

# "A female raid" in 1863: Using newspaper coverage to learn about North Carolina's Civil War homefront

BY KATHRYN WALBERT

This lesson plan is part of a series of instructional materials created for the North Carolina Newspaper Digitization Project of the North Carolina State Archives.

Students will learn about a raid on local stores by Confederate soldier's wives in March 1863 in Salisbury, North Carolina, and use that historical moment to explore conscription, life on the homefront, economic issues facing North Carolina merchants, the challenges of wartime politics, and the role of newspaper editors in shaping public opinion.

## Teacher preparation

### CLASSROOM TIME REQUIRED

Three days — one day to read and analyze the newspaper article, one day to conduct research on particular issues related to the article, and one day to hold a role-play discussion about the bread riot of 1863.

(Please note that if time is of the essence, this lesson plan could be condensed into two days by having a shorter half-period research and group planning session, eliminating the writing assignment, and holding a shorter half-period role playing discussion.)

### MATERIALS NEEDED

- A North Carolina history textbook
- "A Female Raid<sup>1</sup>," *Carolina Watchman*, Monday, March 23, 1863, reporting on the bread riot of Wednesday, March 18, including the summary of the riot in the sidebar.
- Research materials on the Civil War, conscription, military service, and the homefront during the Civil War. Eighth-grade teachers should focus on North Carolina, but U.S. history teachers could broaden the research to include the entire Confederacy. These

resources could come from the library’s media center or the instructor could choose to schedule computer lab time to allow students to conduct research on the Internet.

- Learners’ guides to reading newspapers: factual reporting<sup>2</sup>, opinion pieces<sup>3</sup>, and reader contributions<sup>4</sup>.
- Newspaper analysis worksheet and Bread Riot group worksheet, below. (If you download and print the PDF version of this page, the worksheets and assignment will be formatted as individual handouts.)
- If the newspaper article and research materials will be accessed online, the instructor will need to make arrangements to have computers available for individual students or small groups.

## Pre-activities

Students should be familiar with the southern economy in the antebellum period, the typical experiences of southern planters and yeoman farmers, and the different roles and expectations for men and women in the Old South.

Students should be familiar with Civil War history through 1863. Eighth grade students should be aware of North Carolina’s unique wartime experience to 1863.

This plan relies heavily on primary sources. The following resources can help students learn to analyze primary sources like the ones used in this lesson plan more effectively. If your students have little experience with primary sources, they may want to explore some of these web-based resources and practice working with historical documents, or you may want to review “Reading Primary Sources: An Introduction for Students<sup>5</sup>” to give you some ideas for talking about primary sources with your students.

- “Scholars in Action: Analyze a Colonial Newspaper<sup>6</sup>” from *History Matters* at George Mason University
- “Making Sense of Documents: Making Sense of Letters & Diaries<sup>7</sup>” by Steve Stowe from *History Matters* at George Mason University
- “Scholars in Action: Analyze Nineteenth Century Letters<sup>8</sup>” from *History Matters* at George Mason University
- “Making Sense of Documents: Making Sense of Oral History<sup>9</sup>” by Linda Shopes from *History Matters* at George Mason University

## Activities

### DAY ONE: SETTING THE STAGE

Analyzing the events of March 18, 1863.

1. Explain to students that for the next few days, they will be learning about a riot that took place in Salisbury, NC during the Civil War. It may be worthwhile to take a few moments to review the southern economy, the role of men and women in the pre-war years, and the impact of conscription on southern families. Ask students what they

think it would have been like for families left on the homefront when husbands and fathers went off to the Civil War.

2. Hand out printed copies and/or arrange for computers to view the online version of “A Female Raid” as well as the Learners’ Guides to factual reporting and opinion pieces. You may find it helpful to first read the newspaper article aloud with students following along. When you reach the illegible sections, you may want to explain that sometimes historians have to deal with primary sources that are incomplete or damaged. In this case, parts of the newspaper article were illegible on the available microfilm copy and so we have to work with the text that remains.
3. Divide students into groups of two to five (depending on the teacher’s preference) to first read the learners’ guides and then analyze the article in greater depth. Students may find it helpful to use the levels of analysis and individual questions located in Reading Primary Sources: An Introduction for Students<sup>10</sup>, or the instructor may wish to create a unique handout that students can use to analyze this document. A sample handout (the Newspaper Analysis Worksheet) has been included below for reference, but teachers should feel free to adapt this handout to focus on the issues that are most important for your own class to address.

Allow students to spend 20–30 minutes analyzing this document and filling out the analysis sheets. Each student should have his or her own analysis worksheet since the groups for Day One may not be the same as the groups for Day Two, and students may want to have a copy of their Day One notes later on in the lesson. The instructor should circulate among the groups to answer questions, make sure all of the groups are on-task, and to raise additional questions for groups that seem to be working quickly and may be able to explore the resource in even greater depth.

