

Was General Sherman's Use of Total Warfare Justified?

Historical Thinking Skills Assessed: Close Reading, Corroboration, Contextualizing

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Course: United States History

Level: Middle

Task Question: Was General Sherman's use of total warfare justified?

Learning Outcome:

Students will be able to use sourcing, contextualization, and corroboration to present conflicting perspectives about Sherman's use of total war.

Standards Alignment:

[Common Core Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies](#)

- RH.6-8.2 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.
RH.6-8.6 Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g. loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).

[National History Standards](#)

Era 5: Civil War and Reconstruction (1850-1877)

Standard 2: The course and character of the Civil War and its effects on the American people.

[College, Career, and Civic Life \(C3\) Framework for Social Studies Standards](#)

- D2.His.6.6-8 Analyze how people's perspectives influenced what information is available in the historical sources they created.
RD3.1.6-8 Gather relevant information from multiple sources while using the origin, authority, structure, context, and corroborative value of the sources to guide the selection.

Materials:

- RS#01: General Sherman's Telegram to President Lincoln
- RS#02: Document A – General Sherman to the Mayor and City Council of Atlanta
- RS#03: Document B – A Woman's Wartime Journal (Excerpt)
- RS#04: Student Handout -- Document Analysis Chart
- RS#05: Teacher Resource -- Document Analysis Chart KEY
- RS#06: Student Handout -- Annotated Illustration Directions/Template
- RA#07: Sample Illustration
- RS#08: ARCH Secondary Historical Thinking Skills Rubric

Background for the Teacher:

In this performance task, students will demonstrate the historical thinking skills of sourcing, contextualization, and corroboration. In completing the task, students will analyze two primary source documents that present conflicting perspectives about Union General William Tecumseh Sherman's "March to the Sea" and the concept of total warfare. To be successful with this task, students should have learned previously about traditional military tactics employed before and during the first half of

the Civil War, the causes and course of the war up to 1864, Sherman's March to Sea, and the definition of total warfare.

Throughout history, military theorists and citizens have debated the justice of waging war against civilians. Under what circumstances is it ethical to involve noncombatants in war? Is it acceptable to forage for food and supplies from civilian property? How are citizens in occupied areas to be treated? What if those civilians are hostile? In April 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued an update to the 1806 Articles of War, which came to be known as the Lieber code after its author. This code became the foundation for existing international humanitarian laws during wartime. According to the Lieber Code, which governed the Union army's actions throughout the second half of the Civil War, civilian populations in enemy territories were to be treated humanely, and their personal liberties and private property were to be protected. If the people of an occupied territory resisted military authority, however, the Lieber code permitted the destruction of private property and expulsion and imprisonment of civilians.

In September 1864, Union General William Tecumseh Sherman and his army captured Atlanta. In an effort to prove to the Southern population the inevitability of Union victory in the war, Sherman embarked on his March to the Sea. From November 1864 to December 1864, Sherman led 60,000 troops across the state of Georgia, destroying crops and other commodities, railroads, and telegraph lines. In the process, Sherman's troops sacked homes and destroyed much personal property before finally capturing Savannah on the Atlantic coast. Many in the South at the time, and historians since, have questioned the legitimacy of this form of warfare in which noncombatants lose property, have their effects stolen or destroyed, and endure personal suffering. Students should explore this question of the efficacy and civility of these tactics in the context of the time to answer the task question, "*Was General Sherman's use of total warfare justified?*"

Source:

"The Lieber Code: Limiting the Devastation of War." American Red Cross. Accessed 6/15/14.

http://www.redcross.org/images/MEDIA_CustomProductCatalog/m16240360_Lieber_Code_lesson.pdf

"Nov. 15, 1864: Sherman's March to the Sea Begins." *This Day in History*. The History Channel. Accessed 6/15/14.

