

Supplemental Lesson Plan: Life Onboard an Ironclad

In this lesson for 8th grade students will read letters from crew members on the CSS *Neuse*, an ironclad gunboat built during the Civil War. These letters will help students gain an understanding of what life was like in eastern North Carolina during the Civil War and, particularly, what life was like as a crew member of the *Neuse*. Students will gain a personal understanding of the hardships of war, many of which were not faced on a battlefield, but in ordinary, everyday circumstances.

Goals

This lesson can be used in partial fulfillment of the following:

- North Carolina SCS Social Studies Grade 8: 4.03 and 4.04
- North Carolina SCS Language Arts Grade 8: 1.01, 1.02, 1.03, 1.04, 6.01, and 6.02
- National Standard 2B

Objectives

After examining the letters and holding the class discussion, students will:

- identify four conditions of life onboard the CSS *Neuse*.
- write a letter in the style used during the nineteenth century.
- identify attitudes held by soldiers, sailors, and officers regarding the war, the gunboat, and each other.

- describe conditions in Kinston and Lenoir County during the Civil War.

Teacher Planning

Provide the following materials either through web access to the Educational Unit or through handouts downloaded via the web site.

Site Narrative - the background information on the *CSS Neuse*
Copies of transcripts of following letters:

Lt. Richard H. Bacot, 2nd Lieutenant on the *CSS Neuse*, dated
 February 8, 1864
 March 19, 1864
 April 28, 1864
 May 23, 1864
 July 18, 1864
 January 7, 1865

Mr. Blanton, May 15, 1864

Capt. Richard Henry Parker, 32nd Regiment, NC Troops, dated
 February 18, 1863
 March 1, 1863
 March 19, 1863
 March 31, 1863
 April 12, 1863
 May 11, 1863
 May 26, 1863
 June 10, 1863

Letter Analysis Worksheet

Glossary of terms found in the letters

Worksheets - Fill in the blank, multiple choice, map quiz and matching test to be used in class, as homework or as assessment tools (see Appendix B)

Diagrams of the *CSS Neuse*

Time Requirement

20 minutes for introduction and 30 minutes per activity. Additional time is needed for background reading, which can be done as pre-activity homework.

Teacher Input

- Be sure students have read the chapters of *The North Carolina Civil War Experience* on **Wartime North Carolina** and **North Carolina as a Civil**

War Battlefield. These will give vital background material on the importance of the Confederate Navy and on the role of the CSS *Neuse* in particular, as well as glimpses of what life was like for civilians during the war. The [Site Narrative](#) is also important in giving more detail on the story of the gunboat.

- B. At the beginning of class, ask the students to brainstorm about what life would be like in Kinston during the Civil War and, more specifically, for the crew onboard the CSS *Neuse*. This activity should take place before students are given actual information on how the crew would have experienced the war. Refer to the two diagrams of the layout of the CSS *Neuse*, and explain that the crew's quarters onboard the ship would have been very cramped and hot due to the location of the boiler right next to those quarters. The highest recorded temperature onboard the ship was around 140°, and the men only bathed once or twice a week. The close quarters and high temperatures would make conditions below deck quite unbearable. Make sure the students understand that there were no bathrooms, showers, air conditioning, television, or video games on the CSS *Neuse*. The crew actually spent more time camping on the river bank than onboard the ship. With none of the modern conveniences that we have today the crew would have kept themselves busy by playing cards, quoits (a ring toss game similar to horseshoes), playing music with what instruments they might have or could make, and writing and reading letters to and from friends and family back home.
- C. Explain to the students that part of this lesson will be the reading of transcripts from letters of soldiers and sailors who were stationed in or around Kinston in 1863 and 1864. Copies of the original letters may be passed around or projected on a screen to show students the difficulty in transcribing letters. This will also help explain why we do not know every word written. Also, make students aware of the style of writing during the nineteenth century. Be sure to note for the students, that they will notice a difference in language used in the letters as compared to each other and to the modern day language that is taught in school. It was very different from what most of us use today. Have the students discuss the differences between communication styles of today (email, texting, twitter) and those of the Civil War period. During the nineteenth century, letter writing was the main form of communication between people separated by great distances. It was a drawn-out process that took a good deal of forethought, because paper was limited and costly. Also, there was no easy way to erase words once they were written, thus you find words crossed out or blotted out in many letters.

