

Confederate Schoolbooks as Rhetorical and Analytical Study

by

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Confederates sought the creation of a unique culture, and establishing that culture necessitated the publication of works that were purely Confederate. Among such publications were schoolbooks designed to teach children and the public. Confederate schoolbooks appeared on the surface to teach arithmetic, geography, and language; however, many of the books contained proslavery propaganda and violent rhetoric in order to establish a worldview that was situated on a specific side of the racial divide.

Viewing Confederate schoolbooks as rhetorical study allows the books to still provide instruction to students in the modern classroom. Examining Confederate schoolbooks through a critical lens can help students consider how rhetoric influences their identity. Further, instructors can become arbiters of language in the classroom by remaining aware that violent rhetoric has the ability to permeate school walls. Through rhetorical analysis, Confederate schoolbooks – originally designed to foster a violent worldview – can be transformed in the modern world to function instead as cautionary tails.

This document contains a guide for how to use this website and its contents, ideas for classroom use in a variety of disciplines that can be applied to any of the schoolbooks, a bibliography of schoolbooks that are available in the Blake Collection at Marshall University, and a bibliography of those books from the Blake Collection bibliography that are available in digital form online.

How to Use This Website to Study Confederate Schoolbooks

This website contains a link called “Primary Texts.” Within the “Primary Texts” are four Confederate schoolbooks, which are listed below.

1. Branson’s *First Book in Composition, Applying the Principles of Grammar to the Art of Composing*,
2. Browne’s *Arithmetical Tables, Combined with Easy Lessons in Mental Arithmetic*,
3. Johnson’s *Common School Arithmetic*, and
4. Lander’s *The Verbal Primer*.

Each book link contains a link to a digital copy of the book, accompanying lesson planning guides, data mining ideas – found in *Johnson’s* and *Browne’s* – and a Word document transcription for easy data mining.

Classroom Ideas Applicable to All Confederate Schoolbooks

Considerations for Getting Started in Confederate Schoolbook Study

- Look at the book cover – front and back – and the introduction. Many Confederate schoolbooks contain language that describes the book as being specifically designed for Confederate children, schools, and academies.
- Look at the back cover of the book and the last few pages. Many Confederate schoolbooks contain lists of books that are recommended. Often, these schoolbook lists contain those books offered by the same publisher. Sometimes, certain book titles are being advertised because of their importance in a Confederate education. Some book lists contain titles of dictionaries and various types of reference books that were originally published in the North, but were adapted to conform to Confederate culture.
- Note the date of the book's publication. Often, there are differences in those books that were published before the Civil War's official start in 1861, those books that were published during the War, and those that were published near or after the official close of the War in 1865. See the lesson planning ideas on the website that accompany the four books listed in *How to Use This Website* for more details on the types of differences that may occur due to publication dates.
- Note the publisher and research other publications by that company.
- Note the city and/or state of publication.
- Note the author and her or his title, which is often provided on the cover or opening pages of the book. Often, the introductory information about the book will make note if the author is a teacher and where, or if the author is a reverend. Also, research the author's role in the war, or any other pertinent information.
- Note the age of the children for which this book is designed. Often, the title, cover, or introduction will indicate the age or level student for which the book is addressed. Noting this information is important because it often influences how hot topics of the time, such as the Civil War, slavery, and the cotton business, are handled in the book.

Guiding Questions

- In what way, if at all, does this book proclaim to be exclusively Confederate?
- Does this book mention Africa, African people, or slaves? How is Africa portrayed? How are Africans or slaves portrayed? How is this portrayal different from the way Africa and slaves are portrayed in other Confederate schoolbooks? If there is a difference in this portrayal, what might have caused the difference? (Consider the student age for which the book is designed, the author, the year of publication, etc.).
- Are there any political figures mentioned in the book? Who? Is there anything significant about the person? What is the person's role in the Civil War?

- Is cotton mentioned in the book? Is it discussed in a tone of surrender? Is it portrayed as a necessity? Is the way it is discussed different from other schoolbooks containing a discussion of cotton or the cotton business?
- Are women and girls mentioned in the book? If so, how often are they mentioned compared to men and boys? What roles do women and girls play in the book? How are women and/or girls described? If they are mentioned, what are they doing (playing marbles, feeding chickens, tending to animals or gardens, etc.)?
- Are men or boys mentioned in the book? If so, how often are they mentioned compared to women and girls? What roles do men and boys play in the book? How are men and/or boys described? If they are mentioned, what are they doing?
- Are animals mentioned in the book? What kinds of animals? What is the role of each animal mentioned? What is the nature of the interaction between the animal(s) and people?
- Is nature discussed in the book (trees, flowers, brooks, creeks, seasons, geographical features, etc.)? How is nature discussed? Are there flower or tree types mentioned that are exclusive to the southern states? How are the seasons and weather patterns discussed? Do the weather patterns or geographical features seem to exclude northern states?
- Are holidays discussed? How are the holidays described? In what ways are the holidays celebrated? Which holidays are described as being religious? Compare and contrast the ways the holidays are understood and celebrated in the books to how they are understood and celebrated today.
- Are soldiers, Confederates, or Yankees mentioned in the book? Are Confederates and Yankees compared? How are each portrayed?
- Are there any references to the North or the Union in the book? How is the North or the Union portrayed? Consider other words that refer to the North or the Union, such as northern states or political figures. Consider also the types of measurements that are specific to northern states that may be included in measurement tables and contemplate the author's intent for such inclusions.
- Are there any references to the South or the Confederacy? How is the South or the Confederacy portrayed? Consider other words that refer to the South or the Confederacy, such as southern states or political figures.
- Are there any references to Great Britain, such as British spellings of words, British currency, or British measurements? Why might these occur in Confederate literature?
- Do violent acts or violent words occur in the book? Is the violent act related to war? (Consider verbs like *kill*, *shoot*, *killed*, and *shot* and nouns like *knife*, *gun*, *rifle*, and *sword*.)
- Does the book contain maps? Are there any geographical differences from today's maps (different spellings, different names of counties or towns, varying state lines, etc.)?