<http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/the-march-to-the-sea-begins>

Procedure

Context Setting:

- Using an overhead projector or document camera, project RS#01: General Sherman's Telegram to President Lincoln. Read the telegram aloud.
- Ask students to respond to the following questions to facilitate their understanding of the telegram and activate prior knowledge:
 - What was General Sherman calling his "Christmas gift" to President Lincoln?
 - Why might he have considered the city of Savannah, Georgia a "gift?"
 - What was going on in the Civil War during late 1864?
 - What do you know about Sherman's "March to the Sea."
- Provoke consideration of whether "total war" is a just (fair) military strategy.
 - What is "total war?"
 - How is "total war" different from conventional war?
 - Do you believe that the use of "total war" is ever justified? In what circumstance/s?

- Make a list of student responses that indicate their reasons why and/or why not. Encourage the students to challenge each other's responses in a respectful way.

Document Analysis:

- Distribute RS#02: Document A – General Sherman to the Mayor and City Council of Atlanta; RS#03: Document B – A Woman's Wartime Journal (Excerpt); and RS#04: Student Handout – Document Analysis Chart. Explain to the students that they will analyze two primary sources regarding Sherman's March through Georgia while completing the document analysis chart.
- Depending on the students' level of comfort and experience with analyzing documents, the teacher should choose a method to suit the specific class. Several possible options are described below.
 - Teacher-Directed Document Analysis
 - Utilizing the document camera, work through each document, stopping to discuss specific vocabulary and connections (prior knowledge and/or making predictions).
 - Work together to complete the comprehension questions and/or graphic organizer (depending on the document being analyzed).
 - Small-Group Document Analysis
 - Have the students work in pairs/small groups to examine the documents. They could each analyze one document and then collaborate, or they could work collaboratively on both documents. The teacher should visit each group to ensure understanding and answer any questions.
 - Independent Student Document Analysis
 - Have the students work independently to read both documents and complete the graphic organizer. This method will best assess students' performance and identify areas of weakness.

Corroborating Evidence and Constructing Interpretations – Close Analysis:

- Regardless of the method of document analysis, the teacher should lead the students in a whole class discussion of the documents. Use RS#05: Teacher Resource – Document Analysis Chart KEY to guide the discussion.
- Discussion should focus around the varying perspectives of each source. Possible discussion questions:
 - On what points do the sources agree?
 - How are the two sources different in their perspectives on Sherman's March to the Sea?
 - What information did each author leave out? Why do you think that was?
 - Why would it be important for historians to read and analyze both documents?

Thoughtful Application:

- After discussion, distribute RS#06: Student Handout – Annotated Illustration Directions/Template. Students will create illustrations depicting with symbols, words and images, both perspectives of Sherman's use of total war. They will choose three different symbols, words and/or images, and explain their relevance to the illustration. Accomplishing this assignment will require the students to apply prior knowledge. (See directions).

- Distribute RS#07: Sample Illustration and review the symbols in the cartoon and their meanings as a model of what the students will do.
 - Stocking with Stars (A special gift being presented to the Union)
 - Sleeping man lying in bed (Uncle Sam – U.S. government / Lincoln)
 - Model of Savannah (Confederate city captured)
 - Size of Sherman's head (indicates big ego)
- Explain that, in addition to creating meaningful illustrations, students will need to develop and elaborate written explanations of each symbol used.
- Use RS#08: ARCH Secondary Historical Thinking Skills Rubric to score this assignment.

(student work samples follow)

Thoughtful Application: Student Work Samples

Sample 1

Thoughtful Application- Directions

NO

- Using the template below (*recreate on your own paper*), you will illustrate each perspective regarding Sherman's march through Georgia. Include a caption/header for each (see example below)
- You will choose three symbols/words/images from each illustration and explain their relevance in regards to Sherman's march through Georgia (use prior knowledge).

Check Sheet - Did I include the following?

- Illustration representing each perspective ✓
- Caption/header for each illustration ✓
- Three symbols/words/images and description ✓

Template (*recreate on your own paper*)

Caption can go at the top or bottom	Caption can go at the top or bottom
	
<p>"War shortened by 10 days!"</p>	<p>Sherman targets innocent civilians! They've done nothing!</p>

Symbols and Description

1. Cotton field - Confederate property destroyed in total war.
2. Uncle Sam - Sherman/Union using total war
3. Meter/Stopwatch - time until end of war, Total war accelerates end of war.

