



Social Studies Exemplary Text Student Handout

One of the questions often asked a Civil War historian is, “Why did the North fight?” Southern motives seem easier to understand. Confederates fought for independence, for their own property and way of life, for their very survival as a nation. But what did the Yankees fight for? Why did they persist through four years of the bloodiest conflict in American history, costing 360,000 northern lives—not to mention 260,000 southern lives and untold destruction of resources? Puzzling over this question in 1863, Confederate War Department clerk John Jones wrote in his diary: “Our men must prevail in combat, or lose their property, country, freedom, everything.... On the other hand the enemy, in yielding the contest, may retire into their own country, and possess everything they enjoyed before the war began.”

If that was true, why did the Yankees keep fighting? We can find much of the answer in Abraham Lincoln’s notable speeches: the Gettysburg Address, his first and second inaugural addresses, the peroration of his message to Congress on December 1, 1862. But we can find even more of the answer in the wartime letters and diaries of the men who did the fighting. Confederates who said that they fought for the same goals as their forebears of 1776 would have been surprised by the intense conviction of the northern soldiers that they were upholding the legacy of the American Revolution.

McPherson, J. M. (1994). *The Best Government on God’s Footstool. What They Fought For 1861–1865*. New York: Anchor.

This is an example of exemplary text found in *Common Core Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects: Appendix B Text Exemplars and Sample Performance Tasks*. Retrieved from http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix_B.pdf

Social Studies Exemplary Text Teacher Resource

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EFL 6
Word Count 232

Teacher introduces the text with minimal commentary and students read it independently. Teacher then reads passage aloud. Give a brief definition to words students would likely not be able to define from context (underlined in text). Teacher guides the students through a series of text-dependent questions. Complete the performance task as a cumulative evaluation of the close-reading.

Text-Dependent Questions

1. Why did the South fight the war?
2. What reason(s) does the article give for why the North fought?
3. What does the text mean when it refers to the “conviction” of the Northern soldiers?
4. What results of the Civil War make it difficult to understand why the North kept fighting?
5. In your own words, restate what John Jones wrote in his diary.
6. Why would the Confederates have been surprised to hear that northern soldiers thought “that *they* were upholding the legacy of the American Revolution.”?

Performance Tasks for Informational Texts

Students evaluate the premises of James M. McPherson’s argument regarding why Northern soldiers fought in the Civil War by corroborating the evidence provided from the letters and diaries of these soldiers with other primary and secondary sources and challenging McPherson’s claims where appropriate. [RH.11–12.8]

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