Prevent Further Effusion of Blood: The Surrender at Appomattox and Respect

- **Compelling Question**
  - How can you be respectful of others?

- **Virtue**: Respect
- **Definition** – Respect is civility flowing from personal humility.

- **Lesson Overview**
  - In this lesson, students will read about the surrender at Appomattox between Generals Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee. They will learn about how the two men acted with respect despite their differences and be able to apply this lesson to their own lives.

- **Objectives**
  - Students will analyze the relationship between Grant and Lee at the surrender at Appomattox.
  - Students will understand the purpose of being respectful even when you disagree with another person.
  - Students will determine ways in which they can be respectful in their own lives.

- **Background**
  - In 1864, the Union army decisively gained the upper hand over the Confederates. Union General William T. Sherman captured Atlanta in September and began a destructive “March to the Sea” that included the capture of Savannah, Georgia, and Columbia, South Carolina, and sapped southern morale. Union General Ulysses S. Grant more than doubled the size of the Army of Northern Virginia under General Robert E. Lee and marched against Richmond. In November, President Abraham Lincoln won re-election and pushed the Thirteenth Amendment banning slavery through the Congress in January 1865. In March, Lincoln delivered a conciliatory Second Inaugural Address in which he hoped to bind the nation’s wounds “With malice toward none, with charity for all.” Also in March, Grant and Lee clashed around Petersburg, Virginia, close to the state and Confederate capital of Richmond, and their respective armies dug in. By April 2, Grant broke the stalemate and smashed through Confederate lines, forcing Lee to retreat westward. Union armies entered Richmond and raised the American flag as Grant went in pursuit of Lee. If Grant defeated Lee and forced his surrender, the war might end. However, other Confederate forces might continue fighting. Confederate President Jefferson Davis even called for them to launch a guerrilla war that might last years and delay defeat. Finally, if Grant defeated Lee, how would the Union general treat the rebellious army? Would he treat them as a vanquished foe or more respectful and magnanimously as President Lincoln in order to restore the Union and heal the broken nation after four years of war?

- **Vocabulary**
  - Sapped
  - Morale
  - Conciliatory
  - Malice
  - Stalemate
  - Guerrilla
  - Vanquished
  - Magnanimously
  - Rations
  - Skirmished
  - Reproach
  - Posterity
  - Dissipated
  - Resplendent
  - Adversary
  - Subordinate
  - Solemnly
  - Valiantly
  - Triumphant
  - Rebuked
  - Procession
• Introduce Text
  o Have students read the background and narrative, keeping the “Walk-In-The-Shoes” question in mind as they read. Then have them answer the remaining questions below.

• Walk-In-The-Shoes Questions
  o As you read, imagine you are the protagonist.
    ▪ What challenges are you facing?
    ▪ What fears or concerns might you have?
    ▪ What may prevent you from acting in the way you ought?

• Observation Questions
  o What was Ulysses S. Grant’s role in the surrender at Appomattox? How did it differ from Robert E. Lee’s?
  o What was Grant’s purpose?
  o What did Grant do at the surrender that showed his respect?
  o How did Grant’s purpose affect his role as general of the Union army?

• Discussion Questions
  o Discuss the following questions with your students.
    ▪ What is the historical context of the narrative?
    ▪ What historical circumstances presented a challenge to the protagonist?
    ▪ How and why did the individual exhibit a moral and/or civic virtue in facing and overcoming the challenge?
    ▪ How did the exercise of the virtue benefit civil society?
    ▪ How might exercise of the virtue benefit the protagonist?
    ▪ What might the exercise of the virtue cost the protagonist?
    ▪ Would you react the same under similar circumstances? Why or why not?
    ▪ How can you act similarly in your own life? What obstacles must you overcome in order to do so?

• Additional Resources
  o Appomattox Court House National Historical Park, http://www.nps.gov/apco/
  o The History Channel, “Surrender at Appomattox”, http://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/appomattox-court-house
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Background

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Narrative

On April 5, 1865, Confederate General Robert E. Lee marched his starving, exhausted men across the swollen Appomattox River to Amelia Court House in central Virginia. In mid-afternoon, General Lee was visibly shaken when he was informed that the boxcars on the railroad contained more ammunition but not the expected rations. There was very little forage for his troops in the surrounding countryside, and the Union cavalry under General Philip Sheridan were closing in and burning supply wagons. Lee reluctantly ordered his men to march due west without food. Those soldiers who were firmly committed to the cause set out without complaint, but increasing numbers were deserting the Army of Northern Virginia. Lee faced the inevitable choice that he would have to surrender soon.

