

# CIVIL WAR

## ON THE WESTERN BORDER

### LESSON PLAN

CIVILWARONTHEWESTERNBORDER.ORG



#### OVERVIEW

## The Dominion System and Loyalty Oaths in Missouri

#### GRADE LEVEL:

8-12

#### SUBJECT:

U.S. History

Missouri History

#### ESTIMATED CLASS TIME:

90-110 minutes

Additional time for students to construct a written response to an essay prompt

#### WEBSITE RESOURCES:

[Shadow War: Federal Military Authority and Loyalty Oaths in Civil War Missouri](#)

[Letter from Mrs. Silliman to My Dear Relatives](#)

[Letter from Thomas P. Akers to Hamilton Gamble](#)

[Letter from H. D. Palmer to Isaac Feback](#)

[Letter from Susan A. Staples to Mary W. Mason](#)

[Letter from John A. Bushnell to Eugenia Bronaugh](#)

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

#### Introduction

Missouri's status as a border state during the Civil War made the task of maintaining order a difficult prospect. Missourians of that era were deeply divided in terms of their support for slavery, the Union, and secession. In 1861 pro-secessionist members of the Missouri General Assembly met in Neosho and passed a resolution dissolving Missouri's ties with the Union. While their decision never carried the full weight of law, thereafter a shadow state government acted in opposition to the provisional Union government in Jefferson City until the war's end. Pro-Confederate military units from outfits such as the Missouri State Guard and disorganized bands of [bushwhacking](#) guerrilla fighters threatened stability and were a constant threat. Within this climate military officials found it difficult to make clear distinctions between Unionists and secessionists in the state.



*Photograph, Members of the Missouri State Guard, 1861*

In order to maintain control of such a volatile situation, Missouri-based military commanders enacted a strict dominion system. Under this system civilian authority in nearly all walks of life was replaced by marshal law. Missouri citizens were required to swear loyalty to the Union, or face restrictions on their personal freedoms and often violent reprisals from Unionists. Yet, given how divided Missourians were over the issues driving the Civil War, swearing one's loyalty to the Union was no guarantee of security. Many who swore such oaths found that their words did little more than make themselves targets for the other side. Another problem was that the U.S. government enacted these drastic measures against citizens whose state had never actually left the Union. The compromise of personal rights and freedoms acted as an additional wedge to further divide Missourians.

## Objectives

This lesson plan introduces students to the strict conditions that many Missourians lived under after the establishment of the dominion system during the Civil War. Students will be exposed to a secondary interpretation of the events and actions that defined public life during the war and investigate a series of primary documents written by people who lived through this volatile and dangerous period of American history. Students will make decisions about issues concerning privacy and military authority that continue to impact the public lives of citizens living today. Their positions will be presented to their classmates through group discussion and through individual written essay responses.

## Requirements

Students will require access to web accessible computers or tablets.

The instructor should read the essay "[Shadow War: Federal Military Authority and Loyalty Oaths in Civil War Missouri](#)," by Christopher Phillips prior to implementation of this instructional plan.

## Instructional Plan

1. Assign students to read the first section of the essay "Shadow War: Federal Military Authority and Loyalty Oaths in Civil War Missouri" (The Dominion System) either individually or in groups. Students may use the graphic organizer located near the end of this instructional plan to aid in their understanding of the essay section's content.
2. Display each of the Union counterinsurgency measures provided by author Christopher Phillips. They are:
  - Military districting and garrisons
  - Oaths
  - Levies
  - Martial law
  - Provost martial system
  - Trade restrictions
3. Clarify any of the above listed measures with students before leading a class discussion of the dominion system. Suggested discussion questions:
  - Can you think of other examples from history or from current events when individual rights and liberties have been sacrificed in the interest of maintaining public order?
  - Why do you think Union officials thought the dominion system was necessary?
  - Do you think there are times when it might be necessary for authorities to sacrifice rights and freedoms?
  - Do you think it is possible for citizens to fully regain their rights and freedoms after giving them up to authorities?

