

Did the Civil War have to last as long as it did?



Supporting Questions

1. What was the Hampton Roads Peace Conference?
2. What do telegrams sent from January 31 to February 3, 1865, tell us about the peace conference?
3. What happened at the Hampton Roads Peace Conference?

Did the Civil War have to last as long as it did?

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Inquiry Standard | D2.His.1.6-8. Analyze connections among events and developments in broader historical contexts. |
| Staging the Compelling Question | Working in small groups, brainstorm ideas about how to end a conflict. |

| Supporting Question 1 | Supporting Question 2 | Supporting Question 3 |
|--|---|---|
| What was the Hampton Roads Peace Conference? | What do telegrams sent from January 31 to February 3, 1865, tell us about the peace conference? | What happened at the Hampton Roads Peace Conference? |
| Formative Performance Task | Formative Performance Task | Formative Performance Task |
| Write a brief description of the Hampton Roads conference. | Create an annotated timeline of events, activities, and actions from January 31 to February 3, 1865, as Union and Confederate officials talked about the future of the Civil War. | Create a four-panel storyboard describing the Hampton Roads Peace Conference. |
| Featured Sources | Featured Sources | Featured Sources |
| Source A: The Abortive Peace Conference at Hampton Roads, part 1 | Source A: 10 telegram messages on the Hampton Roads Conference between January 31 to February 3, 1865 | Source A: The Abortive Peace Conference at Hampton Roads, part 2 |

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Summative Performance Task | <p>ARGUMENT Did the Civil War have to take as long as it did? Construct a brief argument with 3 claims supported by evidence from the sources addressing the end of the Civil War.</p> <p>EXTENSION Draft a peace proposal for the Civil War.</p> |
| Taking Informed Action | <p>UNDERSTAND Identify and describe a conflict underway somewhere in the world.</p> <p>ASSESS Discuss ways that the conflict could be studied and how proposed solutions to the conflict could be shared.</p> <p>ACTION Share a procedure for potentially ending the conflict.</p> |

Inquiry Description

In this inquiry, students examine the question of whether the Civil War had to end the way it did. On February 3, 1865, leaders from the Union and the Confederacy met in Hampton Roads, Virginia, to discuss a negotiated end to the Civil War. President Abraham Lincoln and Secretary of State William H. Seward represented the United States. Representing the Confederacy were Vice President Alexander H. Stephens, Senator Robert M. T. Hunter, and Assistant Secretary of War John A. Campbell. They discussed terms for an end to the war, including a compromise over slavery and compensation for emancipated slaves as well as a possible alliance against France. While the conference did not produce any tangible results, it does offer an opportunity to learn more about Lincoln's leadership style, priorities, and hopes for the post-war period.

Structure

Three supporting questions provide students an opportunity to investigate the failed peace effort at Hampton Roads. The inquiry opens with a discussion about how to end conflict. After this staging task, students begin learning about Hampton Roads meeting by reading a brief description of the conference written in 1907 by David Homer Bates, a telegraph officer during the Civil War. In the second formative task, students examine ten telegrams sent by military and civilian officials involved in the negotiations. In doing so, students will engage in a process known as reading forward in history. Instead of beginning with the end in mind or what we know happened in history, students will read the telegram sources as they were produced without full knowledge of where the story is taking them. The second task then is to create an annotated timeline detailing events at the conference. As a third formative performance task, students read a more detailed summary of conference from Bates and complete a four-panel storyboard offering more details.

Staging the Compelling Question

Compelling
Question

Did the Civil War have to last as long as it did?

Staging the compelling question

This inquiry begins by prompting students to consider the general notion of conflict and approaches they may use to end personal conflicts. The conversations students have in their groups will allow them to think about the concept of conflict on their own terms. Students should be encouraged to focus on conflicts that are present in their immediate community, but may also focus on larger conflicts in society.

