war through photographic images. The use of photography during the Civil War has preserved glimpses of what life was like during this period.

Matthew Brady is one of America's most famous photographers. At the onset of the Civil War, Brady recognized the importance of photographing the war and suspected that such photography would be profitable. He and his staff took more than seven thousand pictures documenting the war.

The exact date and place of Matthew Brady's birth is not known, but it is believed that he was born around 1823. As a young man, Brady moved to New York City to work as a jewel case manufacturer. In New York, he met an inventor named Samuel Morse, who taught him a photographic process called daguerreotype. Brady became fascinated with photography and opened a studio of his own in the city in 1843.

During the Civil War, photography was in its infancy. Unlike today's cameras, which have adjustable shutter speeds to allow photographers to capture moving objects, the technology at the time made it difficult to

capture movement effectively. Therefore, most of photographs from this era are still shots. Additionally, Brady and his staff often arranged their photographs to produce the desired look or effect. To produce a sharp picture, people being photographed needed to stay as still as possible during the process.

Matthew Brady photographed many famous people, including Abraham Lincoln, Stephen Douglas, Ulysses Grant, Edward Stanton, Thaddeus Stevens, Horace Greeley, Daniel Webster, and John Calhoun. He also took the pictures of many Union officers, who wanted to be photographed before going into battle. Brady won an award for his work at an exhibition in London.

At the time of the Civil War, Brady's eyes were beginning to fail. As this happened, he began to depend more and more on his assistants to document the war. However, Matthew Brady personally photographed the Battle of Bull Run at Manassas, Virginia, in 1861.

It was Brady's hope that the United States government would purchase his work after the war for a large amount of money. Unfortunately, this was not the case. Although Brady invested close to \$100,000 photographing the war, the government purchased his images for only \$25,000. Brady was forced to sell all of his studios and went into bankruptcy. He died on January 15, 1896, in New York.



Key concepts

Information about life during the Civil War can be found through close examination of photographs of the era.

Key questions

What can we learn about life during the Civil War from photographs? How would historians’ understanding of Civil War life be different without these photographs? How does the use of photography and video affect our interpretation of today’s conflicts? Should the atrocities of war be photographed and documented?

Goal of this lesson

The goal of this lesson is for students to learn about daily life during the Civil War by studying photography from that era. Students will also analyze how photography affects our interpretation of the Civil War.

Objective

Students will use primary sources—photographs—to learn about Civil War-era people, objects, and activities.

Materials

Master copies of the following photographs and handouts are provided.

1. “Inspection of troops at Cumberland Landing” (CHS, ICHI-08092)
2. “Battery Stevens, two 1,000 pound parrot rifles. Breaking battery against Sumter” (CHS, ICHI-07783)
3. “President Abraham Lincoln on Antietam Battlefield” (CHS, ICHI-22224)
4. “Camp scene with family” (CHS, ICHI-22155)
5. “Gettysburg” (CHS, ICHI-07923)
6. “Officers of the 82nd Regiment of Illinois, taken in Atlanta, Georgia” (CHS, ICHI-08204)
7. “Photograph Analysis” worksheets (4 pages)
8. “Key Questions” worksheet
9. Reference materials: Internet and Civil War history books (optional)



*Detail of “President Abraham Lincoln on Antietam Battlefield.”
CHS, ICHI-22224.*

Procedures

Day 1

Break students into six small groups. Distribute one photograph (each group should receive a different photograph) and one copy of the “Photograph Analysis” worksheet to each group. Review the worksheet with students. Have students note the number on the photograph they received. Inform students that they will complete the activity in a rotation. Each group will have ten minutes to analyze a photograph, and then groups will switch photographs. At the end of the activity, every group will have analyzed all six photographs.

Instruct students to collaboratively fill in the chart pertaining to the people, objects, and surrounding activities in each photograph and then answer the questions. Every ten minutes or so, the groups will switch photographs and repeat.

Day 2

After each group has analyzed all six photographs, give students the opportunity to share their findings. Each group should report on one photograph and divide up the information presented among group members. This will ensure that every student has an opportunity to participate.