- D. Make the students aware of what they can expect to learn from the letters, such as attitudes about the war, attitudes about their fellow soldiers/sailors, and general conditions that the men experienced.

Classroom Activities

The class should be given time to work on one or more of the following activities as individuals (homework) or in small groups in class. Most of the options have an interdisciplinary focus on both social studies and language arts.

1. Divide the class up into small groups, giving each group one or two letters from those provided in this lesson. Make sure all letters are distributed. Give the groups fifteen minutes to read the letters and fill out the **Letter Analysis Worksheet**. After analysis time is up, have the groups report to the entire class what they discovered in their letter(s). Perhaps have one member volunteer to read the letter out loud to the entire class and then have one member go over the group's answers on the analysis worksheet. Students in other groups should be taking notes on what is similar and what is different from the letter(s) they read. Repeat for each group.
2. Have students assume the persona of a crew member of the *CSS Neuse* and write a letter home to a friend or family member, telling about their life as part of the crew and in Kinston. They should incorporate information they found in the Bacot, Blanton, and Parker letters, as well as from class discussion.
3. Have two students work together: one as the interviewer and one as a crew member or soldier in the area (they could even take the persona of one of the letter writers). Have the interviewer develop questions that can be answered from the letters and the background given in class. The interviewer will ask questions of the other student and record the answers. Then, working as a team, both students will use the answers to write an article about life onboard the *CSS Neuse*.
4. Use the additional worksheets as homework, class work, or as a quiz. These worksheets include multiple choice questions, fill in the blanks, a word search, and a crossword about the *CSS Neuse* and Eastern North Carolina during the Civil War.

Closure

Go back and revisit the brainstorming discussion at the beginning of the lesson on what life would have been like in Kinston during the Civil War and, more specifically, for the crew onboard the CSS *Neuse*. After examination of the letters and extensive classroom discussion, ask students how have their ideas changed or been validated.

Assessment

Students should be able to write an essay clearly describing life in Kinston, North Carolina for the men who served on the CSS *Neuse* or in the surrounding areas. The essay should include at least four conditions the crew experienced as well as emotions and attitudes learned from the letters of Lieutenant Bacot, Mr. Blanton and Captain Parker.

Lesson Plan Glossary

Some of the words listed are from the primary source documents (the Bacot, Blanton, or Parker letters). Many are non-standard abbreviations mostly of military jargon, misspelled words, or colloquialisms. Where a word is misspelled, the correct spelling follows in parenthesis. There are numerous misspellings in the primary sources. Only those misspelled words that might cause some confusion are listed.

1. **&c** - abbreviation for et cetera, meaning "and others" or "and such".
2. **afft bro** - abbreviation for "affectionate brother".
3. **Asst Surg** - abbreviation for Assistant Surgeon.
4. **bow** - the front end of the ship.
5. **batteries** - groupings of artillery pieces.
6. **bereavement** - a period of grief after the death of a loved one.
7. **bilious** - marked by or suffering from liver dysfunction and especially excessive secretion of bile; sickeningly unpleasant.
8. **block & tackle** - a system of ropes and pulleys that allow a person to move heavy objects easily.
9. **brigade** - an army unit consisting of three to five regiments (3,000-5,000 men*) and usually led by a brigadier general.
10. **bushwack (bushwhack)** - to ambush or assault suddenly; to launch a surprise assault.
11. **camels** - water filled barges that are affixed to the sides of the ship. When the water is pumped out, it causes the ship to rise.

