

Cliff Nitschke: 8<sup>th</sup> Grade U.S. History Teacher  
Kastner Intermediate School; Clovis Unified School District

**Topic:**                    **Civil War Medicine**

**Abstract:**

In this lesson, students, working individually, with partners or small groups, will use various websites to investigate the role medicine and doctors played during the American Civil War. The student activities are independent of one another and do not need to be completed in order or even by all students. Each activity culminates in a student created product.

Students will read accounts of surgeons and doctors, through the documents on the Legion of Valor website and other internet sites. It is to be noted that Medals of Honor were presented to doctors and surgeons during the Civil War.

**Grade Level:**        8

**Time to Complete:** 5 to 10 hours

**Standard(s) Covered:**

**8.10** Students analyze the multiple causes, key events, and complex consequences of the Civil War.  
7. Explain how the war affected combatants, civilians, the physical environment and future warfare.

**Major Objective(s):**

The major objective of this lesson is to help students to understand the role that lack of modern medicine, disease and improvements in weaponry played in the Civil War. One witness described a common surgeon's tent this way: "Tables about breast high had been erected upon which the screaming victims were having legs and arms cut off. The surgeons and their assistants, stripped to the waist and bespattered with blood, stood around, some holding the poor fellows while others, armed with long, bloody knives and saws, cut and sawed away with frightful rapidity, throwing the mangled limbs on a pile nearby as soon as removed."

**Major Points To Teach:**

- Approximately 620,000 men-360,000 Northerners and 260,000 Southerners-died in the four-year conflict, a figure that tops the total fatalities of all other wars in which America has fought.
- Approximately 110,000 Union and 94,000 Confederate men died of wounds received in battle
- The most common Civil War small arms ammunition was the dreadful minnie ball, which tore an enormous wound on impact: it was so heavy that an abdominal or head wound was almost always fatal, and a hit to an extremity usually shattered any bone encountered. In addition, bullets carried dirt and germs into the wound that often caused infection.
- Of the approximately 175,000 wounds to the extremities received among Federal troops, about 30,000 led to amputation; roughly the same proportion occurred in the Confederacy.
- Those who survived their wounds and surgeries still had another hurdle, however: the high risk of infection. While most surgeons were aware of a relationship between cleanliness and low infection rates, they did not know how to sterilize their equipment.
- While the average soldier believed the bullet was his most nefarious foe, disease was the biggest killer of the war. Of the Federal dead, roughly three out of five died of disease, and of the Confederate, perhaps two out of three

## **Suggested Strategies:**

- Students will be exposed through the three modalities through classroom discussion of the topic, through the use of visuals by using the television or video projector and the researching of assigned internet sites and note taking on their laptops.
- Students will be able to participate throughout the lesson through discussion as a class, individually and in their groups. Since this is a web based activity, the lesson will also be hands on with the students actively participating using their textbooks and the internet.
- Throughout the lesson, questioning will occur and the students will be given the opportunity to express themselves allowing the teacher to monitor their grasp of the material presented.

## **Practices:**

### Student Activity 1:

Design and create a poster, advertising for recruitment of doctors and nurses to serve in the war.

- Begin by drawing, or you may use a computer drawing program and scanned pictures.
- Create or find pictures of doctors, nurses and soldiers to use as examples.
- Write descriptions for the pictures (be sure to give details) and incorporate quotes from Abraham Lincoln encouraging doctors and nurses to lend support.
- Design an eye-catching slogan.
- Make as historically accurate as possible.

### Student Activity 2:

Create a historical newspaper front page, from the time period, which details the awarding of the Medal of Honor to Dr. Mary Walker, the only woman that ever received it.

- Using the descriptions provided by the documents on the Legion of Valor site and other sources, write a newspaper story detailing the awarding of the Medal of Honor to doctors during the Civil War.
- Using a sheet of paper mock up the front page of a Civil War era newspaper, including the Banner: name of paper, date, city published; Headline
- Try to make the newspaper as realistic looking as possible.

### Student Activity 3:

Write a report that details medicine during the Civil War.

- Research medicine and sanitary conditions and write a report that would have appeared in a Civil War era publication.
- The report should be 1-2 pages long and include pictures.
- It should tell something about the doctors, especially Dr. Mary Walker, that won the Medal of Honor.
- When you have edited and rewritten it, turn it in to your teacher in the form that he or she has requested.

## **RESOURCES:**

### **Legion of Valor Archives Materials:**

The names listed below are the Andrew's Raiders veterans that received the Medal of Honor and documents relating to receiving this honor as well as military records can be found at the links listed in the Legion of Valor Archives.