Distribute the “Key Questions” worksheet. Give one photograph to every student or student group or display all six photographs in the front of the classroom. Allow time for students to complete the questions in class or assign as homework.



Detail of "Camp scene with family." CHS, ICHi-22155

Suggestions for student assessment

Each group can receive a grade for each worksheet completed. In addition, the teacher can give individual grades to students based on their speaking skills as they report their group's observations from the photographs.

Extension activities

1. Instruct students to cut out images of current conflicts from newspapers or magazines. Use the same Photograph Analysis worksheet to interpret the current images. Hold a class discussion about present-day documentation of conflict. Compare the documentation to that of the Civil War era.
2. Ask students to document important parts of their lives. Instruct them to take five to eight photographs, which represent people or things of importance to them. Students may consider photographing friends, family, possessions, clothes, homes, sports, religious icons, or even hobbies. Have students create a poster of their photographs. Students should then share their images with the class and explain the importance of each image.

Additional resources

Davis, William C. *First Blood: Fort Sumter to Bull Run*. Alexandria, Virginia: Time Life Books, 1983.

This lesson fulfills the following Illinois Learning Standards:

English Language Arts

State Goal 3: Write to communicate for a variety of purposes.

State Goal 4: Listen and speak effectively in a variety of situations.

Social Science

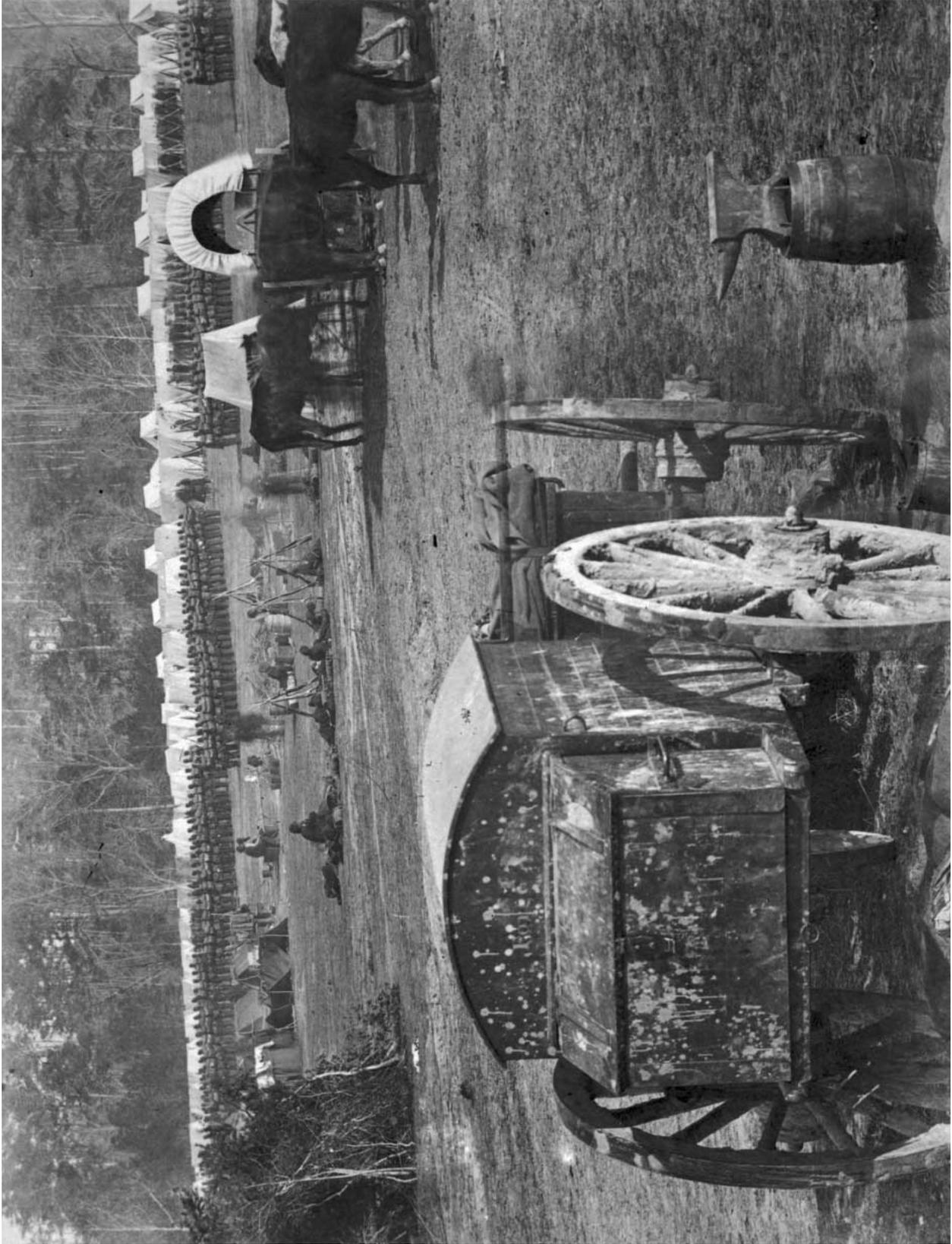
State Goal 15: Understand, analyze, and compare economic systems, with an emphasis on the United States.