12. **casemate** - a protective covering for the gun deck. The *Neuse* had a 25-inch thick casemate wall with 10 gun ports.
13. **cat hole** - sailors' name for the docking place for the CSS *Neuse* in Kinston.
14. **cavalry** - soldiers mounted on horseback.
15. **Col.** - abbreviation for the rank of colonel.
16. **cutlass** - a type of sword used by sailors.
17. **engulphed (engulfed)** - overwhelmed.
18. **embibed (imbibed)** - taken into the mind and retained.
19. **entail** - to restrict (property) by limiting the inheritance to the owner's direct line of descendants.
20. **epistle** - a lengthy letter.
21. **Etemology (Etymology)** - the history of a word.
22. **fatiguing** - tiring or exhausting.
23. **freshet** - a great rise or overflowing of a stream caused by heavy rains.
24. **furlough** - a leave of absence from duty granted to a soldier.
25. **gay** - fun or happy.
26. **Genl.** - abbreviation for the rank of general.
27. **howitzer** - a short-barreled cannon used during the Civil War.
28. **In Statu Quo (Status Quo)** - to maintain or remain in the same state or situation.
29. **Kingston** - an older form of "Kinston".
30. **lighter** - a shallow-draft, barge-like vessel that was flooded with water, strapped to the side of a ship, and then pumped out. When the water was removed, the lighters lifted the ship higher in the water.
31. **Lt. Comdg.** - abbreviation for lieutenant commander.
32. **Midm** - abbreviation for the rank of midshipmen.
33. **neucleus (nucleus)** - A core or central part.
34. **Neus'ance** - nickname for the CSS *Neuse* given by the crew indicating some frustration due to the difficulties of building the ship.
35. **Newbern** - an older form of New Bern.
36. **N.O.** - abbreviation for New Orleans.
37. **Orthography** - the art of writing words with the proper letters according to standard usage.
38. **Phillipics (Philippic)** - a discourse or speech.
39. **port** - the left side of a ship when facing the bow.
40. **propitious** - a good omen or sign.
41. **Prosody** - the study of the rhythm, stress and intonation of a verse or prose.
42. **quoits** - a ring toss game similar to horseshoes.
43. **recd** - abbreviation for "received."
44. **rectus in curia** - Latin term meaning to be found upright in court or in restored legal standing.

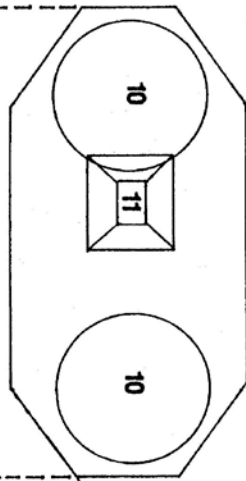
45. **regiment** - generally made up of 10 companies (1,000 men*) led by a colonel.
46. **remonstrate** - plead with or urge reasons in opposition to an argument or position.
47. **shallow-draft** - describes a ship, such as the *CSS Neuse*, that is able to operate in water impassable to larger ships. Draft is the depth of a ship below the waterline.
48. **shoals** - sandbars.
49. **starboard**: the right side of a ship when facing the bow.
50. **stern** - the back or rear of a ship.
51. **Strmr** - abbreviation for steamer, meaning a steam-powered vessel.
52. **Syntax** - the study of the rules for the formation of grammatical sentences in a language.
53. **tin pin alley (tenpin)**- a bowling alley; game using 10 tenpins and a ball.
54. **trenches** - fortifications dug into the ground, behind which troops can hide.

Letter Analysis Worksheet

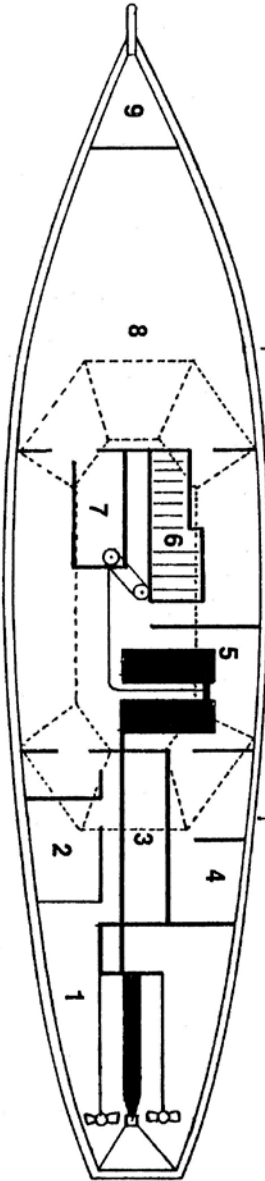
1. Who wrote the letter?
2. To whom was it written?
3. What was the relationship between the letter writer and the recipient?
4. List the main points stated in the letter.
5. What attitudes and feelings are expressed in the letter?
6. What was the mood of the person writing the letter? Does it appear to change within the letter?
7. What can we learn about the letter writer from this letter?
8. What can we learn about the person receiving the letter?
9. What factual information of historical value is conveyed in the letter? What, if anything, do we learn about the CSS *Neuse* from this letter?

