



AMERICAN
BATTLEFIELD
TRUST ★ ★ ★

Antietam Battlefield Field Trip
Lesson Plan: Module 5



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: Burnside Bridge

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

Why was this stone bridge over Antietam Creek so important for both the Union and Confederate armies on September 17, 1862?

OVERVIEW

What has since been referred to as Burnside Bridge was originally known as Rohrbach's Bridge or the Lower Bridge. Architect John Weaver was tasked with producing a way to cross Antietam Creek at a point southeast of Sharpsburg, Maryland. The bridge was completed in 1836 at a cost of \$3,200. Constructed from large pieces of locally sourced limestone, the bridge has three iconic arches. In the late 1960s, it was finally closed to traffic and now it can be visited as part of the Antietam National Battlefield.

On the morning of September 17, 1862, Union troops under the command of Maj. Gen. Ambrose Burnside were given orders to attack the Confederate position on the opposite side of Antietam Creek, on the heights above the Lower Bridge, and beyond. Burnside needed to move the entire IX Corps, approximately 18,000 men, across Antietam Creek and to the southern end of the battlefield to accomplish his orders. Instead of wading the creek, Burnside and other officers initially focused on capturing and using the bridge. The Antietam Creek was much too deep and its banks were much too steep and muddy for troops to safely wade across. Thus this bridge was their only hope.

Using the terrain to their advantage, the 500 or so Confederate troops located on the western bank of the creek were able to position themselves in rifle pits, providing ample cover to attack the approaching Federals. The largely outnumbered Confederates were able to hold this position and keep Burnside from capturing it for nearly three hours. Eventually the Confederates were overrun, having run out of ammunition, and Burnside's men were able to secure this critical point of crossing and attack towards the Confederate line.

Due to the delay posed by Confederates earlier that morning, it took the Union Army an additional two hours to cross their troops over the bridge, hindered by thousands of soldiers bottleneaking as they crossed the twelve-foot-wide span. During this delay, Confederate reinforcements arrived from the area of Harpers Ferry, Virginia (today West Virginia). These Confederate troops drove Burnside's men back, saving the Confederate line and brought an end to the battle. It was after the battle that the bridge would be forever referred to as Burnside Bridge.

OBJECTIVES

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

1. Knowledge (Describe)
 - a. Recall the events that occurred at Burnside's Bridge.
 - b. Describe the structural and architectural points specific to the bridge.



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2. Comprehension/Application/Analysis (Explain)
 - a. Explain why Antietam Creek played an important role in the battle.
3. Evaluation (Interpret)
 - a. Develop an argument supporting or opposing Burnside's choice to cross the bridge here.

BATTLEFIELD LOCATION

Antietam National Battlefield Auto Tour Stop #9 - Burnside Bridge

American Battlefield Trust Antietam Virtual Tour – Burnside's Bridge

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

NPS Website Virtual Tour:

<https://www.nps.gov/anti/learn/photosmultimedia/tour-stop-9.htm>

ACTIVITIES

Motivational Activity:

1. Begin by gathering your group of students at a spot near the bridge. You will want to position them so they can see the bridge in its entirety. The overlook in the parking area is an excellent vantage point.
2. Once you have all gathered, begin by sharing the history of the bridge and the events that occurred here on September 17, 1862. This information can be located in the **Overview** section above.

Procedure:

1. Group students into partners and distribute [Battlefield Investigation - Burnside Bridge](#) worksheet.
2. Explain to students that they will need to answer the questions on the worksheet and then use their findings to discuss and draw conclusions about the events that occurred at this location at the conclusion of the lesson.
3. Students can either use apps on their phones or devices to complete the worksheet; or, if you would rather, they can find creative ways to measure and complete the worksheet.

Summary Activity:

Gather your students back at a designated location and have students share their findings from their Battlefield Investigation. Have your student reflect on Burnside's choice to use the bridge as a key part of his military objective to get across the creek.