#### **GEORGE WASHINGTON BRUSH: Dentist & Physician**

Rank and Organization: Lieutenant, Company B, 34th U.S. Colored Troops. Place and Date: At Ashepoo River, S.C., 24 May 1864. Entered Service At: New York. Born: 4 October 1842, West Kill, N.Y. Date of Issue: 21 January 1897. Voluntarily commanded a boat crew, which went to the rescue of a large number of Union soldiers on board the stranded steamer Boston, and with great gallantry succeeded in conveying them to shore, being exposed during the entire time to heavy fire from a Confederate battery.

<http://lovarchive.fcoe.net/weblink/index.asp?DocumentID=7789&FolderID=3838&SearchHandle=0&DocViewType=ShowImage&LeftPaneType=Hidden&dbid=0&page=1>

#### **GABRIEL GRANT**

Rank and organization: Surgeon, U.S. Volunteers. Place and date: At Fair Oaks, Va., 1 June 1862. Entered service at: New York. Born: Newark, N.J. Date of issue: 21 July 1897. Citation: Removed severely wounded officers and soldiers from the field while under a heavy fire from the enemy, exposing himself beyond the call of duty, thus furnishing an example of most distinguished gallantry.

<http://lovarchive.fcoe.net/weblink/index.asp?DocumentID=8079&FolderID=3838&SearchHandle=0&DocViewType=ShowImage&LeftPaneType=Hidden&dbid=0&page=1>

#### **DR. MARY E. WALKER**

Rank and organization: Contract Acting Assistant Surgeon (civilian), U. S. Army. Places and dates: Battle of Bull Run, July 21, 1861; Patent Office Hospital, Washington, D.C., October 1861; Chattanooga, Tenn., following Battle of Chickomauga, September 1863; Prisoner of War, April 10, 1864\_August 12, 1864, Richmond, Va.; Battle of Atlanta, September 1864. Entered service at: Louisville, Ky. Born: 26 November 1832, Oswego County, N.Y. Citation: Whereas it appears from official reports that Dr. Mary E. Walker, a graduate of medicine, "has rendered valuable service to the Government. and her efforts have been earnest ~ in a variety of ways," and that she was assigned to duty and served as an assistant surgeon in charge of female prisoners at Louisville, Ky., upon the recommendation of Major Generals Sherman and Thomas, and faithfully served as contract surgeon in the service of the United States, and has devoted herself with much patriotic zeal to the sick and wounded soldiers, both in the field and hospitals, to the detriment of her own health, and has also endured hardships as a prisoner of war four months in a Southern prison while acting as contract surgeon; and

Whereas by reason of her not being a commissioned officer in the military service, a brevet or honorary rank cannot, under existing laws, be conferred upon her; and

Whereas in the opinion of the President an honorable recognition of her services and sufferings should be made:

It is ordered, That a testimonial thereof shall be hereby made and given to the said Dr. Mary E. Walker, and that the usual medal of honor for meritorious services be given her.

Given under my hand in the city of Washington, D.C., this 11th day of November, A.D. 1865.

<http://lovarchive.fcoe.net/weblink/index.asp?DocumentID=7119&FolderID=3838&SearchHandle=0&DocViewType=ShowImage&LeftPaneType=Hidden&dbid=0&page=1>

## **Internet Links:**

### **The Doctor is a Lady: Mary Walker Got Her Medal--And Kept It**

The Story of Doctor Mary Walker, the only woman recipient of the Medal of Honor during the Civil War.

<http://www2.froggernet.com/captain/walkermd.html>

### **The National Museum of Civil War Medicine**

This site is set up to provide detailed information on the people and practices of medicine during the Civil War.

<http://www.civilwarmed.org/index.cfm>

### **Civil War Medicine**

This site has invaluable information on many aspects of medicine during the Civil War and numerous links and pictures to aide in research.

<http://www.civilwarhome.com/civilwarmedicineintro.htm>

### **Civil War Medicine**

This site contains information on all aspects of Civil War medicine and incredible links to information and pictures.

<http://www.library.vcu.edu/tml/bibs/cwmed.html>

### **Civil War Battlefield Medicine**

This Site contains General Medical Sites Index: An Introduction to Civil War Medicine; Common Civil War Medical Terms; Civil War Dentistry; and much more in terms of links and pictures.

<http://www.ehistory.com/uscw/features/medicine/cwsurgeon/index.cfm>

## **Materials Required for Lesson:**

This lesson is written for use in a classroom with at least one computer with internet access. It would work equally well in a computer lab situation.

## **Assessment:**

Student projects will be assessed as follows:

- Followed all instructions.
- The project is neat, easy to read and creative.
- The project is historically accurate.
- The main idea is clearly stated.
- Ideas are clarified and supported with evidence and examples.

