

Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute 1981 Volume IV: Writing Across the Curriculum

Reading and Writing about the Civil War

Curriculum Unit 81.04.02 by Joseph P. Binkoski

Introduction

Reading and Writing About the Civil War proposes to bring about new attitudes and understandings of the Civil War through the use of researching and writing skills. The unit will run about six to eight weeks and is intended for high school sophomores who need development in improving these skills. Some of the required papers will be presented as a group project while others will be chosen depending upon the students' individual interests.

In developing research skills, the students will meet periodically in the school library to review basic library skills such as using the card catalog or making use of periodical literature. In addition, many assignments will require research in New Haven's Public Libraries. A trip to the library at the New Haven Historical Society is also planned to investigate topics relevant to New Haven's or Connecticut's role in the Civil War. It is hoped that students will become more competent in research skills as a result of these visits.

Writing skills will be developed through the papers written in library research. The students will be encouraged, however, to proof-read, re-read and to re-write their papers depending upon the paper's accuracy. It is intended that students will develop greater competence in writing skills as they become more aware of their individual strengths and weaknesses. The teacher should keep an individual file of each student's papers throughout the unit and, periodically, the student and the teacher will meet to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the papers.

As the unit progresses, each student will have the chance to view the previous papers and note his/her progress. Also, as the teacher sees necessary, common problems of concern to the entire class will be discussed and class instruction on specific areas may result. These common problems might include how to use a dictionary or Thesaurus, how to construct good paragraphs, how to construct a bibliography, how to footnote properly and the like. The nature, then, would depend upon the common needs of the class and would vary with each group.

Objectives

The objectives of Reading and Writing About the Civil War include the following:

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1. To give the students a basic knowledge of the causes and the results of the Civil War. The required readings (see student Bibliography) will achieve this purpose, but *The Origins of the Civil War* will be the primary sourcebook. The fact that war breaks out for a great number of reasons will be demonstrated, and the students will learn about the impact of the many complex political, economic, social, and psychological elements that historians have made us aware of over the years. The fact that even today many historians still disagree as to the basic causes of the Civil War, the reasons for the rise of the Abolitionists, the results of the Missouri Compromise, the limits of states' rights, and the Compromise of 1850 will be discussed in relation to the outbreak of war. The legal process and its influence will be discussed with regard to the Civil War. Such legislation as the Fugitive Acts, the Dred Scott decision, and the Kansas-Nebraska Bill of 1854 will be highlighted.

The results of the Civil War will also be studied in readings and in paper writing. The failure of Reconstruction, the assassination of President Lincoln, and the resulting strengthening of the central government will be evaluated. In studying the results of the Civil War, students may begin to understand how little was resolved by it as well as its continuing effects on the present-day government.

2. To improve the students' writing styles and expose them to varied writing experiences and to master basic writing skills such as using proper sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, and appropriate diction. Although it is apparent that an objective of this nature might easily be a year's curriculum in a high school English class, it is my opinion that without attempting to improve on the above, very little improvement will result. Since most tenth grade students have had basic instruction in grammar and the other basic writing skills mentioned, many of the common errors in their papers may be corrected in carefully planned class instruction that is pointed toward correcting their individual shortcomings. In other cases, where individuals are having serious difficulty with basic writing skills, individual discussions with these students will be held to remedy their problems.

Whether through the reading of narratives or research materials, writing opinions on photographs or criticizing films, the students' exposure to varied writing experiences will strengthen their individual writing styles and increase their competence in writing. Entire class periods can be spent on writing or re-writing individual papers.

- 3. To develop individual interest in writing.
- 4. To develop confidence in improving writing and research skills.
- 5. To demonstrate the importance of learning good writing techniques and to develop increased student responsibility in improving writing skills.
- 6. To encourage an appreciation for good writing and to develop a personal satisfaction for having achieved a certain competence in writing.

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Many students do not understand the value of writing or its importance in careers, in note—taking or in other daily activities, It is the attempt of this unit to design interesting, thought-provoking stimuli to develop student opinions that will result in student concern for developing good writing skills to express themselves accurately. In the varied assignments, students will be encouraged to express personal opinions as well as to do research. This personal involvement, it is hoped, will encourage the students to develop a greater desire to improve such things as their method of expressing themselves, their vocabularies, their spelling and, consequently, their confidence and interest in expressing themselves well in writing. It is expected that personal satisfaction, too, will result as the students see their improvement with each writing assignment.