Supporting Question 1

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Supporting Question | What was the Hampton Roads Peace Conference? |
| Formative Performance Task | Write a brief description of the Hampton Roads conference. |
| Featured Sources | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Source A: The Abortive Peace Conference at Hampton Roads, part 1 |

This supporting question introduces the Hampton Roads Conference between President Lincoln and Confederate representatives. David Homer Bates provides an account of the meeting in his 1907 memoir. Bates' description of events is a second-hand account, but it serves as a primary source in the sense that he was actively aware of the events and, in fact, intimately familiar with some details as a telegraph operator.

Formative Performance Task

For this task, students will examine this first paragraph of a chapter from Bates' book as an introduction to the Hampton Roads Conference. Bates was a young telegraph operator in the War Department's Telegraph Office and provides an overview of the Hampton Roads Peace Conference in his 1907 memoir reflecting on his time in the telegraph office.

The formative performance task is for students to write a general description of the peace conference. This task will enable students to establish some of the basic facts about the conference including when it occurred and the idea that the conference was highly secret.

Supporting Question 1

Featured Source A

The Abortive Peace Conference at Hampton Roads, part 1

Excerpt

Very little has ever been published concerning the only Peace Conference to which this country was a party, at which our Government was represented by the President in person and also by the Secretary of State — and that little is comprised in a few brief letters and telegrams submitted to Congress by Lincoln in response to a resolution calling for information on the subject. Of what actually took place at the conference itself (February 3, 1865), Lincoln gave an account in these few lines: “On the morning of the said, the three gentlemen Messrs. Stephens Hunter and Campbell came aboard of our steamer and had an interview with the Secretary of State and myself of several hours' duration. No question of preliminaries to the meeting was then and there made or mentioned. No other person was present; no papers were exchanged or produced; and it was in advance agreed that the conversation was to be informal and verbal merely. On our part the whole substance of the instructions to the Secretary of State, hereinbefore recited, was stated and insisted upon, and nothing was said inconsistent therewith; while by the other party it was not said that in any event or on any condition they ever would consent to reunion; and yet they equally omitted to declare that they never would so consent. They seemed to desire a postponement of that question and the adoption of some other course first which as some of them seemed to argue^ might or might not lead to reunion; but which course we thought, would amount to an indefinite postponement. The conference ended without result. The foregoing, containing as is believed all the information sought, is respectfully submitted.”

Source: Source:

Excerpt from David Homer Bates' Lincoln in the Telegraph Office, (1907). New York : Century Company. pp. 322.

Supporting Question 2

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Supporting Question | What do telegrams sent from January 31 to February 3, 1865, tell us about the peace conference? |
| Formative Performance Task | Create an annotated timeline of events, activities, and actions from January 31 to February 3, 1865, as Union and Confederate officials talked about the future of the Civil War. |
| Featured Sources | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Source A: 10 telegram messages on the Hampton Roads Conference between January 31 to February 3, 1865 |

This supporting question focuses specifically on the events leading up to and including the meeting in Hampton Roads, Virginia, between President Lincoln and Confederate representatives. No record exists of the meeting, but telegram messages prior to the meeting provide a window into the planning and thinking of Lincoln and other Union leaders.

Formative Performance Task

In this task, students will examine 10 telegrams to learn more about the events, activities, and actions leading up to and including the Hampton Roads Peace Conference on February 3, 1865. Students will work with these telegrams to gather information they will then use to create an annotated timeline of these events, activities, and actions. The telegrams were sent to and from the War Department Telegraph Office from January 30 to February 3, 1865.

Telegrams provide insight into the details and planning of the peace conference. This formative performance task focuses on some of those details by allowing students to hone in on the daily, hourly, and even minute by minute flow of related activities.

It may be useful to support students with an historical thinking scaffold such as SCIM-C (<http://www.historicalinquiry.com>). In preparation for creating the timeline, students may create a list of events described in the telegrams and then transfer that list over to a timeline.

Supporting Question 2

Featured Source A

10 telegram messages on the Hampton Roads Conference between January 31 to February 3, 1865

Excerpt

Telegram #1

City Point Va

Jany 31st 1865, 10:30 AM

Prest U.S.

