

SOUTH CAROLINA'S CULTURE AND THE COLD WAR OF THE 1950s

An Eighth Grade Interdisciplinary Unit
JET Middle School
Spring 2009

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Introduction

The interdisciplinary unit "South Carolina's Culture and the Cold War of the 1950s" focuses on the historical aspects of South Carolina during that particular decade. Language arts, mathematics, and science activities are designed to support and complement the portions of the social studies content that highlight the development of the Savannah River Site and the tensions of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union during the latter half of the twentieth century. Social studies teachers should begin the unit, and the teachers of other disciplines should expand on these concepts after they are presented in the context of South Carolina's and our country's history.

South Carolina History: Grade 8

Standard 8-7: The student will demonstrate an understanding of South Carolina's economic revitalization during World War II and the latter twentieth century.

Indicators

8-7.1 Summarize the significant aspects of the economic growth experienced by South Carolina during and following World War II, including the contributions of Governor Strom Thurmond in promoting economic growth; the creation of the State Development Board and the technical education system; the benefits of good road systems, a sea port, and the Savannah River site; and the scarcity of labor unions.

Unit Topic: 1950s and the Savannah River Site

From Bebop to the Bomb
(3 to 5 days)

Day 1:

For background information on this period, the text used is South Carolina: The History of an American State by Paul A. Horne, Jr.

- a. Give background on the creation of SRS—pp. 512-513.
- b. Explain the Postwar (WWII) and Cold War period—pp. 508-511 and pp. 514-518.
- c. Relate the political and economic benefits to the S.C. location of SRS—pp. 512-513.
- d. Locate on maps the land selection of SRS and the towns relocated—p.512. ACTIVITY SHEET 1
- e. Read primary sources from the newspaper and books—Internet.
- * f. DVD (90 mins) If this is used, you will need two days. “Displaced: The Unexpected Fallout from the Cold War”

Day 2:

- a. Culture of the 1950s
 1. Music—bebop to shag (Create a CD of music)
 2. Lifestyle (slang)—ACTIVITY SHEET 2
 3. Living with the “bomb”—(video of the 1950s Cold War from etvStreamlineSC: type in Archives of War: The Cold War, then go to the segment “The Duck and Cover Precautionary Procedure: Responding to Danger” (time—9:12 mins.)
- b. Compare bomb threats of the 1950s with terrorist actions of today
 - *Cuban Missile Crisis (1960s) and 9/11/2001

Day 3:

Group work: ACTIVITY SHEET 3

Use as many group topics as you need for your class. You may need two days to do the group lesson.

ACTIVITY 1

Use a South Carolina road map to locate the area included in the Savannah River Site on the worksheet map.

1. Outline in red the SRS area on the South Carolina Counties map.
2. Name the counties today included in the SRS area.
3. What main water source is in this area?
4. Why is there a need to check the land and water sources around and below this site?
5. Name five towns today that surround (not in the area) this SRS land.
6. What state highway runs through the U.S. Government property of SRS? Also, name the US highway that runs through SRS.
7. On the 1901 enlarged South Carolina map of Aiken, Barnwell, and part of Allendale counties (ALLENDALE was NOT a county in 1901), locate the following towns that were done away with when the SRS was built in the 1950s. Highlight these towns with yellow.
Robbins, Dunbarton, Ellenton, Hawthorne, and Meyers Mill
8. Use the road map to locate New Ellenton and then put a green star on the S.C. Counties map where the town is located.

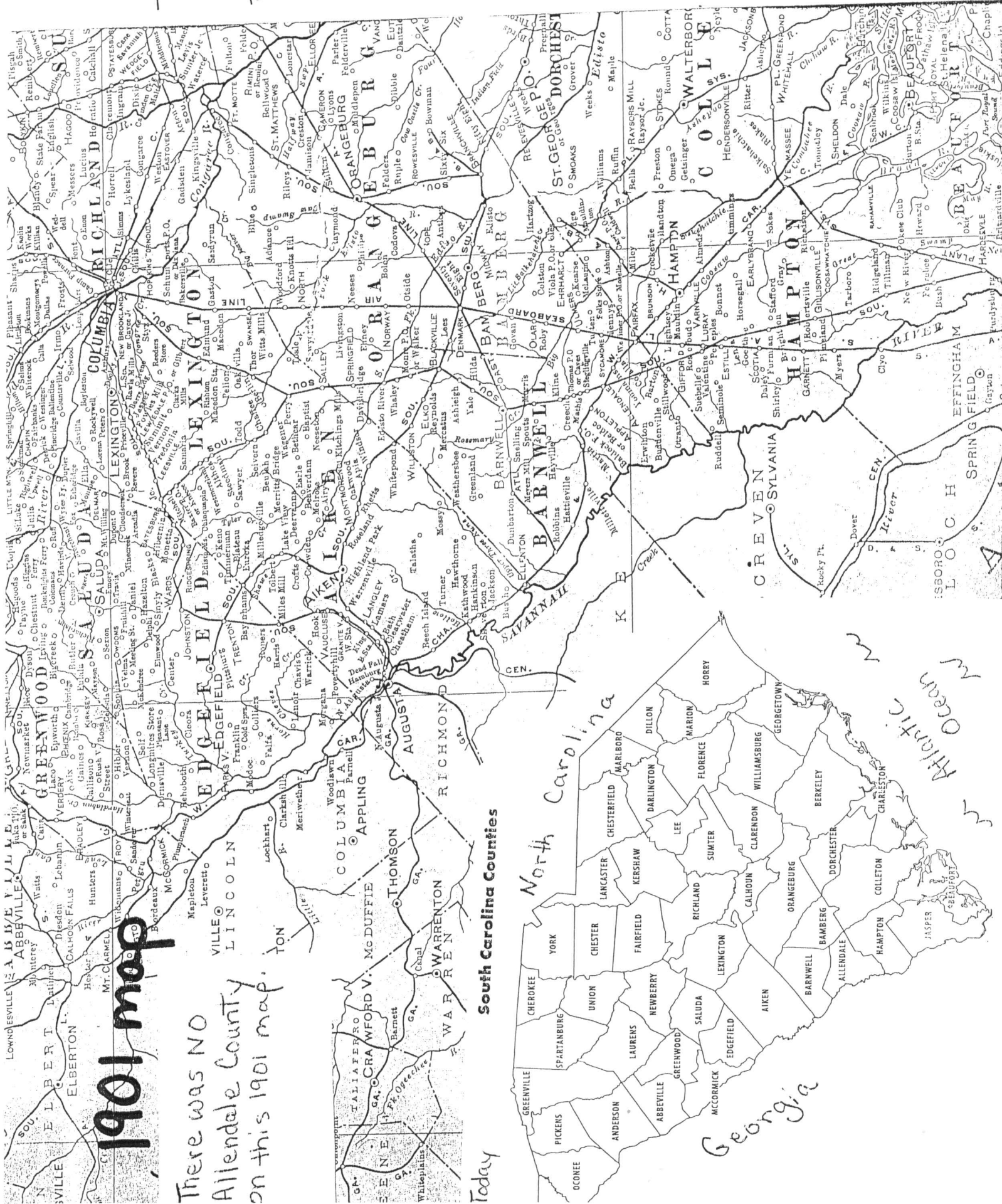
Activity 1 (map)

