

Title of Lesson: *What Would the Ladies Think? An Alabama Secession Story*

(Suggested grade level: 6th Grade)

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Background Information:

Alabama became the fourth state to secede from the Union at 2:30 p.m. January 11, 1861, following South Carolina, Mississippi, and Florida. The vote was 61 to 39. A “perfect jubilee” ensued on the grounds of the State Capitol. A group of ladies from Montgomery must have been expecting the outcome of the vote because they had a secession flag ready to unveil for the occasion. The Republic of Alabama Flag waved over the state Capitol January 11 through February 10, 1861. It was removed to the governor’s office after it was damaged by severe weather; it was never flown again. One side of the flag displayed the goddess of liberty holding a sword in her right hand and a small flag with one star under the state name in her left hand. In an arch above this figure were the words “Independent Now and Forever.” On the other side of the flag was a cotton plant with a rattlesnake beside it. Beneath the cotton plant are the Latin words: “Noli Me Tangere” (Touch Me Not). See the attached letter from W. H. Mitchell for more details.

Overview of lesson:

Students will study a sketch depicting the celebration on the State Capitol grounds after the secession vote was announced. The students will read a letter from Reverend William Mitchell from Florence, who witnessed the legislature’s secession announcement. Later that evening he described the events to his wife in a letter written from his hotel room. Mr. Mitchell gives great detail about the events of the day, namely the unveiling of the Republic of Alabama Flag and its dedication by the women’s sewing group representative. As a final activity, the students will use information from the primary source to annotate the background information on a handout of the flag.

Content Standards

[Alabama Course of Study: Social Studies](#) (Bulletin 2004, No. 18)

Standard 12: Identify causes of the Civil War from the northern and southern viewpoints.

- Describing the impact of the Civil War on the social, economic, and political life of the United States

[National Standards for History, 1996](#)

Era 4, Standard 4: The sources and character of cultural, religious, and social reform movements in the antebellum period

Era 5, Standard 1: The causes of the Civil War

Standard 2: The course and character of the Civil War and its impact on the American people

[National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies](#), (Bulletin 111, 2010)

Themes: 2. Time, Continuity, and Change

6. Power, Authority, and Governance

Primary Learning Objective(s):

- The students will read and highlight specific information in a primary document.

Time allotted: 45 minutes

Materials and Equipment:

- [An article from the *Montgomery Weekly Advertiser* describing the celebration in Montgomery after the announcement of the South Carolina secession](#)
- [Sketch of celebration after secession announcement in Montgomery, Alabama](#)
- [Two letters from W.H. Mitchell in Montgomery, Alabama to his wife, Martha, in Florence, Alabama](#)
- Class set of the [Mitchell letter transcript](#) (located after original letter on Web site)
- [Letter from E. Lewis in Montgomery, Alabama, to Mr. Kerr in Kentucky describing his viewpoint on the celebration of Alabama’s secession](#)
- Highlighters
- Class set of Secession flag – Pictures of the original flag can be found at <http://www.archives.alabama.gov/emblesms/noliflag.html>

Technological Resources:

- Display camera

Background/Preparation:

The student should know the following:

- Students should have a good understanding of the underlying causes of the Civil War, the events that took place at Fort Sumter, and the process of state secession.

Procedures/Activities:

Engagement/Motivation Activity:

Display the article from the [Weekly Advertiser](#) and read it aloud to the students. Discuss phrases such as “perfect jubilee,” “gallant Palmetto State,” and “citizen soldiery.” Encourage the students to debate both perspectives on the secession of states, that of the Union and/or Lincoln and that of the southern states. Display the sketch of the Alabama secession celebration and allow the students to discuss what they see. Encourage the students to notice the dress of the people, the different groups (women, children, gentlemen, soldiers), and the environment (winter scene at the Capitol). Tell the students that many secessionists were present at the Capitol awaiting the vote count. Reverend Mitchell, from Florence, Alabama, was a supporter of secession but worried that representatives from North Alabama would not support the move to leave the Union. He was on the Capitol lawn eagerly awaiting the announcement. Tell the students that men were not the only ones supportive of secession.

Step 1	Display and read the letter from Reverend Mitchell. Ask the students to highlight information about the women’s role in the secession celebration. Highlight the displayed copy of the transcript as students locate information.
Step 2	Allow students to discuss the involvement of the women’s sewing group. Ask, “Do you think the women were expecting the vote?” “Did they support secession?” Encourage students to cite the primary document during their responses.

Step 3	Display and read the postscript of the Kerr letter describing the women’s support of secession. Explain that the author of this letter was more anxious about the likely outbreak of war and was not a dedicated secessionist. Nevertheless, he found it interesting that a woman touched off the first gun to start the secession celebration.
Step 4	Pass out the flag handout and discuss the images and mottos. Encourage the students to cite the highlighted information in the primary document during the discussion.
Step 5	Explain that the students should annotate the flag. Draw arrows to each slogan and image. At the end of the arrows the students should write explanations of each image and slogan, based on the information from the letter. What do the slogans mean? Who is the lady, and why is she holding a sword? Why is the rattlesnake on the flag?
Step 6	After the completion of the assignment, add handouts of the letter and the flag to student notebooks.
Step 7	Allow students to share their annotated flags. Encourage students to share their flags on the display camera.

Assessment Strategies:

- Check notebooks for completion of activity. When appropriate, students should use complete sentences to annotate flag and all information should be derived from the primary document for accuracy.

Extension:

- Display the *Weekly Advertiser* article that described the ongoing celebration that took place in Montgomery after the secession vote. Ask the students to notice the details of the paper and article (paper headlines, sub-titles, font sizes, etc.).
- Ask students to write another article for the same paper, written the same day. The students should write an appropriate, eye-catching title and subtitle followed by an article about the secession flag. The article should not be lengthy, but give the reader the details of the unveiling and flag description.
- Article, “[Alabama Out of the Union!](#)”

Remediation:

- Show students the United States flag and discuss what the symbols mean (stripes, colors, blue field and stars). Discuss other countries’ flags if possible. Allow students to work together to locate information in the article that gives the reader the same information about the secession flag.

Accommodation:

- Read the selection aloud and highlight the article on the display camera. Allow students who need the model to copy from the display. Students may work together to annotate flag.

Modification:

- Allow students to annotate information with incomplete sentences and/or bullets.