

CIVIL WAR

ON THE WESTERN BORDER

LESSON PLAN

CIVILWARONTHEWESTERNBORDER.ORG



OVERVIEW

William Quantrill – Document-Based Questions Activity

GRADE LEVEL:

8-12

SUBJECT:

U.S. History

Missouri History

Kansas History

ESTIMATED CLASS TIME:

100-120 minutes

Additional time for students to compose letters

WEBSITE RESOURCES:

[Border War Encyclopedia](#)

[William Clark Quantrill Portrait](#)

[William Clarke Quantrill Border War Encyclopedia Entry](#)

[Letter from William Clarke Quantrill to William W. Scott, January 22, 1858](#)

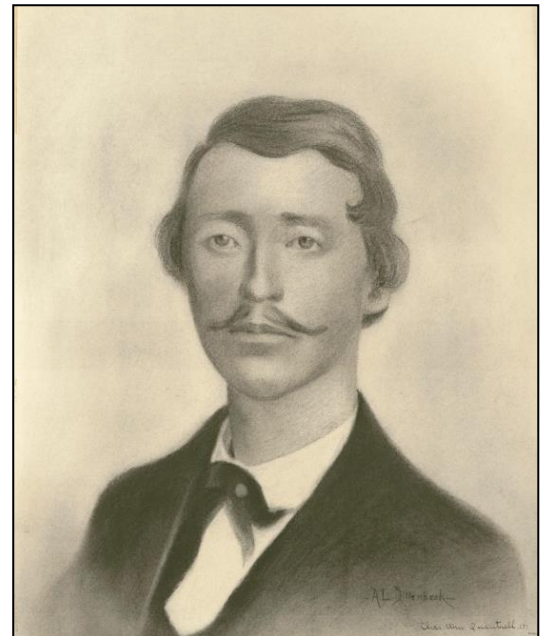
[LeCompton Constitution Border War Encyclopedia Entry](#)

[James Henry Lane Border War Encyclopedia Entry](#)

Created by [Michael Wells](#), Kansas City Public Library

Introduction

William Clarke Quantrill remains one of the most polarizing figures who emerged during the Civil War era. He is best known for leading a series of savage and brutal guerilla-style attacks against Unionists and opponents of slavery during the war years, but fewer are aware that his sectional alignment was not always so concrete. Documentary evidence exists indicating that he actually supported antislavery factions in Kansas prior to 1860. The fact that Quantrill's ideas regarding such a divisive issue as slavery so drastically changed in such a short period of time stands as a testament to the volatile nature of the ideas, words, and deeds that shaped the "Bleeding Kansas" era.



Quantrill, William Clarke. Portrait. ca. 1890. Missouri Valley Special Collections. Kansas City Public Library, Kansas City, Missouri.

Objectives

This activity introduces students to the issues and ideas that defined the actions and deeds of one of the Civil War era's most notorious figures. Students will gain an understanding of how regular Americans living in the mid-1800s responded to and made sense of the pro- and antislavery factions struggling for the future of the nation by assessing events through the lens of Quantrill's experiences. Students will additionally gain an understanding of the thoughts and motivations that led hundreds of young men to leave their homes and families in order to wage a guerilla war against Union forces.

Requirements

Either printed or electronic versions of this activity.

[Letter from William Clarke Quantrill to His Mother, January 26, 1860](#)

[John Brown Border War Encyclopedia Entry](#)

[Proclamation to the State of Missouri](#)

[Quantrill's Raid on Lawrence Border War Encyclopedia Entry](#)

Instructional Plan

Directions: Read the following excerpt from the Border War Encyclopedia entry (<http://www.civilwaronthewesternborder.org/content/william-clarke-quantrill>), describing William C. Quantrill's life as well as the primary source documents that are provided. Use information from all sources to respond to the questions and prompts that follow each document.