There was NO
Allendale County
on this 1901 map.

South Carolina Counties

Today

McCormick
Georgia



Nonprofit SRS group plans new visitor site

Museum dream makes progress

By Josh Gelinas | South Carolina Bureau Chief

Friday, August 12, 2005

PRINTSHARE

AIKEN - If all goes as planned, Savannah River Site history buffs will one day have a museum similar to the one they gathered in Thursday.

Members of Citizens for Nuclear Technology Awareness, who have pushed for an SRS visitor center and museum since 2003, met at the Aiken County Historical Museum to announce the creation of SRS Heritage Foundation Inc.

The new group attained its nonprofit status in May and is preparing a fundraiser crucial to making the center a reality, board members said.

The foundation wants to tell the public about scientific and ecological advances made during the site's 55-year history, in addition to the social impact it's had on surrounding communities.

"We think these are the stories that need to be told to future generations," said Walt Joseph, a former SRS employee who was among early advocates of a visitor center and museum.

The foundation is negotiating with the U.S. Department of Energy to lease an administrative building at the site that would house artifacts that are still being collected, such as model reactors and actual control rooms.

The two sides haven't always worked from the same playbook. The campaign for a museum coincides with the DOE's demolition of Cold War buildings that are outdated and unused, some of which are believed to contain items of historical significance.

"We weren't really ready for what we needed to do to get ready for historic preservation," said Jeff Allison, DOE's SRS manager.

The two sides also are negotiating over what would be the foundation's crown jewel: access to the site's C reactor, which was SRS's last and largest reactor that operated from 1955 to 1985.

Foundation members want to provide tours of the reactor, which raises security concerns because of its location behind SRS security gates. DOE's Hanford site in Washington provides tours of a closed reactor, giving members hope that it can be done at SRS.

Seeing a reactor up close can be a "mind shattering" experience, said Winfred Ray, who worked at SRS for about 32 years.

"It's kind of like the Grand Canyon," he said.

"You can tell people about the Grand Canyon, but you've really got to see it."

Members of the foundation also want to recognize the six towns that were forced to relocate when the federal government gobbled up 300 square miles for the nuclear reservation.

There are still sidewalks, for example, that serviced the town of Ellenton, which was moved to South Carolina Highway 19 outside SRS gates and is now known as New Ellenton.

There are preliminary plans to set up an exhibit at the former location to tell about the town's population, which totaled 739 when they were relocated.

Reach Josh Gelinas at (803) 648-1395, ext. 110, or josh.gelinas@augustachronicle.com.

Nuclear history

Historians want to preserve Savannah River Site history, including its impact on towns that were forced to relocate after 1950 to make way for the original Savannah River Plant. It was commonly called the "bomb plant" at its beginning.

Bonner Smith, a one-time resident of the former town of Ellenton, was 20 years old when he posted a sign with this message on it about 1950:

"It is hard to understand why our town must be destroyed to make a bomb that will destroy someone else's town that they love as much as we love ours. But we feel that they picked not just the best spot in the U.S. but in the whole world."

Friday, March 20, 2009

ENTERTAINMENT

Go to:
www.displaced.us

Ellenton lives again in film

By Steven Uhles
Staff Writer

The streets of Ellenton, S.C., or what's left of them, are difficult to find. Crumbling and covered by 50 years' worth of leaves, growth and pine straw, they become fainter each year. The same can be said for traces of the once-thriving town's businesses, schools and homes. All that's left are broken driveways to nowhere.

What has survived since residents were moved in the early 1950s to make room for Savannah River Plant are the ties that continue to bind the people of Ellenton, Dunbarton, Meyers Mill and the other small towns and villages abandoned in the name of Cold War progress.