Symbols and Description

1. House on fire - Civilians' property being destroyed by Sherman
2. Uncle Sam & black man - Union tries to free slaves (Emancipation Proclamation)
3. Cannonball fired at (targeted) Confederate soldier's wife & child - Psychological impact of total war on soldiers; Soldiers fear for homes

Thoughtful Application: Student Work Samples

Sample 2

Thoughtful Application- Directions

- Using the template below (*recreate on your own paper*), you will illustrate each perspective regarding Sherman's march through Georgia. Include a caption/header for each (see example below)
- You will choose three symbols/words/images from each illustration and explain their relevance in regards to Sherman's march through Georgia (use prior knowledge).

Check Sheet - Did I include the following?

- Illustration representing each perspective
- Caption/header for each illustration
- Three symbols/words/images and description

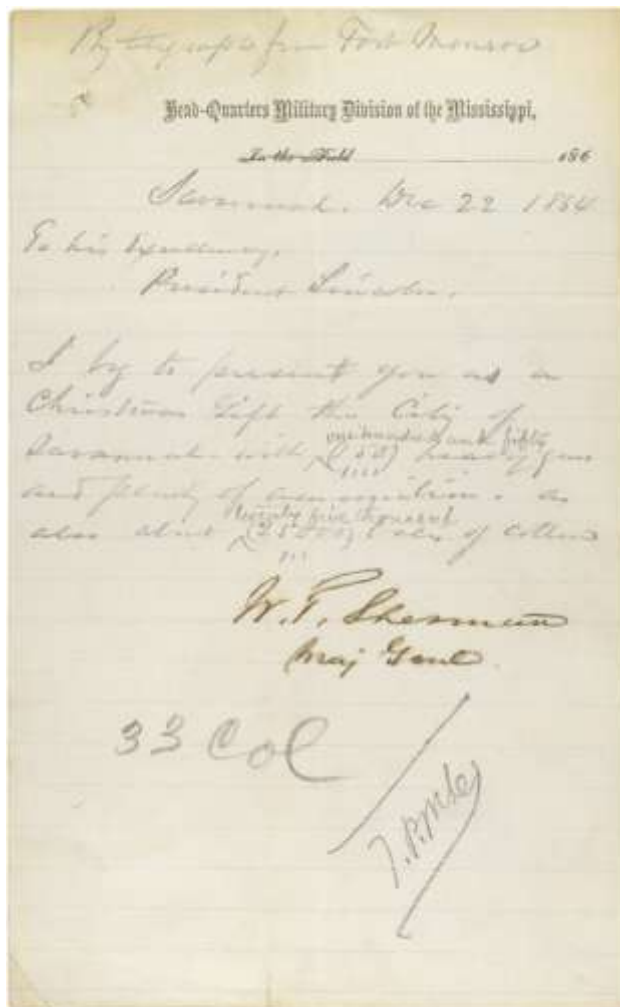
Template (*recreate on your own paper*)



- Sherman successfully captures Savannah and the resources with total war. Sherman marched through the Southern states and destroyed the South's property which weakened the Confederate soldiers morale.
- The Confederate soldiers were cut off from resources - flag + soldiers
 - Smiles/trumpet of triumph wearing uniforms - Union, sunshine at Christmas
 - Standing on resources easily taken - cotton, ammunition, and guns
 - Not carrying weapons - at ease of no predators
 - Mental impact on Confederate soldiers and unable to focus during battle - worry
 - Union soldiers in South have full bellies from eating Southern resources, but are still burning and destroying
 - Southern civilians were frightened animals & crops
 - Jewels and valuables taken from Southern civilian homes, doors, property destroyed
 - bleak clouds - sad and unhappy
 - All destruction for liberation of slaves, slaves in light above even one - fight for slave abolition
 - Conf. soldiers not holding guns because

Resource Sheet #01

General Sherman's Telegram to President Lincoln



By Telegraph from Fort Monroe

*Head-Quarters Military Division of the Mississippi,
Savannah Dec 22 1864*

To his Excellency
President Lincoln,

I beg to present to you as a Christmas Gift the City of Savannah, with 150 (one hundred and fifty) heavy guns and plenty of ammunition, and also about 25,000 (twenty-five thousand) bales of cotton.

