



Civil War Letters

Grade 6 and up

Curriculum Connections: Civil War, Close Reading

From the [L.S. Willard Letters Collection](#)

This activity can be used as an introduction to a unit on the Civil War or as part of a lesson on the Battle of Shiloh or other major battles of the war. It can also be used as part of instruction on historiography, close reading, and how to gather information from a primary source. You may want to review the [Skills Lesson: Reading a Transcription](#) with students.

Display the letter and its transcription. Give students time to generate and answer questions about it and write notes. Use the background material at the end of this activity whenever you think it will encourage students to ask more questions and think more about how to engage with the letter.

[Letter of April 13, 1862](#)

Use the link above to view the original letters or download the Sources packet from the online version of this activity.

direct your letters care 11th Regt Ills cavalry Gen Grants Devision West Tenn Pittsburg Penn
Sunday April 13 1862

Dear Mother + Father one week ago this morning commenced one of the most terriable battles ever fought on this continent I wrote to Wm amediately that Mr. Tripp and myself were safe and ask him to inform you as soon as possiable. supposing you might feel some alarm before this you have got full accounts of it and I have no heart to describe the fearful scean the slaughter was dreadful on both sides such as I never want to behold nor have I any desire to see another battle hope I may not

Still I find that I have as strong nerves as most men and never expect to falter in duty. what newspaper accounts I have heard of this battle dont give the credit as I think it should go but I dosent say more on that subject now. undoubtedly there will soon be an other engagement eather here or at some place at no great distance. have no thought but our folks will be victorious. Mr Tripp has been sick for a week but still is about sometimes am afraid he is going to have a serious time this climate dosent seem to agree with our men one thing it has been raining most of the time and is very mudy but this morning the sun has come out and it is rather plesant. I think of Home and friends continually and of the time when I shall once more be amongst them for this is anything but a plesant life no comforts whatever. I have no ideas this war will be of long duration now and God grant it may be brought speadily to a close I have not receaved a letter since I left Peoria and am getting anxious to hear from you, please excuse this writing for I am sitting on the ground and holding the paper on my knee. Ever your affc Son L.S. Willard



Potential Questions

- When and where was this letter written?
- Who wrote this letter? Who is the letter written to? Why was it written?
- In a sentence or two, explain what this letter is about. What is its main point?
- What can you determine about the writer based on his letter? How did you come to that conclusion?
- Where is the letter writer from? How do you know?
- What does this letter tell you about the Civil War? What does it tell you about being a soldier?
- Think about what you already know about the Civil War. Does this letter challenge or confirm what you know?
- What are some other details in this letter?
- What other questions does this letter inspire? What else do you want to know after reading it, and how could you find that information?

Background

Lot Sabine (L.S.) Willard was a first lieutenant in the 11th Illinois Calvary, Company G. He enlisted in the U.S. Army at age 22 on December 20, 1861. The money that he earned being a "traveling agent" in his hometown of Peoria, Illinois, allowed him to enter the war as a first lieutenant. He was initially eager to experience active service, but changed his mind after his regiment's first fight, the Battle of Shiloh. This battle came to haunt him for years afterward. Willard became a major and senior aide-de-camp to General James B. McPherson on April 18, 1863. He camped in Vicksburg, and then marched with Sherman and fought at Resaca and Kennesaw Mountain. Willard survived the war, and was mustered out on August 9, 1864. He then settled down in Illinois and began raising a family. In 1870 he was a dry goods merchant living in Illinois with his wife Ellen, his children William and May, and a domestic servant. He had accumulated \$6,000 worth of property. Within ten years, Willard moved to Minnesota and his family grew with the addition of a third child, Asa.

Extension Activities

Instead of giving students the information about Willard's post-Civil War life provided above, have students do their own research to find out more about Willard's life both before and after the Civil War. Go to Family Search, a free site (familysearch.org), and search for his name. You will have to create an account with Family Search in order to access their records.

Additional Resources

- [L.S. Willard Letters, Newberry Library. Nineteen Letters from Lot Sabin Willard to his mother, father, and brother in Peoria, Illinois during the Civil War, from 1862-1864.](#)
- [L.S. Willard collection description, Newberry Library.](#)
- ["Battle of Shiloh," Shiloh National Military Park, National Park Service.](#)
- [Letters and the Postage Service During the Civil War, National Postal Museum.](#)