

The First Battle of Bull Run, American Civil War, 1861

Using Primary Source Content from Civil War Primary Source Documents

Introduction

The first Battle of Bull Run, also known as First Battle of Manassas, was the first true battle of the American Civil War. On July 21, 1861, President Lincoln pushed the Union Army in Northern Virginia to attack the Confederate forces gathered in Bull Run. It was believed the Union troops would easily defeat the Confederate army, open the way to the Confederate capital in Richmond, and the war would be over. What happened next led to a bloody, protracted war and changed the United States forever.

This guide includes a list of recommended primary sources for teaching students about the Battle of Bull Run.

Standards

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.7; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.9; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.7; CCSS.ELALiteracy.RI.11-12.9

Materials

- Computers/laptops/tablets
- Access to *Civil War Primary Source Documents Collection* on EBSCOhost
- Optional: SMART Board/Overhead projector

Primary Source Documents

Letters

- ***Letter from William Todd to his parents, dated Washington, July 25, 1861.***
Contents: Letter describes marching through Virginia, and his experiences at the first Battle of Bull Run.
- ***Letter from John Scott to Margaret Scott, dated Washington, D.C., July 26, 1861.***
Contents: Letter describes hearing cannon and seeing the arrival of the wounded after the first battle of Bull Run, asks for a revolver to be sent by friends.

- **Letter from Phoebus W. Lyon to Lorenzo E. Lyon, dated New York, Dec. 1861.**
Contents: Letter discusses public opinion, politics and recent battles of the war, including Fort Sumter and Bull Run.
- **Letter from Charles Brown to his mother, dated Arlington Heights, [Va.], July 25, 1861.**
Contents: Letter discusses the first battle of Bull Run.
- **Letter from Augustus C. Hamlin to A.R. Chisolm, dated Bangor, Maine, May 23, 1903.**
Contents: Letter recounting events during the Battle of Bull Run. Accompanied by hand-drawn map of the Bull Run battlefield.

Newspaper Clippings and Interview Manuscripts

- **Clipping from New York Evening Post, dated July 23, 1861, with an envelope addressed to Angelina Post.**
Contents: Clipping discusses the First Battle of Bull Run/First Manassas.
- **Interview, memorandum, and notes on the Battle of Bull Run by A.R. Chisolm, undated.**
Contents: Interview by a Times reporter concerning the Black Horse Cavalry charge, pages from an incomplete account of the Battle of Bull Run, a memorandum describing Chisolm's role in the battle, and other notes by Chisolm concerning the battle.

Military Reports and Orders

- **Copy of report submitted by Henry J. Hunt, dated Light Battery M, 2nd Artillery, Camp near Fort Albany, July 24, 1861.**
Contents: Account of the operations of the 2nd Artillery Battery and the performance of several officers at the first battle of Bull Run, July 21, 1861, marked "not to be published."
- **Special order No. [blank], dated Head Quarters Army of the Potomac, July 20, 1861, signed by command of General Beauregard, Thomas Jordan, A.A. General.**
Contents: Engagement Orders for the First Battle of Bull Run (Confederate States point of view)

Play

- **A stirring incident of the Federal War, 1861: in one act.**
Contents: Drama written by Edward H. Kellogg, 38th New York Infantry, Company B, who was captured at the First Battle of Bull Run and incarcerated at Libby Prison, Richmond. The one act play is a dramatization of captured Union soldiers, performed by fellow prisoners of war.

Activities

1. Each student reads 3-5 of the documents and creates a news story based on what they have read, then have students compare their stories to see what is similar and different. How does this relate to journalism in general?
2. Students compare what they have read in their history textbook to these documents. Discuss how stories of events may be described differently now than they were when they happened. Who writes “history?” What makes a source credible? Is there always one “right” story or can there be multiple viewpoints that are true?
3. Having used these documents for the Battle of Bull Run, students must now seek their own primary source documents for other events, people, or organizations of the Civil War and deliver a class presentation on the history of their individual, event or organization and the document(s) they selected.