From Farmer to Soldier: Using the Inquiry Design Model to Revisit Civil War Soldier Wakeman's Story

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Historians estimate that anywhere from 400 to 1,000 individuals who were assigned female at birth enlisted to fight during the U.S. Civil War, either for the Union or Confederate armies. Cisgender women were not permitted to join the armed forces until the Women's Armed Service Integration Act passed in 1984. During the Civil War, some people assigned female at birth enlisted as men. They used "male" names and wore short haircuts, pants, and other traditional "male clothing." Many stories of these soldiers have been lost, but some were reported in newspapers after the Civil War, recorded in personal diaries, and preserved in photographs.

In this article, we share one possible implementation of a set of curricular materials titled *From Farmer to Soldier*, based on the life of Sarah Rosetta/Lyons/Edwin Wakeman (see Figure 1), one of many individuals who presented themselves as men and joined the armed forces. *History UnErased*, a non-profit organization that creates LGBTQ+ history curricular materials, originally developed *From Farmer to*



Figure 1. Private Lyons Wakeman, 153rd Regiment, New York State Volunteers

Soldier (visit www.UnErased.org/resource/about-us). The inquiry sequence we describe in this article resulted from the collaboration between *History UnErased* and two teacher educators to revise these materials and center inquiry.

All too often, the existence and contributions of LGBTQ+ people are excluded from the elementary curriculum. In this article, we propose including LGBTQ+ content within the history of the U.S. Civil War.

Teaching about soldiers like Wakeman offers a more complete and accurate representation of America's diverse society, teaches children about gender expansiveness, and fosters their ability to critically examine mainstream America's history narratives.

First, we introduce Wakeman's story and share our transinformed rationale for departing from the historical account of soldiers as "women who disguised themselves as men." We advocate for moving towards a more nuanced history of gender transgressions, one that recognizes that transgender people have existed across time, whereas historical (and current) narratives tell binary stories of cisgender women and men. Second, we introduce the Inquiry Design Model (IDM) and its three foundational elements—i.e., questions, tasks, and sources—we used to design the Farmer to Soldier curriculum (see Table 1). Finally, we detail our revised From Farmer to Soldier inquiry sequence.

A Note about Language

We refer to Sarah Rosetta/Lyons/Edwin using the genderneutral pronoun *they*. While we do not attempt to apply modern labels to historical figures, we do not know how Wakeman would have self-identified today; neither *she* nor *he* served us to capture the ambiguity, queerness, and fluidity embedded in Wakeman's life story.

We should also note that to re-tell the gendered stories of Civil War soldiers in a more nuanced way, we use contemporary terms (e.g., assigned female at birth, cisgender, transgender), but this terminology did not exist back then. Relatedly, throughout the inquiry, we invite teachers and students to examine historical soldiers' possible reasons for *cross-dressing*. The main goal is to challenge the simplified narrative of "women who disguised themselves as men." It

should be noted that in today's linguistic conventions, soldiers who were assigned female at birth and wore "masculine" clothes for reasons linked to their gender identity would not be considered cross-dressers, and it would be derogatory to refer to them as such. Simply put; they would be (trans) men, dressing as men.

Centering and Reframing Soldier Wakeman's History

Born on a farm in New York in 1843, Sarah Rosetta/Lyons/ Edwin Wakeman left their family at age 19 and, after adopting a male gender identity, worked on a boat that transported coal long distances. On August 30, 1862, they joined the Union Army as Lyons Wakeman. As a Union soldier, Wakeman fought in Virginia and Louisiana. Like many other soldiers, Wakeman contracted dysentery from drinking contaminated water and died on June 19, 1864. Historians have not determined if physicians discovered Wakeman's sex assigned at birth while in the hospital. They were buried as Lyons Wakeman in Chalmette National Cemetery in Louisiana.4

During their time in the military, Wakeman wrote letters to their family, signing some as Rosetta, others as R. L. (referring to Rosetta Lyons), and others as Edwin. Sometimes, they used Rosetta and Edwin simultaneously. The letters were "preserved in an attic for over a century by family members who considered [Wakeman's] adventures in male attire a bit strange."5 In 1940, Jackson K. Doane was exploring his family's attic and found a trunk filled with said letters. Later published in Lauren Cook Burgess's An Uncommon Soldier, the letters provide invaluable insight into Wakeman's story and their experiences on the battlefield.