On April 6, General Lee would become even more desperate when Union forces led by General George Custer cut off Lee’s army at Sayler’s Creek. The two sides skirmished for hours, and the battle descended into savage hand-to-hand combat. As his army suffered thousands of casualties and captured, Lee cried out, “My God! Has the army been dissolved?” He tried to rally his troops by picking up a battle flag and riding through their ranks, but the day was lost. The next day, the Rebels retreated across the Appomattox at Farmville where rations awaited and thought themselves safe until the Union forces flooded across the main bridge that was foolishly not blown. The hungry Confederates fled again without eating their rations.

On April 7, Union General Ulysses S. Grant wrote to Lee asking for his surrender to prevent “any further effusion of blood” especially in light of his dwindling army. Grant signed the letter, “Very respectfully, your obedient servant.” Lee responded that while he did not think his position was as hopeless as Grant indicated, he asked “the terms you will offer on the condition of its surrender.” With more bluster, Lee told his generals, “I will strike that man a blow in the morning.” When one of the generals suggested accepting the surrender, Lee informed him: “I trust it has not come to that! We certainly have too many brave men to think of laying down our arms.”

On April 8, Lee’s army straggled into the town of Appomattox Court House. It was hopelessly outnumbered six-to-one and had very little chance of resupply or reinforcements. Still, Lee planned a breakout for the next day, which was Palm Sunday. The following morning, as his army dug in and blocked any Confederate escape, Grant suffered a debilitating migraine headache. When Lee’s escape failed miserably, he sat down with his generals to discuss surrender. When Porter Alexander suggested melting away and initiating a guerrilla war, Lee summarily rejected it out of hand. “You and I as Christian men have no right to consider only how this would affect us. We must consider its effect on the country as a whole.” Lee had acted as a general according to an honorable code. He once said, “It is better to do right, even if we suffer in so doing, than to incur the reproach of our consciences and posterity.”
With an extremely heavy heart, Lee sat down and composed a message to Grant asking for “an interview at such
time and place as you may designate, to discuss the terms of the surrender of this army.” Grant was greatly
relieved to receive this letter. His migraine and all the tension within him immediately dissipated. While puffing on
his cigar, he wrote back to Lee and magnanimously offered to meet his defeated foe “where you wish the interview
to take place.” An exhausted Lee was napping under an apple tree, when an aide brought Grant’s letter and then
went in search of a meeting place to surrender. The ceremony would take place at the home of Wilmer McLean,
who had moved to the town to escape the war after a cannonball blasted into his kitchen during the First Battle of
Bull Run in 1861. Now, the war’s final act would occur in his living room.

Lee was resplendent in his new grey uniform, adorned with a red sash, shiny boots, and his sword in a golden
scabbard as he awaited Grant. The Union general arrived with several subordinates and dressed in a rough
uniform with muddy boots. Grant thought that Lee was “a man of much dignity, with an impassible face.” Grant did
not outwardly rejoice and respectfully treated his worthy adversary as an equal. They shook hands and exchanged
pleasantries.

Grant sat down at a small table to compose the terms of surrender and personally stood and handed them to Lee
rather than let a subordinate do it. Grant had allowed the Confederate officers to keep their sidearms, horses, and
baggage. Lee asked that all the soldiers be allowed to keep their horses since many were farmers, and Grant readily
agreed. Grant also generously agreed to feed Lee’s hungry men. Their business completed, the two generals shook
hands, and Lee departed with a bow to the assembled men.

As Lee slowly rode away, Grant stood on the porch and graciously lifted his hat in salute, which Lee solemnly
returned. The other Union officers and soldiers followed their general’s example. Grant was inwardly sad “at the
downfall of a foe who had fought so long and valiantly.” Indeed, when the Union camp quickly broke out into a
triumphal celebration, Grant rebuked his men and ordered them to stop. “We did not want to exult over their
downfall,” he later explained. For his part, Lee tearfully rode back into his camp, telling his troops, “I have done the
best I could for you.” He continued, “Go home now, and if you make as good citizens as you have soldiers, you will
do well, and I shall always be proud of you.”

On April l2, the Union formally accepted the Confederate surrender. Brigadier General Joshua Chamberlain, the
hero of Gettysburg, oversaw a seven-hour parade of Confederate troops stacking their weapons. As the defeated
army began the procession, Chamberlain ordered his men to “carry arms” or raise their muskets to their shoulders
as a salute of honor to their fellow Americans. Confederate Major General John Gordon returned the gesture by
saluting with his sword. Chamberlain described his feelings at witnessing the dramatic, respectful ceremony:
“How could we help falling on our knees, all of us together, and praying God to pity and forgive us all.” After a
dreadful Civil War, in which 600,000 men died, the Americans on both sides of the war demonstrated remarkable
respect for each other.