It's a sense of community Mark Albertin finds inspiring.

Mr. Albertin recently completed production on *Displaced: The Unexpected Fallout from the Cold War*. The documentary traces the history of the communities displaced by the construction of the "bomb plant" in the early 1950s. Mr. Albertin, who will premiere the film tonight at the University of South Carolina Aiken, said the project appealed to him because the communities serve as a microcosm for the changes that affected the United States during the early years of the Cold War.

"After World War II, we found ourselves in a very different, very modern world," he said.

PREMIERE

WHAT: *Displaced: The Unexpected fallout from the Cold War*

WHEN: 7:30 p.m. today

WHERE: The Etherredge Center, University of South Carolina Aiken.

COST: Free

FOR MORE: www.displaced.us

TODAY, ELLENTON is marked by a simple sign on the highway that bisects Savannah River Site. Mr. Albertin said he was inspired to make the movie because he thought a population of nearly 6,000 deserved more than a metal marker.

"There was a real sense of urgency," he said. "This was over 50 years ago, and I wondered how long it would be before people just drove by that sign and not really know what that meant."

Over the course of more than three years, Mr. Albertin assembled footage and photographs of the displaced communities and interviewed more than 40 former residents. He said he was surprised to discover that even after 50 years, former residents still consider the abandoned towns home.

"It's funny, because when I heard the first story, I thought perhaps there was some exaggeration," he said. "But then I heard the same things from another person, and another, and

another. I quickly realized that this was not a case of everyone being overly emotional. Bad things happened. The government at the time did not handle the situation correctly."

THE CHALLENGE in assembling the film for Mr. Albertin was in editing it. He said it was difficult for him to remain objective during the process and he found cuts extremely painful.

"There were people that I just couldn't use. ... I have at least five hours of documentary material left, material I just couldn't weave into the fabric of the film."

Mr. Albertin, a multimedia producer for Morris Visitor Publications in Augusta, said being welcomed into homes, into the annual reunions held by former residents of both Ellenton and Dunbarton, meant more than spending a few hours collecting stories. It meant becoming part of the community and serving as a witness.

"Those reunions, they are really all they have left, in terms of community," he said. "That's the way they keep in touch, keep those places alive. They come together and repeat those stories. It's important to them and it became important to me."

"This documentary is a eulogy — a eulogy for a place that once was."

Reach Steven Uhles at (706) 823-3626 or steven.uhles@augustachronicle.com.

Activity 2

Slang of the 1950s--- Slang of Today

List five clean slang expressions of today that you use with your friends, and tell their meaning:

Read over the 1950s slang list. How many of these do we still use today?

How does it sound when a person over 30 uses your slang? Why?

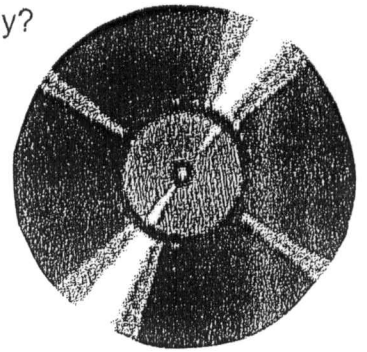
Write a note to a person in the class using 1950s slang. Exchange the notes and respond to that person by using today's slang. COOL!!!!!!

Slang of the 1950s

actor - show-off
big daddy - older person
blast - good time
bread - money
cat - hip person
cloud 9 - really happy
Clyde - term of address for any normal male
cookin' - doing very well
cōōl it - relax
cranked - excited
cream - badly damage
cut out - leave
dig - understand
dolly - real cute young girl
don't have a cow - don't get excited
flat out - fast as you can
flat-top - men's hairstyle (flat on top crewcut)
flick - movie
fracture - to amuse
frosted - angry
going ape - getting really excited
hang out - do very little
heat - police

hip - cool, in the know
horn - telephone
kick - a fun thing, or a good thing
knuckle sandwich - fist in the face
kookie - nuts (in a nice way)
made in the shade - guaranteed success
make the scene - to attend
nerd - dorky person with brains
no sweat - no problem
odd ball - someone a little out of sync
on the stick - smart, prepared
pad - home
party pooper - no fun at all
rattle your cage - get you upset
shot down - failed
sing - tatttle or inform on someone
split - leave

stacked - female with well proportioned figure
stack up - wreck a vehicle
threads - clothes
tight - close friends
total - completely destroy
unreal - exceptional



Activity 3

Group Topics: Use as many as needed. Students will prepare their group topic and share with the class.

Group A

Create a song/poem/rap about nuclear threat/terrorist attack.

Group B

Summit solutions: You are "world leaders" and must come up with solutions for prevention of possible nuclear attacks today.

Group C

Describe the type of world you would like your children 25 years from now to have.

*Are things from another decade anything you would like your children to experience?

Group D

Pros and Cons: Tell three positive benefits of SRS locating in the Aiken area. Tell three negative aspects of SRS locating in the Aiken area.

Group E

Tell how you would feel if the United States government told you that your family must move off your 100-year-owned land. Write a speech to be read at a meeting with government officials. Remember, your land, the town, the church, the cemetery, the school, etc. will be taken by the U.S. government for some national use.

