

## Lesson: The War of 1812: Should I Stay or Should I Go?

Grade 7: Canada, 1800–1850: Conflict and Challenges



### Introduction

In this lesson, students will use primary sources to investigate the War of 1812.

By using a chart to keep track of details, students will outline the hardships faced by soldiers during the War of 1812 and use this information to write a first-person letter about whether they would desert the army if they were in the soldiers' place.

### Topic

The War of 1812

### Source

The Archives of Ontario's War of 1812 online exhibit - [click here to view the online exhibit](#).

Use the Archives of Ontario's online exhibit on the War of 1812:

- As a learning resource for yourself
- As a site to direct your students for inquiry projects
- As a place to find and use primary sources related to the curriculum

### Themes that can be addressed

- Use of Primary Sources
- Perspective taking
- Life as a soldier during the War of 1812

**Curriculum Links****Strand B. Canada, 1800-1850: Conflict and Challenges**

<i>Overall Expectations</i>	<i>Historical Thinking Concepts</i>	<i>Specific Expectations</i>
<b>B1. Application:</b> Changes and Challenges	Continuity and Change; Historical Perspective	B1.1, B1.2, B1.3
<b>B2. Inquiry:</b> Perspectives in British North Americans	Historical Perspective; Historical Significance	B2.1, B2.2, B2.4, B2.5, B2.6
<b>B3. Understanding Historical Context:</b> Events and Their Consequence	Historical Significance; Cause and Consequence	B3.3, B3.5

## Assignment & Activity Ideas

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### Lesson Plan

This lesson can be abbreviated and completed in one class or expanded and completed across five classes.

### Getting Organized

- Review the resources at the end of this plan
- Make overheads or create a PowerPoint with the introductory information found on: *Slide 1: Research Question and Directions*
- Print out a set of primary sources for each student or for each group of students
- Print out copies of the *Primary Source Chart*, *Letter* handout, *Vocabulary* handout, and *Reflection* sheet for each student

### Lesson Outline

- Using *Slide 1* to introduce the following class activity: Use primary sources to learn about conditions of war during the War of 1812 and make a judgement in the form of a first-person letter as to whether they would stay or go based on their findings.
- Using the *Should I Stay or Should I Go* handout, encourage students to read the primary sources provided to fill out the chart.
- Encourage students to keep track of vocabulary they may not be familiar with. A vocabulary handout is also available for distribution.
- Using the information found in the *Should I Stay or Should I Go* chart, ask students to write a letter incorporating hardships in a first person narrative on the *Write a Letter* handout.
- Share these letters as a class, read them aloud, put them up on display, have each student mail a letter to a peer, or even mail the letters to the Archives of Ontario and we'll display them in our classroom space!
- Following the completion of the letters, hold a discussion about what the conditions of war can tell us about the conditions of life in early nineteenth century Upper Canada and how it compares to life in Ontario today. Examples could include:
  - Clothes were not plentiful or readily available. Many people had a set of clothes for the summer, another for the winter, and a third for church. Clothes had to be specially made for weather conditions.
  - People drove wagons with horses and there were few bodies (such as city governments) to take care of the roads.
  - Travel was difficult and time consuming.

- Wounds were not easily cleaned or disinfected, meaning that many people died from wounds that today would not be serious.
  - As entertainment in the evening, men could relax by the fire and play cards.
  - Adequate accommodations could include a barn and it was not uncommon for travellers to ask a farmer if they could stay in his barn for the night.
  - Farming was an important part of life for most people. If they did not plant seeds each year they could starve
  - Letter writing was the most efficient way of communicating needs and wants.
- We have also provided a Reflection handout so that students can reflect on their own learning following the task.

