

The War of 1812: Impact on Soldiers and Civilians

by Marc Keirstead

Suggested grade level: Intermediate/Senior

Suggested time: 2 class periods

Brief Description of the Task

In this lesson students will identify various perspectives from the war of 1812 and better understand the impact of the war on the average soldier.

Historical Thinking Concepts

- Historical Perspective-Taking
- Use of Primary Source Evidence

Learning Goals

Students will be able to:

1. Identify various perspectives from the war of 1812
2. Better understand the impact of the war on the average soldier and civilian

Materials

Copies of the primary sources (Appendices A, B and C) and the organizer.

Prior Knowledge

It would be an asset for students to:

- be familiar with the causes of the war of 1812
- understand that the American and British/Canadian authorities saw the war as an opportunity for glory and honour

Assessment

- assessment for learning (formative) → students will submit a brief answer to the focus question

- assessment for learning (formative) → teacher will circulate among the groups and offer feedback on the student analysis of the sources

Detailed Lesson Plan

Focus Question: How can the perspective of soldiers and civilians provide us with a fuller picture of the impact of the war of 1812?

Part 1

1. Students will be told that the focus of this lesson is to try and get a clearer picture of what impact the war of 1812 had on average soldiers and civilians.
2. Students will be asked to conduct a quick scan of the information in their textbook on the War of 1812 and indicate what aspects of the war are included. After they have made notes, ask if they saw any information about what it was like to live in that time as an adolescent; either as a soldier or a civilian. If they say “no” ask them to consider why that might be? Why is it that we stress the battles of war, rather than the impact on soldiers or the impact on local communities?
3. Students will be given the following description of a woman fleeing Fort George with her family. They should be asked to consider what the passage teaches us about the impact of the war? How does this passage give us a different perspective on the war than what is in their book?

Note: You may want to draw students’ attention to the fact that the word “durst” used in the passage means “dare”.

“... about eleven o’clock in the night, I was obliged to make my retreat with the children. When we had got four miles from Queenston, six Indians rushed out of the bush and asked me for my money. The servant was so frightened he durst not speak to them, but I had courage enough to make them understand that I was an officer’s lady, when they immediately went away. You may easily suppose what a

tremor I was in. As we went towards the Twelve, before we got to within six miles of it, our servant upset us. Fortunately we had not limbs broken, only much bruised." [Emma Currie (1900), *The Story of Laura Secord and Canadian Reminiscences*. Toronto: William Briggs, p. 171]

4. Students can then be divided into three large groups to examine three different primary sources and collaboratively answer the focus questions.

5. Once the groups have completed their study, students can regroup into smaller groups of three with a representative from each of the appendices. Each student will provide a brief summary of the source they reviewed. As a group, students will identify the one source they feel should be included in a textbook to help students gain a more personal perspective of the impact of the War of 1812. Students must provide a rationale for their choice.

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Comment: There is only on focus question, correct?

Lesson 8, Appendix A

Appendix A - Daily Life for Soldiers

Conditions Faced by Soldiers:

"It rains almost every day, cold as Greenland... Our troops are dieing rapidly, 1500 sick, no boards for tent floors, very little straw, sometimes something to eat, and sometimes nothing, no money.... And no prospect of getting any." (Alan Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812*: New York (Vintage Books, 2010), p. 193)

"Our best troops are raw, many of them dejected by the distress their families suffer by their absence, and many have not necessary clothing. We are in a cold country, the season is far advanced and unusually inclement; we are half deluged by rain. The blow must be struck soon or all the toil and expense of the campaign will go for nothing, and worse than nothing, for the whole will be tinged with dishonor." (Pierre Berton, *The Invasion of Canada 1812-1813*: Toronto (McClelland and Stewart, 1980), p. 224)

"...yet in the midst of our privations, we had some hearty laughs. Some of the men would run toboggans down the hill sitting on them, and would frequently capsize. Our big black drummer straddled the big drum, which was lashed to a toboggan, to try the experiment, but it got off the track, shooting him off at high velocity, and the sable African came up some distance from where he disappeared, a white man exciting roars of laughter." (Jon Latimer, *1812 War With America*: Cambridge, (Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 124)

Soldier's Meal:

"A black jack filled with coffee, served in tin tots; brown sugar in a paper bag; slices of bullock liver (*beef liver*), grilled upon wood-ashes; and biscuits, which had been toasted to destroy the wevils (*insects*), constituted our repast. Little did I dream, when, as a youngster, I used literally to "quarrel with my bread and butter," that the day arrived when such fare would be acceptable." (Latimer, 259)

- a) What issues do soldiers face in the war?
- b) How do soldiers try to keep up their spirits?
- c) Why do you think soldiers faced such difficult conditions?