DIAGRAM of C.S.S. NEUSE

CASEMATE

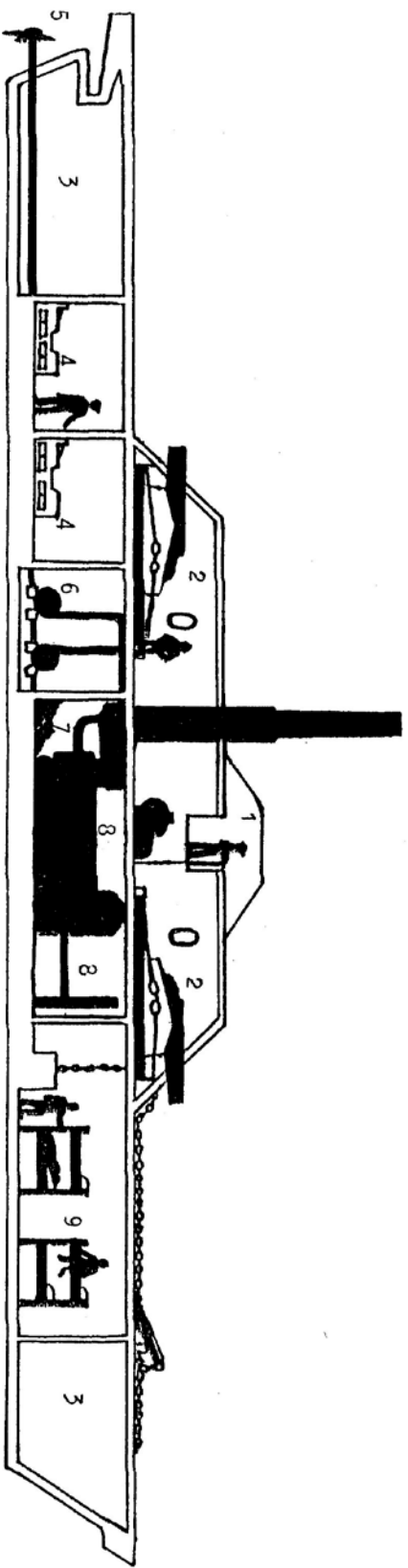


LOWER DECK



- 1-STORES
- 2-SHELL ROOM
- 3-WARD ROOM
- 4-OFFICER'S QUARTERS
- 5-ENGINE ROOM
- 11-CAPTAIN'S BRIDGE
- 6-COAL BUNKER
- 7-BOILER ROOM
- 8-CREW'S QUARTERS
- 9-STORES
- 10-CANNON MOUNTS

D I A G R A M O F C S S N E U S E



1. Pilothouse-Bridge: The pilothouse, or bridge, housed the ship's steering wheel. From the pilothouse, the captain could steer the ship.
2. Cannons: The Neuse carried two Brooke rifled cannons which weighed about 10,700 pounds each.
3. Storage Areas: Ammunition, tools, extra clothing and other things were stored in these areas.
4. Officers' Quarters: These are the rooms where the ship's officers slept.
5. Propellers: The propellers turned to push the ship forward in the water.
6. Engine Room: Two steam engines taken from a locomotive powered the Neuse. The steam produced in the boiler ran the engines which turned the propellers.
7. Coal Bunker: Coal, the ship's fuel, was stored in this area.
8. Boiler Room: Coal was burned in the boiler to heat water and form steam. Steam pressure ran the engines.
9. Crew's Quarters: Where the crew slept and kept their personal belongings.