## **Extension/Accommodation**

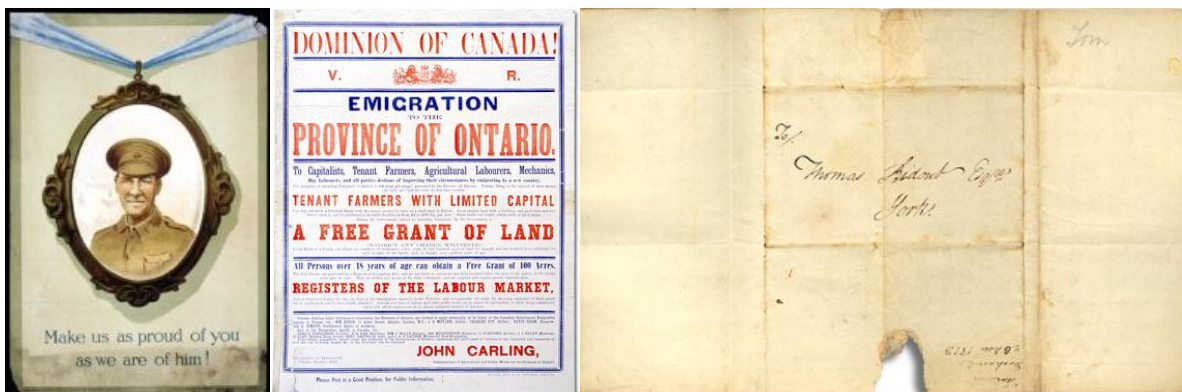
- The task can be undertaken individually, in small groups, as a jigsaw with primary source stations, or even as a class, complete with a presentation on primary sources.
- Instead of an individual chart, students in the class could complete a 'graffiti' activity by walking around the classroom, reading the primary sources, and writing down their thoughts about the content on a large piece of paper. The combined responses can form the basis of a class letter determining whether a soldier should 'stay or go.' This would encourage a more affective and kinaesthetic engagement with the material.
- Instead of letter writing, the chart can form the basis of a class debate or trial for a soldier who deserted.
- Students can illustrate the conditions of a soldier who is thinking of deserting. A comic strip instead of a letter can still express the hardships of war in a format that may be more interesting to certain students.

## Handouts & Worksheets

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## Overhead 1: Exploration through the Archives!



Over the course of a lifetime, most people accumulate a variety of records.

Taken together, these records can provide a fascinating view into someone's life and into the past.

Like a detective investigating a case, a researcher using these records can get a sense of what a place looked like, what people were thinking, what life was like, and what happened and why.

Some examples of records that a historian may look at are:

- Birth, death, and marriage records
- letters or diaries
- photographs, sketches, and paintings
- court records
- audio, video and film records

An **archive** is a place where these records and historical documents are preserved. The **Archives of Ontario** collects and preserves records with relevance to the history of Ontario.

Using primary sources from the Archives of Ontario's collections, you too can be an investigator exploring the past and understanding the present.



## Introduction to Primary Sources



Major-General Sir Isaac Brock, KB [President and Administrator of Upper Canada, 1811-12], George Theodore Berthon, c. 1883  
Government of Ontario Art Collection, 694158

A *Primary Source* is a document or object from the past created by people who lived during that time. Primary Sources provide a view into an event or experience that only people living during that time could have experienced.

Archives collect and preserve Primary Sources so that students can learn history from the experiences of people who were there. At Archives, Primary Sources are called Records. At Museums, Primary Sources are called Artefacts.

### Have you ever used a primary source before?

<i>Primary Sources</i> (Original material from the past)	<i>Secondary Sources</i> (Material people today write about the past)
<i>Example:</i> Letters Diaries Photographs Paintings and other art work Graphs Maps	<i>Example:</i> Textbooks Reference books Websites such as Wikipedia Current news articles Documentaries and films

**What are some other examples of primary and secondary sources?**

**Can sources be both primary and secondary?**

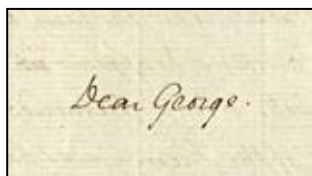
## Slide 1 - Research Question and Directions

It is best to begin with a *research question* before you start researching at an archive. For this lesson, your research question could be:

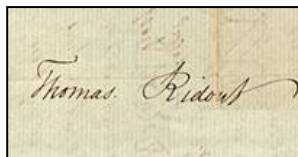
*Why did soldiers desert the British army or militia during the War of 1812?*

In the primary sources found at the Archives of Ontario, you will discover:

- What soldiers from the War of 1812 said to their loved ones about conditions of life during the war.
- Why the conditions of life were such that people deserted during wartime.
- If you were in their place, would you stay or would you go?