4. Close the day with a whole-class discussion of the article. You may wish to ask students to share what they wrote on their worksheets for the key questions. On a closing note, you may also want to ask who students thought was in the right and who was to blame in the events that they read about. Let them know that tomorrow they will be working in groups to explore unique perspectives.

## **DAY TWO: RESEARCH, GROUP PLANNING, AND WRITING**

Today students will work in groups to determine how specific individuals might have reacted to the bread riot of 1863 in preparation for a role-playing “town hall meeting” discussion on Day Three. Let students know that if they finish early, they can work on their homework assignments individually.

1. Hand out copies of the newspaper article that was used on Day One and ask students to get out their own analysis worksheets from Day One for reference. Divide students into five groups and assign each group a role: Rioters, Shopkeepers, Soldiers, Commissioners, Newspaper Editor. Remind students that yesterday we analyzed the newspaper article’s content as historical scholars, but that today we will be adopting a particular point of view and thinking about how the bread riot might have looked differently to different people at the time. Hand out the Salisbury Bread Riot Group Worksheet and make research materials available (textbooks plus either books about the Civil War and the NC homefront or computers for Internet-based research) so that

students can look up the answers to any questions that arise during their research. The instructor should circulate among the groups to make sure that all students are on-task and to answer any questions that may arise.

2. When groups have finished their work and feel ready to represent their assigned group in tomorrow's Town Hall Meeting, students will work individually on a homework writing assignment. The teacher may wish to create a handout explaining the assignment (a sample has been provided for teachers to modify) or to write the assignment on the board for student reference. Students will need a copy of the newspaper article and a copy of the learners' guide to reader contributions to complete the assignment. It may also be helpful to provide a selection of letters to the editor from modern newspapers for students to use as models for their own writing.

### **DAY THREE: ROLE PLAYING DISCUSSION**

In today's discussion, students will (in groups) take on the roles of rioters, shopkeepers, soldiers, commissioners, and the newspaper editors in discussing the bread riot. Before class begins, arrange the seating in the room so that students can sit in their groups and so that all of the groups can see the other groups — a U-shape or circle might work well.

1. At the start of class, announce that you are the mayor of Salisbury and that it is late March 1863. You have called a town meeting about the recent bread riot and you want to hear from all of the interested parties. Start by asking each group, in turn, to share their own perspective on what happened — you may want to remind the other groups to listen and take notes so that they can ask questions or rebut specific points later in the discussion. You may wish to begin with the newspaper editors who may be viewed as a more neutral group, then proceed to ask the rioters, shopkeepers, soldiers away in the war, and commissioners who may have more biased opinions.
2. After each group has provided an introduction, ask groups to share their questions for the other groups. If a group needs a moment to confer before answers, grant them a 1 or 2 minute discussion period to confer. Each group should ask at least one question to each other group and answer the questions posed to them. Working through all of these questions should generate some lively debate and discussion and should take most of a typical class period.

You may also wish to ask each group:

- ? Which other groups do you agree with and on which issues?
  - ? Which group do you most strongly disagree with and why?
  - ? What would your group want the mayor, the county commissioners, the state legislature, or the Confederate government to do about the problems that led to the riot?
3. Close by asking students (now responding as themselves, not as their groups) what this specific incident tells us about the homefront of the Civil War. You may also want to ask them how taking on the perspective of a particular role changed their view of the events and whether they, personally, agreed with the point of view that they adopted during the group.

## **OPTIONAL EXTENSIONS**

- Students could also choose to create a political cartoon about this event. It might be particularly interesting to ask student groups to create two or three cartoons showing different ways of interpreting this event. They might create cartoons that are sympathetic to or critical of the women, sympathetic to or critical of the shopkeepers, sympathetic to or critical of the commissioners, or from the point of view of a soldier in the field whose wife and family lived in Salisbury.
- Students could compare and contrast the support of soldiers' families in the Civil War to the support for soldiers' families during modern deployments. This could be a particularly relevant comparison for students in schools that serve large military communities and where deployments are common. Attention to the home front and the lives of soldiers' families during wartime could be a theme that could carry throughout the course as well.

## **Assessment**

Assessment will be based on the student's body of work from throughout the lesson, taking into account students' participation in discussions, analysis of documents, written letter to the editor, and contributions to group-based activities. Teachers can determine how much to weight each part of the lesson and what specific rubric to use based on their own priorities and classroom practices. The following questions will help you think about how to assess students' work for various parts of the lesson.

### **DISCUSSIONS AND CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES**

- Did students contribute frequently and thoughtfully to class discussion?
- When group work was a part of the lesson, did students cooperate and do their fair share of the work? If you wish, you can incorporate a peer-review or self-assessment to allow students to comment on the contributions of group members or on their own contributions to group work and class discussion.

### **PRIMARY SOURCE ANALYSIS (NEWSPAPER ARTICLE)**

- Did students identify significant information about this source and its main ideas?
- Did students summarize the content of this source thoughtfully?
- Did students draw reasonable conclusions when analyzing this source?
- Did students write down their observations carefully and in detail for later analysis?