Quantrill Biographical Information:

- Date of Birth: July 31, 1837
- Place of Birth: Canal Dover, Ohio
- Claim to Fame: Led a band of Confederate guerrillas, "Quantrill's Raiders," and attacked Lawrence, Kansas, in "Quantrill's Raid on Lawrence"
- Date of Death: June 6, 1865
- Place of Death: Louisville, Kentucky
- Cause of Death: Shot in a Union ambush on May 10, 1865
- Final Resting Place: Saint John's Cemetery, Louisville, Kentucky; Fourth Street Cemetery, Dover, Ohio; Confederate Memorial State Park, Higginsville, Missouri ([Read the story of Quantrill's three graves.](#))

William Clarke Quantrill was a prominent Confederate guerrilla leader during the American Civil War who is most famous for having led a raid on the Unionist town of Lawrence, Kansas, in August 1863. Confederate "bushwhackers" such as Quantrill and pro-Union "jayhawkers" used irregular tactics in Kansas and Missouri, contributing to a prolonged and violent guerrilla conflict in the region and the creation of a romantic outlaw mythology after the war. Quantrill was perhaps the most notorious and enigmatic wartime guerrilla, and many of the "facts" or mythologies surrounding him were self-created.

Quantrill was born in Canal Dover, Ohio, on October 11, 1837. The son of a school teacher, Quantrill worked as a teacher and other various trades in Ohio, Illinois, and Indiana before moving to Missouri at age 19. Quantrill traveled to Kansas in 1858, where he earned a living as a gambler under the alias "Charles Hart" and worked as a school teacher in Lawrence before becoming involved in the border violence and fleeing to Missouri in 1860.

Document 1. Letter from William Clarke Quantrill to William W. Scott, January 22, 1858. (<http://www.civilwaronthewesternborder.org/content/william-clarke-quantrill-william-w-scott>)

Friend William,

I have come to the conclusion to write to you again. You wrote to me last summer & I answered it shortly afterward; but, not having received one afterwards, I came to the conclusion that you had never received [my letter], for at that time letters frequently

were mislaid & lost.

About the last election here is this: 10,126 votes against the Lecompton swindle & 6000 for it, of which 3000 if not more were illegal. I saw the Ohio Democrat [newspaper] here yesterday which had...lies about Kansas & I would like to tell the editor so to his face. He said Jim Lane, (as good a man as we have here) was fighting with U.S. Troops at Fort Scott. [Lane] was there but did no fighting; his presence [alone] is enough to frighten 100 Missourians. The settlers shot two men & wounded 4 or 5 but in self-defense...it is a pity they had not shot every Missourian that was there.

The Democrats here are the worst men we have for they are all rascals, for no one can be a democrat here without being [a rascal]; but the day of their death is fast approaching & they will be like the Jews [and] be scattered to the four winds of the earth & [have] a guilty look which will always betray them.

If you are in the printing office yet tell the editor if he wants any subscribers in Kansas he must do a little better than he has done, for the boys here will hardly use [the newspaper] when they go [behind] the house.

If you know where George Scott is tell him to write to me or if he wants to get a farm [for] nothing to come here as soon as he can; for [there] are good chances here now...if you want land, here is the only place to get it cheaply & you had better come if you want any.

Tell George if he wants to come, to come by railroad to Jefferson City, Mo. & then shoulder his carpet sack & foot it to Independence & from there to Little Santa Fe, & then to Olathe [in] Johnson County...which is [a] six day walk.

When you write tell me all about the girls & especially yours & my fair one that used to be in years past...You & the rest of the boys there must attend to the girls well while we are here in Kansas...

I must close...write soon...give me all the news.

W. C. Quantrill

Document 1. Questions and Prompts

1. What was the event that William Quantrill came to be most known for?
2. On which side of the Civil War conflict did Quantrill fight for?
3. Describe Quantrill's life between 1858 and 1860.

4. What is Quantrill referring to when he writes of “the Lecompton swindle”?
5. Which side of the slavery debate did Jim Lane support?
6. Does Quantrill seem to support or oppose Lane?
7. Which political group does Quantrill label as “rascals,” and why do you believe he disagrees with them?
8. What is the message that Quantrill asks William W. Scott to deliver to George Scott?
9. How would you describe Quantrill’s feelings about Kansas and the people settling there in 1858? Provide at least three examples to support your position.

Document 2. Letter from William Clarke Quantrill to his mother, January 26, 1860.
(<http://www.civilwaronthewesternborder.org/content/william-clarke-quantrill-my-dear-mother>)

My dear Mother,

I again seat myself down to pen you a few lines, hoping that they may cheer you in a measure, and if so it is all I can do at this time. I have not yet received an answer to the [letter] I wrote to you before this, for the reason that it has not had time to reach here; but I expect to have [your letter] by the time you receive this.

There is no news now. I believe at present, all is peace and quietness in [Kansas], and all seems to move on smoothly, but times are hard, and the people complain of the taxes...which they have to pay, and indeed they are enormous for such a new [territory], and under the present form of government are not apt to cease.