4. Introduce students to the oaths of allegiance that Missourians living under the dominion system were required to take. Use the following outline to guide your presentation:
  - Problems with Loyalty Oaths
    - Missourians were citizens of a Union State. Why should they have to swear loyalty?
    - Many viewed being forced to sign such oaths as a violation of their First Amendment rights.
    - The oaths were forced on Missourians by people that were viewed as an outside force.
    - Oaths divided communities.
    - Reprisals often followed either signing or refusing to sign an oath.
      - Shunning
      - Violence
  - To Sign or Not to Sign
    - Some refused
    - Others lied – claimed that they had already signed a loyalty oath
    - Consequences of not signing...
      - Public identification
      - Arrest
        - Required to pay bond to Union authorities
        - Must present signed statements from known Unionists promising good behavior
  - General Order No. 11
    - Questions of loyalty remained an issue for Union authorities
    - Orders issued August 25, 1863, in reaction to Quantrill’s raid on Lawrence, Kansas.
    - The first forced removal of white U.S. citizens from their homes.
5. Allow students to explore the primary documents listed under website resources. Students should respond to the following prompts as they view the documents (transcribed and abridged versions of the listed primary documents can be found below the graphic organizer following this instructional plan):

**Letter from Mrs. Silliman to My Dear Relatives, August 24, 1862 – Warrensburg, Missouri**

1. Which groups of people does Silliman blame for turning her town into a “battlefield”?
2. How does Silliman characterize the Union troops that were encamped near her home?

3. Does Silliman's reaction to discovering a group of bushwhackers encamped near her home seem different to how she felt about the presence of Union troops?

**Letter from Thomas P. Akers to Hamilton Gamble, September 12, 1862 – Kansas City, Missouri**

1. Did Akers support or oppose secession of the southern states from the Union?

2. According to his letter, how does Akers characterize his support for President Lincoln?

3. What happened after Akers swore an oath to the Union in Lexington, Missouri?

4. How did Akers respond to this action?

5. What happened to Akers' wife and family while he was in Leavenworth?

6. What does Akers suggest was the cause of his family's troubles?

**Letter from H. D. Palmer to Isaac Feback, December 20, 1862 – Independence, Missouri**

1. What does Palmer claim he has done for his friends during the war?

2. How do some of his friends respond to his kindness?

3. Why does Palmer question the need for loyalty oaths?
4. What does he suggest will result from all the property being taken from citizens by Union forces?

**Letter from Susan A. Staples to Mary W. Mason, February 1, 1863 – Independence, Missouri**

1. How does Staples describe the treatment of Southern sympathizers by Colonel Penick and his men?
2. List the violent acts committed by Penick’s men that Staples records in her letter.
3. What are the factors in Staples’ letter that she lists to describe how life has become very difficult for her and her family since the Union Army arrived in Independence?

**Letter from John A. Bushnell to Eugenia Bronaugh, July 3, 1864 – Clinton, Missouri**

1. How does Bushnell defend some of the things he has written in his letter that may be understood as disloyal to the Union?
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6. Ask students to imagine that they are living in Civil War era Missouri. Ask for a show of hands from students who would have and from students who would not have signed a loyalty oath. Ask for volunteers to explain their position to the class. Record important points made by students using a for and against T-chart that is visible to the entire class.

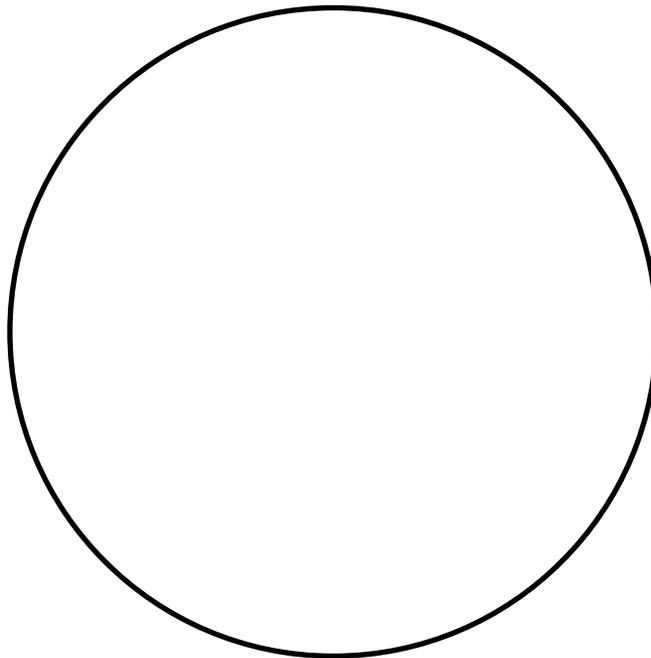
7. Assign students to respond to the following essay question: Was it right for the

United States government to impose the dominion system upon and require loyalty oaths from citizens living in Missouri during the Civil War? Use examples from the essay segment, class discussions, and the letters you have read to support your position.