*"Desertion has come to such height that 8 or 10 men go off daily" - Thomas G. Ridout*



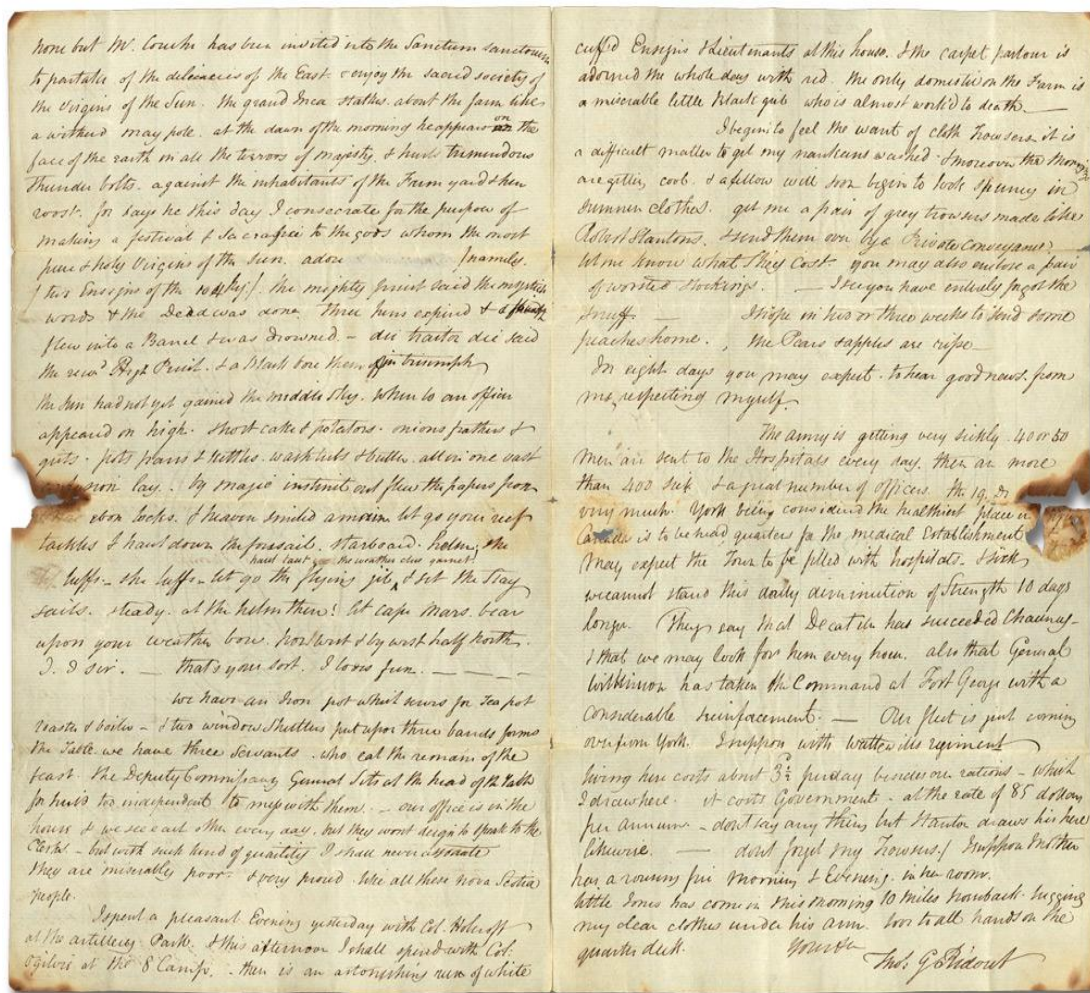
Extract from an original letter from Thomas G. Ridout to his brother George Ridout,  
September 16, 1813  
Thomas Ridout family fonds  
Reference Code: F 43, box MU 2390

*Desertion:* To quit one's post without permission especially with the intention of remaining away permanently.

Directions:

1. Read the 7 primary sources found in the Archives of Ontario collection
2. Fill out the chart about the Hardships expressed in the primary source.
3. Use the information on your chart to write a letter from the point of view of an 1812 soldier. In this letter, inform a family member of the hardships of war. Share with them why you are thinking about the question "Should you stay or Should you go?" Have you made a decision?

## Primary Source 1:



Letter from Thomas G. Ridout to his brother George Ridout, September 4, 1813 (Pages 2 and 3).  
Thomas Ridout family fonds,

Reference Code: F 43, box MU 2390, Archives of Ontario

"(...) I begin to feel the want of cloth trousers it is a difficult matter to get my nakedness washed. And moreover the mornings are getting cool. And a fellow will soon begin to look funny in summer clothes. Get me a pair of grey trousers made like Robert Stanton's."