In the following pages a number of activities are presented to improve writing skills in *Reading and Writing About the Civil War.* I recommend that the activities be presented to a class in the order in which they are shown here as they are developmental. Each lesson is based upon knowledge and understanding of subject matter learned in the previous activity. This sequencing of activities also allows for the instructor to design lessons in grammar, paragraph structure, etc. and to space then in accord with the activity. The activities, naturally, can be varied in form to meet special interests of a class.

Biographies

In an introductory lesson to the Civil War, the students will be asked to select one person from a list of several that they would like to investigate and write a two page paper about (see sample assignment).

A research period in the library may follow in which the instructor should work among the students and help them to select from the research materials that information which is relevant and that which is not relevant in a short paper. After receiving each completed paper, the instructor will correct them, return them and, if necessary, request that his students re-write them after noting the errors. It is important here that those errors that are pointed out by the instructor will be the errors that the students will correct. The burden, then, to correct the papers in terms of research, accuracy of interpretation of the facts, grammar, spelling and so forth is placed on the instructor. The instructor, then, to maximize student improvement in writing, MUST take the initiative in correcting the papers thoroughly. Student improvement in writing skills is directly correlated to the instructor's emphasis on spelling or grammar. Those facets of writing a teacher stresses will be the same facets the students will improve upon.

Sample Assignment: Biographies

Choose one person from the Civil War era that you would like to write about. Then, write a two page paper on that person emphasizing his/her contributions to the period, that is, what did he/she do to meet the challenges of his/her times. For example, you might discuss his/her leadership qualities, ability to overcome obstacles or personal commitment to a cause. In any case, research this person carefully before writing about him/her.

Your paper should be neatly written and, as always, it is recommended that you pay close attention to spelling, grammar, verb agreement and the like. Proof—read your papers. Include a bibliography written in proper form with your paper. A list of suggested Civil War era people that you may choose from follows. Your paper is due on (date).

Elizabeth Cady Stanton General Robert E. Lee Lucretia Mott General Ulysses S. Grant

Dorothea Dix John Wilkes Booth

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William Lloyd Garrison General George McClellan

Sojourner Truth Abraham Lincoln
Henry Clay Frederick Douglas

Harriet Beecher Stowe a slaveowner

Dred Scott General William T. Sheridan

John Brown Sarah Edmonds Stephen A. Douglas Jefferson Davis Harriet Tubman Belle Boyd

Andrew Johnson Supreme Court Justice Roger

B. Taney

Interviews

After the re-writing of the papers has taken place in Biographies and the students are quite familiar with their Civil War era person, Interviews can begin. The students are seated in a circle and each will play the role of the person he/she has written on. This activity will reinforce the group's understanding of the people who collectively and separately influenced the times of the Civil War.

Then, each student will answer the questions on his own person (see Sample Assignment: Interviews). When each student feels that he can answer the questions, the instructor will interview the students asking each, any, or all of the five questions he/she has prepared. This role playing will bring into the foreground a number of issues including the South's view of the Civil War, the Abolitionist movement, the Underground railroad, the Women's movement, etc. The interplay of personalities, diverse opinions (Abraham Lincoln vs. Jefferson Davis, for example) will bring out many of the conflicts that resulted in the Civil War. If interest in the project continues, a videotape of a second interview may be held for which the students have already 'rehearsed' and are prepared for.

The interviews conducted should be presented in an autobiographical manner. The student should be playing the role of the person he/she has written on to maximize the effect of bringing out the various personalities and issues of the day. The students, it is hoped, will experience greater personal involvement with a particular aspect of the Civil War and will see that aspect in relation to the spirit of the times.

Sample Assignment: Interviews

Using the Civil War era person you've previously reported on, write five questions that you would ask him/her if you were interviewing him/her. Be selective in writing your questions and be sure to ask questions that will bring about a better understanding of that person's involvement with the Civil War era.

After writing down the five questions, answer each as well as you can. You may use any resource materials necessary to make your answers thorough. Five or six sentences should be sufficient for each question asked.

You will then be "interviewed" as if you were this Civil War person. You will be asked the five questions that you've already prepared.

You may use notecards if you wish during the interviewing.

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Sample questions to be asked of Abraham Lincoln:.

