**Elevation Chart, Topography Map Cross-Section, Battle of Fredericksburg**  
Alan Town, Waldo Middle School, Salem, Oregon

**Overview:** In this lesson students will be able to identify the elevation at different points on the Fredericksburg Battlefield. Students will be asked to read 6 narratives from different soldiers that fought in the battle. Each soldier was positioned at a different place on the battlefield. From the narrative students will create an elevation chart, displaying the topography (different elevations) as a cross-section of the battlefield from Chatham Manor on Stafford Heights to the Brompton House on Marye’s Heights.

**National Geographic Standards:**

*Places and Regions*
4. The physical and human characteristics of places.

*The Uses of Geography*
15. How physical systems affect human systems.
17. How to apply geography to interpret the past.

**Oregon Geography Content Standards:**
8.12 Investigate how differing geographic perspectives apply to issues in U.S. History

**Common Core Standards:**
RH.6-8.5 - Describe how a text presents information (e.g., sequentially, comparatively, causally).
RH.6-8.7 - Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

**Objectives:**
In completing this exercise, students should be able to:
- Work collaboratively in a small group.
- Read critically to find the elevation and distance between specific points on the battlefield.
- Form a perspective of the battlefield elevations and display them on a chart.
- Create a topography chart stating the elevation of specific points.
- Give an oral report to the class explaining their chart.

**Grade Level:** 8  
**Time:** 3 class periods (55 minutes)

**Materials:**
- Reading - Short overview of the battle, Fredericksburg, December 1862, *Appendix 1*
- Elevation of Fredericksburg Battlefield (blank grid), *Appendix 2*
- Soldier's narrative (6), *Appendix 3*
- Fredericksburg Key Landmark PowerPoint
Background:
This lesson is a good exercise to strengthen the emphasis on geography in the Battle of Fredericksburg. Student should already have some historical knowledge of the Battle of Fredericksburg prior to complete this activity. Several items that would be important to know prior to this activity are:

- Knowing where the armies were positioned and why.
- Who won the battle?
- The names of landmarks and geographical features.

Procedures:

Day 1

1. Introduction: Take students outside to the schools yard and have them look at the field with a critical eye. They will be looking for changes in the elevation of the field. Tell the students that they are an army scout and their job is to look over the land where the battle will take place (school yard). Their commander needs to know about the different elevations of the battlefield. Tell the students to be observant of how the land rises and falls, and how far away different objects are. Possible questions to start conversations:
   - How would you compare the schoolyard to a flat surface?
   - What do you notice about…?
   - How would you describe…?
   - Can you identify the objects that you see?
   - Can you explain how the land rises and falls?

Note: When using these questions be sure and give students think time and have them share answers with a fellow student prior to whole class discussion.

2. Students write their answers in their notebook and discuss responses.

3. Once back in the classroom give each student a copy of the reading, Fredericksburg, December 1862. Do a Cloze Reading of the article with the students.

4. Partners the students and have them do another Cloze read with their partner. Then have them switch. Because they are army scouts as they read the third time have them discuss and underline any and all places. (third critical read)

5. View the Powerpoint, Fredericksburg Key Landmarks, as a whole class. Point out to the students that the landmarks (places) are important for them to remember. While viewing compare the reading with the Powerpoint and discuss the landmarks with the class.

Assessment:

Formative 1: Day 1 - Ticket Out the Door: As a scout for the army your job was to look over the land and identify places and elevation changes. From what you read and viewed on the Powerpoint, identify 2 places where the elevation changes, and 2 key landmarks on the battlefield.
Day 2
1. Does anyone know what a cross-section is or means? Discuss various answers. Take a deep paper plate, write A at the top and B at the bottom. Draw a line from A to B. With your scissors cut along the line from A to B cutting the plate in half. Point out the cross-section of the plate (you might need to take a black marker and highlight the edge). Be sure to point out how the elevation changes on the plate’s cross-section. (If students are still puzzled, use a picture of the Grand Canyon and draw an example on the board of its cross-section).

2. Use the Fredericksburg Key Landmarks PowerPoint to show the Fredericksburg battlefield (Slide 1) on the white board. Draw a line on the white board map from Chatham Manor to the Brompton House. This line will be the students’ cross-section line of the battlefield.