**The Dominion System Graphic Organizer (For Use with Shadow War Essay)**

<b>Cause</b>	<b>Effect</b>
Disorder and chaos in the state of Missouri during the early years of the Civil War	
Union soldiers and officers brought in from outside of Missouri	
The dominion system administered at the local level by private citizens	

Union Cavalry officer Wyllis C. Ransom describes his perception of the loyalty of Missourians to the Union during the Civil War. Use the circle provided below to create a pie chart that represents Ransom's statement. Label each section appropriately.



Use your pie chart to respond to the following questions: According to Ransom, what percentage of the population of Missouri was loyal to the Union during the Civil War?

What percentage of the population of Missouri did Ransom consider to be disloyal to the Union?

### **Transcribed and Abridged Primary Documents**

#### **Letter from Mrs. Silliman to My Dear Relatives, August 24, 1862 – Warrensburg, Missouri**

To my Dear Elisabeth, my sister, Brother George, and all my dear relatives,

I have not had the opportunity of writing to you for months. The mails have all been stopped on this route, we did not even get the papers, unless accidentally or by a traveler...

...our little town has from the commencement, been a battlefield...it has been a thoroughfare for soldiers, jayhawkers, bushwhackers...assassins and marauders from the first of the contest...we have almost waded in blood. Citizen after citizen of the most peaceable quite character have been shot down in the street...

...500 Federal soldiers, those who were encamped so near came to our well...for their cooking and drinking water. 5 weeks and never was there a disrespectful word or act committed by them. I frequently sat in the yard by the door and they always raised their caps in the most respectful manner...

...the night before last 50 bushwhackers encamped in our grove all night. They came in after dark...They came to watch for a company of State Militia that were expected here. If they had met them there would have been a bloody battle in sight of the house, but the Militia heard of it in time...they are desperate men and fight to the death...

...Scouts have just come in. they say in a few hours there will be a battle within a very short distance of this place...Heaven keep us.

#### **Letter from Thomas P. Akers to Hamilton Gamble, September 12, 1862 – Kansas City, Missouri**

Dear Sir,

...Just before the election which resulted in the choice of Mr. Lincoln I published a letter in the evening news of your city in which I used the following language: "The election of Mr. Lincoln will furnish no just cause, nor any cause whatever for a dissolution of the Union." After the election and shortly after the assembling of the 37<sup>th</sup> Congress I went to Washington City...While there I did everything in my power to discourage secession...

...I felt that the disruption of the Union would be an overwhelming calamity not only to us as a nation but also to the civilized world...

...As to the main question, the preservation of the Union, I have never disagreed, and

do not now disagree with the administration. If I could save the Union, Heaven knows there is no sacrifice that I should hesitate to make...

...As soon as I reached Lexington, Missouri, I was notified by the Provost Marshal that it would be necessary for me to take the "military oath" which I did. After this I was not molested in any manner whilst I remained there. After the expiration of about a month, during which time I had made but little progress in arranging my affairs, my father-in-law...was arrested and confined in the military prison at Lexington...

...I went to St. Louis and had an interview with the Provost Marshall...who, upon hearing the case, sent to Lexington for the charges and evidence upon which the arrest was made, and after receiving and examining them, he ordered his release upon parole...

...A few days after my arrival at Leavenworth I received a letter from my wife at her father's house, informing me that her father had been re-arrested and taken to St. Louis...[she] advised me not to return as I would most probably be arrested also...I received another letter informing that she and her sister and their children had been turned out of her father's house in the rain and that the house was then being used as a hospital...my wife, by reason of her father's arrest and her own and her sister's expulsion from his house in the rain, had a premature labor resulting in the birth of a child now dead...

...while in St. Louis, I learned that some sort of proceeding had been instituted against me at Lexington, but of what character I was not informed. I requested...for the charges and evidence against me...my case...was referred to General Schofield who dismissed the charges as frivolous...