Resources:

Textbook:

South Carolina: The History of an American State by Paul A. Horne, Jr.
African-Americans and the Palmetto State by Dr. Carol S. Botsch
(1994 South Carolina State Department of Education, p. 146)

Maps:

South Carolina State Road Maps
1901 South Carolina Map

Internet:

etvStreamlineSC (video) Archives of War: The Cold War --- "Duck and Cover"

Articles about SRS

1950s slang

www.displaced.us

Newspaper:

Augusta Chronicle 3/20/09

DVD:

"Displaced: The Unexpected Fallout from the Cold War"

Language Arts: Grade 8

Selected Text for Reading: "There Will Come Soft Rains"
From The Martian Chronicles
by Ray Bradbury (1950)

Textbook: Elements of Literature. Holt, Rinehart and Winston,
2006. pp. 265-272.

Standards and Indicators

R1 The student will integrate various cues and strategies to comprehend what he or she reads.

8-R1.3 Demonstrate the ability to make connections between a text read independently and his or her prior knowledge, other texts, and the world.

8-R1.4 Demonstrate the ability to summarize and paraphrase, and evaluate what he or she read.

8-R1.7 Demonstrate the ability to analyze the main idea of a particular text.

R2 The student will use a knowledge of purposes, structures, and elements of writing to analyze and interpret various types of text.

8-R2.1 Demonstrate the ability to analyze the author's use of static, dynamic, round, and flat characters.

8-R2.6 Demonstrate the ability to analyze and interpret figurative language.

W1 The student will apply a process approach to writing.

8-W1.1 Demonstrate the ability to choose a topic, generate ideas, and use oral and written prewriting strategies.

8-W1.2 Demonstrate the ability to generate drafts that use a logical progression of ideas to develop a topic for a specific audience and/or purpose.

8-W2.2 Demonstrate the ability to use writing to learn, entertain, and describe.

8-W2.3 Demonstrate the ability to use writing to persuade, analyze, and transact business.

"There Will Come Soft Rains" by Ray Bradbury
Activities

Before Reading

- A. Discuss the popularity of science fiction literature and movies during the 1950s as a result of the Cold War. During this time, writers examined the "what-ifs" of a nuclear holocaust and imagined finding worlds beyond our own to escape such an event.

Research Websites

www.scififantasyfilms.suite101.com/article.cfm/more_sci-fi_movies_from_the1950s

www.lotl.com/fifties_movies

- B. Examine and discuss the characteristics of science fiction, which combines real science with exaggerated science to create believable, yet imaginative stories.

Short Video

www.unitedstreaming.com

Discovering Language Arts: Grades 06-08: Fiction
Segment: Science Fiction (8 minutes, 46 seconds)

- C. Think and Write Paragraph: (on the Reading Guide)
Consider all the technology we have available today, such as microwave ovens, cell phones, the internet, spacecraft, etc. What are some advances that you think will be made or that you would like to see made during the next twenty-five to thirty years?

- D. Vocabulary Words (on the Reading Guide)
paranoia, cavorting, tremulous, oblivious, sublime
- E. Literary Terms to Know (on the Reading Guide)
character, setting, chronological order, personification

During Reading

- F. Complete the attached Reading Guide.
- G. Use index cards to create summary notes of the events occurring during each of the times listed in the story.

After Reading

H. Discuss how not only literature, but also music written thirty years later during the 1980s reflected society's attitudes toward the Cold War. Divide students into groups. Give each group the lyrics to a different song from the 1980s, explaining that the Cold War spanned a significant length of time. After sufficient time to study the lyrics, ask each group to share thoughts on the following questions:

- What points of view or feelings about the Cold War are revealed in these lyrics?
- In what ways do these lyrics from the 1980s still reflect the events of the 1950s?
- What particular lines stand out to you? Why?

Songs to Consider

- "Breathing" by Kate Bush (1980)
- "99 Red Balloons" by Nena (1983)
- "Everybody Wants to Rule the World" by Tears for Fears (1985)
- "Between the Wars" by Billy Bragg (1985)
- "Burning Heart" by Survivor (1985)
- "Land of Confusion" by Phil Collins (1986)

Lyrics to these songs may be found on the internet on sites such as www.lyrics.com and www.music.yahoo.com/lyrics. They are not always punctuated correctly and sometimes have misspelled words, so I prefer to correct these problems before sharing them with the students. You may also find versions of these songs on the internet to play for the students, or you may purchase the compact discs at most music stores or on-line.

I. Writing Extension Activities

Narrative Writing

- Pretend that you are a survivor of a nuclear holocaust. Write a story that tells what you would do the day after it occurred.
- Retell the story "There Will Come Soft Rains" from the house's point of view. Be sure to reveal its thoughts and feelings as it performs various functions with no people there.

Descriptive Writing

- Describe your own ideal version of a technologically advanced "dream house."
- Imagine that you are a news reporter who has arrived at the scene of a prior nuclear blast. Describe the landscape to a distant television or newspaper audience.

Persuasive Writing

- Imagine that you are a United States ambassador to the Soviet Union during the 1950s. Write a letter or a speech for their leader or governing body persuading him/them to stop producing weapons of mass destruction.
- Design a brochure or newspaper advertisement or article convincing South Carolina's citizens to travel with you to another planet where there is no threat of war or nuclear weapons.

Comparing Literature

- Explain how the main idea and authors' attitudes are similar in Sara Teasdale's poem "There Will Come Soft Rains" and Ray Bradbury's story by the same name. In your opinion, which work of literature conveys the idea with more interest? Why?

J. Other Stories to Read

"The Third Level" by Jack Finney (1957)

"Of Missing Persons" by Jack Finney (1957)

"The Call of the Stars" by Arthur C. Clarke (1957)

Any of the stories in The Martian Chronicles by Ray Bradbury (1950)

A. Think and Write (6-9 sentences)

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper appears to be a standard notebook page.