W.T. Sherman
Major Genl

Source: Telegram from General William T. Sherman to President Abraham Lincoln announcing the surrender of Savannah, Georgia, as a Christmas present to the President, 12/22/1864-12/22/1864. Telegrams Sent by the Field Office of the Military Telegraph and Collected by the Office of the Secretary of War, 1860-1870. Records Group 107, Records of the Office of the Secretary of War, 1791-1948. National Archives. Washington, D.C. Accessed 6/13/14. <http://research.archives.gov/description/301637>

Resource Sheet #02

Document A – General Sherman to the Mayor and City Council of Atlanta

Headquarters Military Division of the Mississippi in the Field, September 12, 1864

James M. Calhoun, Mayor, E.E. Rawson and S.C. Wares, representing City Council of Atlanta.

Gentlemen:

. . . I cannot impart to you what we propose to do but I assert that our military plans make it necessary for the inhabitants to go away, and I can only renew my offer of services to make their exodus in any direction as easy and comfortable as possible.

You cannot qualify war in harsher terms than I will. War is cruelty, and you cannot refine it; and those who brought war into our country deserve all the curses and maledictions a people can pour out. I know I had no hand in making this war, and I know I will make more sacrifices to-day than any of you to secure peace. . . Once admit the Union, once more acknowledge the authority of the national Government, and instead of devoting your houses and streets and roads to the dread uses of war, I and this army become at once your protectors and supporters.

..

. . . You might as well appeal against the thunder-storm as against these terrible hardships of war. They are inevitable, and the only way the people of Atlanta can hope once more to live in peace and quiet at home, is to stop the war, which can only be done by admitting that it began in error and is perpetuated in pride. . . .

Yours in haste,
W. T. Sherman, Major-General commanding

Resource Sheet #03

Document B – A Woman’s Wartime Journal (Excerpt)

November 19, 1864

. . . I hastened back to my frightened servants and told them that they had better hide, and then went back to the gate to claim protection and a guard. But like demons they rush in! My yards are full. To my smoke-house, my dairy, pantry, kitchen, and cellar, like famished wolves they come, breaking locks and whatever is in my way. The thousand pounds of meat in my smoke-house is gone in a twinkling, my flour, my meat, my lard, butter, eggs, pickles of various kinds – both in vinegar and brine – wine, jars, and jugs are all gone. My eighteen fat turkeys, my hens, chickens, and fowls, my young pigs, are shot down in my yard and hunted as if they were rebels themselves. Utterly powerless I ran out and appealed to the guard.

“I cannot help you, Madam; it is orders.”

. . . Sherman himself and a greater portion of his army passed my house that day. All day, as the sad moments rolled on, were they passing not only in front of my house, but from behind; they tore down my garden palings, made a road through my back-yard and lot field, driving their stock and riding through, tearing down my fences and desolating my home – wantonly doing it when there was no necessity for it.

Source: Lunt, Dolly Sumner. *A Woman’s Wartime Journal: An Account of the Passage Over a Georgia Plantation of Sherman’s Army on the March to the Sea, as Recorded in the Diary of Dolly Sumner Lunt*. New York: The Century Co., 1918. Documenting the American South. Accessed 6/10/14.
<http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/burge/lunt.html>

Resource Sheet #04

Student Handout – Document Analysis Chart

Document A – <i>Close Reading</i>	Document B – <i>Close Reading</i>
1. Who was the author of this source? To whom was the source directed? What position/role did the author have during this time period?	1. Who was the author of this source? To whom was the source directed? What position/role did the author have during this time period?
2. What claims does the author make explicitly or implicitly within the source?	2. What claims does the author make explicitly or implicitly within the source?
3. What evidence does the author use to support the claim(s)?	3. What evidence does the author use to support the claim(s)?
4. What feelings does the author try to <i>invoke</i> [appeal to]?	4. What feelings does the author try to <i>invoke</i> [appeal to]?
5. What information does the author leave out? Which perspectives are missing?	5. What information does the author leave out? Which perspectives are missing?