You have undoubtedly heard of the wrongs committed in this territory by the southern people, or proslavery party, but when one once knows the facts they can easily see that it has been the opposite party that have been the main movers in the troubles & by

far the most lawless set of people in the country. They all sympathize for old [John] Brown, who should have been hung years ago, indeed hanging was too good for him. May I never see a more contemptible people than those who sympathize for him. A murderer and a robber made a martyr...just think of it.

I suppose all of the people [at home] think that I am never coming back again, and also that I have done wrong in going away at all; this I will acknowledge, but who could have made me believe it at that time, I think no one, for my brain ran so with wild thoughts that I was blind to everything else. I think that I am not the only one, of that failing; only it has probably been carried to a greater extent in my case than others...

Though I have been quite foolish in my notions of the last three or four years, still I have been taught many a good lesson by them, and think I shall not regret it in [the afterlife] so much as I do now; for it is now that I feel it the keenest, and can see the whole picture of my doings in one broad sheet...

...Well I must bid you goodbye; for my sheet is about full, and when I receive an answer to my first [letter] I will write again. Hoping that this may find you and all in fine health...My love to you all.

Your Son

W. C. Quantrill

Document 2. Questions and Prompts

10. About how much time had passed between Quantrill's writing of the letters labeled as documents 1 and 2?
11. How does Quantrill describe the situation in Kansas to his mother in 1860?
12. How does his description of Kansas in 1860 differ from the tone of his previous letter?
13. Who does Quantrill blame for the troubles affecting Kansas since the time of his previous letter?
14. Which side of the slavery debate did John Brown support?

15. Based upon document 1, did Quantrill support or oppose slavery in Kansas in 1858?

16. How does Quantrill seem to feel about his past beliefs in document 2?

Document 3. Proclamation to the State of Missouri, August 1862.

(<http://www.civilwaronthewesternborder.org/content/proclamation-state-missouri>)

Whereas the Federal Government has issued an order calling upon all male citizens between the ages of eighteen and forty-five to come forward and enroll their names, preparatory to drafting men to reinforce their lately defeated army [near Richmond].

We proclaim to all men, if they will come to any of [our] camps now in the brush they will be furnished with arms and ammunition.

Anyone who shall be found guilty of reporting to any [Union] military post, the [whereabouts] of any southern man shall be shot.

Any one liable to military duty who shall leave [Missouri], or shall be found preparing to leave the state to prevent being called into the service will be deemed enemies of the South, and treated accordingly.

Upton Hays and W. C. Quantrill

Document 3. Questions and Prompts

1. What prompted Quantrill and Upton Hays to write a proclamation to the people of Missouri?
2. Which army does Quantrill describe as “lately defeated”?
3. What do Quantrill and Hays promise to young men who fight with them?
4. How do Quantrill and Hays promise to deal with anyone that provides information to the Union forces or refuses to assist the Confederacy?

Directions: Read the following summary of Quantrill's August 21, 1863, raid on Lawrence, Kansas.

(<http://www.civilwaronthewesternborder.org/content/quantrill%E2%80%99s-raid-lawrence>)

Assume the role of William C. Quantrill and write a letter to a friend or family member explaining your actions. Be sure to explain how your ideas and thinking about the expansion of slavery changed over time. Use information from each of secondary sources as well as the three primary source documents you have now read to support your statements.

Event Summary:

- Date: August 21, 1863
- Location: Lawrence, Douglas County, Kansas
- Adversaries: William Clarke Quantrill's Raiders vs. the civilian population of Lawrence
- Casualties: Between 160-190 men and teenaged boys killed; one raider, Larkin Skaggs, killed
- Result: Destruction of most of the town; Order No. 11 issued to quell the bushwhacker violence

William Quantrill's raid on the Free-State town of Lawrence, Kansas (also known as the Lawrence Massacre) was a defining moment in the border conflict. At dawn on August 21, 1863, Quantrill and his guerrillas rode into Lawrence, where they burned much of the town and killed between 160 and 190 men and boys. This raid was the culmination of an ongoing conflict between the Free-State forces who controlled Lawrence and the proslavery partisans who lived in nearby Missouri. Although Kansas entered the Union as a free state in 1861, ending the period called "Bleeding Kansas," the animosities of the territorial period lived on with the outbreak of civil war that same year.