1. character _____

2. setting _____

3. chronological order _____

4. personification _____

5. science fiction _____

C. Vocabulary

paranoia, cavorting, tremulous, oblivious, sublime

6. Her hands were _____ while she waited for the curtain to rise.

7. Visitors will remember the _____ mountains of Yosemite.

8. When Tom is watching a basketball game, he is _____ to everything else.

9. The baby goats were _____ in the pasture.

10. Because of the man's _____, he felt safe only at home.

D. Comprehension Questions

11. What is the setting of this story? (time and place)_____

12. What sort of personality does this house seem to have? Why do you think so?_____

13. What happened to the people who once lived in this house?_____

What was left behind as a reminder of them?_____

14. List three things people usually do that the house can do on its own.

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

15. Why do you think the dog dies?_____

What happens to the dog after it dies?_____

16. How does the house's personality change as the fire breaks out?_____

17. Tell about the actions the house takes in response to the fire._____

18. What kind of personality does the fire have?_____

19. Is the house a flat or a round character in the story?

Explain._____

20. Is the house a static or a dynamic character in the story?

Explain._____

21. Write five sentences from the story that are examples of personification.

A._____

B._____

C._____

D._____

E._____

22. Explain the irony or what is unusual about the last sentence of the story._____

23. What do you think the main idea, or lesson, of the story is?

24. Explain how Sara Teasdale's poem embedded in the text relates to this main idea? _____

25. In what ways does this story reflect the concerns of the 1950s, even though it takes place in a future time? _____

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

There Will Come Soft Rains is a 12-line poem by Sara Teasdale written in 1920. The subject of the poem imagines nature reclaiming the earth after humanity has been wiped out by a war (line 7). The voice of the poem speaks definitely, the way in which the poet imagines how little the human race will be missed is an absolute certainty and not just a possibility. The poem reads:

There will come soft rains and the smell of the ground,
And swallows circling with their shimmering sound;

And frogs in the pool singing at night,
And wild plum trees in tremulous white;

Robins will wear their feathery fire,
Whistling their whims on a low fence-wire;

And not one will know of the war, not one
Will care at last when it is done.

Not one would mind, neither bird nor tree,
If mankind perished utterly;

And Spring herself when she woke at dawn
Would scarcely know that we were gone.

The poem has six stanzas, each made up of a rhyming couplet. The rhythm of the poem is close to iambic pentameter but each line deviates from this slightly; the one line which maintains iambic pentameter is line 7 'And not one will know of the war, not one' notably the first two syllables of the next line have been included here, also suggesting that the poet has intentionally included them to complete the metre. It might be proposed that the rest of the poem has been written close to iambic meter reflects the world of the poem is one where the remains of human existence are dissipating; for example the robins are 'on a low fence-wire' suggesting it has either fallen over or begun to sink into the ground which no longer belongs to the human race.

The imagery in the poem is also dreamlike; for example the idiosyncratic use of the adjective 'shimmering' in the second line to describe sound rather than light, and the phrase 'wild plum trees in tremulous white' makes the image seem ambiguous and hard to imagine, as plum trees are not white (plum tree blossoms are however white, so it seems rather likely that this refers to a blooming plum tree in spring) and 'tremulous' suggests a kind of shaking movement which we would not normally associate with trees (probably tremulous is used in a figurative manner here, as for example 'a tremor of excitement went through the audience', so it is simply used to describe a feeling associated with the vision of a plum tree in full bloom).

The use of metaphor in the poem to further illustrate the image of the robins wearing 'their feathery

fire' implies the idea not just of the colour of the feathers but also how warm they keep the birds. The robins are also personified; their birdsong is described as 'whims', which contrasts them with the swallows whose appearance, despite the unusual way their sound is described, is far more naturalistic. This draws attention to them and perhaps suggests they are emblematic of something more than birds which have outlived humanity; they are perhaps a symbol of the leaders who have led humanity to its destruction. The poet also places them on a fence rather than a more organic perch, further connecting them with humans rather than the natural world. Some have suggested substituting on a low fence-wire with over a glowing myre to eliminate this connotation.

Rewind the Fifties

There are wings on the threads of the net

Travel the memories

Ads by Google

All Movies

Movies In

New Movies

New Films

1950s Science Fiction films

by Cynthia C. Scott

The 1950s was a time of contradiction. Americans were alternately optimistic in the post-war economic boom and paranoid in the shadow of the Cold War and the Atomic Age.

Hollywood released an output of films during this period that reflected Cold War paranoia and apocalyptic fears. But these films used the science fiction genre to dig deeper into these fears without frightening audiences off from their political messages.

One of the first films to address these concerns was the 1953 classic **War of the Worlds**. Based on the H.G. Wells novel, War of the Worlds was updated for contemporary audiences, taking place not in Wells' native England, but 1950s Los Angeles. In this modern retelling, Martians revealed a superhuman strength and technology that no man made weaponry could defeat.

Even the atomic bomb proved to be a weak opponent to these aliens. In the end, biology would do them in, offering a potent message to 1950s audiences that, like the germs and viruses that populated the planet and that which the human race has become immune, Communism was unnatural.

The 1956 film **Invasion of the Body Snatchers** was more aggressive in its anti-Communism message. In the film, alien invasion occurs in the most invasive way imaginable: the very body itself is invaded as citizens of a small southern California town are replaced by their emotionless alien pods. Group think and the masses take the place of individuality and the individual; individual pleasures and experiences are replaced by the communal good.

