

## Historical Background

“There are different social classes in every society. Historic events may impact these classes differently and so these classes may have different perspectives on historic events.

The **elite** were the wealthy, upper class, planter aristocracy who were land rich. The elite owned 20 or more slaves and attained their wealth from the cultivation and sale of the cash crops, cotton and rice. Although the elite had lived only along the coast in colonial times, by the antebellum period they lived in the midlands and the upstate as well. The children of the elite were often educated by private tutors or at private schools in South Carolina and abroad. The elite had greater political power and influence in the state because of their wealth and social standing and made laws that protected their interests, especially their interests in slavery.

The **middle class** were tradesmen, merchants, shopkeepers, physicians and attorneys, and could easily earn a living during prosperous economic times. They were most likely to live in cities and towns and had some political and social influence in their neighborhoods. They may have owned a few slaves to do household chores. Children of the middle class were taught to read and write and might pursue a profession like their fathers.

The **lower class** were unskilled and uneducated and often landless. Their job prospects were very limited. Those who could afford to hire them preferred to use slave labor. Often lower class people squatted on a piece of land and engaged in subsistence farming. Children of the lower class were uneducated as there were no public schools and their parents were also uneducated and needed the children to work. They had little social or political influence.

**Independent farmers** owned small farms which they worked themselves with the aid of family members. Some independent farmers owned a few slaves but worked side by side with them in the fields. The children of independent farmers might be educated at home. The majority of farming in the state, especially in the upstate, was done by independent farmers. As independent farmers were more successful in growing cash crops and became more prosperous, they bought more slaves and increased their social and political standing. Some even became members of the elite. At the time of the Civil War not all white South Carolinians owned slaves.

**Free African Americans** usually had a particular skill, such as carpentry, or a talent, such as music making. This skill led them to be hired out by their masters. Some were allowed to keep a portion of the money they earned from being hired out which they saved to buy their freedom. Others had been given their freedom by a master for some special deed or service, although this became much less likely (and illegal) after the slave revolt of the early 1830's. Their skill or talent allowed them to earn a living in the towns or cities of the South. Others were independent farmers. Many stayed in the region because they had family members who were still enslaved. They worked to earn money to buy the freedom of wives and children. The children of freed African Americans might be taught to read and write at home but there were no public schools provided for them. Although free African Americans in the South had more economic opportunity than free African Americans who lived in the North because of their special skills, they did not have political or social equality with other Southerners. They had to pay a special tax and carry their freedom papers wherever they went. They lived in fear of being returned to slavery.

**Enslaved African Americans** were an unpaid labor source who were bought and sold and considered the property of their white masters. Slaves were allowed few personal freedoms and had to carry a pass issued by their master to travel from one plantation to another. Many enslaved African Americans were born and died on the same plantation where they lived in one- room slave cabins under the strict supervision of

their masters. Others were sold upon the death of their masters, when they were disobedient or when the master needed extra cash. Families were divided by such sales. Slaves, including women and children worked from sun-up to sun-down in the fields or in the master’s house. They were not paid but were given a few clothes and limited amounts of food by the master. It was illegal for slaves and their children to learn to read and write because such knowledge might allow them to escape their masters. Slaves who disobeyed the rules or tried to escape were punished, sometimes severely.”

South Carolina Social Studies Support Document, Grade 3, 2008 [http://ed.sc.gov/agency/Standards-and-Learning/Academic-Standards/old/cso/social\\_studies/social.html](http://ed.sc.gov/agency/Standards-and-Learning/Academic-Standards/old/cso/social_studies/social.html)

## South Carolina Standards

**3-4.1** Compare the conditions of daily life for various classes of people in South Carolina, including the elite, the middle class, the lower class, the independent farmers, and the free and the enslaved African Americans.

## Objectives

- Students will compare and contrast characteristics of varying social classes during the Civil War.
- Students will discuss the positive or negative impact of each of these characteristics on the daily life of each class.
- Students will make inferences and draw conclusions regarding the different lifestyles by completing Venn Diagram.

## Time Required

1 class period

## Recommended Grade Level

Elementary

## Lesson Materials

- From the [University of South Carolina Libraries Primary Sources for K-12 Pilot Project](#): “The Low-Country Planter Lived in a Luxurious but Careless Way” image
- Chart paper divided into sections
- Venn diagram

## Lesson Preparation

- Prepare a list of information from the “Background Information” above
- Select questions from the photograph analysis sheet that are appropriate for your students.
- Print or download the image from USC’s Digital Collections site listed above.
- Divide students into groups of three or four.
- Prepare a chart like the one below

Social Class	Jobs/Occupations	Education	Homes
Elite Planters			

Enslaved African Americans			
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## Lesson Procedure

Then the teacher will ask the students how they think the slave owners must have lived. She will introduce the students to the elite class who lived in South Carolina during the Antebellum period by projecting a primary resource document showing the two classes.

1. Use the background information that you prepared to teach students about the different social classes of different South Carolinians during the Civil War.
2. Divide students into groups of four or five.
3. Have each group of students create a list of everything they can remember about the daily lives of slaves. (7 minutes)
4. Ask students to share information from their group's list. Record this information on the chart for "Enslaved African Americans" and use this as an introduction to the various classes of people who lived in South Carolina during the antebellum period. (7 minutes)
5. Project the primary resource document on the interactive white board, or pass out copies of the picture to the small groups of students. Ask the students to talk about what they see in the picture with a friend. (3 minutes)
6. Have students share their thoughts about the picture with the class. Record this information on a chart labeled "Elite Planters". Then ask the following questions:
  - a. Who is in the picture? (A slave owner and 2 slaves are pictured.)
  - b. How do you know? (The African American woman is taking care of white lady. The African American boy is serving the white lady.)
  - c. Where do you think the slave owner lived? Why? (Accept all reasonable answers.)
  - d. If the slave owner had a child, how would s/he be educated? Why? (Accept all reasonable answers.)
  - e. Why are the slaves serving their owner? Why don't they just run away? (Accept all reasonable answers.)
7. Pass out the Venn Diagram sheet. Briefly model how students should compare and contrast using a Venn Diagram by completing one item for the class and one with the class. Ask the students to refer to the chart to complete a Venn Diagram comparing the two social classes. They may work in pairs for this task. (13 minutes)
8. Conclude the lesson by having the students share their Venn Diagrams. Record their responses on a class Venn Diagram. Keep this diagram displayed for future use. (10 minutes)

## Assessment

Informal assessment will be completed via teacher questioning and student responses. Venn Diagrams may be collected, if a more formal assessment is desired.

### Lesson Extension Options

- Research photographs for the other social classes listed in the “Historical Background” above. Photographs may be found online by searching through the Digital Collections at the University of South Carolina or at SCDL’s site (<http://sc.edu/library/digital/index.php> or <http://www.scmemory.org/index.php> ).
- Students may draw pictures to record the information.
- Students may be given a Word Bank to help them with the written responses.
- Students may write a two paragraph composition comparing the two classes of people.
- Students may research using the Internet to learn more about each class of people.

### Digital Collections Information

This lesson plan is based on images and/or documents derived from the K-12 Primary Sources Pilot Project collection available from the University of South Carolina’s Digital Collections Library. To see more from this collection please visit the following link.

<http://www.sc.edu/library/digital/collections/K-12.html>

To see other collections that may be helpful to your search, visit the Digital Collections homepage by clicking here <http://sc.edu/library/digital/index.php> or visit SCDL’s collections by clicking here <http://www.scmemory.org/index.php> .

What am I looking at or reading about?

Attributes:  
*What am I comparing?*