- 1. How could the Civil War have been avoided?
- 2. Mr. Lincoln, why didn't you favor the immediate abolition of slavery?
- 3. Why, Mr. Lincoln, did you suspend the right of Habeas Corpus in some places when it is guaranteed by the Constitution?

How can you justify such action?

- 4. Why can't states break away from the Union if they are not in agreement with it?
- 5. What do you feel was your greatest contribution as President of the United States?

Photographs

Since the Civil War is said to be the "most photographed war", there exist large numbers of photos, made chiefly through the efforts of Mathew Brady, that provide a classroom with a rich learning tool. If the adage "a picture is worth a thousand words" holds true many good writing assignments can result by creatively using these photos in the classroom.

Large volumes of Civil War photos are available in most public libraries (see sample bibliography). The students can be shown the photos and asked to select one on which to write. The writing assignment might be describe the action that is taking place in the photo, a dialogue between two of the people in the photo or a short story about the photo and the people in it. A series of three photos shown to the entire class for ten minutes each might be viewed. Each student then writes a paragraph about the photo describing the events that are taking place as if the student were the photographer.

To encourage vocabulary development, new words can be listed on the chalkboard that the student should include in his paper. Such words as muster, Confederate, conciliation, propaganda, emancipation or secession might lend themselves to a number of Civil War photos. The creative pursuits of the students in describing the photos will provide still another opportunity to strengthen the writing (and re-writing, if necessary) that this lesson is aimed at developing.

Sample Bibliography Photographs

A list of sourcebooks that can be used with Photographs follows. The photos are mostly done by Mathew Brady and can be duplicated easily. All of these books are found in the Main Branch of the New Haven Public Library.

Angle, Paul, A Pictorial History of the Civil War, Garden City, New York, 1967.

Frassinito, William A., Gettysburg; A Journey in Time, New York, New York, 1975.

Horan, James D., Mathew Brady:. Historian With A Camera, New York, New York, 1955.

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Ketchum, Richard M., The American Heritage Picture History-of the Civil War, New York, New York, 1960.

Kouwenhoven, John A., Adventures of America 1857-1900, New York, New York, 1938.

Lossing, Benson J., Mathew Brady's Illustrated History of the Civil War, Washington, D.C., 1912.

Milhollen, Hirst and Kaplan, Milton, *Divided We Fought: A Pictorial History of the War 1861-1865*, New York, New York, 1961.

Pratt, Fletcher, Civil War in Pictures, New York, New York, 1955.

Whitmen, Walt, Specimen Days, Boston, Mass., 1971.

Wiley, Bell, The Common Soldier of the Civil War, New York, New York, 1975.

Films on the Civil War

The New Haven School System has available to teachers many films and motion pictures dealing with the Civil War. The topics are varied (see Audio-Visual Materials) and many themes for writing papers can be derived from the films.

Famous people from the Civil War is one common theme found in the films. The films can be viewed by the class and then the students can write a paper on such topics as "How influential was Frederick Douglas as an abolitionist" or "Discuss some of Ulysses Grant's Contributions as a General."

A series of filmstrips on battles of the Civil War can be presented. The students can take notes on the filmstrips and afterwards write a paper on "Important Battles of the Civil War" or an opinion question such as "In your opinion, which battle of the Civil War was most significant? Why?" The topics of the papers naturally should vary with the ability of the group. Thought questions on the film "Causes of the Civil War" can be assigned to a group that is concentrating on improving such fundamental writing skills as sentence structure or grammar. A more sophisticated student could, having viewed selected films dealing with Black History, write a summary of the Blacks in America. An assignment such as this reinforces writing skills and historical information as well. It is particularly effective with minority students.

Any number of writing assignments can be developed by an instructor who effectively uses the Audio-Visual materials. The films will provide still another media aimed at stimulating thought and creativity among the students.

Audio-Visual Materials

A list of Audio-Visual materials recommended for use with "Reading and Writing About the Civil War" follows. These films can be found in the Audio-Visual department at Winchester School and are listed in the Audio—Visual Materials Catalog for the New Haven Public Schools.