The metaphor for this pod transformation—sleep—is another potent message to American audiences: as long as they are blind to the Communist terror then they too will be, as the film's tagline suggest, next. More horror story than science fiction, Invasion of the Body Snatchers is a 1950s cautionary tale.

Not all films during this period were analogies for the Communist terror, but for

the terror of the Atomic bomb. Though many Americans would come close to that terror in the 1960s during the Cuban Missile Crisis, that threat was still very much real in the '50s, a decade after the dropping of the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The Japanese, who had suffered the most from the atomic fallout, were foremost in delivering this terror on the large screen. **Godzilla** (1954) was the monstrous result of American atomic prowess, wrecking havoc on Tokyo and Japanese citizens. Godzilla was a metaphor for the horrors with which the Japanese people were still coming to grips and that became a way to approach their worst fears within the safety of a movie theater.

American filmmakers were likewise concerned about the consequences of nuclear technology and created their own beasts on the rampage pictures, such as **The Beast of 20,000 Fathoms** (1953) and **Them** (1954).

These films revealed the horrors that atomic technology could wrack on the environment and on the very creatures with whom we share space on this planet. Their warnings were forceful: screw with the environment and you screw with the natural balance that holds life together.

But one 1950s science-fiction film that had the most astute Cold War message was 1951's **The Day the Earth Stood Still**. A forerunner of Cold War films, **The Day the Earth Stood Still** didn't give in to the paranoid fantasies of other such films but offered a warning to American audiences about what would happen if they gave in to them.

The movie was about an alien and his robot who came to Earth with a message: if Earthlings didn't restrain their destructive habits, they were going to be liquidated. Following the horror and destruction of the Nazi regime nearly a decade before and the ongoing conflict in Korea, **The Day the Earth Stood Still** resonated with audiences weary of war.

While the 1950s is known as a decade of endless optimism, these films pull the shade back from that facade and reveal a decade filled with paranoia, uncertainty, fear, and existential dread over what science and technology has brought to humanity.

more articles by [Cynthia C. Scott](#)

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Classic Horror Film

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More Classic Sci-Fi Movies from the 1950s

Invaders from Mars, War of the Worlds, Them!

© John K. Davis

Aug 3, 2008

The Golden Age of Science Fiction Films from 1950 to 1957 featured movies that are still enjoyable today. The fact that many were "B" level has not diminished them.

The science fiction movies of the 1950s were strongly influenced by the paranoia of the Nuclear Age, the Cold War between the West and the Soviet Union, or by the fears of the unknown. The special effects in these movies might not always have been good, and the acting often left something to be desired, but the stories that they told were often good tales that reflected the feelings of that decade.

Big Green Men: *Invaders from Mars* (1953)

- **Director:** William Cameron Menzies
- **Cast:** Helena Carter, Arthur Franz, Jimmy Hunt, Leif Erickson, Hillary Brooke
- **Source Material:** Original screenplay by John Tucker Battle and Richard Blake
- **Synopsis:** A young boy (Hunt) witnesses the landing of a flying saucer near his home. Over the next few hours, he discovers that his parents (Erickson, Brooke) and other adults have been transformed from loving, caring people into often angry, but otherwise unfeeling, individuals. A twist at the end leaves the viewer wondering if it was all a dream or not.

Director Menzies was a veteran art and production designer who used his imagination to cre

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some outstanding moments in this film. Many of the scenes, particularly the one in a police station where the young boy goes for help, have a definite feel of German Impressionism.

Also, the scenes of people temporarily disappearing into the sand and the revelation of the "brain" behind the invasion are quite spooky. Only the green "Martian" humanoids leave something to be desired.

For most, this movie is an alien invasion and/or anti-Red Menace story, but others have seen additional themes. C. J. Henderson in his *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction Movies* also sees it as an allegory of a young person passing from childhood to puberty with its accompanying fears and insecurities.

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The Non-Big Green Men: *War of the Worlds* (1953)

- *Director:* Byron Haskin
- *Cast:* Gene Barry, Ann Robinson, Les Tremayne, Robert Cornthwaite
- *Source Material:* Loosely based on the novel of the same name by H.G. Wells
- *Synopsis:* Wells' indictment of Western colonialism disguised as science fiction and set in Victorian England was transformed into an alien invasion film with religious undertones and moved to California in the 1950s. Martians invade the Earth and the world's population appears helpless against the invaders' flying saucers and death rays.

The movie's special effects, guided by producer George Pal, won an Oscar at the 1954 ceremonies. Although not up to today's standards (wires can be seen at times supporting the saucers), they were the state of the art at that time and, overall, are still impressive today.

Memorable scenes include: The opening of the Martian "rocket;" the massacre of the white f bearers; the young couple (Barry, Robinson) trapped in a demolished house while a Martian roams about; and, the ending sequences when the invaders are killed.

Seen by some critics at the that time, and since, as reflecting the conflict between the West and the Soviet Union, the film saw three remakes in 2005, one of them by Steven Spielberg. In the Spielberg version, Barry and Robinson make a brief appearance as Tom Cruise's in-laws.

