It is September, 1862. What is happening in America? (The Civil War)

What two groups are fighting and what are they fighting for? (North/Union: Fighting the preserve the Union. Does not believe the Southern states had the right to leave the Union. South/Confederacy: Fighting for the right to govern themselves.) Slavery is an issue, but President Lincoln has only stated up until now that he wants to keep slavery from expanding into the territories, not end it.

On the last three days of August, 1862, Confederate General Robert E. Lee wins a big battle known as The Battle of Second Manassas, which took place near Dulles Airport. Afterwards, he writes Confederate President Jefferson Davis and says, “The present seems to be the most propitious time since the commencement of the war for the Confederate Army to enter Maryland.” (Ask students, based on prefix and context clues, what propitious and commencement mean. The present is the best time since the start of the war for the Confederate Army to enter Maryland.

Lee wants to take his army into Maryland for three reasons:

1. The war has been going on for 17 months, all of it in Virginia. Lee wants to move both armies out of Virginia so that farmers can have time to harvest crops without two armies taking what they have grown.
2. Lee believes that a Confederate victory on northern soil will bring England and France into the war on behalf of the South. How did we win the Revolutionary War? (With help from France.)
3. Lee is hoping to recruit soldiers into the Confederate Army. He has his troops sing “Maryland, my Maryland,” the state song, as they march. It does not help. As word spreads the region has been invaded, most citizens pack their belongings and leave the area.

Lee crosses White’s Ford from Leesburg, VA and enters Poolesville, MD with 45,000 on the night of September 4, 1862. It is a rough march for the Southern Army. There is not a variety of food available, and soldiers mostly find apples in great numbers. What happens when you only eat roughage? (Diarrhea) One quarter of the army, 10,000 men, come down with it. Imagine walking these mountains with no bathrooms around in that condition!

Lee splits his men into three groups of 15,000. He sends Stonewall Jackson 30 miles to the west to seize the Union arsenal at Harper’s Ferry. (What is an arsenal ?) He sends General Longstreet north to Hagerstown. Lee himself will stay with the rest of his army in Frederick for a few days.

Who knows where the Francis Scott Key Mall and the Olive Garden in Frederick are? In 1862 that land is part of a farm that belongs to a man named Best. On September 12, Lee packs up his campsite there and moves on. A few hours later, Union troops enter the area. One Union soldier wanders around looking for anything valuable left behind. He finds 3 cigars wrapped in a piece of paper. He thinks he has made a pretty good find. When he looks at the piece of paper, he realizes he has made an incredible find. It is a copy of Special Order 191, which tells exactly what General Lee is doing by dividing his army into three groups.

The order is passed up to Union commander General George B. McClellan. McClellan is a pompous, arrogant man who has little respect for his boss, Abraham Lincoln. Behind Lincoln’s back, he refers to the President as “the original gorilla.” What should McClellan do now that he knows Lee has divided his army into three groups and they are spread across the countryside? (Attack each before they can reunite.) However, McClellan does nothing for 18 hours.

When McClellan was told Lee’s plans had been captured, he was very excited. One of the people who saw his reaction was a Confederate sympathizer who sends word to General Lee that his plans are no longer secret. Lee immediately begins to make plans to reunite his army. To do this, he will have to hold off the Union army hunting for him. The two armies clash here at South Mountain on Sunday, September 14, 1862, in a day long battle. We are on the extreme left side of the Confederate battle line, at a place called Campton’s Gap. Fighting will occur in two other places on South Mountain, Fox’s Gap and Turner’s Gap.

The day long battle gives General Lee enough time for his army to reunite. After nightfall, the Confederates retreat down the mountain and take up positions along Antietam Creek in the town of Sharpsburg, Maryland. What happens along Antietam Creek on September 17, 1862? (The bloodiest single day in American history. There will be 23,001 soldiers killed, wounded or taken prisoner that day.) The Battle of Antietam is really a tie, but because the Confederates leave the battlefield first, retreating back into Virginia on the evening of September 18, the Union can say it won the battle.

This win allows President Lincoln to issue the Emancipation Proclamation, which frees slaves who are living in states that are part of the Confederacy. Maryland, Kentucky and Missouri are border states, meaning they have slavery, but did not secede from the Union. Why would Lincoln not include these states in his proclamation? (Because that would make them join the Confederacy.)

***Take out bullets and artillery fragment at this point.***

The Civil War was fought at a time when great advances were taking place in weaponry. Up until then, the bullets used to fight were like this .69 caliber round ball. The gun power pushed the bullet down the smooth barrel, much like a chest pass in basketball. The gun was only accurate from about 25 yards, so you had to get close to your enemy for it to be effective.

At the time the Civil War starts, a Frenchman named Claude Minnie invents a gun that has grooves in the barrel, and a special bullet to go with it. Note the three rings at the bottom of the Minnie bullet. These rings would fit into the grooves in the rifle and the bullet would be fired from the gun the way a football in thrown, in a spiraling motion. A football can be thrown much further than a chest pass in basketball. Instead of having to get within 25 yards of your enemy to fire effectively, the Minnie ball is accurate up to 250 yards and can kill from almost a mile away.

In addition, the Minnie Ball is made of soft lead. Unlike the bullets used today, which are made of steel, and will only clip a bone, the Minnie ball would shatter any bone it hits into many pieces, so there was no option but to amputate. Another cause of amputation would be if you were hit be a piece of artillery, or cannon fire, like this. This fragment is from a shell that would explode in the air, causing fragments like this to fall out of the sky. These bullets and fragments will lead to the biggest killer of the war: disease.

620,000 Americans, 2% of the population at the time, died during the Civil War. 2 out of every 3 deaths were the result of disease. Today, when you have an infection, you go to the doctor and he gives you what? (Penicillin) There were no antibiotics in the 19th Century. A person could die from something as simple as strep throat. Here is what would happen if you were wounded on a Civil War battlefield.

(Select a student to serve as a wounded soldier) Johnny has been hit by a Minnie Ball in the right shin, and the doctor determines he must amputate. What will the doctor use for anesthesia? (He might give the soldiers a gulp of whiskey to calm his nerves, and a chloroform soaked rag will be held over the soldier’s mouth and nose.) About six people will be around the soldier during the operation: the surgeon, the person holding the rag, and four others to hold the patient down while the surgeon is sawing off the limb. While the chloroform will greatly disorient the patient, it will not kill all the pain he is feeling.

The surgeon will cut diagonally (/). He will take the flap of skin that is left behind and tuck it up into what is left at the end of the bone, then he will sew that together. Now, the soldier must wait to see if an infection sets in. If so, he most likely will die.

Having finished the operation, the surgeon will go over to a basin of water and rinse his hands. The basin would start as fresh water, but quickly mix with the blood of other patients. Remember, doctors at that time did not know about the necessity of sanitary conditions in the operating room as we do today. So if the surgeon has worked on 15 other men prior to his current patient, he is washing his hands in a mixture of their blood and then sticking his hands directly into the wound of his next patient.

Thank you Jim Reed at Lakelands Park MS!