

Civil War Slang Activity

The military of today has a distinctive and sometimes confusing catalog of terms, unique and all its own. The Civil War soldier had a wide variety of names for the things they used in their daily routines and also invented many *slang* terms or nicknames for their equipment, experiences, and other soldiers. Many of these expressions were based on military terms, lighthearted humor, or biblical references and can still be found in our everyday language.

Directions: Using the list of words below, create a short story about a Civil War battle or event. Try to use several of the words below in your story, but not so many that your does not make sense. Try to make your story as interesting as possible. We will then ask the class to see if they can determine what your story is all about. Be sure to brainstorm about which words you would like to use.

Accoutrements: soldier's fighting equipments, made of leather.	Shirker: A soldier who wouldn't do his duty on the battlefield.
A beat: A lazy soldier	Tough as a knot: In good health.
Bombproof: Officers who never went to the front. (Where the fighting was.)	Vittles: Food or rations.
Bones: Dice	Yank: Confederate soldier's term for a Union Soldier. (Billy Yank)
Bedroll: rolled blankets containing personal belongings, carried by soldiers	Sheet iron crackers: Hardtack: Very hard cracker. Coffee was used to get the bugs out of it.
Carriage: Wooden mount for artillery.	Bread basket: The stomach.
Dogrobber: A soldier of a group who cooks for everyone.	Arkansas toothpick: A large knife.
First rate: Feeling good.	Fit to be tied: Angry.
Forage: To search for food from nearby farms.	Hunkey Dorey: O.K. or good.
Fresh Fish: New recruits.	Bugger or Skunk: An officer.
Greenbacks: Money	Snug as a bug: Comfortable.
Gum Blanket: Rubber-coated cloth sheet used as a rain cover.	Hornets: Bullets.
Haversack: Cloth for carrying rations and utensils.	Possum: A buddy.
Housewife: A sewing kit.	Scarce as a hen's teeth: Rare or scarce.
Horse Sense: Smart or to use good sense.	Hard Case: Tough.
Johnny: Union soldiers term for a Confederate soldier (Southern Soldier) (Johnny Reb)	Bluff: Cheater.
Jonah: A soldier with bad luck.	Jailbird: Criminal.
Picket: A guard or guard duty.	Been through the mill: Dealt with a lot.
Sawbones: The surgeon of the regiment.	Played out: Worn out.
Seeing the elephant: A man's first experience in combat.	Toeing the mark: Obeying orders.
Rebel: Common term for a Southern soldier.	Kepi: A cap or hat.
Comrade: A close friend or companion.	Bummer: A soldier who would take supplies from local townspeople.
Enlist: To join the army.	Battle/Engagement: large-scale fight between two armies

Directions for sub: Please have the students get into their groups. They know what they are. (See seating chart) Hand out the Civil War Slang Activity worksheet. Please read the directions out loud to the students and check for understanding. Then you can read the sample sentence below. Have the students work in groups to discuss the words and brainstorm about how to use the words in a short story.

By the end of the period, the students should begin working on their stories. Tell the students that they are **NOT** to be finished for homework. We will work on them in class tomorrow.

Please let the students know that they are not required to use every word from the list. They should only use the words that make sense for their story.

PLEASE COLLECT ALL WORK BEFORE THE STUDENTS LEAVE. NOTHING SHOULD LEAVE THE CLASSROOM.

Sample few sentences: Please read this to the class.

After the attack at Fort Sumter, I knew I had to **enlist** in the army. I went and grabbed my **comrade** Joe and we headed down to sign up for the army. Neither one of us had a **greenback** in our pockets. We did however, have our **bedrolls** slung over our shoulder. We were feeling **hunkey dorey**. We were really excited about the thought of getting into an **engagement** with the **rebels**.