

United States Colored Troops

Lesson plans for primary sources at the Tennessee State Library & Archives

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Grade Level: 8th grade

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Introduction: United States Colored Troops or U.S.C.T soldiers played a significant role in securing victory for the Union during the Civil War. In this lesson, students will explore what motivated men to volunteer for duty in the U.S.C.T, and the particular risks they faced.

Guiding Questions:

- What motivated men to volunteer for service in the United States Colored Troops?
- What risks did they face?
- How did the experiences of African American soldiers differ from those of white Union soldiers?

Learning Objectives: In the course of the lesson, students will

- identify African American involvement in the Union army
- analyze documents and images
- draw inferences about the motivations of African American soldiers
- draw inferences about the risks that African American soldiers faced
- write an opinion piece that demonstrates knowledge of motivations and risks of African American soldiers in the Civil War

Curriculum Standards:

8.78-Describe African-American involvement in the Union army, including the Massachusetts 54th Regiment and the 13th U.S. Colored Troops in the Battle of Nashville. (C, H, TN)

6-8.RH.2 - Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

6-8.WHST.4 - Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Materials Needed:

- 1) Copies of the graphic organizer
- 2) Copies of, or computer access to, the following primary sources:

[The Fort Pillow Massacre](#)

[Appointment of George Singleton as sergeant in USCI regiment](#)

[Certificate of enlistment for Dennis Morgan into the United States Colored Troops](#)

[Letter from Decatur G. Chapin, a white officer of the 55th United States Colored Troops \(to his brother\)](#)

Transcribed Excerpt of Letter from Decatur G. Chapin, a white officer of the 55th United States Colored Troops (to his brother) *see attached document*

[Letter from Decatur G. Chapin, a white officer of the 55th United States Colored Troops \(to his father\)](#)

Transcribed Excerpt of Letter from Decatur G. Chapin, a white officer of the 55th United States Colored Troops (to his father) *see attached document*

[“To Colored Men” Recruitment Poster](#)

[“Mother of a Northern Black Soldier to the President”](#)

Background:

[“The Color of Bravery: United States Colored Troops in the Civil War.”](#)

Author: Hari Jones

Source Location: [Civil War Trust website.](#)

[“United States Colored Troops.”](#)

Author: Kenneth Bancroft Moore

Source Location: [Tennessee Encyclopedia of History & Culture](#)



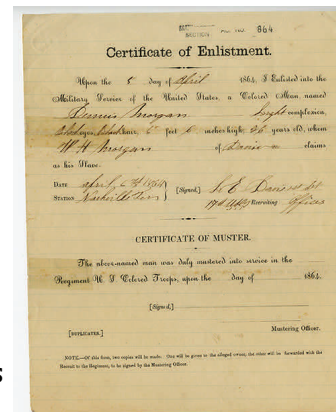
Preparation Instructions:

1. Read the articles listed in the background section.
2. Preview the video and decide if you will stream or use the download option on the page.
3. This lesson assumes that your students have experience in analyzing primary sources. If you feel they will need more guidance in the analysis process, the Tennessee State Library and Archives has [analysis guides](#) available for you.
4. Determine if you are going to print the primary sources for students use or if you are going to have them access the sources digitally.
5. If you are going to print sources, you will need one of each of the primary sources listed under “Materials Needed” per group. If you are going to have students access the documents digitally, prepare a list of links that students can access from your webpage or other platform for ease of use.
6. Either copy the graphic organizer for each group, or make it available digitally as well.
7. Create a rubric for scoring the opinion piece. See [ReadWriteThink.org](#) for examples.
9. Familiarize yourself with the sources prior to the lesson.

Lesson Activities:

Lesson Activity 1- Introduction

- 1) Ask students to describe what, if anything, they knew about the role of African American soldiers in the Civil War prior to watching the video.
- 2) View the video [Black Soldiers In4](#) from the Civil War Trust website.
- 3) Ask them to describe any new information from the video.
- 4) Explain that the rest of the lesson focuses on why men volunteered for service in the United States Colored Troops and what risks U.S.C.T. troops faced.
- 5) Ask the students to divide a sheet of paper into two columns and label one "motivations" and the other "risks."
- 6) Explain that you want them to make some predictions based on what they already know about the Civil War. Give the students a few minutes to work on their predictions. If necessary reassure the students that they will not be "graded" on their predictions.



Lesson Activity 2 - Working With Primary Sources

- 1) Divide students into groups and distribute primary sources and graphic organizer to each group. Or, if you have access to multiple computers, direct students to the website where you have made the list of sources and the graphic organizer available digitally.
- 2) Have students discuss the predictions they made individually earlier and combine them into a master list for the group's graphic organizer.
- 3) Direct the students to analyze the documents and images to understand the motivations of African American soldiers and the risks they faced. Remind students that some risks such as injury or death were shared by all Civil War soldiers. Ask them to consider if there were any risks that only African American soldiers faced.
- 4) As the students analyze, they should work together to revise their predictions by highlighting those supported by the evidence, and adding any additional motivations or risks that they uncover in the documents.
- 5) Allow time for students to share the results of their inquiry with the class.

Lesson Activity 3- Writing an Opinion Piece

Instruct students to write a short opinion piece in response to the following prompt:

Imagine that you were an African American man during the Civil War. Would you have joined the U.S.C.T? Why or why not?

Extending the Lesson:

- 1) Require students to cite evidence from specific sources in their opinion piece.
- 2) Give students the option of creating a poster encouraging OR discouraging men from joining the U.S.C.T.
- 3) Have students find additional primary sources that support predictions from their graphic organizer not covered by the sources in the lesson.

Transcribed Excerpt of Letter from Decatur G. Chapin, a white officer of the 55th United States Colored Troops **(to his father)** Page 2

“You may think that unforgiving in those people but let me state another report in all probability you have heard and read of Forrest’s raids in Tenn. and northern Alabama and of his cruelty towards the colored soldiers captured or rather surrendered at Ft. Pillow which enough to make a man’s blood boil here at Memphis.”

Transcribed Excerpt of Letter from Decatur G. Chapin, a white officer of the 55th United States Colored Troops **(to his brother)** Page 2

“in your letter to me you wanted to know what I thought of the negroes for soldiers. I can tell you in a very few words I think they make the best we have my reasons are these, that they have always subject to obedience, and for that reason are much easier disciplined that the whites and without discipline you have no army they are bold and daring and will hazard anything commanded by their officers.’

Note : Spelling and capitalization have been modernized in the transcriptions.

Graphic Organizer

	Motivations	Risks
P r e d i c t i o n s		
F r o m S o u r c e s		