Importantly, Wakeman and many other soldiers were already living as men prior to joining the armed forces. Some soldiers also continued to live as men after the war. Wakeman's letters suggest that, provided they survived the war, they planned to continue living as a man too. Historians and popular accounts have usually recounted the story of soldiers such as Wakeman as "women who disguised themselves as men," framing these stories as instances of women hiding their "true female identities," primarily to access spaces only available to men at that time. As historian Susan Stryker notes, "while it is important to recognize that we still know very little about the history of cross-dressing or the public expression of transgender feeling in earlier periods,"7 this mainstream narrative fails to recognize a history beyond one of cisgender women and men. In other words, the mainstream narrative of women disguised as men fails to acknowledge the possibility that some of these soldiers transgressed gender norms, not to deceive others and not only to join the armed forces, but as a goal in and of itself. As trans educator and writer Genny Beemyn explains,

People who would be referred to today as transgender, transsexual, and gender nonconforming—trans people in contemporary popular terminology—have not only been left out of history but have been given no place to exist in history, which is constructed as the experiences of women and men. To the extent that individuals who cross-dressed or lived as a gender different from the one assigned to them at birth have been considered in historical texts, it has generally been to dismiss them as masqueraders. ... The possibility that they may have cross-dressed or lived cross-gendered lives as an end in itself is rarely considered. Of course, we rarely have evidence of the subjectivity of people who crossed gender lines in the past, which makes teaching trans history particularly challenging. But raising questions about how we understand gender-nonconforming people historically allows for a more nuanced analysis of the construction of gender and gender systems over time.8

Accordingly, in this article we depart from the traditional and simplified storytelling of Wakeman as a woman who dressed as a man. While it is unclear why Wakeman decided to leave their family and adopt a male identity, most historians have suggested their reason was to help their family financially.9 However, we recognize stories like Wakeman's are not only or simply about women disguising themselves as men. Wakeman's case study exemplifies the historically situated complexities of gender identities and gender expressions, capturing how gender transgressions outside the rigid boundaries of femininity and masculinity have always existed and for multiple and complex reasons. Centering Wakeman's experiences within the history of the U.S. Civil War is one possible way of unerasing trans and queer history from elementary social studies curricula.

In Table 1, we list a series of NCSS Themes (e.g., ●INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT & IDENTITY and SINDIVIDUALS, GROUPS & INSTITUTIONS) that align with this inquiry. The content we share also complies with certain state standards, such as the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for Social Studies: "In Grade 5, students survey the history of the United States from 1565 to the present, [including] the Civil War and Reconstruction."10 Introducing soldier Wakeman to existing elementary-level curricular units about the Civil War serves as an avenue to deepen students' understandings of this period by exploring gender expansiveness and gender transgressions, inviting young learners to critically examine how gender did—and continues to—regulate our participation in the social world.

Various elementary teachers, primarily from fourth and fifth grades, have used From Farmer to Soldier in their classrooms. The learning activities we present, however, can be easily adapted for different elementary grade levels (e.g.,