3. Give every student a copy of the blank Battlefield Elevation Chart. Their instructions are:
   - They will make a Battlefield Elevation Chart (cross-section) of the Battle of Fredericksburg.
   - Chatham Manor will be on the left of the chart and Brompton House will be on the right.
   - Put the students in groups of 4 or 5.
   - Pass out to each group a copy of Narratives of Soldiers (6). Explain that each narrative is from a soldier who was on a specific place on the battlefield (recall the key landmark PowerPoint). Some are Confederate soldiers and some are Union. *These are not Primary documents, but written by me for the purpose of this lesson.*
   - Students will read the narratives in their groups; from the information they are to find the elevation of key points (river, town, ditch, stonewall, etc.) and the distance between these points. Working (collaborating and problem solving) as a team they construct their chart by transferring the written information onto their Battlefield Elevation Chart.
   - Teacher circulates, as needed assessing student conversations and charts.

4. Give students 30 minutes to complete the task.

**Assessment:**
**Formative: Day 2 - Ticket out the door:** What did your discover, or what surprised you about the Battle of Fredericksburg?

Day 3
Have each team come up in front of class and present their charts. The presentation will allow the teacher to see the students thinking. They should be able to report how they interpreted the information from the reading, and also discussed the information to come up with the end product.

1. Place charts on the document camera.
2. Teacher asks – “Why did you draw the chart the way you did? Explain.”
-Students are to explain how they worked as a team to come up with the cross-section of the battlefield.

**Assessment:**

**Formative: Day 3**
Assess the work the students did on their Battlefield Elevation Chart while they are talking to the class. You may need to ask a few questions to stimulate the conversation. Visually does the chart have a V shape to represent a valley with high walls and a river? If so, then they did the task in a satisfactory manner.

**Summative:**

**Writing assessment:** Have students answer the following prompt in writing.

You took the role of a scout at the beginning of this lesson. A scout is important because they are the eyes of the commander, and a commander will use the information the scout gives to gain a victory. Your task is this:

Choose to be a scout for either the Union or the Confederates. Write a report to your commander stating what on the battlefield he needs to be cautious about, or what could be a potential problem. Also, add what he could use to his advantage to win this battle. Be sure to use evidence from the reading and your chart.

**Extensions:**

- For a lower skills group the teacher can prepare the chart in advance with the key landmarks already drawn in the right places.
- For English Language Learners give students **think time** and have them discuss or share answers with a fellow student prior to whole class discussion.
- Create a grid style graphic organizer for students to record the elevation and distance information while reading the narratives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place Name</th>
<th>Elevation</th>
<th>Distance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chatham Manor</td>
<td>150 feet</td>
<td>¼ mile from river</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix: 1

**Fredericksburg, December 1862**

General Robert E. Lee – Confederate Commander, Army of Northern Virginia
General Ambrose Burnside – Union Commander, Army of the Potomac

At the Battle of Fredericksburg, the town of Fredericksburg, Virginia was destroyed, the Confederates won an important battle and Union leaders were greatly embarrassed. On December 11, 1862, the Union artillerists bombarded the city from Stafford Heights, near Chatham Manor, east across the Rappahannock River. After the bombardment they planned to lay pontoon bridges across the river. While the engineers were putting the pontoons in place a brigade of Mississippi riflemen took position in the town and began to fire on the engineers killing many and forcing others to retreat back across the river. The Union artillerists again fired on the city trying to drive the Mississippian out of the town, with no success. Finally, Union soldiers boarded empty pontoons, crossed the river under fire, landed, and then fought building-to-building and hand-to-hand to drive the Confederates out of the town. Once successful the building of the pontoon bridges began again. This was the first urban (city or town) warfare in the Civil War and the first amphibious assault in US military history.

After securing the river crossing the Union took up two positions, one in the town and the other south of town in front of Prospect Hill. On the 13th, General Burnside launched a two-pronged attack. On the south end of the line, about 5 miles from town, the Union briefly broke through the Confederate lines at Prospect Hill before being pushed back. On the North end of the union line, soldiers marched west from the town, and attacked a well entrenched Confederates corps on a sunken road behind a stonewall on Marye's Heights. Confederate soldiers repelled wave after wave of Union soldiers. Six deep in places and behind the stonewall, Confederate soldiers would load weapons and pass them forward to create continuous fire against the lines of attacking Union soldiers. The field between Marye’s Heights and the town was covered with Union dead and wounded. Confederate soldier Edward Porter Alexander said of the battlefield, "A chicken could not survive on that field." Throughout the day column after column of Union soldiers were ordered to assault the hill. As darkness fell on a battlefield strewn with dead and wounded, it was abundantly clear that a Confederate victory was at hand. The Army of the Potomac had suffered nearly 13,300 casualties (dead, wounded, missing), nearly two-thirds of them in front of Marye’s Heights. By comparison, General Lee's Confederate army had suffered some 4,500 losses. No Union soldiers reached the stonewall or the sunken road.

