'Large and in charge' - you are General Burnside at Fredericksburg, VA; December 13, 1862

Overview: The purpose of the lesson is to use photographs, elevation charts and primary source maps to assist students in determining a course of action against Lee's troops during the final battle of Fredericksburg.

National Geography Standards -

The world in spatial terms

1). How to use maps and other geographic representations, tools, and technologies to acquire, process, and report information from a spatial perspective

2). How to use mental maps to organize information about people, places, and environments in a spatial context

3). How to analyze the spatial organization of people, places, and environments on earth’s surface

Places and Regions

4). The physical and human characteristics of places

The Uses of Geography

17). How to apply geography to interpret the past

Supporting Standards: 14, 15

Oregon Geography Content Standards:

8.10 Interpret maps to identify growth and development of the United States.

8.12 Investigate how differing geographic perspectives apply to issues in U.S. History.

Oregon Science Content Standard - Engineering Design

MS-ETS1-1. Define the criteria and constraints of a design problem with sufficient precision to ensure a successful solution, taking into account relevant scientific principles and potential impacts on people and the natural environment that may limit possible solutions.

Common Core/Social Science Connections:
8.6 Use and interpret documents and other relevant primary and secondary sources pertaining to U.S. History from multiple perspectives.

8.8 Evaluate information from a variety of sources and perspectives.

8.9 Construct or evaluate a written historical argument demonstrating an understanding of primary and secondary sources.

8.28 Investigate a response or solution to an issue or problem and support or oppose, using research.

**Objectives:** In completing this assignment, students will be able to:

- 'read' elevation charts, topographical photographs and maps of battle site
- consider solutions based on geographic features that limit a leader's potential course of action
- through discussion, determine course of action for troops based on primary source documents such as photographs and maps
- write a short 7-10 sentence group based synopsis that explains your decision to fight/not fight (formative assessment)
- reflect upon ACTUAL events of a battle after reviewing the battle's outcome through a 1-2 page extended response and agree or disagree with General Burnside's decision to attack (summative assessment)

**Grade Level:** 8  
**Time:** three 55 minute class periods

**Materials:**

A) Hotchkiss' cartographic sketch of Fredericksburg battle (primary source),
B) historical photograph of approach to Marye's Heights from Union viewpoint
C) elevation graph from river bottom to Marye's Heights
D) blank map of battle with basic geographic elements (the town, Marye's Heights, the Rappahannock river)
E) one page historical synopsis of events preceding Fredericksburg battle
F) map of northern Virginia circa 1862.
G) map of Fredericksburg battle site as battle ensues (with notations made)
H) pencil and colored pencils
I) lined notebook paper that will be used in explaining the group's decision to attack/not attack as explained to the Congressional Committee on the Conduct of the War after the battle.

**Background:** Students should have a general understanding of the history of the Civil War, its combatants and the economic and political goals for each side during the conflict. Students must have specific knowledge of the Union's plans and strategies for
victory and understand how to read a Civil War battle map prior to this assignment. (e.g. the Confederates/Union are represented by blue or red on the map).

**Procedure:**

1) Provide students with 1 page synopsis of events that preceded the Fredericksburg battle. Have students read the synopsis. The map, 'Seat of War in Northeastern Virginia', should provide a sense of where Fredericksburg is in relation to Washington and Richmond. (10 minutes)

   a. In groups of three have students discuss and list motivations behind a Union attack at Fredericksburg. Accept any pertinent information including prior knowledge. Share with class to add to pool of knowledge. (10 minutes)

   b. Identify and rate General Burnside's motivations between 1-5. Ask students to note why their group rated them in a particular way (provide an explanation for each rating). (10 minutes)

2) Provide students with 'Sketch of the Battle of Fredericksburg', created by Stonewall Jackson's cartographer, Jed Hotchkiss.

   Have students note any significant physical or human made geographic features on Hotchkiss' map (such as railroads, rivers, towns). Since the focus will be on the fight at Marye's Heights outside of town, orient the students to focus to the upper left part of Hotchkiss' map. (5 minutes)

   - students should stop to ask for clarification of human/natural features on Hotchkiss' map Share with class to pool information. (5 minutes)

3) Give each student a basic map of the Fredericksburg battle site (drawn by hand). They will also be given a historic photograph of the open field approach to Marye's Heights. (the Rappahannock river is behind you about 600 m and through the town).

