The Civil War and the Fight for Freedom

Suggested Activities

When Johnny Comes Marching Home
Listen to Civil War songs, i.e. When Johnny Comes Marching Home Again or Dixie. Have children describe “Johnny” by drawing a picture of him, or where “Dixie” is. Help them write a caption for their artwork. The drawing and caption should contain an element of the meaning of the song, e.g., a soldier, celebration of homecoming, heroes, or whatever the child thinks it means. The song Dixie might conjure up images of a home, a map, or a reference to living in the South. It is important that children listen to the words and feel of the music and relate them to what they might mean. It should demonstrate that the child listened.

Slave Story Quilts
Read Faith Ringgold’s book, Aunt Harriet’s Underground Railroad in the Sky (1992, Crown Publishers, NY). Look at photographs of story quilts made by slaves, particularly those made by Harriet Powers. Do you see symbols that you recognize? Do you think Harriet Powers was telling a story with her quilt? Describe the story that you see. Why do you think stories were told using quilts? Talk about how symbols help people find their way then and now. Make a paper quilt with symbols that tell a story or explain a journey or path that you have taken. The paper quilt could be comprised of one block from each student to comprise a class quilt. It could also be done with smaller blocks of relatively little number, such as 9. Children should be given the opportunity to tell the story of their quilt.

Harriet and Abraham
Study the lives and contributions of Harriet Tubman and Abraham Lincoln. Imagine a discussion between them. Write a dialogue for what they might have discussed. Students can work in pairs, with one portraying Harriet Tubman and the other Abraham Lincoln. Each pair can present their dialogue to the class. After their skit, they can answer questions from their classmates. The dialogue and responses should demonstrate their knowledge who these leaders were and why they were important to the history of the United States.

Proclaiming Freedom
Read Abraham Lincoln’s “Emancipation Proclamation.” Research newspaper or magazine articles announcing or responding to this declaration. Imagine that you are a news reporter at the time of the announcement in 1865. Write a newspaper article of your own with your response. The newspaper articles prepared by the students should demonstrate that they have researched the Emancipation Proclamation and used primary sources for doing so. The primary sources can be facsimile. The response should also state a point of view with supporting argument.

An Emancipated Slave
Imagine that you are a slave and are at the Knott House on May 20, 1865 listening to the reading of the Emancipation Proclamation. Write a letter to a friend or family member describing your experience. Include what you think you might do next. Each student’s letter should demonstrate that the student has read the declaration and is able to consider a perspective other than his or her own. It should also demonstrate knowledge of challenges faced by slaves as they were freed, including finding paid work, and/or the possible desire or ability to reunite with their families and how they might do that.

Abraham Lincoln’s Diary
Choose a day in the life of Abraham Lincoln. Explain why you chose this day. Then, imagine that you are Lincoln and write a journal entry in your diary about your thoughts, choices and decisions. The journal entry should demonstrate research pertaining to documented turning points in Abraham Lincoln’s life. The journal entry should also demonstrate the demonstration of a range of feelings as they relate to a leader with tremendous responsibility.

**Gone with the Wind**
Watch or read “Gone with the Wind” by Margaret Mitchell. How is it an accurate telling of the Civil War and how is it a Hollywood fabrication? Choose a point of view (Union, Confederate, slave, wife, mother, child, journalist, etc.) and prepare a script for a short movie you would produce about the Civil War. The script should demonstrate an understanding of the difference between fact and dramatization. It can contain both, but notes should be included that explain the students’ understanding of how they’ve created this presentation. Justification for why these decisions were made should be noted parenthetically. Research with respect to understanding the point of view of the maker needs to be documented in the script and referenced at the end.

**Witnessing Emancipation**
Prepare your own re-enactment of General McCook reading the Emancipation Proclamation at the Knott House. Include witness accounts from people from all walks of life. Each student can keep a journal/portfolio of his or her daily activities in the development of the re-enactment. The journal should include both plans and accomplishments as they occur. At the end of the journal, students should prepare an overview of the process, including how they researched their part, prepared for their role, challenges they faced and how they were resolved (or not), and finally, a list of the three most important things they learned from the experience.

**Additional Resources**

http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured_documents/emancipation_proclamation/

This website is from the National Archives in Washington, D.C. It includes photographs of the original document, a transcript of the document, “The Emancipation Proclamation: An Act of Justice” by scholar John Hope Franklin, and an audio of former slave Charlie Smith discussing work and living situations after the Emancipation Proclamation. The site also contains excellent resources for using primary and secondary documents for teaching and learning.

http://newdeal.feri.org/asn/asn00.htm

This website is involves a study of a selection of American Slave Narratives, which were gathered as a project of the Works Project Administration during the Great Depression. The site includes 17 narratives, lesson plans, and resources for teaching.