

Civil War Letters Worksheet

In an era when there were no telephones or Internet, mass transportation was limited, and people often lived miles apart, communication was quite limited. Letter writing was an essential part of everyday life, a skill and art that has faded in recent times. During the Civil War, people wrote letters to keep family members informed of the effects of the war on their personal lives, their businesses, and their health. Personal letters provided a vital link between the battlefields and the home front. Today, surviving letters from the Civil War period provide unique glimpses into effects of war on both civilians and soldiers.

To begin, read a selection of Civil War letters. You may use your textbook and other resources related to the Civil War. As you read the letters, consider the following:

- What does it reveal about the writer's home, family members, work, and level of education at the time the Civil War started?
- Can we tell which side the writer supported — the Union or the Confederacy? How do we know?
- What was happening in the war at the time this letter was written?
- What can we learn of the writer's views or attitudes about the war?
- What can we learn about women and their contributions to the war effort? About their views or attitudes toward the war?
- What personal concerns does the writer express?

Using the information from the letters and other resources, do the following:

- Select a "personality," male or female, military or civilian, Union or Confederate.
- Pick a pseudonym, and create a war-era personality for yourself.
- Write a letter to a family or friend discussing a major event related to the Civil War and how it has affected your family. Possible topics include but are not limited to:
 - A major battle (e.g., Gettysburg, Vicksburg, Antietam)
 - The issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation
 - How the occupying army has been treating civilians in the area
 - The death of Stonewall Jackson
 - The military draft for the Union Army
 - The Gettysburg Address
 - The enlistment of African Americans soldiers into the Union Army
 - A hospital experience as a patient or nurse.
- Create a fictional story about your personality, using historical facts to make your story "real." Your letter should demonstrate a general understanding of the time period and the feelings and experiences of your personality.
- Remember your audience. Letters did not cross from the Confederacy into the Union, so a family member or friend, either civilian or military, would have been on the same side as you.
- Be sure to include details and use words to create a picture for the reader.
- Write about how the event has affected your character personally. Letters should include emotion and evoke a certain personal tone. Include the date when the letter was written.
- Use complete sentences and proper grammar.

To enhance the “authenticity” of your letter, make it look as though it were actually written during the war 140 years ago. Some characteristics that it might possess are:

- Handwritten in black ink
- Written on unlined paper or stationery
- In an envelope with the name and address of the person back home
- “Battle worn” or crumpled from being in your pocket and from getting wet
- Tea-stained
- Decorated with drawings.