The following communication was recd here last eveg

Petersburg Va Jany 30th 1865 Lt. Gen. U.S. Grant. Sir; we desire to pass your lines under safe conduct & to proceed to Washn to hold a conference with Prest. Lincoln upon the subject of the existing war & with a view of ascertaining upon what terms it may be terminated in pursuance of the course indicated by him in his letter to Mr Blair of 18th Jany. 1865 of which we presume you have a copy & if not we wish to see you in person if convenient & to confer with you upon the subject signed your very respectfully Alexander Stevens

- J. A. Campbell - R. M. T. Hunter

I have sent directions to receive these gentle men & expect to have them at my Quarters this Eveg. awaiting your instructions.

US Grant Lt Genl

Telegram #2

City Point Va

Jany 31st 1865, 7.30 PM

Secy of War.

On my arrival this morning I received letters from Messrs Stephens Hunter and Campbell which I immediately telegraphed the contents of to the President and sent at the same time a Staff Officer to receive the gentlemen & conduct them to my Head Quarters to await the action of the President. The gentlemen have arrived & since their arrival I have been put in possession of the telegraphic Correspondence which had been going on for two days previous. Had I known of their correspondence in time these gentlemen would not have been received within our lines.

U.S. Grant, Lt. Genl.

Telegram #3

City Pt

Feby 1st 1865, 12:30 PM

Prest U.S.

Your dispatch recd, there will be no armistice in consequence of the presence of Mr Stephens & others within our lines. The troops are kept in readiness to move at the shortest notice if occasion should justify it

U.S. Grant Lt Genl

Telegram #4

City Point

Feb 1st 1865, 10 P.M.

The President,

I have the honor to report the delivery of your communication and my letter at four fifteen this afternoon, to which I recd a reply at 6 PM but not satisfactory. At 8 PM the following note addressed to Gen Grant was recd

"City Point Va Feb first 1865 - Gen Grant Sir, We desire to go to Washn city to confer informally with the President personally in reference to the matters mentioned in his letter to Mr F P Blair of the 18th Jany [???] without any personal compromise on any question in the letter - We have the permission to do so from the authorities in Richmond - very respectfully

Yours sig

Alexander H Stephens

R. M. T. Hunter, J. A Campbell

at 9.30 PM I notified them that they could not proceed further unless they complied with the terms expressed in my letter - the point of meeting designated in above note would not, in my opinion , be insisted upon I think Ft Monroe would be acceptable - Having complied with my instructions I will return tomorrow unless otherwise ordered

Thomas T. Eckert, Maj &c

Telegram #5

City Point

Feb 1st 1865, 10.30 PM

Secy of War

Now that the interview between Major Eckert - under his written instructions & Mister Stevens and party - has ended, I will state confidentially but not officially to become a matter of record, that I am convinced, upon conversation with Mister Stephens and Hunter that their intentions are good & their desire sincere to restore peace and union. I have not felt myself at liberty to express even views of my own or to account for my reticency - this has placed me in an awkward position which I could have avoided by not seeing them in the first instance - I fear not their going back without any expression from any one in authority will have a bad influence , at the same time I recognize the difficulties in the way receiving these informal commissioners at this time and do not know what to recommend I am sorry however that Mr Lincoln cannot have an interview with the two named in this dispatch if not all three now within our lines. Their letter to me was all that the Presidents instructions contemplated to secure their safety conduit if they had used the some [i.e. same?] language to Major Eckert

US Grant, Lt Genl

Telegram #6

City Pt

Feby 1st 1865, 10 P.M.

for Secretary of War Washn

in reply to the letters delivered by me to Messrs Stephens Campbell & Hunter they give a copy of their instructions from Jeff Davis which I think is a verbatim copy of that now in the President's possession - am positive about the last two words which differ from the ending of copy delivered by me & to which the President called my particular attention - after giving object of conference they add "our instructions contemplate a personal interview with President Lincoln at Washn. but with this explanation we are ready to meet any person or persons that President Lincoln may appoint at such place as he may designate - our earnest desire is that a just & honor-able peace may be agreed upon & we are prepared [page break] to receive (sic) or to submit propositions which may possibly lead to the attainment of that end

Sigd Alex H Stephens R. M. T. Hunter & J A Campbell

they say the ending of letter I delivered to them is the only objection able point & one that in their opinion should be left out of both the letter they bring as well as the one they receive adding if they accept the latter & terms are not agreed upon it would be an acknowledgement that might prejudice future interests of people they represent

Sig Thos T. Eckert

Another for b{???} or Tinker - say to the secretary that this dispatch was written that City Pt last sight [i.e. written at City Pt last night?] but the line being out of order I brought it here

Sigd Thos T. Eckert.