What Are the Reasons that Historical Soldiers Might Have Cross-Dressed in the Civil War?			
Standards and Content	 TIME, CONTINUITY & CHANGE INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT & IDENTITY INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS & INSTITUTIONS D1.1.3-5. Explain why compelling questions are important to others (e.g., peers, adults). D1.2.3-5. Identify disciplinary concepts and ideas associated with a compelling question that are open to different interpretations. D2.Eco.1.3-5. Compare the benefits and costs of individual choices. D2.His.4.3-5. Explain why individuals and groups during the same historical period differed in their perspectives. D2.His.10.3-5. Compare information provided by different historical sources about the past. D2.His.11.3-5. Infer the intended audience and purpose of a historical source from information within the source itself. D2.His.12.3-5. Generate questions about multiple historical sources and their relationships to particular historical events and developments. D2.His.16.3-5. Use evidence to develop a claim about the past. D3.3.3-5. Identify evidence that draws information from multiple sources in response to compelling questions. D3.4.3-5. Use evidence to develop claims in response to compelling questions. D4.3.3-5. Present a summary of arguments and explanations to others outside the classroom using print and oral technologies (e.g., posters, essays, letters, debates, speeches, and reports) and digital technologies (e.g., Internet, social media, and digital documentary). 		
Staging the Compelling Question	The teacher sets the stage: Do you know who fought in the Civil War? Who was able to join an army? Who, if anyone, was not able to enlist in an army? Students note down their background knowledge and share it with the rest of the group.		

Supporting Question 1	Supporting Question 2	Supporting Question 3
What do we know about Wakeman based on the original sources?	Why might Wakeman have presented as a man?	Why might other Civil War soldiers have cross-dressed?
Formative Performance Task	Formative Performance Task	Formative Performance Task
Initial exploration of primary sources using the Library of Congress primary source analysis tool to develop students' noticings and collection of evidence from primary sources.	Students will do an in-depth analysis of a selection of the letters to complicate and question the common narrative that Wakeman disguised as a man only to help their family financially.	Students conduct a gallery walk and note down the ways that various soldiers cross-dressed, and their possible reasons.
Featured Sources	Featured Sources	Featured Sources
Source A: Wakeman's letters to their family Source B: Picture of Wakeman's engraved	Source A: Letters from Sarah Rosetta/ Lyons/Edwin Source B: Highlighted letters	Source A: Biographical sketches of Albert Cashier, Frances L. Clayton, Malinda Blalock, and Loreta Janeta Velazquez
ring		·
Source C: Picture of soldier Wakeman		

Summative Performance Task	ARGUMENT What are the reasons that historical soldiers might have cross-dressed in the Civil War? Write a persuasive letter to historians, or as an opinion piece for a newspaper, arguing for changing the language around cross-dressing from people being "in disguise" to the many reasons historical figures had for cross-dressing.
	EXTENSION Reach out to the local historical society or a local history department to host a discussion where students can share their persuasive letters and hear the perspective of the historian.
	UNDERSTAND How the policing and punishments of people who cross-dressed during the Civil War resembles and connects with current school dress codes.
Taking Informed Action	ASSESS Analyze how dress codes affect and limit the lives of all students and school staff within your local context.
	ACT Use your knowledge to re-write the school dress code and present the plan to the school leadership.

breaking one activity into two of shorter duration), with teachers using their expertise to account for their students' characteristics and classroom dynamics.

Using the Inquiry Design Model to Learn about and from Sarah Rosetta/Lyons/Edwin Wakeman

The IDM instructional approach serves to scaffold the practical implementation of the C3 Framework's Inquiry Arc. ¹¹ Three foundational components constitute the IDM: questions, tasks, and sources. The *compelling question* frames and undergirds the inquiry, while the *supporting questions* logically and progressively organize the inquiry. The formative and summative *performance tasks* allow students to apply and develop their understandings and the teacher to evaluate students' developing knowledge and skills. The third and last key IDM element is the *sources* (e.g., photographs, census data, newspapers, and other historical records) that the students engage with as they develop evidence-based arguments to answer the supporting questions. ¹²

The compelling question that frames our *From Farmer to Soldier* inquiry is "What are the reasons that historical soldiers might have cross-dressed in the Civil War?" This compelling question supports our aim to challenge the mainstream historical narrative of women cross-dressing as men for the simple and singular reason of deceiving others and gaining access to otherwise restricted public spaces and activities. We aim for students to learn about Wakeman and other soldiers in a way that accounts for the complexities and nuances of gender transgressions and honors trans history. Next, we describe the inquiry sequence, organized by three supporting questions and tasks, in which students engage with Wakeman's letters and other primary and secondary sources. Table 1 uses the IDM blueprint¹³ to provide a snapshot of our IDM.