Homegrown Creatures: *Them!* (1954)

- *Director:* Gordon Douglas
- *Cast:* James Whitmore, Edmund Gwenn, Joan Weldon, James Arness
- *Source Material:* From an original story idea by George Yates
- *Synopsis:* Atomic testing in the New Mexico desert has created a nest of giant ants. A highway patrolman (Whitmore) and a FBI agent (Arness), aided by a scientist (Gwenn) and his daughter (Weldon), find and destroy the nest only to discover that two queens have

escaped. A hunt to find them and their nests before they destroy the world leads to a final confrontation in the Los Angeles sewers.

This is one of the best science fiction movies of the 1950s. It has strong characters, the overacting is good, the script is well-written, and its anti-nuclear theme is subtle. True, the special effects in this movie are not great. In fact, the opening scenes in the desert when the ants are heard, but not seen, are scarier than the actual revealing of the creatures. But, that doesn't matter since the strength of the film is in its story.

Related articles: [Sci-Fi Movies from the Early 1950s](#), [Sci-Fi Movies From the Later 19](#)

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Unit Topic:

1950's and the Savannah River Site

Mathematics-8th grade

Announcement of the United States Atomic Energy Commission in November 1950

-On November 28, 1950, the U.S. Government announced that a nuclear weapons facility known as Savannah River Plant would be developed on 300 square miles of land taken from three counties in rural South Carolina. The plant would be one of the most ambitious technical feats ever accomplished and was expected to be a deterrent to the growing Communist threat abroad. The farming towns of Ellenton, Dunbarton, Myers Mill and others lay within the designated area. As construction began, these communities were dismantled. More than 5,000 residents were displaced. They would never return.

In 1950, something strange was going on in Ellenton, South Carolina. Strangers, businessmen with brown attaché cases checked in and out of the local hotel with more frequency than usual. Then finally, in November of 1950, the announcement came: The United States Atomic Energy Commission was building a plant south of Aiken, South Carolina to produce nuclear weapons. It was to be operated by E.I. DuPont de Nemours & Co. The plant site would encompass 250,000 acres, including Ellenton and beloved Bent Lake.

In 1950 Aiken had a population of 6,500. Construction families arrived along with 126,000 carloads of building materials and equipment. Less than two years later there were 38,580 construction workers and families in and around the Aiken area. Bedlam prevailed and vice was rampant. There weren't enough classrooms, enough laundries, the grocery stores were too small. When lodging facilities gave out, tents were put up. Fine old homes like Elm Court and Banksia became boarding houses. Aiken families would wake up and find people sleeping on their front porches or in the parkways. Long time residents coined their own word for the "bombers" who came. Some residents resisted change. Clay roads which were once used for horses and carriages were paved over with concrete. The two-lane road, once a log-bed road that had been used to run whiskey from Charleston to the Highlands, hence the name Whiskey Road, became a four lane asphalt surface the likes of which Aiken had never known or needed. The sleepy little towns of Aiken, Ellenton, Dunbarton and the surrounding areas had suddenly mushroomed into a noisy hubbub of humanity. Privacy was something that wasn't understood by the construction people who made do in little metal trailers or canvas tents dotted like lichen throughout Aiken and Ellenton's flat fields. Many trailer parks were established during this period. Oak Hill, located just North of New Ellenton, was created for the original 1,500 residents displaced from Ellenton. This started a chain of events that would completely change the surrounding areas of Aiken and Ellenton forever. What happened next caused displacement for many residents of Ellenton, Dunbarton, Myers Mill and the surrounding communities of Ellenton, Barnwell and Aiken. New Ellenton was created.

Mathematics Activities that connect with Lessons from Language Arts and Social Studies classes may include:

- 1. Have math students calculate the actual amount of displaced population in number form, percentage, and decimal form in relation to surrounding populations of Aiken and Barnwell Counties.**
- 2. Have math students measure and calculate distance the population of Ellenton had to move (not all residents moved to New Ellenton) or relocate to in order to establish a new home.**
- 3. Next, have students make scale drawing (using to scale) and a map of the movement of the displaced citizens of Ellenton.**
- 4. Pretend to build a bridge from Ellenton to Aiken or Ellenton to Barnwell, measuring angles, distance, etc.**
- 5. Estimate the time and cost it took for population to move from Ellenton to surrounding areas ie Aiken, Barnwell, New Ellenton, North Augusta and Augusta, Ga.**
- 6. Compare populations of Ellenton before Displacement and population after Displacement occurred. Have students write answers in number form, decimal form, percentage form.**
- 7. Tie together above activities with a culminating Activity such as: Set up the town of New Ellenton. Good planning is essential. Review major problems. Think about supplies needed etc. Consider what types of maps and drawings would be needed in order to create the town of New Ellenton. After making maps and supply list; make budget and then have students build actual creations of town.**

Kay Taylor-8th grade

Culminating Activity for end of unit:

Compare populations of Ellenton and New Ellenton , before and after Displacement. Set up the new town of New Ellenton. Good planning is essential on your part. Review and make a list of all major problems associated with Displacement. Think about the supplies needed to move. Make a map drawing of new town of New Ellenton. Design on graph paper first. Next,, make a scale drawing of the town of New Ellenton. Last, your group is going to build a small-model version of your new town. Keep all documentation to support your decisions while planning and building your town.

Consider the following questions:

1. How will you supply water, electricity and sewage to your new town?
2. How many streets will you need when designing your town?
3. What supplies will you to support new residents of your town?
4. What will you use for building your new town?
5. What about stores such as grocery, gas, banks, police ?
6. What about schools or daycare?
7. Are there enough people to support these institutions ?
8. What will your budget for the town be? How much will residents have to pay in taxes?
9. What about jobs? Where will everyone work in your town?
10. Point out value of all percents (%) you use. Make sure they all match 100%.
11. Make circle or bar graphs to represent the old and new population of Ellenton versus New Ellenton.