Telegram #7

Ft Monroe Va

Feby 2nd 1865, 2.30 P.M.

for Bates

ascertain immy by what boat the President left Annapolis & the time of leaving and telegraph me in cipher also the time the boat passes Pt Lookout

Eckert

Telegram #8

Ft Monroe

Feby 2nd 1865, 7 P.M.

for Fred'k. W. Seward Asst Secy State

Richmond party are here - President not arrived Wm. H. Seward (another) to Secy War - Richmond party here - President not arrived I do not recognize them until he comes

Wm. H. Seward, Secy State

Telegram #9

Ft Monroe

Feb 2d 65, 11.30 PM.

For Secy War

I have the honor to report the arrival of the President at 10.30 PM and is now with Mr Secy of State on board the River Queen - the interview will take place in the morning - the vessels of both parties are anchored half mile out from doc

sig Thomas T. Eckert no one

Telegram #10

Fr Monroe Va

Feby 3rd 1865, 3 P.M.

for Secy of War Wash'n - The President directs me to say the conference has closed & both parties preparing to return . We shall leave here on Steamer "River Quee" at 4.30 P.M. this P. M. The President requests that you please arrange for train to be in readiness at Annapolis at 7 A.M. tomorrow

(sig) Thomas T. Eckert

another to Hon F. W. Seward Asst Secy State

We leave here at 4.30 P.M. & expect to leave Annapolis about 7 A.M. tomorrow for Washington -

Wm. H. Seward

Source:

Scott, R. N., Lazelle, H. M., Davis, G. B., Perry, L. J., Kirkley, J. W., Ainsworth, F. C., & Moodey, J. S. (1891)*The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Vol. 38). US Government Printing Office.

Supporting Question 3

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Supporting Question | What happened at the Hampton Roads Peace Conference? |
| Formative Performance Task | Create a four-panel storyboard describing the Hampton Roads Peace Conference. |
| Featured Sources | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Source A: The Abortive Peace Conference at Hampton Roads, part 2 |

This supporting question focuses on the overall purposes and prospects of the peace conference in Hampton Roads, Virginia, between President Lincoln and Confederate representatives. David Homer Bates provides an account of the meeting in his 1907 memoir. Bates' description of events is a second-hand account, but it serves as a primary source in the sense that he was actively aware of the events and, in fact, intimately familiar with some details as a telegraph operator.

Formative Performance Task

In this task, students will create a four-panel storyboard about the how, why, when, and what of the Hampton Roads Conference. Following from the first formative performance task, students read part 2 of a chapter from David Homer Bates' book. In the chapter, Bates relies most heavily on his personal conversations with Thomas Eckert, a fellow telegraph officer and director of telegraph operations in the War Department. Eckert played a special role as courier in the peace conference.

The four-panel storyboard may focus on specific details students are reading about in the text and/or may follow a chronological sequence. The following questions may help structure students' analysis.

1. What happened before the Hampton Roads Peace Conference?
2. Why were some in favor of the peace effort?
3. What were some reasons why the peace conference did not work?

Supporting Question 3

Featured Source A

The Abortive Peace Conference at Hampton Roads, part 2

Excerpt

There was also a preliminary conference with the Confederate commissioners at which the President was represented by Major Eckert, and of what occurred at that conference beyond the formal exchange of letters no account whatever has been given to the public. In fact, Eckert's reticence in regard to all confidential Civil War matters with which he had to do has been so marked as justly to entitle him to the sobriquet of the "Silent Eckert" bestowed upon him by Major Johnson, Stanton's private secretary. However, after the lapse of more than forty years, Eckert has unlocked his memory-box and brought to light some incidents of the Civil War drama in which he played an important, though subordinate part in relation to Lincoln, the principal actor.