Filmstrips:

Lincoln and Douglas Reconstruction Period
Causes of the Civil War From Africa to America

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From Bull Run to Antietam Slavery in the Young American Republic

From Shiloh to Vicksburg Slavery in a House Divided

Civil War at Sea Negro in the Civil War and Reconstruction

Gettysburg Story of Abraham Lincoln

Sherman's March to the Sea Ulysses S. Grant

Road to Appomattox

Clara Barton

Filmstrip and Record:

Civil War A Nation Divided—America's Trial

Legacy of the Civil War and Agony

Artillery in the Civil War High Tide of Valor-Darkest Hour

Footsoldier in the Civil War then Peace

How We Know About the Civil War

Toll of the Civil War

Afro-American's Life from 1770-1861.

Civil War and

War on Water part IIEli Whitney Changes America Reconstruction, Part

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Songs of Slavery Adventures in Negro History-Black Songs of the Civil War Frederick Douglas Years

Frederick A. Douglas—Harriet Tubman

Motion Pictures:

One Nation Indivisible (parts I and II)

Abraham Lincoln (parts I and II)

Frederick Douglas (parts I and II)

Harriet Tubman-Underground Railway (part I and II)

Out of Slavery 1619

Land of Liberty (pa

Civil War and Recon

Sunset at Appomatto

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Newspaper Articles

Actual newspaper articles from the era are an excellent source of learning about the Civil War. Reading actual copy that leads up to the outbreak of the Civil War or writeups of the battles in progress can awaken students to the feeling of the day and they can experience the events from first accounts. In addition, related political events can be observed as well as advertisements, fashions and even the biases of the newspapers themselves. The students can explore the news of the era and thereby gain a feeling for the conflict as it progressed.

After the students have read the accounts of the newspapers, they can write their own newspaper articles. They may choose any event that appeals to them from the war and write an article on it. They may decide to write an editorial on a particular topic that interests them such as the role of the Black soldier, the necessity to go to war, the need for the south to secede from the Union, or a criticism of Lincoln's policies during the war. Several editorial topics can be selected by the students depending upon individual interests.

A news broadcast can be presented using the news articles. The students can present realistically up-to-themoment developments on the war. Commercials advertising products of the day can augment the news broadcast. The students will often develop their own ideas for an activity like this to make it accurate and entertaining as well.

Cartoons and Posters

There are many cartoons and posters from the Civil War era (see sample bibliography-Photographs) that allow students to understand the sentiments of the day. Political cartoons can be viewed and discussed in terms of political satire, racism or misinformation. The students can be awakened to the very strong feelings of the day regarding issues of secession or abolitionism, for example, and can begin to see the influence of the newspapers on public opinion. Propaganda methods, persuasion and the like can also be evaluated in terms of cartoons and posters. The strong nationalistic biases of the posters can be described. All these approaches can provide topics for writing papers.

Students can create their own cartoons and posters. A paragraph describing the action and messages displayed can be included. The importance of the political cartoon and the strong appeal of the posters when designed by the students can provide them with a clear understanding of the importance of such media particularly during times of war.

Short Plays on the Civil War

Short plays on various events of the Civil War can increase understanding of the war and provide the students with an opportunity to improve their writing skills. For example, a class of 24 students could be broken down into six groups of four. Each can be assigned a research topic that they collectively must investigate and then write a short 3-4 page play on. Each play must include a role for each of the four students to act out.

The characterization can be fictional, of course, but realistic in that it portrays accurately the concerns of the times. When the plays are written and the students have had time to rehearse them, they can present the plays. If the topics of each play are arranged chronologically, they can be presented in that way. Otherwise, a series of loosely related Civil War era plays can do the job just as nicely. In any case, the students will learn about the Civil War and have still another opportunity to develop their writing ability.

Some suggested research topics for the plays include:

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Freedom From the Plantation The War on the Water Surrender at Appomattox Spies in the Civil War

Sherman's March to the Sea Black Troops in the Civil War Women in the Civil War After the Battle of Gettysburg

any battle scene The Secession of South Carolina From

the Union

The variations of playwriting are endless. For example, four characters (whether real or fictional) could be traced in each of the plays. Each play, then, would have the same four characters experiencing another phase of the war. A battle scene, a soldier's camp or enlisting in the army are some possibilities the same four characters could experience. Another possibility, of course, is to present the entire series of plays to another U.S. History class.

Narratives

The reading of narratives and folklore (see Bibliography) from the Civil War can bring relief to a classroom overwhelmed with the stories of gruesome battles and casualties. A great number of writings from the Civil War have survived to the present day and provide us with a lighter and more personal view of the war years. In addition, the writings have come from various sources including not only generals and presidents, but also infantrymen and women during the Civil War. The variety of writings, then, can bring about a wider view of the Civil War to the student. The personal experiences and observations in the narratives add new perspectives and a greater understanding of the war between the states.