On that fateful August morning, a group of roughly 400 Confederate guerrillas entered the sleeping town. They immediately began to ransack homes, shoot civilians, loot stores, and set fire to buildings (including the prominent Eldridge Hotel, although Quantrill allowed its inhabitants to evacuate safely). One of the first casualties was Reverend Snyder, shot as he was milking his cow outside his home along present-day East 19th Street. Mayor George Collamore, upon hearing the commotion, hid in his family's well, where he died of smoke inhalation. The rest of his family survived, although they had lost their home and the raiders severely wounded his 18-year-old son.

As the day went on, terror spread throughout the town, with panicked citizens fleeing into nearby ravines, hiding in cellars or cornfields, and attempting to escape across the Kansas River. By nightfall the raiders were gone, but traumatized residents now faced the daunting task of cleaning up between \$1 million and \$1.5 million of damage (in

1863 dollars) and coping with the high death toll. Approximately 20 percent of the male population had been killed, leaving 85 widows.

There are many possible motivations behind the Lawrence Massacre. Founded in 1854, Lawrence’s reputation for being an antislavery stronghold made it a target for guerrilla violence. Then, during the Civil War, Union regiments tasked with controlling the guerrilla population in Missouri often rendezvoused in Lawrence. A prominent resident and U.S. Senator, James H. Lane, commanded the infamous “Jayhawkers,” a military regiment that conducted raids into Missouri, confiscated supplies, and killed Missourians who sided with the Confederacy. One such raid took place on September 23, 1861, when Lane and his men ransacked Osceola, destroying stores and homes and robbing the bank. Quantrill’s guerrillas likely sought retribution for these attacks on Missouri.

Historians have also speculated that the Lawrence massacre was revenge for the unexplained collapse of a women’s prison in Kansas City only eight days earlier, which killed female relatives of the guerrillas, including one of William T. “Bloody Bill” Anderson’s sisters and Cole Younger’s cousin. Quantrill himself also had personal experience with Lawrence, having lived there under an alias a few years prior. All of these motivations are plausible explanations for why Quantrill chose to attack Lawrence.

Standards Statement

This lesson plan has been designed in keeping with the National Council for the Social Studies’ framework for social studies content standards, with focus placed upon the goals of encouraging students to better understand important concepts, such as change over time, historical context, continuity, and bias, so that they may become more effective historical researchers and argumentative writers.

Suggested Assessment Rubrics¹

Document Question and Prompt Assessment Rubric				
Category	4	3	2	1
Identifies Important Information	The student lists all of the main points of each document in response to the questions and prompts.	The student lists most of the main points from each document in response to the questions and prompts.	The student lists some of the main points from each document in response to the questions and prompts.	The student has only listed a few of the main points from each document in response to questions and prompts.
Identifies Details	The student provides supporting details from each document in response to	The student provides supporting details from most of the documents in response to	The student provides some supporting details from the documents in response to questions and	The student provides only a few supporting details from the documents in response to questions and

	questions and prompts.	questions and prompts.	prompts.	prompts.
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Letter from Quantrill Assessment Rubric				
Category	4	3	2	1
Sentences & Paragraphs	Sentences and paragraphs are complete, well-constructed and of varied structure.	All sentences are complete and well-constructed. Paragraphing is generally done well.	Most sentences are complete and well-constructed. Paragraphing needs some work.	Many sentence fragments or run-on sentences, or paragraphing needs lots of work.
Ideas	Ideas were expressed in a clear and organized fashion. It was easy to figure out what the letter was about.	Ideas were expressed in a mostly clear manner, but the organization could have been better.	Ideas were somewhat organized, but were not very clear. It took more than one reading to figure out what the letter was about.	The letter seemed to be a collection of unrelated sentences. It was very difficult to figure out what the letter was about.
Content Accuracy	The letter contains at least 10 pieces of accurate information that directly relates to the prompt.	The letter contains 6-8 pieces of accurate information that directly relates to the prompt.	The letter contains 2-4 pieces of accurate information that directly relates to the prompt.	The letter contains no pieces of information that directly relates to the prompt.
Neatness	Letter is clean and easy to read with no distracting errors.	Letter is clean and easy to read with very few distracting errors.	Letter is somewhat difficult to read with a distracting amount of errors.	Letter is difficult to read and has many distracting errors.

ⁱ Assessment rubrics created using *Rubistar*. <http://rubistar.4teachers.org/>