One of these incidents has for its subject the Peace Conference at City Point and Hampton Roads of February, 1865. Following the reelection of Lincoln in November, 1864, the peace agitators in the North ceased their active efforts and, in his Annual Message to Congress on December 6, Lincoln alluded to the question in the briefest manner as follows: "In stating a single condition of peace, I mean simply to say, that the war will cease on the part of the Government whenever it shall have ceased on the part of those who began it."

This postulate referring to a vital subject could not have been stated more clearly, or in shorter terms, in fact, it is axiomatic. Mr. Francis P. Blair, Sr., was one of the most earnest and selfless supporters of the peace movement. His fine old residence at Silver Spring, Maryland, not far from where the battle of Fort Stevens had taken place the previous July, was set on fire by Early's artillery and was later converted into a hospital for our wounded soldiers, a large number of whom were thus hospitably cared for. Blair fancied he discerned something between the President's lines in reference to peace, and made the latter believe, or at least hope, that if given the opportunity to see Davis in person he could work out a plan that would meet the simple conditions named, and at the same time enable the Confederate leaders to "save their faces."

The patient Lincoln trusted his old political friend and believed in his wisdom and skill; and, was unwilling to cast aside the poorest chance to bring the war to an end, he gave Blair, on December 28, 1864, a safe conduct through our lines and return, against the protest, however, of Stanton. Blair was soon back in Washington with a letter from Davis, dated January 12, which was shown to the President, who gave Blair authority to say to Davis that* he had been, and should continue to be "ready to receive any agent whom he or any other influential person now resisting the national authority may informally send to me with the view of securing peace to our common country."

This allusion to "our common country" was made because Davis had referred in his letter to "the two countries," an idea perhaps suggested or at least fostered and strengthened in Davis's mind by the memory of Gladstone's remarkable speech at Newcastle-upon-Tyne, in which the dominant British Cabinet Minister spoke of Jefferson Davis as having "created not only an army and a navy, but a nation."

Source:

Excerpt from David Homer Bates' *Lincoln in the Telegraph Office*, (1907). New York : Century Company. pp. 322-324.

Summative Performance Task

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| Compelling Question | Did the Civil War have to last as long as it did? |
| Argument | Did the Civil War have to take as long as it did? Construct a brief argument with 3 claims supported by evidence from the sources addressing the end of the Civil War. |
| Extension | Draft a peace proposal for the Civil War. |

Argument

Using what they have learned from the sources, students create a brief argument with three claims supported by evidence addressing the compelling question, "Did the Civil War have to last as long as it did?" The argument need not be a fully developed essay. Teachers who are limited for time may want to have students write a paragraph or even list claims supported with evidence about a possible end to the Civil War.

Student responses will vary, but may include any of the following.

- The Civil War was a fight to the finish where neither side really wanted to budge.
- The peace efforts at Hampton Roads were doomed and, consequently, the war would drag on because Lincoln and others were not willing to budge on certain issues.
- Lincoln and the officials (both Union and Confederate) did not take the peace efforts seriously, but hoped the conversations would lead to an early peace.

Extension

If teachers choose to extend students' work with this inquiry, they may have students write a proposal for how to end the Civil War in early 1865. Using information from the sources, students may propose a peace from the Union or Confederate perspective. A further extension might involve role-play where students negotiate their proposal playing characters on both sides.

Taking Informed Action

| | |
|------------|---|
| Understand | Identify and describe a conflict underway somewhere in the world. |
| Assess | Discuss ways that the conflict could be studied and how proposed solutions to the conflict could be shared. |
| Action | Share a procedure for potentially ending the conflict. |

Following up on their work to understand more about the failed efforts to end the Civil War early, students may examine a contemporary conflict and related efforts toward peace. The task would likely involve some background on the conflict and a clear presentation of the main issues. With this background in place, students may propose a peaceful solution and communicate their ideas to an outside audience. This final step of communicating their ideas is vital to the task. It is in this act of sharing with others that students are, in fact, taking informed action. The audience matters less than the practice and experience that students will have in working in the civic sphere to express their ideas.

