

Life During the Civil War: A Soldier's Kit

Name: _____ Date: _____

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will analyze primary source letters describing Civil War soldier life and create an annotated soldier's kit list explaining the purpose of each item.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- notebook paper
- pencil or pen
- ruler
- colored pencils (optional, for drawing items)
- internet-connected device or reference book

HANDS-ON ACTIVITY

1. Read the excerpt below, adapted from a real Civil War soldier's letter describing camp conditions: "We marched twenty miles today with little to eat but hardtack and salt pork... My feet are blistered through my boots, and half the company is down with fever."
2. Underline every specific hardship mentioned in the letter (marching distance, food, physical condition, illness).
3. Research (briefly) 6-8 real items a typical Civil War soldier carried (e.g., hardtack, canteen, wool blanket, rifle/musket, bayonet, haversack, cartridge box, bedroll).
4. Draw or list each item on your paper, and next to each write one sentence explaining its purpose and why it mattered for survival or fighting.
5. Write a 3-4 sentence reflection imagining carrying this full kit while marching 20 miles, describing what would be most physically difficult.

QUESTIONS

1. What hardships does the soldier describe in the letter excerpt?
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2. What was 'hardtack,' and why was it a practical (if unpleasant) food for soldiers to carry?
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3. Name two items from your soldier's kit list and explain their purpose.

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4. Based on the letter and your kit research, what do you think was the greatest daily challenge for a Civil War soldier: combat, or everyday survival conditions? Explain.
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