- Thomas G. Ridout

**Primary Source 2:**

*"I have furnished barracks for one hundred and twenty men and they are all on the spot, including the Rifle Company now on duty here. And all are in the greatest want of almost every necessary. And I have this day received a letter from Col. Vincent referring me to you for stoves, blankets, etc. and I must observe that we are in as great want of shoes, pantaloons, jackets, and watch coats for the Guard"*

*- Colonel Joel Stone*

Extract from an original letter from Colonel Joel Stone to  
Colonel Lethbridge, October 25, 1812  
Joel Stone family fonds  
Reference Code: F 536, MU 2892  
Archives of Ontario

**Primary Source 3:**

*"We have had a most harassing journey of 10 days to this place when we arrived last night in a snow storm. It has been snowing all day & is now half a foot deep. ... Frequently I had to go middle deep in a mud hole & unload the wagon & carry heavy trunks 50 yards waist deep in the mire & reload the wagon. Sometimes put my shoulder to the fore wheel & raise it up. One night the wagon [upset] going up a steep hill in the woods in one of the worst places I ever saw."*

*- Thomas G. Ridout*

Extract from an original letter from Thomas G. Ridout (Kingston) to his father Thomas Ridout,  
November 1, 1813  
Thomas Ridout family fonds  
Reference Code: F 43, box MU 2390  
Archives of Ontario

## Primary Source 4:

LIST of Orphan Children whose Fathers have been killed in Action, or have died from Wounds received or Disease contracted on Service.

NAME OF DECEASED FATHER	NAME	RANK	Regiment or Service to which he belonged	ACTION in which killed or how Deceased	DATE OF DECEASE	NAME OF GUARDIAN	PERIOD for which PENSION is in course of ISSUE.			PROVIDED CURRENCY DOLLAR AT 6s
							FROM	TO		
Children of	John Hendershot	Private	2d Lincoln	Quebec	18th September	1812 Christian Almont	1st January	1817 31st December	1817	20 0 0
do	Thomas Smith	do	3d York	do	13th October	12 William Smith, Sen.	do	do	do	20 0 0
do	Marion M. Clellan	Private	First Lincoln	Fort George	27th May	13 Elizabeth Thomson	do	do	do	20 0 0
Child of	William Cameron	Private	do	do	do	Phoebe Goodson	do	do	do	20 0 0
Children of	Mathias Saunders	do	First York	York	27th April	do Elizabeth Elrod	do	do	do	20 0 0
do	Timothy Skinner	do	2d Lincoln	Chippawa	30th July	14 Ann Sinclair	do	do	do	20 0 0
Child of	John McGrath	do	Incorporated	Fort Erie	24th September	do Catherine M'Grath	do	do	do	20 0 0
Children of	Chassey Smith	do	Oxford	Caundry	5th November	do Myrann Lyntamer	do	do	do	20 0 0
do	Francis Weaver	do	First Lincoln	Disease	15th November	do	do	do	do	20 0 0
do	Bergamin Newkirk	do	do	do	23rd November	do	do	do	do	20 0 0
do	Casper Shufelt	do	3d Lincoln	do	5th January	do John Penner, Sen.	do	do	do	20 0 0
do	John Shackleton	do	do	do	14th December	do John Warren, Esq.	do	do	do	20 0 0
do	John Galipot	do	1st Lincoln	do	6th December	do Peter Trumble	do	do	do	20 0 0
do	Gaspar Conger	do	do	do	3d December	do Lawrence Jennings	do	do	do	20 0 0
do	William Dennis	do	do	do	18th December	do Sarah Dockstader	do	do	do	20 0 0
do	John Smith	Sergeant	First do	do	25th August	14 George Adams	do	do	do	20 0 0
do	Jonathan Giffin	Private	1st do	do	20th October	12 Joseph Giffin	do	do	do	20 0 0
do	Charles Stevenson	do	do	do	8th November	do Anna Youngs	do	do	do	20 0 0
do	Lease Walker	do	do	do	14th November	do William Walker	do	do	do	20 0 0
do	Leeds Bouzner	do	do	do	14th November	do Eleanor Chambers	do	do	do	20 0 0
do	Abraham Acre	do	do	do	— November	do Robert Nelles	do	do	do	20 0 0
do	Samuel Nunn	do	do	do	1st December	do Charlotte Acre	do	do	do	20 0 0
do	John Stewart	do	5th do	do	— November	do Sarah Banghart	do	do	do	20 0 0
do	Solomon Mills	Sergeant	2d York	do	5th July	14 Sophia Lafferty	do	do	do	20 0 0
do	Thomas Booth	Private	First Glenary	do	22d March	13 James Hauchet	do	do	do	20 0 0
do	Robert M. Laughlin	do	Incorporated	do	24th August	do Nadah Eastman	do	do	do	20 0 0
do	Jacob Van Camp	do	First Grenville	do	1st March	do John Lamson	do	do	do	20 0 0
Child of	Rodolphus Fuller	do	2d do	do	27th March	do Anna Fuller	do	do	do	20 0 0
Children of	James Clapp	do	Prince Edward	do	20th November	12 Nancy Scott	do	do	do	20 0 0
do	John M'Grath	do	do	do	30th April	14 Dorothy Griffith	do	do	do	20 0 0
do	Benjamin Smith	do	do	do	31st October	do Ardisiana Cummings	do	do	do	20 0 0

