



**AMERICAN
BATTLEFIELD
TRUST ★ ★ ★**

Antietam Battlefield Field Trip Lesson Plan: Module 3



American Battlefield Trust, 2022

This is an individual module from the Antietam Battlefield Field Trip Lesson Plan. It has been formatted for ease of use or printing options for stand-alone learning experiences.

We strongly recommend viewing the PDF of the entire Field Trip Lesson Plan to find maps, touring tips, and extra resources. If you want just one file, this PDF is for you. It includes all modules (lesson plans and activities), the maps, and the supplemental historic photos in one easy download.

These lesson plans are listed according to their locations on the National Park Service's Self-Guided Auto Tour route. Please consult the [Antietam National Battlefield's Self-Guided Auto Tour map](#) when planning your visit with these lesson plans and battlefield investigations.



American Battlefield Trust Field Trip Lesson

Antietam: The Cornfield

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How does a photograph taken shortly after the battle of Antietam help us understand the horrors of war for soldiers and civilians?

OVERVIEW

On the morning of September 17, 1862, Union Gen. George McClellan moved almost 15,000 men into position at the northern end of the growing battle near a cornfield. The Union's objective was to move south towards a piece of high ground where the modern day Visitor's Center is located. Halfway between the high ground and the North Woods was a field of corn. At approximately 5:45 am, Union soldiers under the command of Maj. Gen. Joseph Hooker moved out of the North Woods, heading south towards the cornfield and high ground beyond. Confederate artillery off to their right opened fire. Hooker's men received their first casualties.

To combat the deadly Confederate artillery fire, General Hooker ordered up some of his own cannons and an artillery duel began. With the artillery firing, Hooker's men moved south, but soon this attack fell into disarray, leaving only 1,000 Union soldiers making it to the cornfield. By 6:30 am, almost half of these 1,000 soldiers had been killed or wounded. As the Union soldiers struggled to push southward and through the corn, they finally met their foes, Confederate soldiers from the state of Louisiana. Later that morning, more men from General Hooker's I Corps were thrown into the swirling action in the cornfield, and, even later, soldiers from the Union Army's XII Corps joined the fray.

Over the next three hours the struggle for this plot of corn raged back and forth, changing hands too many times to count. As the Union soldiers gained more ground and pushed further southward towards the rise of ground in the distance, they encountered reinforcements for the Confederate line from Georgia, Alabama, North Carolina, and Virginia. During one critical moment, Confederate soldiers from Texas charged into the battle to save this sector of the Confederate line. One regiment, the 1st Texas Infantry, suffered 82% casualties from their charge.

The fighting in the now famous Cornfield was violent, chaotic, and at a close range between the opposing lines. All of these factors increased the number of casualties from the fight. Adding to this bloodshed was the use of the rifled musket by many soldiers. The rifled musket was a weapon that had better accuracy and range than older smoothbore muskets. These weapons, used at close quarters, only increased the carnage.

Alexander Gardner photographed the aftermath of the Battle of Antietam, including the Cornfield and Hagerstown Pike. His images of dead soldiers across the landscape were exhibited in New York, shocking the nation. Taking photographs on a battlefield was a difficult and timely process, with photographers having to bring portable lightrooms



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and lots of equipment and chemicals. Furthermore, photographers were limited in their subjects; most Civil War documentary photographs were taken by Northern photographers of Eastern subjects. This was one of relatively few engagements where photographers recorded images of dead soldiers, making these photographs of Sharpsburg after the battle an invaluable source for both contemporary and modern historians.

The landscape was also transformed by this battle. The land that comprised the now famous Cornfield was owned by farmer David R. Miller at the time of the battle. After the battle, he submitted a damage claim to the United States government to help recoup some of the loss to his livelihood. In all, Miller submitted a claim of \$1,237 to the government and, nine years later, only received \$995.

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Knowledge (Describe)
 - a. Cite specific examples of modern weaponry.
 - b. Discuss why casualties were high during close range fighting.
2. Comprehension/Application/Analysis (Explain)
 - a. Compare the similarities and differences between smoothbore and rifled muskets.
 - b. Explain the important role photographers of the time played in documenting the events of the Civil War.
3. Evaluation (Interpret)
 - a. Analyze clues within the photograph to determine the photographers location when the image was taken in September 1862.

BATTLEFIELD LOCATION

Antietam National Battlefield Auto Tour Stop #4 - The Cornfield, Cornfield Avenue

American Battlefield Trust Antietam Virtual Tour – Cornfield and Hagerstown Road Segments

<https://www.battlefields.org/visit/virtual-tours/antietam-360-virtual-tour>

NPS Website Virtual Tour:

<https://www.nps.gov/anti/learn/photosmultimedia/tour-stop-4.htm>

ACTIVITIES

Motivational Activity:

1. Gather your students near the fence at the southern edge of The Cornfield opposite the parking lot. As you are sharing historical information from the **Overview** section, encourage them to imagine what this field would have looked like during the late summer of 1862, before, during, and after the battle.
 - a. Note: The cornfield is not always planted with corn as the National Park Service issues permits to farmers who cultivate this land as they deem necessary.