Lesson 8, Appendix B

Conditions Facing Civilians During the War

Reality faced by people during the war

"We heard nothing but wailing and weeping from the inhabitants on this river. Retreating Indians had taken all their horses, slaughtered cattle and pigs to their hearts' content and stole whatever else they could from their homes... After the Indians came and went, the armies took whatever was left." (Taylor, 244)

Woman's plea not to draft her son:

"I am a poor, helpless and sickly old Woman and no one to help me but one boy. I have three sons in the army and Now I am like to have the last taken away and if he is gone, I shall inevitably suffer. And now if it is in your power to help me I beg you to show some pity-that is, to let my son stay at home and take care of his poor helpless Mother." (Taylor, 296-297)

Description of a wounded youth:

Private Byfield was "much affected by seeing and hearing a lad, about 11 or 12 years of age, who was wounded in one of his knees. The little fellow's cries from the pain of his wound, his crying after his dear mother; and saying he should die, were so affecting that it was not soon forgotten." (Latimer, 119)

Woman weeping over her wounded husband:

"... awakened by a groan from her unfortunate husband, she clasped er hands, and looking wildly around, exclaimed, 'O that the King and President were both here this moment to see the misery their quarrels lead to-they surely would not go to war without cause that they could give as a reason to God at the last day, for thus destroying the creatures that he hath made in his own image.'" (Latimer, 298)

- a) What impact did the war have on the civilian population?
- b) Why is it important to learn about these aspects of the war?

Lesson 8, Appendix C

The War's Impact on Families

A captain's request for his two-year-old son while the father is away at war:

"Teach my boy to love truth, to speak truth at all times...He must be taught to bear in mind that 'an honest man is the noblest work of God'; he must be rigidly honest in his dealing...Never allow him to run about on Sabbath days, fishing. Teach my son the habits of industry...Industry that leads to virtue...Not a day must be lost in teaching him to work...It may be possible that I may fall in battle and my only boy must know that his father, next to God, loves his country, and is now risking his life in defending that country against a barbarous and cruel enemy...Pray for me that you may be with me once more." (Berton Vol 1, 288)

Wife tries to smuggle herself and her child on her husband's ship:

"The rain ceased in the middle of the day and the sun looked out from the black clouds as Charles marched his little detachment to the place of embarkation. Our travelling bags were already on board and with Tilly in my arms I followed at a short distance, not wishing to make myself conspicuous as I would have been had I kept with the party. This, thought I, is one of the consequences for which I thought myself quite prepared. The moment was approaching when I must either be separated from my Husband or take my chances with him in [on an] actual perilous mission.

... I was resolved not to flinch from my determination never if I could help it to be separated from my Husband. Indeed there seemed no easy tempting alternative for ... I did not know a single human being in the garrison, we were so suddenly leaving.

... Putting my plaid mantle closely round little Tilly I quickly stepped on board without raising any objections from any one so that the first glance of my Husband looking for us found me seated very comfortably in a corner of the deck upon a pile of greatcoats which I had arranged for my own accommodation.

... My worst fear for myself was unfortunately realized for just as I was trying to persuade myself that no one would interfere with us, the old commissary came on board accompanied by a young naval officer who it appeared was to command the sloop and the expedition. Mr. T____, the commissary, was a very old gentleman whose views had been heard long before that it was necessary to get out of the Harbour before it was dark. His glance fell upon us as I sat crouching on the pile of greatcoats and making myself as small as I could in the hope of escaping observation.

'Hallo, what the devil have we here?' was his first exclamation. 'Maund, sergeants, corporals, yay, hello! here is a woman on board ... walk off Madam, if you please, who in the name of wonder brought you here or gave you leave to come.'

'I am here with my husband,' was my reply.

'Your husband! My goodness are you a mad woman to talk of Husbands and think of following them in an affair as this. Walk off, Madam, go on home and thank your stars that I found you before it was too late.'

(<http://www.warof1812.ca/wife.htm>)

- a) What impact did the war have on families?
- b) What additional duties did women face when their husbands were off fighting?

Organizer for Sharing

Summary of the sources in my group:

Summary of one of the other groups:

Summary of one of the other groups:

The source that I think should be included in a textbook to give students a clear idea of the impact of the war is:

The reasons I think it should be included are: