



Brooklyn *in the* Civil War



Unit: Women

Lesson 3.3: Follow-Up Math Lesson - Inflation (Although this lesson pairs well with the Sanitary Commission lesson above, it also works well in the Daily Life Unit)

Aim: To compare prices then and now.

Objective: Using the calculated rate of inflation, students figure out the equivalent prices today for items sold at the fair and money earned in 1864.

Materials:

1. Shared reading on the 1864 Sanitary Fair
2. Rate of inflation derived from Web site: “Economic History Services: ‘How Much Is That Worth Today?’” http://eh.net/hmit/ppowerusd/dollar_question.php
3. 10 cent note <http://www.brooklynpubliclibrary.org/civilwar/cwdoc041.html>
4. Universal clothes wringer for sale at the 1864 Sanitary Fair <http://www.brooklynpubliclibrary.org/civilwar/cwdoc067.html>

Procedure:

1. Tell the class that they are about to participate in a shared reading lesson about the Sanitary Commission. Teacher models reading.

A note about shared reading: During a shared reading session, the whole class is on the same “page”—everyone’s attention is focused on the same overhead transparency. The teacher models the initial reading in several ways. In addition to simply reading the passage aloud, slowly and clearly, he or she reveals thoughts and reading strategies for the group. Be it visualizing, making connections, or noticing new or interesting vocabulary, these thoughts are shared so that students see and understand what goes on in the mind of a good reader.

2. Ask students what they know about inflation. Record remarks on board.
3. Provide a simple explanation to clarify misconceptions (e.g., “a gradual increase in prices or decrease in the purchasing power of money”). Give examples from teacher’s life (“When I was your age, a bus or subway ride cost 25 cents...”).

4. Explain to class that one penny spent in 1864 had the buying power of approximately 11 cents today. One dollar in 1864 would be the equivalent of \$11 or so today. With this information in mind, ask students to look back at the shared reading to calculate the actual value of a bowl of soup, a dinner, or how much money was raised by the Fair. (Multiply by 11.)
5. Discuss shortcuts or tricks to multiplying by 11. Also discuss estimation. Eleven is close to what round number that is easy to work with? (10)
6. Ask students to make a list of several items they spend money on regularly (e.g., a candy bar, a movie ticket, bus fare) and how much these things cost them.
7. What would these items have cost in 1864? How can we figure this out? (See if students come up with the idea of dividing by 11.)
8. First estimate, then calculate to determine the cost of these items in 1864.
9. Students can make illustrated charts by folding a piece of paper into thirds vertically. In the first column, they can draw and label the item, in the second column its cost today, and in the last column its calculated cost in 1864.

A precursor to the Red Cross and USO*, the Sanitary Commission was established in 1861. Though men were paid to head and run the organization, most of its work was accomplished by the tens of thousands of women volunteers who collected food, clothing, and medical supplies for the Union. These women also served as volunteer nurses in army camps and hospitals and raised money through the Sanitary Fairs. These were social events which combined entertainment and education with philanthropy.

The highly successful fair of 1864 featured a two-story restaurant, Knickerbocker Hall, which served green turtle soup for 35 cents a bowl, brook trout for 50 cents a serving, and striped bass for a mere 20 cents. There was also a Hall of Manufacturers, a replica of a colonial New England kitchen, a Museum of Arts, Relics, and Curiosities, and a mirrored optical illusion called The Skating Pond. The mirrors appeared to create an ice pond filled with fashionably dressed skaters. Though the Commission hoped to raise \$100,000, this sensational success brought in \$400,000 before it was over.

*United Service Organizations.