Supporting Question 1: What Do We Know About Wakeman Based on the Original Sources?

Most likely, students have not previously heard of Wakeman and soldiers like them who presented themselves as men to fight in the Civil War. We begin with an activity to support students' learning about Wakeman. The teacher scaffolds student-led inquiry by providing students with what *History UnErased* calls the *History Mystery Box*. ¹⁴ As its name indicates, the History Mystery Box is a box that contains a curated collection of primary sources for students to read and analyze. In doing so, students will solve a "history mystery," or more properly, build their knowledge on a largely untold yet important part of history.

Wakeman's History Mystery Box includes a photograph of soldier Wakeman (Figure 1), a ring (or a picture of Wakeman's engraved ring), and a selection of the letters discovered by Jackson K. Doane. The letters are curated and available

in Lauren Cook Burgess's book *An Uncommon Soldier*.¹⁵ We suggest selecting letters that are signed under different names,¹⁶ that indicate that women were not allowed to enlist in the armed forces,¹⁷ and that provide some clues about why Wakeman left the family and enlisted in the armed forces.¹⁸ Additionally, the teacher can select letters that refer to Wakeman's cross-dressing¹⁹ and post-war plans.²⁰

As a "hook" to draw students into both the historical narrative and the task at hand, the teacher sets up the mystery:

In the 1940s, a kid named Jackson K. Doane was exploring his aunt's attic. He discovered a trunk filled with letters, a ring, and a picture. Jackson quickly realized that the contents of the trunk belonged to one of his ancestors. However, some information contained in these letters was a bit unclear. Jackson was confused. Let's explore this History Mystery Box, which has what Jackson found back then. "What do we know about Wakeman based on these sources of information Jackson found?"

Mirroring Jackson Doane's experience almost a century ago, students work in small groups to explore the primary sources in the History Mystery Box with a focus on the first supporting question: "What do we know about Wakeman based on the original sources?" We suggest supporting students' work with the primary sources using a graphic organizer like the primary source analysis tool from the Library of Congress (www.loc.gov/programs/teachers/getting-started-with-primary-sources/guides/). Students will note their observations and reflections, as well as their lingering questions and curiosities.

Having completed a small group exploration of the primary sources, students share their interpretations and questions. The teacher can scaffold the whole-group discussion with questions like: "Did Wakeman participate in the Civil War? What role did they seem to have in the war? What can we know about Wakeman's family and their relationship? How did Wakeman sign these letters? Why do you think they signed as *Rosetta*, *R. L.*, and *Edwin*? Were women allowed to be soldiers?"

Supporting Question 2: Why Might Wakeman Have Presented as a Man?

After students engage with the History Mystery Box, the teacher invites the students to do an in-depth analysis of the letters, guided by the second supporting question: "Why might Wakeman have presented as a man?"

The teacher gives the students about 40 minutes to reanalyze the letters with this new inquiry goal. The teacher can guide students to re-examine the letters by asking:

Most historians claimed that Wakeman dressed as a man to access better-paid jobs that women couldn't

access back then. What might be other reasons for Wakeman's choices? What were their plans for after the war? Does it seem Wakeman liked or disliked cross-dressing and living as a man?

The invitation is for students to delve into some of the letters and open possibilities other than Wakeman simply being "a woman disguised as a man" to support their family financially.

To scaffold students' understandings, mid-activity, the teacher can provide a copy of the letters that have some paragraphs and sentences highlighted and suggest focusing on those sections. For example, some of the letters insinuate that Wakeman felt comfortable with or even enjoyed their life as a man. In a letter signed "Edwin R. Wakeman or Rosetta Wakeman," they wrote, "I have enjoyed [myself] the best since I have been gone away from home than I ever did before in my life." Likewise, the teacher could highlight some statements that suggest Wakeman wanted to keep living as a man after the war and own a farm (something only men could do back then). For example, one letter states:

When I get out of this war I will come home and see you but I shall not stay long before I shall be off to take care of [myself]. I will help you all I can as long as I live.