## Pension poster-Orphans (details), 1817

Robert Nelles family fonds

Reference Code: F 542, box MU 2192

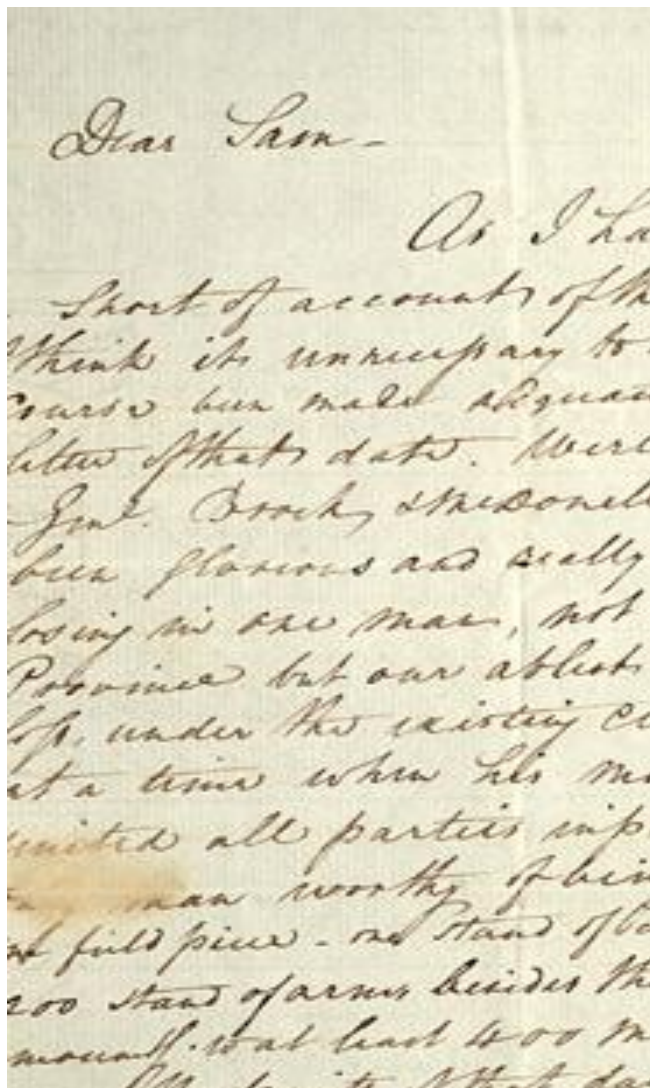
Archives of Ontario

The extract above is from a poster printed in 1817 that shows the pensions payable to minors left orphans by the war, war widows and militiamen disabled on active service.

*Of interest is to note how many people died from disease and not battle wounds.*

Overall 171 men serving in the militia were listed on this document as having died on service during the war. Of these 137 died of various diseases contracted while on duty; 25 were killed in action; and 9 from wounds received in battle or through an accident while on duty.

