

54th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment

Critical Thinking & Discussion Questions

General Topic - War History

K - 2

Before the United States army was started, militias were used. What is a militia? Why are soldiers important to a country?

Name different ways that famous abolitionists helped recruit Black volunteers to fight in the war.

Black volunteers came from many states and countries. Locate them on a map.

Why was the Battle of Fort Wagner a success? Name two of the heroes.

Grades 3 – 5

Pretend you lived during the Revolutionary War. Would you be a Patriot or a Loyalist? Share your reason.

Some Americans became *activists* that were called *abolitionists*. Why did abolitionists want Black men to be included as soldiers?

In every war there are two sides or two causes. When you see two friends in a disagreement, how do you decide which friend you believe is right?

Discuss the highs and lows of the Battle of Fort Wagner. Was it a success? Why or why not?

What is a militia? How is a militia different than the US Army?

Would you join the military one day? Give a reason for your answer.

Grades 6-8

Which two groups belong to the Revolutionary War? State what each group wanted for the United States.

- Patriots
- Confederacy
- Loyalists
- Union

In every war there are two sides or two causes. When you see two friends in a disagreement, how do you decide which friend you believe is right?

What is the significance of a formal invitation or permission? For example, although Blacks fought in the Revolutionary War and War of 1812, it was not until the Emancipation Proclamation that their participation was official.

Discuss the meaning of each of these words: infantry, regiment, soldier, militia, army, armed forces, volunteer, abolitionist, troops and answer the following questions:

- Which of these words do we use today for people involved in military action?
- Why is it important for Americans, then and now, to volunteer to be part of fighting forces? Do you know someone who has volunteered to join the military?
- In every war there are two sides or two causes. In the Battle of Fort Wagner, discuss how each side might claim the victory.

General Topic – Societal Interaction

Grades K-2

What is integration? Why did Frederick Douglass want Black men to fight in the war?

Give reasons why Black and White Americans can do great things together, like win a war?

Some Black soldiers had been slaves. If they were caught by a Confederate soldier, they could be sent back to slavery. Why would these men want to join the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry?

Grades 3-5

How do you feel when people with different skin colors agree about something?

Is your class integrated? What about your neighborhood, church, or favorite sports team? How does integration help our country? Why is it important to have an integrated military?

Many former slaves such as Peter Salem, Nicholas Said, and James Trotter, volunteered to serve in the Massachusetts Infantries. If you were alive at that time, would you have served?

What was the *Anti-Emancipation Proclamation*? What did this mean for Black soldiers?

Grades 6-8

How would you define integration?

Is your class integrated? What about your neighborhood, church, or favorite sports team? How does integration help our country? Why is it important to have an integrated military?

Confederate President Jefferson Davis issued an *Anti-Emancipation Proclamation*. What did this mean for Black soldiers?

Name 2-3 Black soldiers that fought for the Union. Why do you think that the Black soldiers were willing to serve despite this Proclamation? If you were alive at that time, would you serve?

Originally Robert Gould Shaw, born into wealth and privilege, was reluctant to lead the “colored” troop, but later he relented. What lessons might he have learned from these Black volunteers?

General Topic – Patriotism

Grades K-2

What good deed did Sergeant William Harvey Carney do for the country? Share a good deed that you have done for someone and why you did it.

Name different ways a citizen can be patriotic. Give reasons why people celebrate our country.

Paul Laurence Dunbar wrote a poem for his father who had been a soldier. What ways can you show kindness to a soldier?

Write a short poem about your favorite person in history.

Memorials and statues remind people what happened before they were born. What did the sculptor of the Shaw Memorial want people to remember about the Civil War?

Grades 3-5

People notice good deeds. What good deed did Sergeant William Harvey Carney do for the country? Why was this important and what award did Carney receive?

Name different ways a citizen be patriotic. What did Paul Laurence Dunbar, a Black poet, write to celebrate his father's patriotism?

Poetry, moviemaking, and drawing are creative ways to express an idea or emotion. If you wrote a poem to a Black soldier in the Civil War, what would you say?

Movies and books teach about history. If you wrote a book or a screenplay about a time in history, which would you choose? Why would you choose this time period?

Memorials and statues are built to remember important events in history. What happened to the Shaw Memorial?

Grades 6-8

What benefit did Frederick Douglass give to encourage Black men to join the fight? Is Douglass saying that citizenship is a right that should be earned?

Give reasons why a former slave would want to fight for the country?

What do you know about proper treatment of the American flag? Sergeant William Harvey Carney never let it touch the ground. Why is this meaningful? How was Carney rewarded?

Define Patriotism. Why did Paul Laurence Dunbar write the 1913 poem, "The Colored Soldier?"

Memorials and statues often reflect important events in history. What was the significance of the Shaw Memorial? Why did the memorial become neglected and even controversial?

Movies and historical fiction give us a perspective of an event or era in history. *Glory*, *Remember the Titans*, *To Kill A Mockingbird*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and *Amazing Grace* deal with Black-White relations in US History. How accurate is a single perspective of our history? Why is it important to understand a variety of perspectives? Give reasons why a person might enjoy reading a book over watching a movie?

Poetry, cinematography, and drawing are creative ways to express an idea or emotion. What did the director of the movie *Glory* want moviegoers to appreciate about the role of Black soldiers?

Write a short poem about a Black Union soldier in the Massachusetts 54th Volunteer Infantry. Try to use words that express emotions that they might have experienced during the Battle of Fort Wagner.

General Topic – Equality and Economics

Grades K-2

Describe how you would feel if you were paid less than your classmate for doing the same chore.

What type of protest is a mutiny? Give ideas for other ways to protest an unfair law.

Many soldiers sent the wages to their families. Name different things that families today must pay for to survive.

Grades 3-5

How do you feel when something is unfair? What did Black and White soldiers do when the US government would not pay Black soldiers the same as White soldiers?

Black soldiers received \$10 each month. What can \$10 buy today?

Grades 6-8

What did Black and White soldiers do when the US government would not pay Black soldiers the same as White soldiers? Name different ways to protest a federal policy or a law.

Black Union soldiers received \$10/month in wages. White Union soldiers received \$13/month in wages. The minimum wage in the US varies by state, with the lowest being \$7.25 in various states to \$15.20/hour in the District of Columbia. Name reasons why income levels and the cost of living have changed in the last two hundred years. Why would some states pay less per hour than other states?