If I ever own a farm, it will be in Wisconsin. On the Prairie. I [am] enjoying [myself] better this summer than I ever did before in this world. ... I will dress as I am a mind for all anyone else [cares], and if they don't let me alone they will be sorry for it.²²

Similarly, in another letter, Wakeman wrote:

If I ever get clear from the army I will come home and make you a visit, but I shall not stay for long for I can content [myself] somewhere else in the world. For my part I never shall live in that neighborhood again. ... How do you like the looks of my likeness? Do you think I look better than I did when I was at home?²³

The goal is not to draw unequivocal conclusions but to complicate the common narrative that Wakeman disguised themselves as a man *only* to help their family financially, first by working as a boatman and later by joining the Army. This might have been the case, but we will probably never know for sure what motivated Wakeman to leave the family farm and live a cross-gendered life. However, to start tracing a trans history, it is important to question the absolute claim that Wakeman was one of the "many women who disguised themselves as men."

Supporting Question 3: Why Might Other Civil War Soldiers Have Cross-Dressed?

After students familiarize themselves with Wakeman's story, the teacher invites the students to a gallery walk to introduce examples of other soldiers like Wakeman who, for different reasons, presented themselves as men. The supporting question that guides this portion is: "Why might other Civil War soldiers have cross-dressed in the past?"

The goal is to continue examining different reasons for cross-dressing in the Civil War era. The previous activity left open the possibility that Wakeman might have preferred to live a cross-gendered life rather than simply using their male identity as a necessary means to join the Army. Introducing other cases helps students recognize distinctions across these soldiers' apparent reasons for transgressing gender rules during the period.

The gallery walk includes bio-sketches of four Civil War soldiers: Albert Cashier, Frances L. Clayton, Malinda Blalock, and Loreta Janeta Velazquez (see Pullout).

To illustrate, Albert Cashier lived as a man from a young age and continued to do so after the Civil War. Later in his life, when a doctor discovered and made public his sex assigned at birth, he was forced to dress as a woman. He struggled with this, and his mental health deteriorated. According to the National Park Service, "many scholars suggest that if he had been alive today, Cashier may have identified as a transgender man."²⁴

In contrast, Loreta Janeta Velazquez joined the Confederate army as Harry T. Buford. Later in her life, she published her memoir: *The Woman in Battle: A Narrative of the Exploits, Adventures, and Travels of Madame Loreta Janeta Velazquez, Otherwise Known as Lieutenant Harry T. Buford, Confederate States Army.*²⁵ As noted, she signed the book under her female birth name, and in the title and throughout the book, she refers to herself as a woman.

As students conduct the gallery walk and learn about these soldiers, the teacher encourages students to discuss and note their hypotheses on the different motives these various soldiers might have had for transgressing the rules of gender. After the gallery walk, the students engage in a whole-group discussion of their observations and examination of the multiple and sometimes contrasting reasons these soldiers seemed to have lived part or almost all their lives as men.

Summative Performance Task and Taking Informed Action

As a final task where students integrate and demonstrate their new understandings, the teacher invites students to write a persuasive letter to historians (or an opinion piece for a newspaper). Supported by relevant evidence gathered during the inquiry, students can present their answers to the compelling question: "What are the reasons that historical soldiers might have cross-dressed during the Civil War?" Through their

reasoning, students can challenge the simplified narrative of "women who disguised themselves as men" and argue for a narrative that honors the existence of a transgender history.

Lastly, the teacher can encourage students to connect the historical learnings to the current context. For example, students can examine their school dress codes and discuss how these policies preclude diverse gender expressions. They can evaluate the school's explicit and implicit rules about so-called proper or improper dress and how these rules regulate and negatively impact the school experiences of students and teachers. This is also a good opportunity to explore intersectionality, such as how dress codes impact the school members across the lines of gender, as well as race, ability, and other social and cultural locations. Taking informed action at the local level, one possibility is for students to draft an improved dress code proposal and present their recommendations to the school leadership.