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2. After reading the overview above, introduce your students to the more modern weapons used during the American Civil War, specifically the rifled musket. Rifled muskets were a new type of weapon for infantrymen and posed a much greater threat to the enemy.
 - a. Rifled muskets have grooves in the barrel that allow the bullet to fit snugly and then spin as the weapon was discharged.
 - b. Smooth bore muskets could only accurately hit a target at approximately 50 yards.
 - c. Rifled muskets could accurately hit a target at approximately 300 yards.
 - d. Rifled muskets had a flatter and longer trajectory than smoothbore muskets.
 - e. The velocity of the ammunition leaving the barrel is higher from a rifled musket than it is from a smoothbore musket.

Procedure:

1. Show students the following picture:
 - a. [Antietam, Md. Confederate dead by a fence on the Hagerstown road](#)
2. Provide them with a brief background on Civil War photography, found in the **Overview**.
3. Have students work together to find the location that this photograph was taken just two days after the battle.
4. Once the students have located where they believe the photograph was taken, share with them that photographer Alexander Gardner took these photos to help document the destruction and toll that battles had taken on both armies.
5. At this location, have students complete the photography worksheet. This will allow them to immerse themselves into both the photo and its story as well as specific locations on the battlefield. Students can also take photos at each location to create their own “Then & Now” to compare historic photos with the current-day landscape. They can utilize this link as well: [National Archives Photograph Analysis Worksheet](#)

Summary Activity:

Close this lesson by facilitating a discussion that focuses on the effect that rifled muskets would have on the number of casualties incurred by both armies. Do the photographs the students analyzed support the claims that rifled muskets led to increased casualty rates?

RESOURCES

Teacher:

- National Park Service Website
<https://www.nps.gov/anti/learn/photosmultimedia/tour-stop-4.htm>
- Library of Congress Photograph
[Antietam, Md. Confederate dead by a fence on the Hagerstown road](#)
- Battlefield Investigation
- [Battlefield Investigation - The Cornfield - National Archives Photo Analysis Worksheet](#)



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- American Battlefield Trust Video: The Cornfield, Unknown Antietam 159
<https://youtu.be/cOctOj8vRwY>
- American Battlefield Trust In4 Video: Infantry Tactics During The Civil War
<https://youtu.be/tYg3v9lUuNA>
- American Battlefield Trust In4 Video: Soldier Life
<https://youtu.be/zgNxfMIObBk>
- American Battlefield Trust In4 Video: Photography in the Civil War
<https://youtu.be/kDzYkygdJO8>

Students:

- National Park Service Website
<https://www.nps.gov/anti/learn/photosmultimedia/tour-stop-4.htm>
- Library of Congress Photograph
[Antietam, Md. Confederate dead by a fence on the Hagerstown road](#)
- Battlefield Investigation
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- American Battlefield Trust In4 Video: Infantry Tactics During The Civil War
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STANDARDS

Social Studies - National Council for the Social Studies

- Theme 2: Time, Continuity, and Change
- Theme 3: People, Places, or Environments
- Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- Theme 7: Production, Distribution, and Consumption
- Theme 8: Science, Technology, and Society



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American Battlefield Trust Field Trip Battlefield Investigation
Antietam: The Cornfield

Name: _____

Analyze a Photograph



Meet the photo.

What do you see?

Is the photo?

- BLACK AND WHITE
- COLOR

Is there a caption?

- YES
- NO

If so, what does the caption tell you?

Observe its parts.

Circle what you see in the photo.



- PEOPLE
- OBJECTS
- BOTH

What are the people doing in the photo?

What are the objects used for in the photo?

Write two words that describe the photo.

Try to make sense of it.

Who do you think took this photo?

Where do you think this photo was taken?

List something that helps you prove where it was taken.

Why do you think the photo was taken?

How does this photo compare to modern times?



Use it as historical evidence.

Where do you think we could find out more information about the people or objects in the photo?



BATTLE QUOTES — THE CORNFIELD

“it seemed the whole world was in arms against us....Their new bright flags were waving in every direction.”

E. Scott Carson of Hampton’s Legion remembers the Cornfield fight

“Just as fast as one man would pick it up, he would be shot down. Eight men were killed or wounded trying to bring it off the field. I can’t say we were whipped, but we were overwhelmed.”

H. Watters Berryman of the 1st Texas describing his battle flag in the Cornfield

“the air was full of shot and shell...it seemed almost impossible for a rat to live in such a place.”

J. M. Polk of the 4th Texas

“The corn and the trees, so fresh and green in the morning, were reddened with blood and torn by bullet and shell, and the very earth was furrowed by the incessant impact of lead and iron.”

Francis Palfrey of the 20th Mass





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