

Was the Civil War Worth the Cost to our Nation?

Teacher Lesson Plan

Summary:

Students are given placards with 6 major consequences of the Civil War and asked to classify them as positive or negative. Groups use a rating system to spur discussion about whether the Civil War was worth the cost to our nation.

Time:

55 minutes

Essential Question:

Was the Civil War Worth the Cost to Our Nation?

Related larger essential question: When should wars be avoided and when is a war the best solution?

Specific Understandings:

1. Because a historical event occurred does not mean that it was inevitable.
2. More Americans died in the Civil War than in all other major American wars put together.
3. A significant amount of money was spent fighting the war
4. As a result of the war, 4 million slaves were freed and were able to take advantage of the many rights of citizenship.
5. Freeing the slaves also had negative consequences, such as increased racism and loss of about \$4 billion for southerners who were slave holders.
6. Soldiers who fought in the war endured severe hardships (amputation, living in poor conditions, time away from family, seeing the horrors of death)
7. Southern farms and towns sustained severe damage.
8. Rebuilding provided opportunities for newly freed slaves and other workers.
9. The Northern and Southern states may not have been successful countries separately.

Preparation:

1. Put students in pairs or groups of three.
2. Each group gets one set of 6 placards from Powerpoint ([Click Here for Powerpoint](#)) and Student Worksheets for each student. ([Click Here for Student Worksheets](#))
3. Alternate Procedure: Put students in 6 groups of 4-5 students. Each group gets one placard. Placards are passed to the next group in 5-minute intervals.
Advantage: timing gives the activity a steady pace. Disadvantage: Having more

students per group means that quiet students are less likely to participate actively.

4. Alternate Procedure: Use the Powerpoint in front of the class.

Procedure:

1. The Hook:

Ask students to think of a recent argument they've had. It could be with a parent, a sibling, or with a friend. It should be a big argument that provoked emotions. Use one student's example to build further discussion. Ask student to **list the "costs"** of this argument. Costs could be negative outcomes or negative consequences of having this argument. Now **list the positive outcomes. Was it worth it?** What if you never had the argument? Explain that it's important to talk a closer look at arguments to learn what can be done differently in the future. Sometimes it's better to resolve things peacefully and sometimes it's not. Take the larger issue of wars . . . of the American Civil War in particular. If we look more closely at the positive and negative effects, we can form opinions that affect the way we view this and other wars.

2. Directions:

- The goal of the activity is for each group of students to decide **whether the Civil War was worth the cost to our nation.** Remind them that they are looking at this war from the broad perspective of living in modern times. They are NOT looking at it from multiple perspectives like they did in the *Price of Freedom* tour (civilian, soldier, slave, North, South etc). In other words, was the Civil War worth the cost to our nation on the whole?
- Each placard contains information about one effect of the Civil War. Students should take turns reading each placard aloud to the group. **As a group, students examine and debate each placard and discuss the following:**
 - A. Is this more of a positive effect or negative effect?
 - B. On a scale of 1-5 how important is this effect?
 - C. Why did the group assign this number?
 - D. After reviewing the ratings, was the Civil War worth the cost?
- Students EACH record the group ratings on the Student Worksheet. At the end, students individually write a paragraph explaining their own answer to the main question.

3. Whole Class Discussion:

- What was the highest-ranking negative effect? Why?
- What was the highest-ranking positive effect? Why?
- Which effect created the most debate in your group? Why?

- How many people decided that the Civil War was worth the cost overall? Why?
- Think about the reasons for your decision. Do you think these reasons apply to other wars? When should war be avoided and when is war the best solution?