Extension:

Have students research other types of bridges. What types of bridges are the strongest and can support the most weight? Was using arches in the nineteenth-century like those on the Burnside Bridge the strongest they could build during that time? Do we still use arches in modern bridge construction?



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RESOURCES**Teacher:**

- American Battlefield Trust Virtual Tour – Burnside Bridge segment
<https://www.battlefields.org/visit/virtual-tours/antietam-360-virtual-tour>
- National Park Service Website
<https://www.nps.gov/anti/learn/photosmultimedia/tour-stop-9.htm>
- American Battlefield Trust Antietam Map – Burnside's Bridge 12pm to 1pm
<https://www.battlefields.org/learn/maps/antietam-burnsides-bridge-september-17-1862-12pm-1pm>
- American Battlefield Trust Antietam Map – Burnside's Bridge 3:30pm until dark
<https://www.battlefields.org/learn/maps/antietam-burnsides-bridge-sep-17-1862-330-pm-dark>

Students:

- American Battlefield Trust Virtual Tour – Burnside Bridge segment
<https://www.battlefields.org/visit/virtual-tours/antietam-360-virtual-tour>
- National Park Service Website
<https://www.nps.gov/anti/learn/photosmultimedia/tour-stop-9.htm>

STANDARDS**Social Studies - National Council for the Social Studies**

- Theme 3: People, Places, or Environments
- Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- Theme 6: Power, Authority, and Governance
- Theme 8: Science, Technology, and Society



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**American Battlefield Trust Field Trip Battlefield Investigation
Antietam: Burnside Bridge**

Name: _____

- 1.) Describe the overall appearance and prominent features of the bridge.

- 2.) What material(s) is the bridge made from?

- 3.) Do you think that the bridge was built by hand or with machinery? Please defend your answer.

- 4.) Using your device, please figure out the following dimensions of the bridge:
 - a.) Length:
 - b.) Width:
 - c.) Height:



ANTIETAM BATTLEFIELD FIELD TRIP LESSON PLAN: MODULE 5

American Battlefield Trust Field Trip Battlefield Investigation
Antietam: Burnside Bridge
Answer Key

Name: _____

1.) Describe the overall appearance and prominent features of the bridge.

Large, made of stone, 3 arches

2.) What material(s) is the bridge made from?

Local stone (Limestone and Granite)

3.) Do you think that the bridge was built by hand or with machinery? Please defend your answer.

Built by hand- you can see the chisel marks and variations in the shape of the rocks

4.) Using your device, please figure out the following dimensions of the bridge:

a.) Length: 125' Long

b.) Width: 12' Wide

c.) Height: The height at the central part of the bridge is 35.5' tall and the height at the ends is 30' tall.



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BATTLE QUOTES — BURNSIDE'S BRIDGE

“During that long and terrible fire, not a man, except a wounded one, fell out and went to the rear-not a man.”

Henry Benning

“The conduct of the officers and men generally under my command in the battle of Sharpsburg was so strongly marked with the noble virtues of the patriot soldier that a narrative of this day’s deeds performed by them, however simple and unadorned

Robert Toombs describing the actions of his men at Antietam

“The brave fellows reeled and fell back as if smitten at the bridge with the blast of Hell....At this bridge the murderous balls and bursting shells were appalling destruction hovered in the air, death environed it; the approaches were strewn with dead men. It spanned the Antietam, but all who attempted to cross it had found eternity.”

A Federal soldier on the tragic fate of the 2nd Maryland

“Of the first hundred men who passed through the opening in the fence, at least nine tenths were either killed or wounded. Such sweeping destruction checked the advancing column, but the men sheltered themselves behind logs, fences, and whatever other cover they could find, and bravely held the ground already gained.”

A 6th New Hampshire soldier

The gravel struck up by the bullets stinging hand and face...we charged in regular order, but some of the boys could not be restrained from firing at the enemy...the shrieks of the wounded and the moans of the dying could only be faintly heard amid the din of noise and confusion.”

A Union Private

“so many of the men were shot down that the officers filled their places and loaded and fired their guns.”

Theodore Fogle





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