Contextualizing

1. How is the author's role in the march through Georgia shown through the content of the letter? Using your prior knowledge of the Civil War Era, provide one example to support your response and one example directly from the text.

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Documents A and B: Corroboration

Both documents clearly refer to Sherman's march through Georgia; however, their opinions about the march differ greatly. Why would it be important for a historian to have access to both of these documents? How could the documents be useful in further research and understanding?

Resource Sheet #05

Teacher Resource – Document Analysis Chart **KEY**

Document A – Close Reading	Document B – Close Reading
<p>1. Who was the author of this source? To whom was the source directed? What position/role did the author have during this time period?</p>	<p>1. Who was the author of this source? To whom was the source directed? What position/role did the author have during this time period?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>By William T. Sherman</i>• <i>To the Mayor and City Council of Atlanta</i>• <i>Sherman was a Major General in the U.S. Army.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>By Dolly Sumner Hunt</i>• <i>To a general audience interested in the Civil War</i>• <i>Hunt was a Georgia Plantation mistress.</i>
<p>2. What claims does the author make explicitly or implicitly within the source?</p>	<p>2. What claims does the author make explicitly or implicitly within the source?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>War is always cruel.</i>• <i>The people of the South deserve to suffer.</i>• <i>Hardships during war are inevitable.</i>• <i>The only way the people of Atlanta can be at peace is to stop the war.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Sherman’s soldiers destroyed her property unnecessarily and savagely.</i>
<p>3. What evidence does the author use to support the claim(s)?</p>	<p>3. What evidence does the author use to support the claim(s)?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Southerners brought on the war themselves.</i>• <i>Sherman bears no responsibility for starting the war.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>The soldiers broke locks and stole all of her food stores.</i>• <i>The soldiers killed her livestock.</i>• <i>They destroyed her back-yard and fields by riding their animals through them.</i>
<p>4. What feelings does the author try to <i>invoke</i> [appeal to]?</p>	<p>4. What feelings does the author try to <i>invoke</i> [appeal to]?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Fear/dread</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Helplessness</i>• <i>Pity</i>• <i>Confusion</i>
<p>5. What information does the author leave out? Which perspectives are missing?</p>	<p>5. What information does the author leave out? Which perspectives are missing?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Perspective of Southerners is missing.</i>• <i>Leaves out information about what his army is actually doing in and around Atlanta, as well as why the South is solely to blame for the war.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Perspective of the Union leaders and soldiers is left out.</i>• <i>Leaves out details about how she might have been supporting the Confederacy or what she might have done, if anything, to provoke the attack.</i>

Contextualizing

1. How is the author's role in the march through Georgia shown through the content of the letter? Using your prior knowledge of the Civil War Era, provide one example to support your response and one example directly from the text.

- *Sherman is obviously leading a military unit that is about to attack Atlanta, Georgia.*
- *From prior knowledge, I know that Sherman was a general in the Union Army serving under General U.S. Grant and was responsible for the March to the Sea.*
- *In the text, Sherman writes beneath his signature, "Major-General Commanding." Also, he references his "military plans" and offers to help arrange a smooth evacuation of Atlanta.*

Contextualizing

1. How is the author's role in the march through Georgia shown through the content of the letter? Using your prior knowledge of the Civil War Era, provide one example to support your response and one example directly from the text.

- *Lunt is shown to be the mistress of a plantation in Georgia.*
- *From prior knowledge, I know that when Lunt refers to "servants" she means slaves. Also, I know that Sherman, whom she mentions, marched through Georgia.*
- *In the text, Lunt refers to servants and details a long list of property that she could only have owned if she lived on a large plantation.*

Documents A and B: Corroboration

Both documents clearly refer to Sherman's march through Georgia; however, their opinions about the march differ greatly. Why would it be important for a historian to have access to both of these documents? How could the documents be useful in further research and understanding?

