

# Transcribing Civil War History Lesson Plan

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**Grades:** 4-12

**Length of Time:** Approximately four 45-minute class periods

## **Goals:**

The students will understand that historians use primary sources to research historical events and that everyday people effect and are affected by history.

## **Objectives:**

1. Given a historical document, the students will correctly transcribe the content of the document.
2. Given a historical document, the students will write a “modern” version, a version in present day terms.
3. Given the student’s modern day transcription, they will present this transcript orally to their peers.

## **Materials Used:**

1. Civil War era primary sources  
(See the “[Civil War Letters – A Michigan Connection](#)” website for a collection of Civil War letters from Michigan cavalryman that have been used successfully with this lesson plan.)
2. Writing supplies and appropriate reference materials (dictionaries, maps, textbooks, etc.); computers with word-processing and internet capabilities.
3. Magnifying glass for reading difficult print
4. Copies of the “Transcription Procedure” Handout for students
5. Copies of the “Transcription Rubric” for students

## **Anticipatory Set/Hook:**

Ask your students if they can think of what life was like during the time of the Civil War. Do they think it was like life today? What are some of the similarities and what are some of the differences?

## **Procedure:**

Prior to starting this lesson, the classroom teacher should determine how students will be paired for this cooperative learning activity. We have found that students are more successful when they are paired with others of like ability and learning style.

### **Period 1: Lesson Introduction; Start Verbatim Transcriptions**

1. Show students how to access copies of the primary historical documents they will use for this lesson or provide copies to student pairs.
2. Provide folders for pairs to store their primary documents and transcription work in.
3. Distribute copies of the “Transcription Procedure” Handout (see below) to all students and discuss the directions for doing a verbatim transcription of their primary sources.
4. Show students reference materials (or acceptable Internet sites) that are available for their use during the transcription process (dictionaries, maps, textbooks, etc.).
5. Allow time for student pairs to start their verbatim transcriptions of their primary documents.
6. Collect the folders of documents and save the verbatim transcriptions at the end of the period.

### **Period 2: Finish Verbatim Descriptions; Start Modern Transcriptions**

1. Distribute folders to student pairs.
2. Review the procedures listed on the “Transcription Procedure” Handout (see below) for both the verbatim transcription and modern transcription of their primary sources.

3. Remind students of the reference materials (or acceptable Internet sites) that are available to them during the transcription process.
4. Allow time for student pairs to finish their verbatim transcriptions of their primary documents and to start their modern transcriptions.
5. Collect the folders and save all transcriptions at the end of the period.

### **Period 3: Finish Modern Transcriptions: Further Research; Prepare to Present**

1. Distribute folders to student pairs.
2. Explain that students should finish their modern transcriptions during this period, do additional research related to their primary sources and prepare to give an oral presentation of their modern transcription.
3. Discuss the “Transcription Rubric” (see below) you will use to evaluate student work.
4. Allow time for student pairs to finish their modern transcriptions of their primary sources.
5. Allow time for student pairs to research concepts that relate to their primary source and their transcriptions.
6. Allow time for students to determine how they will share the responsibility of presenting their modern transcriptions orally during the next lesson period and practice for this presentation.
7. Collect the folders with primary sources and verbatim transcriptions at the end of the period. (You may want to allow students to keep their modern transcriptions to prepare for their presentations.)

### **Period 4: Transcription Presentations/Evaluations**

1. Review the “Transcription Rubric” (see below).
2. Allow pairs of students to present the modern transcriptions of their primary sources. Consider having students present their transcriptions in chronological order if their primary sources are part of a collection.

3. Discuss topics addressed in the primary sources that interest students or relate to classroom studies.
4. Collect the folders with primary sources and both transcriptions at the end of period.

### **Closure:**

Ask the students if they thought transcribing documents was hard. Did they enjoy doing the work of a historian?

### **Assessment:**

Students will successfully complete the transcription and a version in their own terms. They will then present a historically accurate transcription orally to the class.

### **Modification Ideas:**

- For students with difficulties in reading or writing, think about pairing them with a student who could help them read or write the letter.
- Think about having different media for writing the letter, such as typing it or writing with a marker.
- Offer the option to draw a picture related to the letter.