Interesting information and cool facts:
1) A famous remark about the battle came from Robert E. Lee, "It is well that war is so terrible or we would grow too fond of it."
2) It was the first opposed river crossing in American military history.
3) It was the largest battle of the war in terms of total men fighting at almost 200,000 soldiers.
4) It was one of the first times the Union used aerial reconnaissance in the war as the Union used hot air balloons to go in the air and look at the Confederate army’s location and defenses.
Appendix 3

Narratives of Soldiers
Battle of Fredericksburg December 1862

My name is Robert Hendershot, I am an artillery sergeant with the 97th New York Regiment of the Army of the Potomac. My current position is on Chatham Manor, east of Fredericksburg, Virginia. We have set up our artillery cannons here on Stafford Heights, the high ground above the Rappahannock River. We are ¼ miles from the river, which is 135 feet below our position. As I look west I can see the river below and the town of Fredericksburg on the west bank of the river. The town looks like it is built on a stairway. From the river the land rises in steps. The steps are about 15 feet tall and about 150 feet long. From what I can tell there are about 4 steps. I can see 2 church steeples in town and Marye’s Heights, a ridge running north and south, about 1 mile from where I stand.

My name is Captain Wesley Brainerd and my job is the lead engineer assigned to build one of the two pontoon bridges across the Rappahannock River. We need to get these bridges built so the Union Army can cross the river, travel through the town, and engage the Confederates up at Marye’s Heights. The Heights look to be about ¾ of a mile from the river. The river is not very wide this time of year, from my calculations I’d say it is 200 feet across and 14 feet deep. I have also calculated that the river, which flows into Chesapeake Bay, is 20 feet above sea level. We should be able to get the bridge built in half a day if we don’t meet any resistance from the Confederates.

My name is John Cooke, and I am a sharpshooter in the Mississippi Brigade, my commander is General Barksdale. Our job is to delay the Yankees from building their pontoon bridges. My position is on the west side of the river. I am 30 feet above the Rappahannock River in a damaged building with a great view of the river. From where I sit the river looks to be 200 feet wide and about 150 feet from me as I sit in the second step up from the river. I should have no problem getting a bead on those Yankee boys.

My name is Patrick Kelly an infantry soldier with the 88th New York Infantry Regiment, of the Irish Brigade. We are standing in formation waiting to charge up the hill to Marye’s Heights. We are lined up on the west edge of town about 1/3 of the way up the hill. By my estimation we are almost a ¼ mile from the river. From what I can see the steps up from the river have stopped and we have open field in front of us. One hundred feet ahead is a canal ditch. The ditch is 15 feet wide and 6 feet deep; this could be trouble when the shooting starts. After the ditch is a steady rise up to a stonewall and a little white house they call Innis House. About 100 feet above the wall is a large house called the Brompton House. The stonewall looks like a fortress and I can see the enemy waiting for us to start our march. Getting to that stonewall is going to be the hardest 2,400 foot walk of my life. I hope I can make it in one piece.

My name is Jubal Pender I am an infantrymen with the Georgia Regiment of General Longstreet’s 1st Corps. We are west of Fredericksburg standing behind a stonewall on
Marye’s Heights nearly ¾ of a mile from town. The road behind the wall is a small wagon road and it is called a sunken road because it is used so often the wagon wheels have worn it down. As I look back at the town I can see the Yankee soldiers starting to line up, I guess they are getting ready to attack and charge up the hill. They have about 2,400 feet to walk with a little rise of about 75 feet. This would be a nice easy walk on any other day, but today they face the Army of Northern Virginia. We will defend our land from these invaders. I better go and check my ammunition and make sure my powder is dry.

Not far away I can see General Lee sitting on his horse, Traveller. He is at his command post. My name is Col. James B. Walton and I am in charge of the Confederate Armies Washington Artillery. We have our 9 cannons positioned near the center of the ridge at the Brompton House. Looking eastward, down past my cannons, I can see Fredericksburg. Half of the town is destroyed from the Union army cannons and the hand-to-hand fighting between the Mississippi Brigade and the Yankee troops. Just below me about 100 feet are the Georgia and North Carolina boys of the 1st Corps. They are standing behind a stonewall preparing for a fight. I can also see a little white house just on the other side of the stonewall. Far to the east, on the other side of town, I can see the Union cannons at Chatham Manor on Stafford Heights. Chatham Manor is on the other side of the Rappahannock River; it looks to be about a mile away.