Considerations for Data Mining

While data mining is possible for all the books listed in the bibliography, four books have been transcribed into Word documents for ease of use in word-counting tools such as Voyant Tools (voyant-tools.org). See the information listed under “How to Use This Website to Study Confederate Schoolbooks” for a list of books available as Word documents, and how to find accompanying lesson planning ideas that contain sample searches using Voyant Tools in the classroom. Below are other methods to consider for those books that are not available as Word documents:

- Consider using the questions above to get started with data mining.
- Consider simply processing *sections* of a book in a digital tool such as Voyant Tools, or other word-counting tool, instead of tackling the entire book. You may also simply do searches of small sections of the book using the features of Word or Pages to check for the location and frequency of certain words.
- If the content is not available in Word and cannot be copied and pasted, consider doing simple word counts. Also consider the context surrounding each searched word or topic.

Schoolbooks Available in the Blake Collection – Morrow Library, Marshall University

Bingham, William. *A Grammar of the Latin Language for the Use of Schools with Exercises and Vocabularies*. Sterling, Campbell & Albright, 1863.

Branson, Levi. *First Book in Composition, Applying the Principles of Grammar to the Art of Composing*. Branson, Farrar & Co., 1863.

Browne, George Y. *Browne’s Arithmetical Tables, Combined with Easy Lessons in Mental Arithmetic*. Franklin Printing House, 1865.

Campbell, William A. *The Child’s First Book*. Ayres & Wade, 1864.

Johnson, L. *Johnson’s Common School Arithmetic*. Branson & Farrar, 1864.

Lander, Samuel. *Our Own School Arithmetic*. Sterling, Campbell & Albright, 1863.

Lander, Samuel. *The Verbal Primer*. Sterling, Campbell & Albright, 1865.

Moore, Marinda Branson. *The Geographical Reader, for the Dixie Children*. Branson, Farrar & Co., 1863.

Rice, John H. *A System of Modern Geography Compiled from Various Sources and Adapted to the Present Condition of the World; Expressly for the Use of Schools and Academies in the Confederate States of America..* Franklin Printing House, 1862.

Smith, Richard McAllister. *The Confederate First Reader: Containing Selections in Prose and Poetry as Reading Exercises for the Younger Children in the Schools and Families of the Confederate States*. George. L. Bidgood, 1864.

Smith, Richard McAllister. *The Confederate Spelling Book, Reading Lessons for the Young, Adapted to the Use of Schools or for Private Instruction*, 5th edition. George L.

Bidgood,

1865.

Smith, Richard McAllister. *Smith's English Grammar, on the Productive System, Revised and Improved, and Adapted to the Use of Schools in the Confederate States*. George L. Bidgood, 1863.

Smith, Richard McAllister. *Smith's English Grammar, on the Productive System, Revised and Improved, and Adapted to the Use of Schools in the Confederate States*, 2nd edition. George L. Bidgood, 1864.

Stewart, Kensey Johns. *Geography for Beginners*. J.W. Randolph, 1864.

Schoolbooks from the Above Bibliography that are Currently Available Online

Bingham, William. *A Grammar of the Latin Language for the Use of Schools with Exercises*

and Vocabularies. Sterling, Campbell & Albright, 1863.

<https://archive.org/details/cu31924031185857>

Branson, Levi. *First Book in Composition, Applying the Principles of Grammar to the Art of Composing*. Branson, Farrar & Co., 1863.

<https://archive.org/details/firstbookincompo00bran>

Browne, George Y. *Browne's Arithmetical Tables, Combined with Easy Lessons in Mental Arithmetic*. Franklin Printing House, 1865.

<https://archive.org/details/brownesarithmeti00brow>

Johnson, L. *Johnson's Common School Arithmetic*. Branson & Farrar, 1864.

https://books.google.com/books/about/Johnson_s_Common_School_Arithmetic.html?id=qlGipwAACAAJ

Lander, Samuel. *Our Own School Arithmetic*. Sterling, Campbell & Albright, 1863.

<https://archive.org/details/ourownschoolarit00land>

Lander, Samuel. *The Verbal Primer*. Sterling, Campbell & Albright, 1865.

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=dul1.ark:/13960/t8gf1mv0v;view=1up;seq=1>

Moore, Marinda Branson. *The Geographical Reader, for the Dixie Children*. Branson, Farrar & Co., 1863. – <https://archive.org/details/geographicalread00moor>

Smith, Richard McAllister. *The Confederate First Reader: Containing Selections in Prose and Poetry as Reading Exercises for the Younger Children in the Schools and Families of the Confederate States*. George. L. Bidgood, 1864. –

<https://archive.org/details/confederatefirst00smit>

Smith, Richard McAllister. *The Confederate Spelling Book, Reading Lessons for the Young,*

Adapted to the Use of Schools or for Private Instruction, 5th edition. George L.

Bidgood,

1865. – <https://archive.org/details/confederatespell00smit>

Stewart, Kensey Johns. *Geography for Beginners*. J.W. Randolph, 1864. –

<https://archive.org/details/geographyforbegistew>