State Goal 16: Understand events, trends, individuals, and movements shaping the history of the United States and other nations.

Science

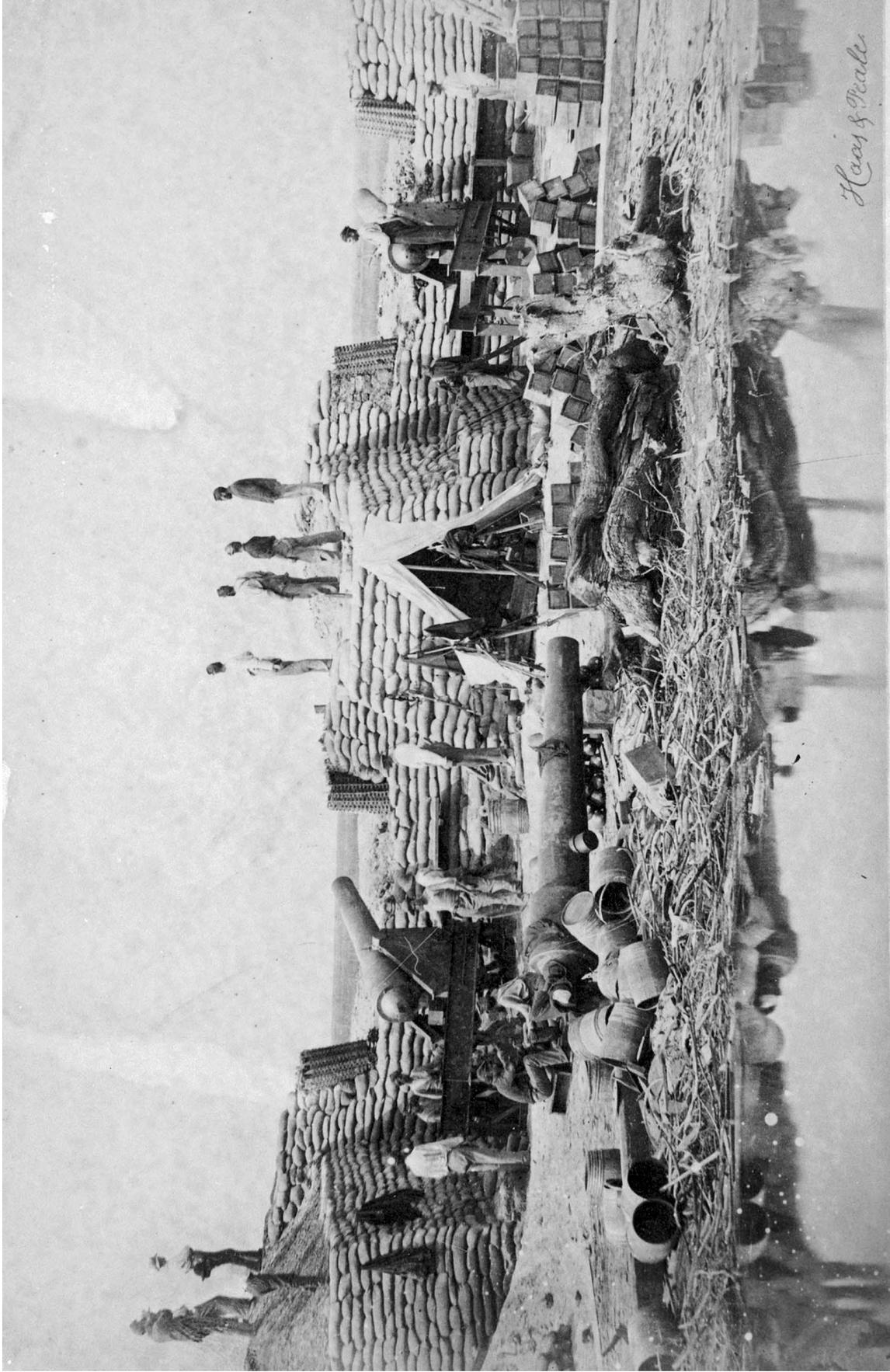
State Goal 13: Understand the relationships among science, technology, and society in historical and contemporary contexts.