## Primary Source 5:

A photograph of a handwritten letter on aged, yellowed paper. The text is written in a cursive script. The visible portion of the letter includes the salutation 'Dear Sam -' and the beginning of a paragraph: 'As I have... Short of accounts of the... think its unnecessary to... course but made... letters of that date. Were... Gen. Brock, & personally... been glorious and really... losing his own man, not... Province but our ability... off, under the existing co... at a time when his ma... united all parties in p... man worthy of bin... of full power - no stand of... 200 stand of arms besides the... mount. - at least 400 m... All to it that day

*"I am very anxious to know how things go on in your part of the world. ... I will remember the many happy evenings I spent by your fireside, when we had nothing to think of but play cards, drink whiskey & watch the old horse by the window. ... But these days are gone perhaps never to return."*

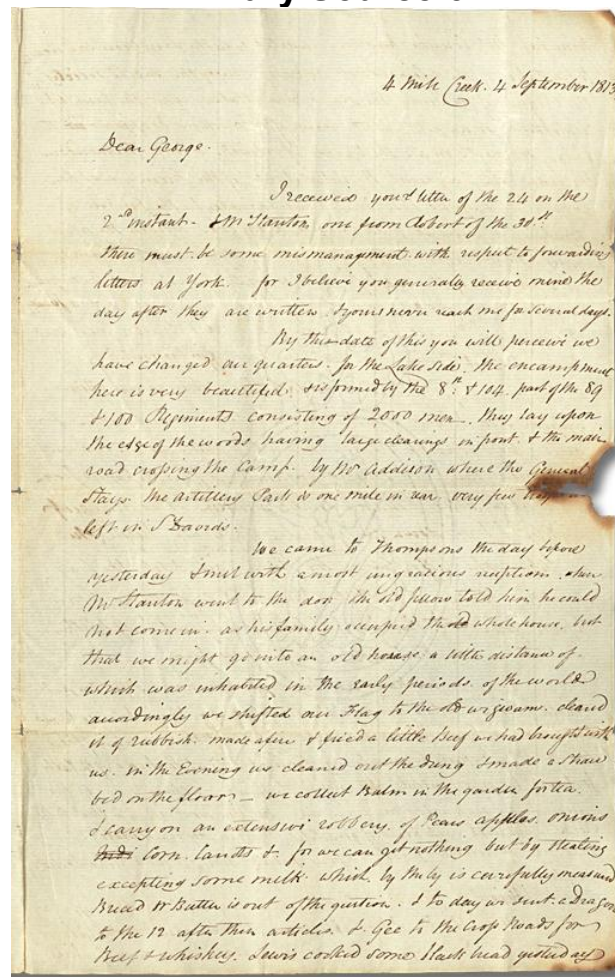
– Thomas G. Ridout

Excerpt from a Letter from Thomas G. Ridout to his brother Samuel Ridout, December 3, 1813

Thomas Ridout family fonds

Reference Code: F 43, box MU 2390, Archives of Ontario

## Primary Source 6:



"We came to Thompson's the day before yesterday. I met with a most ungracious reception when Mr. Stanton went to the don. The old fellow told him he could not come in as his family occupied the whole house but that we might go into an old house a little distance of which was inhabited in the early periods of the world. Accordingly we shifted our Flag to the old wigwam, cleared it of rubbish, made a fire & fried a little Beef we had brought with us. In the Evening we cleaned out the dung, made a straw bed on the floor. We collect balm in the garden for tea. I carry on an extensive robbery of pears, apples, onions, corn, carrots [etc.] for we can get nothing but by stealing excepting some milk, which by the by is carefully measured. Bread & butter is out of the question."

- Thomas G. Ridout

Excerpt from a letter from Thomas G. Ridout to his brother George Ridout, September 4, 1813  
(Pages 2 and 3)

Thomas Ridout family fonds  
Reference Code: F 43, box MU 2390  
Archives of Ontario