Activity 1 (map)

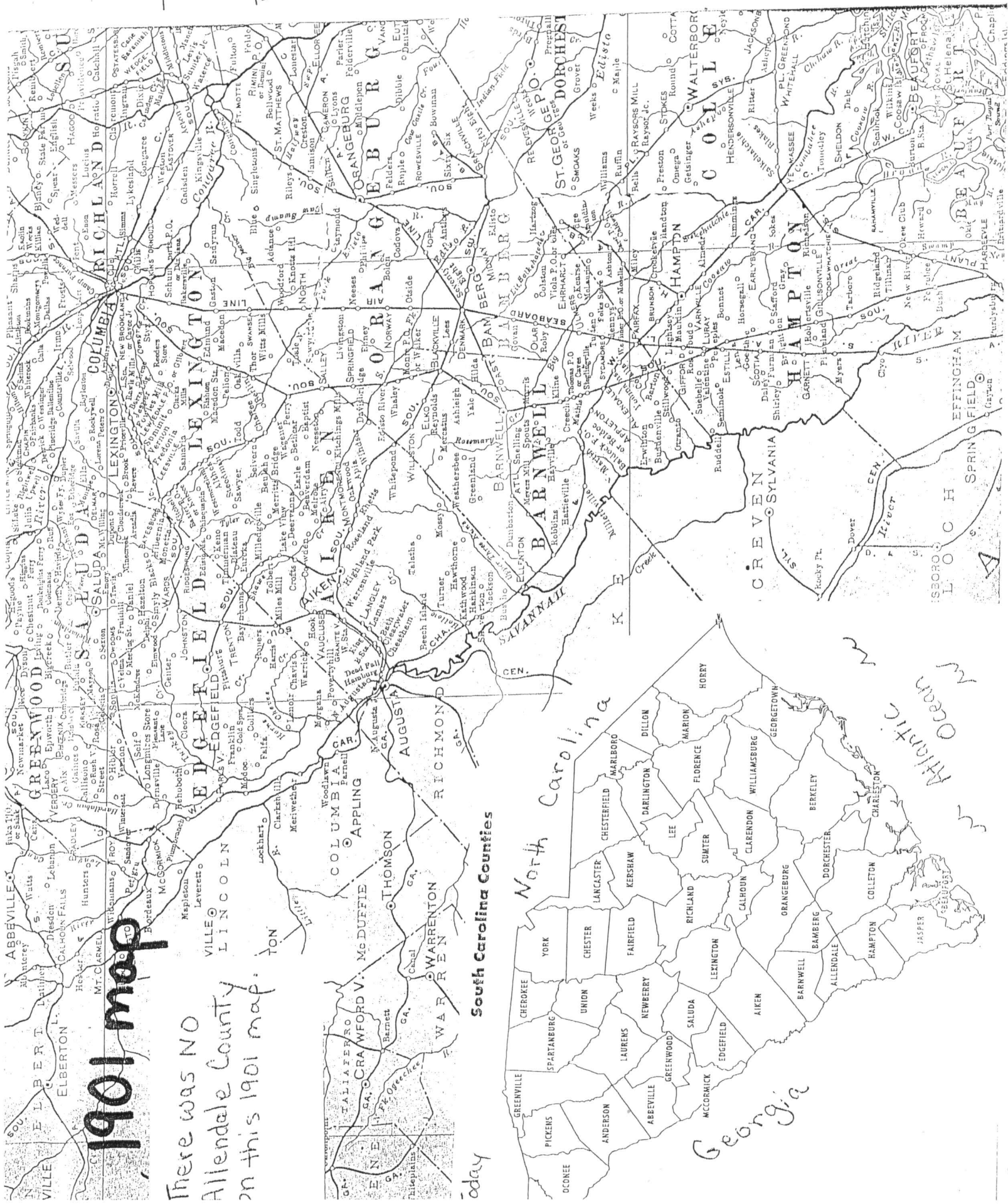
1901 map

There was NO
Allendale County
in this 1901 map.

South Carolina Counties

North Carolina

McCormick
Georgia



Resources:

Eulalie: The Woman written by Emily B. Cooper

Displayed : The unexpected Fallout from the Civil War DVD
by Scrapbook Video Productions

INTERDISCIPLINARY UNIT

Grade: 8th

Subject: Science

TITLE: *Cold War Fallout (SRS)*

Standard: 8 – 3.5 *Summarize the importance of minerals, ores, and fossil fuels as Earth resources on the basis of their physical and chemical properties.*

Standard: 8 – 2.7 *Summarize the factors, both natural and man-made, that can contribute to the extinction of a species.*

- The student will be able to list pros and cons of nuclear facilities for energy.
- The student will be able to list pros and cons of nuclear facilities for weapons of defense.
- The student will be able to write a one page essay on his/her belief on the usage of nuclear energy.

Teacher will lecture on nuclear weaponry; the creation of *SRS* (Savannah River Site) in South Carolina during the *Cold War*; how uranium ore is used to create plutonium and tritium for bombs; and future nuclear energy production from bomb grade materials shipped to us from other areas of the world.

Teacher will use *United Streaming* for video segments: Atom War; White Sands New Mexico; etc.

Materials: Asbill C-Mist
Grant

① DVD = cost \$ 21.40

Displaced

② S.C. state road maps

20 maps @ \$5.00 each

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