These narratives can be read aloud by the students to the entire group. Particularly if they are read successively, they can be thought-provoking and can lead to interesting group discussions wherein an exchange of perceptions and ideas can take place among the students.

Once the students' imaginations have been sufficiently stimulated, the students can be asked to close their eyes and picture themselves living during the Civil War. After a few minutes of fantasizing about themselves involved in the war, they can be asked to describe themselves if they were living at that time. A student might see himself as a Colonel in the army, a freed slave, a nurse or even a wounded soldier lying on a battlefield. After the students have described themselves, they can be asked to write a narrative or even a short diary of their experiences, observations, prejudices and the like.

Writing narratives on the Civil War stimulates the imagination and, although fictional, student involvement with Civil War experiences is real. Whether based on fact or fiction, the writing gained can be meaningful to the student and can result in better written papers. Since the purpose of the lesson is largely to develop better writing skills, a fictional experience like this can bring about real developmental writing skills for the students.

Civil War Mapwork

Each student should be given a map of the United States with the states outlined, but without the individual names of each state written in. First, the students will be asked to find and write in the names of the states that existed in 1860 without the use of an atlas. The students will decide where they think each state is located as well as which states were in existence at the outbreak of the Civil War. If the students are really having a rough time of it, the instructor can write the existing states (1860) on the chalkboard. They are:

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Maine Vermont Virginia New Hampshire New York Alabama Massachusetts Tennessee Wisconsin Rhode Island Illinois Missouri Connecticut Iowa Texas Pennsylvania Louisiana Michigan West Virginia Oregon Georgia California New Jersey Florida North Carolina Maryland Indiana South Carolina Delaware Kentucky Mississippi Ohio Minnesota

Arkansas Kansas

The great lakes and the Mississippi River might also be included in the list.

After the students have been given approximately fifteen minutes to try to match each state with its place on the map, they should be given time to check their work with an atlas or a map.

Next, the students will be asked to compose a list of the eleven states they think seceded from the Union. As the students call them off they can be listed on the chalkboard and, when completed, should include Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, South Carolina, North Carolina and Virginia.

Next, the students should be shown where the following places are on a wall map and then mark the places on their own maps. A short explanation of these significant places follows and will help the students understand where the action of the Civil War took place.

Fort Sumter Antietam Vicksburg
Bull Run Fredericksburg Chickamauga

Shiloh Chancellorsville Atlanta

New Orleans Gettysburg Appomattox

- 1. Fort Sumter was the scene of the opening engagement of the Civil War that lasted from April 12 through April 14, 1861. Fort Sumter is located at the mouth of the harbor of Charleston, South Carolina. No one was killed in this opening battle, but the action between the North and the South realized the belligerent spirit of both the Union and the Confederate armies.
- 2. Bull Run: Two important battles were fought here. The first battle of Bull Run (July 21, 1861) was the first MAJOR engagement of the Civil War. Bull Run is the name of a small stream located in northeastern Virginia, about 30 miles southwest of Washington, D.C. The second battle of Bull Run was fought on August 29-30, 1862. Both battles were victories for the Confederate army.

3. The Battle of Shiloh fought on April 6-7, 1862 was one of the greatest battles of the Civil War.

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The battle took its name from Shiloh Church, a meetinghouse about three miles south southwest of Pittsburg Landing, a community in Hardin County, Tennessee. The Battle of Shiloh was one of the bloodiest battles of the Civil War. Losses in both the Confederate and Union troops exceeded 10,000 men. Ultimately, it is considered to be a Union victory.