### **WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT (LETTER TO THE EDITOR)**

- Does the student's letter contain accurate historical information and are the student's interpretations or speculations plausible for the specific historical context?
- Does the student's written assignment demonstrate thoughtful historical analysis with all key points well-supported by historical evidence?

- Does the student demonstrate a clear understanding of the differences in historical perspective between various individuals who might have a personal stake in the bread riot of 1863?
- Is the student's letter well-organized and clearly written? Is it free of the kinds of errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation, and formatting that might distract or confuse a reader? Does it follow typical conventions for a letter to the editor?



5. Does the article seem to support the women or the shopkeepers or both?

6. What is the writer's opinion of the Commissioners?

7. Do you think that this article was fair and balanced in its coverage of the riot?





# Homework: Letter to the Editor about the Salisbury Bread Riot of March 18, 1863

To work on this assignment you will need:

- Your copy of the newspaper article “A Female Raid”
- Learners’ Guide to Reader Contributions (introductory paragraphs)
- Modern letters to the editor found in a newspaper or online.

From the point of view that you were assigned in your group today, write a letter to the editor of the *Carolina Watchman* responding to the article of March 23, 1863 about the Salisbury bread riot. Please use the Learners’ Guide to Reader Contributions and modern letters to the editor to help you learn more about letters to the editor and their role in newspapers. Modern letters to the editor may provide useful models for your own letter.

In your letter, share your opinion of the bread riot and the newspaper’s coverage of it. Who was at fault and who was treated wrongly? What do you think should be done about the high cost of wartime goods? What do you think should be done about the riot itself? Be sure to use specific examples and details to make your points clear and to elaborate on your unique perspective.

Please be sure to bring your copy of the newspaper article and your letter to the editor with you to class tomorrow!

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## On the web

### A female raid

<http://learnweb1.learn.unc.edu/lp/pages/4187>

Newspaper coverage of a raid on local stores by Confederate soldier's wives in Salisbury, North Carolina on March 18, 1863.

### Reading newspapers: Factual reporting

<http://learnweb1.learn.unc.edu/lp/pages/4132>

This learner's guide introduces students to the use of historical newspapers as primary sources and provides key questions for reading them.

### Reading newspapers: Reader contributions

<http://learnweb1.learn.unc.edu/lp/pages/4183>

A learner's guide to reading letters to the editor and other reader contributions in historical newspapers.

### Reading newspapers: Editorial and opinion pieces

<http://learnweb1.learn.unc.edu/lp/pages/4184>

A learner's guide to identifying, reading, and understanding editorial and opinion pieces in historical newspapers.

### Reading primary sources: An introduction for students

<http://learnweb1.learn.unc.edu/lp/pages/745>

A step-by-step guide for students examining primary sources, with specific questions divided into five layers of questioning.

### The Home Front

[http://ncmuseumofhistory.org/exhibits/civilwar/about\\_section4.html](http://ncmuseumofhistory.org/exhibits/civilwar/about_section4.html)

Part of an online exhibit on North Carolina and the Civil War from the North Carolina Museum of History.

### Women and the Civil War

<http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-2719>

from the *New Georgia Encyclopedia*. While this article focuses on the experiences of Georgia women, many of the experiences and attitudes described would have been typical of the North Carolina experience as well.

### More from LEARN NC

Visit us on the web at [www.learnnc.org](http://www.learnnc.org) to learn more about topics related to this article, including North Carolina, civil war, history, home front, newspapers, and primary sources.

## Notes

1. See <http://learnweb1.learn.unc.edu/lp/pages/4187>.
2. See <http://learnweb1.learn.unc.edu/lp/pages/4132>.
3. See <http://learnweb1.learn.unc.edu/lp/pages/4184>.

4. See <http://learnweb1.learn.unc.edu/lp/pages/4183>.
5. See <http://learnweb1.learn.unc.edu/lp/pages/745>.
6. See <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/sia/newspaper.htm>.
7. See <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/letters/>.
8. See <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/sia/letters.htm>.
9. See <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/oral/>.
10. See <http://learnweb1.learn.unc.edu/lp/pages/745>.

## About the author

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Kathryn Walbert holds a Ph.D. in United States History from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She directs LEARN NC's efforts to develop instructor-led and self-guided materials for professional development in a range of topics in United States and North Carolina history. She has developed and taught online courses on "The Civil Rights Movement in Context" and "North Carolina American Indians." She is also the author of several articles for LEARN NC, including a series on using oral history in the K-12 classroom and "Beyond Black History Month."

A long-time associate of the Southern Oral History Program, Walbert has been using oral history in her own research and training others in the craft for over ten years. Her doctoral research focused on Southern women, both black and white, who became teachers after the Civil War, and the role of teaching in shaping their identities. From 2001 to 2003, she was an academic skills instructor at Duke University. She now serves as a consultant on U.S. history, oral history, and academic skills to LEARN NC and other organizations.