- *It would be important to have access to both documents so that you can see the perspectives of both sides in the war. How Sherman felt as the leader of an invading army was very different from how the people of Atlanta felt as they were being attacked. Neither source alone provides a complete picture of what happened. By considering both documents together, you can get a better idea of what really occurred.*

Resource Sheet #06

Student Handout – Annotated Illustration Directions/Template

Directions:

1. On your own paper, you will illustrate each perspective regarding Sherman’s march through Georgia. Include a caption/header for each (see example below). **Use the template below.**
2. Use your prior knowledge to choose three symbols/words/images from each illustration and explain their relevance in regards to Sherman’s march through Georgia.

Check Sheet -Did I include the following?

- Illustration representing each perspective _____
- Caption/header for each illustration _____
- Three symbols/words/images and description _____

Template (*recreate on your own paper*)

<i>Caption can go at the top or bottom</i>	<i>Caption can go at the top or bottom</i>

Symbols and Description

1.

2.

3.

Symbols and Description

1.

2.

3.

Resource Sheet #07

Sample Illustration



Source: "Santa Claus Sherman Putting Savannah Into Uncle Sam's Stocking." Political Cartoon. *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, January 14, 1865. Civil War Era Collection at Gettysburg College. Accessed 6/13/14. <http://gettysburg.cdmhost.com/cdm/ref/collection/p4016coll2/id/121>

Resource Sheet #08

ARCH Historical Thinking Skills Rubric – Secondary

	Close Reading Strategies		Strategies/Procedural Concepts	
Criteria	Sourcing	Critical Reading	Corroboration	Contextualizing
4	<p>Identification: Fully understands the meaning and content of sources.</p> <p>Attribution: Cites all authors and all original dates of primary and secondary sources.</p> <p>Perspective: Evaluates the reliability sources based on the author’s perspective and when and why they were produced.</p>	<p>Questions the author’s thesis and determines viewpoint and evidence to evaluate claims, highlighting what the author leaves out.</p> <p>Cites accurate examples of how the author uses persuasive language and specific words and phrases to influence the reader.</p> <p>Seeks answers to questions left unanswered in the source to formulate an interpretation.</p>	<p>Constructs an interpretation of events using information and perspectives in multiple sources. Identifies consistencies and inconsistencies among various accounts.</p>	<p>Applies prior and new knowledge to determine the historical setting of sources. Uses that setting to interpret the sources within the historical context as opposed to a present-day mindset.</p>
3	<p>Identification: Mostly understands the meaning and content of sources.</p> <p>Attribution: Cites most authors and most original dates of primary and secondary sources.</p> <p>Perspective: Examines the reliability of sources based on the author’s perspective and when and why they were produced.</p>	<p>Analyzes the author’s thesis, determines the viewpoint and evidence to evaluate the claims; may highlight what the author leaves out.</p> <p>Cites examples of how the author uses persuasive language and specific words and phrases to influence the reader.</p> <p>Notes that the author has left some questions unanswered.</p>	<p>Explains similarities and differences by comparing information and perspectives in multiple sources.</p>	<p>Applies prior and new knowledge to determine the historical setting of the sources. May attempt an interpretation of some sources with a present-day mindset or with a limited application to the historical context.</p>
2	<p>Identification: Understands the meaning and content of sources with appropriate scaffolding and support.</p> <p>Attribution: Cites some authors and some original dates of primary and secondary sources.</p> <p>Perspective: Attempts to evaluate the reliability of sources.</p>	<p>States the author’s claims and evidence presented to prove those claims.</p> <p>Determines the author’s viewpoint.</p> <p>Notes how language is used to persuade.</p>	<p>Identifies similarities and differences in information in multiple sources.</p>	<p>Attempts to determine the historical setting of sources without fully understanding the historical context.</p>
1	<p>Identification: Attempts to understand the meaning and content of sources with the appropriate scaffolding and support.</p> <p>Attribution: Cites few authors and few original dates of primary and secondary sources.</p> <p>Perspective: Does not adequately examine reliability.</p>	<p>Attempts to identify the author’s claims, viewpoint, or evidence.</p>	<p>Demonstrates little to no attempt to examine sources for corroborating or conflicting evidence.</p>	<p>Demonstrates no attempt to understand the historical setting of sources.</p>