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I Inspection of troops at Cumberland Landing

Chicago Historical Society, ICHI-08092



2 Battery Stevens, two 1,000 pound parrot rifles. breaking battery against Sumter

Chicago Historical Society, ICHi-07783



3 President Abraham Lincoln on Antietam Battlefield

Chicago Historical Society, ICHi-22224



4 Camp scene with family
Chicago Historical Society, ICHI-22155





6 Officers of the 82nd Regiment of Illinois, taken in Atlanta, Georgia

Chicago Historical Society, ICHI-08204

PHOTOGRAPH ANALYSIS (part 1, page 1)

Directions: Your group will have ten minutes to study each photograph. Use the chart below to record as much information as you can about the people, objects, and the surrounding activities in the photograph. Then answer the questions below.

Photograph #	Title	People	Objects	Surrounding Activities
1.	Inspection of troops at Cumberland Landing			
2.	Battery Stevens, two 1,000 pound parrot rifles. breaking battery against Sumter			
3.	President Abraham Lincoln on Antietam Battlefield			

PHOTOGRAPH ANALYSIS (part 2, page 2)

Directions: Your group will have ten minutes to study each photograph. Use the chart below to record as much information as you can about the people, objects, and the surrounding activities in the photograph. Then answer the questions below.

Photograph #	Title	People	Objects	Surrounding Activities
4.	Camp scene with family			
5.	Gettysburg			
6.	Officers of the 82nd Regiment of Illinois, taken in Atlanta, Georgia			

PHOTOGRAPH ANALYSIS (part 2, page 1)

Answer the following questions for each photograph:

What do you think are the most important parts of the photograph? Why?

Photograph 1: _____

Photograph 2: _____

Photograph 3: _____

What is one conclusion you can make about the Civil War based on this photograph?

Photograph 1: _____

Photograph 2: _____

Photograph 3: _____

Write down one question that you have about this photograph.

Photograph 1: _____

Photograph 2: _____

Photograph 3: _____

PHOTOGRAPH ANALYSIS (page 2, page 2)

Answer the following questions for each photograph:

What do you think are the most important parts of the photograph? Why?

Photograph 4: _____

Photograph 5: _____

Photograph 6: _____

What is one conclusion you can make about the Civil War based on this photograph?

Photograph 4: _____

Photograph 5: _____

Photograph 6: _____

Write down one question that you have about this photograph.

Photograph 4: _____

Photograph 5: _____

Photograph 6: _____

KEY QUESTIONS

Name _____ Date _____

Directions: Read each question carefully and answer with complete sentences.

1. Before the invention of photography, how do you think people learned what war was like?

2. Would our interpretation of the Civil War be different without these photographs? Why or why not?

3. Which photograph is the most interesting to you and why?

4. Write down two things you can learn about life during the Civil War from these photographs.

- a. _____
- b. _____

5. How did people learn about war and conflict during the Civil War? How do people learn about war and conflict today?

6. Do you think photographers should be able to photograph current and future wars? Why or why not?

7. Are there any images of war or conflict that should not be made public?

8. Can the use of photography affect a person's opinion about a war or conflict? How?