...I desire to return to Lexington, to remain there during my wife's illness, to close up my business and to leave the state...

**Letter from H. D. Palmer to Isaac Fedback, December 20, 1862 – Independence, Missouri**

Dear Sir,

...I am glad to know that there are a few of my old friends who are capable of rising above political prejudice and can still be friends, but I am sorry to hear there are but very few of them. There are those who I have befriended in a time of adversity...I protected them all that was in my power, and fed them and their stock nearly all last winter, and took care of some of them when sick for months. What I did for them, I done through kindness. Notwithstanding all this, in return for my kindness toward them; they have had the audacity to go to my house and rob me and abuse me, behind my back...

...Some who I once regarded as my friends say that I am a rebel...the government has offered protection to those who would comply...I have done my part. I have complied with every requirement of government. Now, in the name of God and my country, is there no protection for a man who takes the oath of allegiance and deems himself

accordingly? If there is no protection why require the oath? I have kept my oath strictly...I entertained my honest opinions as you did yours, and as every man has a right to do...

...It is the duty of officers to [give] receipt for anything that they take for use of the army, and it matters not who it is taken from...but the way the matter is generally carried on by every ignorant upstart of an officer...[is that they] will go out...and bring in what he deems contraband property. This is all wrong and the Government will have millions of dollars to pay to...its citizens...

**Letter from Susan A. Staples to Mary W. Mason, February 1, 1863 – Independence, Missouri**

My Dear Sister,

...Col. Penick's Command is stationed at Independence. He deals very strict with southerners. He has a great many female prisoners and says that he is going to banish every lady that has husbands in the Southern Army or with the bushwhackers. He has already banished several...He has hung Sam Wear and several others. He has made every lady that has been in town for the last three months take the oath of allegiance. His men burned 15 houses last Friday and [he] says he intends to burn every house that a bushwhacker has ever been in. These houses were in Dr. Lee's neighborhood. The Federals killed Dr. Lee.

Oh Mary, it is useless for me to try to tell you what Jackson County has to endure on paper...the negroes have all left in a great measure and those that has not is so impudent that there is no living with them. Goods of every kind are extremely high Tom and I went to Kansas City last week. We found goods equally as high there as here but a better assortment. We have all been so dreadfully jayhawked that I cannot tell what is to become of my children...

**Letter from John A. Bushnell to Eugenia Bronaugh, July 3, 1864 – Clinton, Missouri**

My Dear Eugenia,

...Little did I think that I should let my pen run so much at will, but I hope what I have said cannot be construed into disloyalty – a spirit of insubordination...it is expressing truths which by the freedom of speech and the freedom of the press might be elaborated and handled with good effect to establish loyalty and good government – and if understood more generally and acted upon would result in much good...

**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 Rubric<sup>i</sup>

<b>Individual Written Response Assessment Rubric</b>				
<b>Category</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Sentence Length</b>	Every paragraph has sentences that vary in length.	Almost all paragraphs have sentences that vary in length.	Some sentences vary in length.	Sentences rarely vary in length.
<b>Flow and Rhythm</b>	All sentences sound natural when read aloud. Each sentence is clear and has an obvious emphasis.	Almost all sentences sound natural when read aloud, but 1 or 2 are difficult to understand.	Most sentences sound natural when read aloud, but several are difficult to understand.	The sentences are difficult to read aloud because they are difficult to understand.
<b>Introduction</b>	The introduction is inviting, states the main topic, and previews the structure of the paper.	The introduction clearly states the main topic and previews the structure of the paper but is not inviting to the reader.	The introduction states the main topic, but does not adequately preview the structure of the paper nor is it inviting to the reader.	There is no clear introduction of the main topic or structure of the paper.
<b>Accuracy of Information</b>	All supportive facts are reported accurately.	Almost all supportive facts are reported accurately.	Most supportive facts are reported accurately.	No facts are reported or most are inaccurately reported.
<b>Conclusion</b>	The conclusion is strong and readers can understand the writer's intent.	The conclusion is recognizable and readers can understand most of the writer's intent.	The conclusion is recognizable, but readers have difficulty understanding the writer's intent.	There is no clear conclusion or intent.

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