Conclusion

While historical records are not definitive, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that some soldiers presented themselves as a gender other than the one assigned at birth for a myriad of reasons. Some did so to surpass restrictive gendered norms (e.g., inability to participate in well-paid jobs or join the armed forces), whereas others seemed to have done it as a means in and of itself, in ways that conform to what we now call transgender identity. As Beemyn states, "While someone's motivations for gender nonconformity are not always simple and clear, it is important to try to make these distinctions in order to delineate a specific 'transgender history." 26 While history has largely referred to these soldiers categorically as "women in disguise," by using the IDM, we invite students to critically revise and retell Civil War (trans)history.

Notes

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- 2. Blanton and Cook, They Fought Like Demons, 1.
- 3. Kathy Swan, John Lee, and S. G. Grant, Inquiry Design Model: Building Inquiries in Social Studies (Silver Spring, MD: National Council for the Social Studies & C3 Teachers, 2018); S. G. Grant, Kathy Swan, and John Lee, Inquiry-Based Practice in Social Studies Education: Understanding the Inquiry Design Model (New York: Routledge, 2017).
- 4. Lauren Cook Burgess, An Uncommon Soldier: The Civil War Letters of Sarah Rosetta Wakeman, Alias Pvt. Lyons Wakeman, New York State Volunteers, 1862-1864. (Pasadena, MD: The Minerva Center, 1994).
- 5. Burgess, An Uncommon Soldier, 1.
- 6. e.g., Blanton and Cook, They Fought Like Demons; Burgess, An Uncommon Soldier; Larry G. Eggleston, Women in the Civil War: Extraordinary Stories of Soldiers, Spies, Nurses, Doctors, Crusaders, and Others (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2003); Brigid Schulte, "Women Soldiers Fought, Bled and Died in the Civil War, Then Were Forgotten," The Washington Post, April 29, 2013, www.washingtonpost.com/local/women-soldiers-fought-bled-and-died-in-thecivil-war-then-were-forgotten/2013/04/26/fa722dba-a1a2-11e2-82bc-511538ae90a4_
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- 11. Swan, Lee, and Grant, Inquiry Design Model.
- 12. S. G. Grant, Kathy Swan, and John Lee, Inquiry-Based Practice in Social Studies Education; Kathy Swan, John Lee, and S. G. Grant, "The New York State Toolkit and the Inquiry Design Model: Anatomy of an Inquiry," Social Education 79, no. 5 (2015): 316-322.
- 13. S. G. Grant, John Lee, and Kathy Swan, Inquiry Design Model Blueprint (C3 Teachers, 2014), https://c3teachers.org/inquiry-design-model/.
- 14. Similar to "journey box" in Cinthia Salinas, Noreen Naseem Rodríguez, and Brenda Ayala Lewis, "The Tejano History Curriculum Project: Creating a Space for Authoring Tejanas/os into the Social Studies Curriculum," Bilingual Research Journal 38, no. 2 (2015): 172-189; see also Linda D. Labbo and Sherry L. Field, "Journey Boxes: Telling the Story of Place, Time, and Culture with Photographs, Literature, and Artifacts," The Social Studies 90, no. 4 (1999): 177-182.
- 15. Burgess, An Uncommon Soldier; All the letters and materials needed for this inquiry are accessible at History UnErased website, https://unerased.org/ resource/from-farmer-to-soldier. An Uncommon Soldier is also conveniently accessible for purchase online as an eBook.
- 16. e.g., Burgess, An Uncommon Soldier, 25, 55, 58.
- 17. e.g., Burgess, An Uncommon Soldier, 44.
- 18. e.g., Burgess, An Uncommon Soldier, 18.
- 19. e.g., Burgess, An Uncommon Soldier, 31.
- 20. e.g., Burgess, An Uncommon Soldier, 37.
- 21. Burgess, An Uncommon Soldier, 58.
- 22. Rosetta Wakeman, in Burgess, An Uncommon Soldier, 31.
- 23. Rosetta Wakeman, in Burgess, An Uncommon Soldier, 37.
- 24. "Albert Cashier," (National Park Service) www.nps.gov/articles/000/albertcashier.htm.
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