## Primary Source 7:

Dear Sir,  
I received your order of the 29<sup>th</sup> March also the 3<sup>rd</sup>  
5<sup>th</sup> & 11<sup>th</sup> April all of which I have punctually obeyed  
except ordering a substitution officer to do the duty of the  
I cannot find any of them that think them selves adequate  
to the task - I trusted that duty on the 12<sup>th</sup> instant to one  
Samuel Lockwood a man that has brought from previous  
a very good recommendation both of his courage and loyalty  
served in the Local Militia 13 years as a sergeant and in his  
recommendations is highly honored - He is a stranger to me  
I know not his moral character any further than from  
his recommendations - he appears willing to undertake if it  
meets your approbation  
I was very much surprised on receiving your order  
of the 11<sup>th</sup> in not giving me any direction of your intention  
of the training I expected your presence in order to arrange  
the best available to the new act. Did not think my self  
authorised with out your order - and not knowing the  
strength of the two companies on duty nor of any promotion  
except Broadbent and as the flank companies is done using the  
men on duty must be considered as detachments from each  
company and the best divided in two blocks and each post  
in his return state the number of men on and off duty  
the frequent changes that has been made in detachments  
and returning home is very difficult to ascertain the true  
strength of the post - they are very likely to be returned  
twice or perhaps not at all - there is some objection  
from Attorney General Malad being one the order for  
a court martial for absentees from different companies  
must be ordered by the commanding officer as also a court  
of inquiry for exemption some I think has a right  
to claim the exemption agreeable to the 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> clause of the new  
act and undoubtedly many more will claim than will be  
excused - your order to all steps by coming out of the  
general channel has gave some uneasiness he not having  
the return of companies ordered the number the same  
a small as well as a large company - Capt Russell  
has returned his old company of Riflemen  
Give me leave Sir to remark the duty I owe to my  
fellow creatures and as a true patriot to my  
country to remind you of the certain calamity that must  
befall us if the Militia are thus continued to be  
called from their families - if they are called one month  
or six weeks from their farms they can  
put no spring grain in the ground - if they are  
called one month or six weeks from their farms they  
can put no spring grain in the ground and the consequence  
will be that their families must inevitably suffer  
the famine even threatens before the ensuing harvest  
when there is but little sown that can be reaped  
if the farmers are prevented from putting in spring  
grain the famine will undoubtedly be dreadful.  
Yours &c

"Give me leave Sir to remark the duty I owe to my fellow creatures and as a true patriot to my country to remind you at the certain calamity that must befall us if the Militia are thus continued to be [called] from their families. If they are [called] one month or six weeks from their farms they can put no spring grain in the ground and the consequence will be that their families must inevitably suffer the famine even threatens before the ensuing harvest when there is but little sown that can be [reaped] if the farmers are prevented from putting in spring grain the famine will undoubtedly be dreadful."

- Colonel Benoni Wiltse

Letter from Lieutenant Colonel Benoni Wiltse to Colonel Joel Stone, April 13, 1813  
Joel Stone family fonds  
Reference Code: F 536, MU 2892  
Archives of Ontario

### Should I Go or Should I Stay?

Read each of the primary sources provided. In the chart below, give each hardship an appropriate label and then provide details about why this hardship would be difficult for the soldiers.

Source	Hardship	Details	Reference Information	Vocabulary Words
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				