- 4. New Orleans was captured by a Union naval squadron commanded by Rear Admiral David G. Farragut on April 27, 1862. This was considered by the North to be a significant victory because of the importance of the harbor city.
- 5. Battle of Antietam was fought in September, 1862. Antietam is located in northern Virginia not far from the Pennsylvania border. It is considered a Union victory in that the Confederate troops were stopped, but the casualties on both sides were considered enormous.
- 6. Battle of Fredericksburg was fought on December 13, 1862 at Fredericksburg, Virginia. The Union losses were more than 12,000 and were twice those of the Confederate troops. The defeat of the North in this campaign caused profound depression throughout the North.
- 7. The battle of Chancellorsville was fought on May 2-4, 1863. Chancellorsville is located ten miles west of Fredericksburg, Virginia. The South's army was half the size the army of the North in this battle. General Lee's Confederate troops emerged victorious in this battle.
- 8. Battle of Gettysburg was fought during the months of June-July, 1863. Gettysburg is located in southern Pennsylvania, near the Maryland line. General Lee, leading the southern troops, invaded the North and was met here by the Union troops led by General Ewell. Lee finally withdrew after a long and bloody series of conflicts leaving the North victorious. Both sides suffered over 20,000 casualties.
- 9. The Battle of Vicksburg lasted from November, 1862 until July, 1863. Vicksburg is located in Mississippi. After a series of battles, the Union army finally gained control of Vicksburg and the strategically important Mississippi River.
- 10. The Battle of Chickamauga was fought on September 19, 1863. Chickamauga is the name of a creek in northern Georgia and the battle was fought as part of the Chattanooga campaign. The North was victorious in this battle and by the end of 1863 it was clear that the North would win the war.
- 11. The battle of Atlanta was an overwhelming victory for the North under the leadership of General Sherman. Atlanta, Georgia, an important center for Confederate communications and supplies, fell to the Union armies on September 2, 1864. The city was almost totally burned to the ground by General Sherman before he began his famous march to the sea.
- 12. Appomattox is a town in central Virginia. At the Appomattox Courthouse on April 9, 1865 General Robert E. Lee surrendered the remnants of the Army of North Virginia to Ulysses S. Grant. The surrender marked the virtual end of the war, as the remaining Confederate armies, on hearing of Lee's capitulation, followed suit.

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Reading and Writing About the Civil War Student Bibliography

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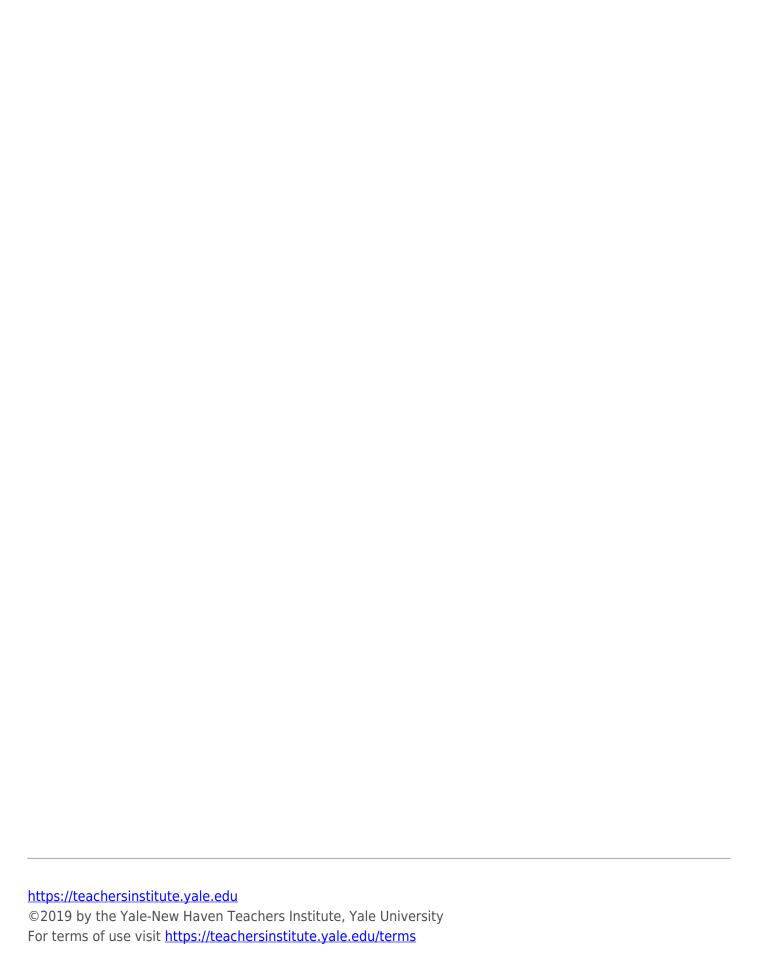
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Strother, Horatio T., The Underground Railroad in Connecticut, Middletown, Conn., 1962.

*All of these books are located in the Main Branch of the New Haven Public Library.

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