**Wilmington: The Last Port City**

Slideshow Notes

Slide 1: Title Slide

Today we are going to talk about an important city in North Carolina during the Civil War and one of the fortifications defending it.

Slide 2: We’re going on a field trip!

Our class is going on a field trip to Fort Fisher State Historic Site on \_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

Slide 3: Video

*Questions on worksheet covered in video:*

1. *Where is Wilmington?*
2. *Wilmington was an important city during the Civil War because it was a major* ***port*** *city with* ***railroad*** *lines.*

4: Build your fort [title slide]

5: Place Matters

Forts have strategic significance. Today, air travel, cars, and fast-moving ships have made the location of military bases a bit less important. However, a fort in the Civil War was chosen with location in mind. Forts were built with geography in mind so that the landscape helped defend against enemy attack.

This is a map of the lower part of the Cape Fear River. *[For a larger image, see Google Drive or use this link: https://dc.lib.unc.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/ncmaps/id/1262/rec/8. We recommend waiting to show students the enlarged map until after this activity so students don’t see all forts along the river before they think about where to put a fort.]*

In the 1860s, Wilmington was the largest city in North Carolina with just under 10,000 people. It was also a major port city – ships would bring goods in and out of Wilmington for trade. Wilmington was also connected to several major railroad lines, so goods could be shipped from Wilmington to Virginia or into central North Carolina and beyond. Railroad lines ran right to the port docks in Wilmington, making it relatively easy to unload cargo and ship it across the South.

Ships sailed in and out of Wilmington through the two inlets.

During the Civil War, there were several fortifications along the Cape Fear River. Some utilized turns in the river or narrow points of land. By placing a fort on a narrow part of land or near the inlets, for example, enemy soldiers would have no choice but to go through or sail directly past your fort to reach Wilmington.

**If you were in charge of building a fort to protect the ships coming in and out of Wilmington, where would you put it?**

Before you decide where to put your fort, here are a few key things to consider:

1. Wilmington is the largest city. You probably want to keep civilians safe by putting your fort farther away from the city. That way, if there is a battle at your fort, civilians are not in the line of fire.
2. Engineers – those who design and build fortifications for the military – would utilize the geography to cut off other paths.
3. Trading ships would sail through the Old or Net Inlets. It was the only way in and out of the river.

[Next slide has the blank map that is on the handout. Give the students 3-5 minutes to place their fort.]

6: Where will you put your fort?

Go ahead and take [3-5 minutes]. Think about where you would put your fort and why. Go ahead and mark your fort on the map on the worksheet.

*You can select a few volunteers to show where they put their fort and why there.*

7: Cape Fear Defenses

These triangles depict forts and defenses along the Cape Fear River.

8: Why Here?

The Confederate Army put a lot of thought into where to put defenses like a fort. Let’s explore why the Confederacy built Fort Fisher where they did.

9: The Port of Wilmington

During the 1860s, the value of exports from Wilmington was about $4.5 million – well over $50 million dollars in today’s money value. **North Carolina still exported primarily naval stores – tar, pitch, and turpentine used to build and seal wood ships. North Carolina also exported rice, cotton, peanuts, and corn.**

North Carolina was a rural state – the largest city had only about 10,000 people. Most people lived and worked in agriculture. Many farms that grew enough crops to sell relied upon the forced labor of enslaved people.

*Student worksheet question: What were some of the exports from the port of Wilmington in the 1860s?*

10: Guarding the “Door” to the Port City

Fort Fisher sat on “Federal Point,” which was quickly renamed “Confederate Point” by Confederate soldiers.

As you can see, Federal Point is just above a mouth or opening/door from the Atlantic Ocean to the Cape Fear river. So, Fort Fisher guarded one of the entrances into the Cape Fear and thus protected the port of Wilmington. There was very shallow waters in the New Inlet and dangerous currents. So, ships could not sail directly from the South into the New Inlet. They had to sail a bit north to a channel off of Fort Fisher, and then sail under the safety of the fort’s guns and in the water channel into the Cape Fear.

The Confederate soldiers would keep watch and allow Southern trade ships into the river but fire upon any U.S. Navy ship trying to enter the river or stop a trade ship.

*Student worksheet question: True/False Fort Fisher guarded one of the inlets or entrances to the Cape Fear River.*

11: What Fort Fisher Looked Like… [subtitle only]

12: Photo – beach and Fort Fisher

There were no trees, so for most of the year it was hot with little shade available!

13: Photo – inside of a fort hill

Fort Fisher was made of sand hills called “**traverses**.” They were about 30 feet tall! On the traverses were gun batteries – places for cannons.

14: Timeline

Finally, let’s take a look at what happens at Fort Fisher and how that fits into the broader Civil War history.

15: Civil War Timeline (1)

*Orange = general Civil War events*

*Green = Fort Fisher/Wilmington specific*

*Blue = things that affect Wilmington (closure of other ports)*

*This timeline will help students place key events in Fort Fisher’s history in context with the greater Civil War history. On the student worksheet, the following dates are highlighted. (They do not need to fill in anything, but are encouraged to make further notes if what is provided is not enough to remember the date’s significance. This timeline may come in handy later when students write the history of the Fort.)*

1. Jan. 1861: Cape Fear Forts Taken.
2. April 1861: Blockade & Construction Begins at Fort Fisher

16: Civil War Timeline (2)

*Orange = general Civil War events*

*Green = Fort Fisher/Wilmington specific*

*Blue = things that affect Wilmington (closure of other ports)*

*This timeline will help students place key events in Fort Fisher’s history in context with the greater Civil War history. On the student worksheet, the following dates are highlighted. (They do not need to fill in anything, but are encouraged to make further notes if what is provided is not enough to remember the date’s significance. This timeline may come in handy later when students write the history of the Fort.)*

3. May 1861: NC Secession

4. Sept. 1862: New leadership at Fort Fisher

5. Dec. 1862: N.C. labor laws passed

6. Aug. 1864: 2nd Last Port Closed

17: Civil War Timeline (3)

*Orange = general Civil War events*

*Green = Fort Fisher/Wilmington specific*

*Blue = things that affect Wilmington (closure of other ports)*

*This timeline will help students place key events in Fort Fisher’s history in context with the greater Civil War history. On the student worksheet, the following dates are highlighted. (They do not need to fill in anything, but are encouraged to make further notes if what is provided is not enough to remember the date’s significance. This timeline may come in handy later when students write the history of the Fort.)*

7. Dec. 1864: First Battle

8. Jan. 1865: Second Battle

9. Feb. 1865: Wilmington Falls

10. April 1865: Major Confederate armies surrender (war is effectively over)