   **Assessments - Formative #1:**

   Students will be given 10 minutes to sketch any physical or man-made features (e.g. Hanover Street, Innis House etc.) on their map. Students will then compare and discuss their sketches with one another. They may look at the photograph a second time for further assistance after consulting their partners. (10 minutes)

   The group will then DRAW ONE final map that the group agrees to be the most geographically accurate. The teacher will walk around and ask questions based on what they see students create. (15 minutes)
Assessments - Formative #2:

4) As General Burnside, pretend you are in direct communication with President Lincoln by telegraph. Using your final group map, write a group 7-10 sentence summary of your military readiness to take Marye's Heights. Since he is not there, provide a visual description of the landscape and be very, very specific. You should use all of the evidence you've been given, from maps to photographs to the elevation graph. Then, let the President know your decision, will you attack the Confederates at Marye's Heights? Consider ALL of your strengths and weaknesses in this situation. Be very clear about this because the fate of the nation and ending the rebellion are on your shoulders. (10-15 min)

5) Students will watch a short film summary of the Battle at Fredericksburg and read the short summary of the way the battle concluded on December 13. (teachers should come up with their own sources for providing this for students). The Civil War Trust is a good, accurate website as one potential source. (15 minutes)

Students should list 5-7 items they observed in readings and in video of the battle. The class can pool results for a more informed final written response. (10 minutes)

Assessment - Summative:

6) On your own, write a ½ page summary of the attack on Marye's Heights (last battle). Consider what occurred based on the film and short reading.

For the second half of your assignment, explain in ½-1 page your response to the following statement: "Burnside was a complete fool to attack Lee's position on Marye's Heights". Consider: the geographic features that most hurt the Union goal of taking the hill; the geographic features that most helped the Confederates. (30-40 minutes)

Vocabulary: corps, division, regiment, Confederate, Union, mill race, pontoon, tentative, appoint, morale

Extension/Adaptation:

If useful, use a T chart to determine 3+ items students understand and what they do not understand after reading the synopsis

For SIOP based and ELL classrooms, word walls with definitions are useful. Students refer to them as they tackle new ideas. Visual representations on the whiteboard for symbols from maps and pictures that help explain vocabulary are useful. Time for discussion of new vocabulary terms are critical in adding to new knowledge (as it is for all class levels). Give students time to think and discuss before you have whole group discussion.

Consider having students read the synopsis more than once (teacher, individual, pairs).
Synopsis of events leading to final Fredericksburg battle

After the September 1862 battle at Antietam Creek in Maryland, General Lee's Confederate army had sustained heavy casualties. Retreating to Virginia to rest and reorganize itself, the army was strengthened to 85,000 men. There, Lee waited to see what the Union army would do next.

Despite its tentative victory at Antietam, the Union army's popular commander General George McClellan was relieved of command on November 5th. For President Lincoln, commander in chief of the U.S. Military, McClellan had simply not used the army in an aggressive hunt to destroy Lee forces and take Richmond. President Lincoln appointed General Ambrose Burnside as the new commander with these specific goals in mind for Burnside. Here is the President's letter to Burnside's boss, Major General Henry Halleck:

"To Henry W. Halleck (Major General of the U.S. Army)

Sir: Nov. 27, 1862
I have just had a long conference with Gen. Burnside. He believes that Gen. Lees whole army, or nearly the whole of it is in front of him, at and near Fredericksburg. Gen. B. says he could take into battle now any day, about, one hundred and ten thousand men, that his army is in good spirit, good condition, good moral, and that in all respects he is satisfied with officers and men; that he does not want more men with him, because he could not handle them to advantage; that he thinks he can cross the river in face of the enemy and drive him away, but that, to use his own expression, it is somewhat risky."

General Burnside moves his army down from Washington to Fredericksburg, a little colonial town (home to George Washington's family). His desire to cross the Rappahannock river quickly and get between Lee's two armies of 40,000 is delayed. After nearly two weeks on December 13th, Lee's army, now 80,000 strong is gathered west of the town waiting for Burnside's Union troops who have finally crossed the river and taken the city. It had been a brutal, exhausting street-by-street fight for the Union.

Burnside's army outnumbers Lee's almost 2 to 1 and he is confident of victory with a frontal assault. The Confederates are behind barriers however. They have the high ground. Burnside's troops must march across a mile of mostly open fields with few places to hide. What will the outcome be?
Bibliography