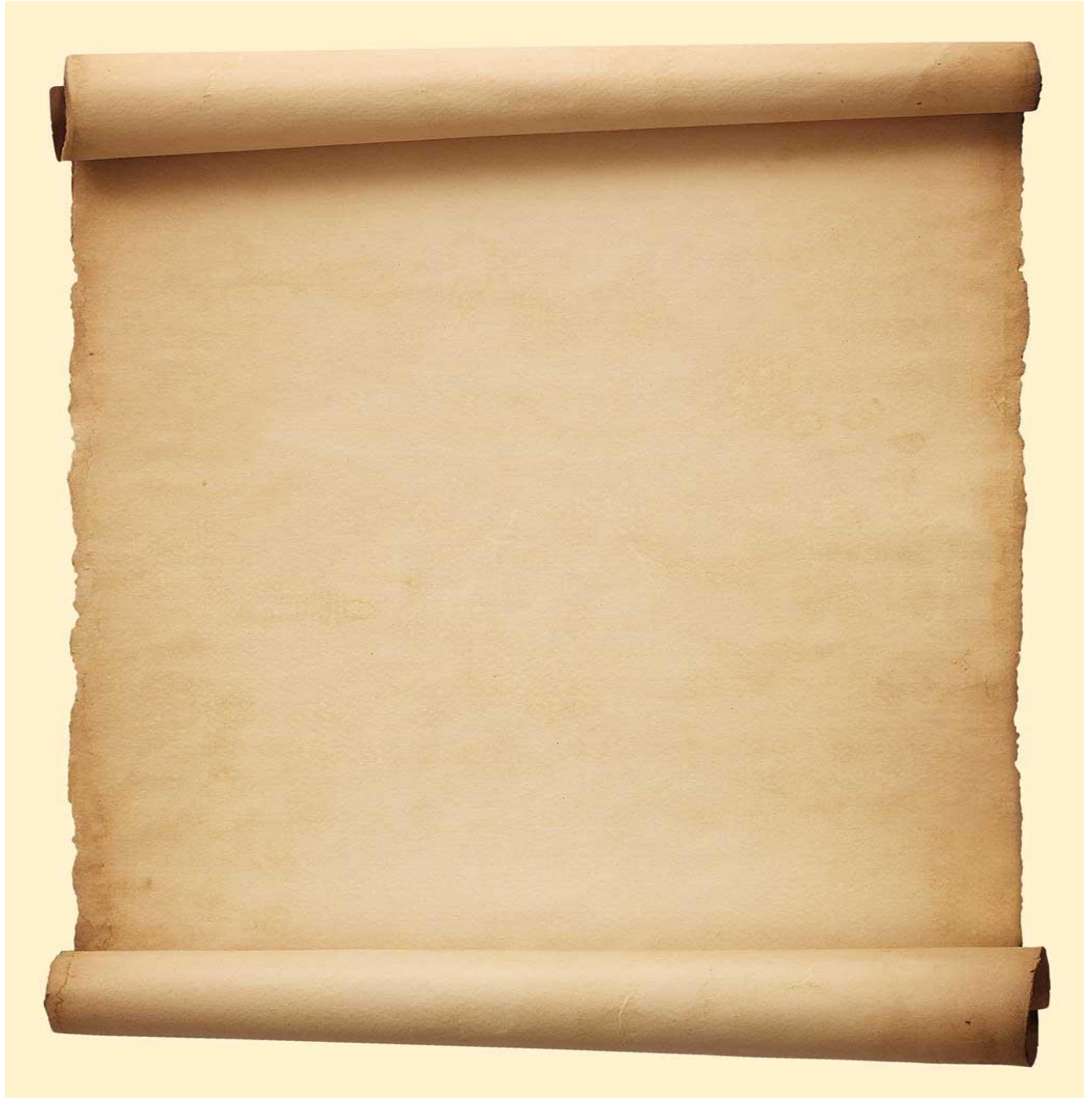
## War of 1812 Vocabulary

Check this list for any words you may not have been familiar with when reading the primary sources. Can you add any others?

Vocabulary Word	Definition
Archive	A place in which public records or historical documents are preserved
Balm	Resin from small evergreen trees
Barracks	A building or group of buildings in which soldiers live
Calamity	Deep distress or misery
Desertion	To quit one's post without permission especially with the intention of remaining away permanently
Don	Head of household
Dung	Waste matter of an animal
Ensuing	To come at a later time or as a result
Extract	To choose and take out for separate use
Famine	An extreme general shortage of food
Fonds	Collection of papers that originate from the same source
Fore	In, toward, or near the front
Harass	To tire out by continual efforts; to annoy persistently
Militia	A body of citizens with some military training who are called to active duty only in an emergency
Mire	Heavy often deep mud or slush
Pantaloons	Close-fitting trousers usually with straps passing under the insteps
Predominant	Greater in importance, strength, influence, or authority
Primary Sources	Original, first-hand accounts created at the time of an event, or very soon after something has happened. These sources are often rare or one-of-a-kind.
Sown	To plant seed for growth
Ungracious	Rude or disagreeable
Unsanitary	State of filth, infection, or dangers to health

## Write a Letter

Put yourself in the place of a soldier during the War of 1812. Write a letter to a friend or family member telling them of the hardships of being a soldier and why you are thinking of the question, '**Should I Go OR Should I Stay**'?



*Keep in mind that the purpose of your letter is to make sure the audience understands the hardships of being a soldier.*

**Reflection**

1. Place a check on the line provided to show how valuable the extracts from the original letters were in helping you understand what it was like to be a soldier during the War of 1812.

Extremely valuable

Not valuable

2. Explain why you placed your checkmark where you did:

3. What are the advantages of using Primary Sources to learn about history?

4. List some of the disadvantages of using Primary Sources when studying history.

5. List three questions you would have liked Mr. Ridout or Mr. Stone to have answered about military life during of the War of 1812? Explain why you would like to learn more about each of these topics:

Question	Why You Would Like to Learn More About This Topic?

6. How has the archival material helped you answer your research question?