

KENTUCKY ENERGY

A CIVIL WAR GOVERNORS OF KENTUCKY TEACHING THEME

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CONTEXT

The archive of letters to the governor about coal, petroleum, and gas are fragments of larger conversations and snapshots of individual lives. Our goal in approaching this is not to find any definitive answer on questions of economics, health, environment, government policy, gender, or other related topics, because there are no definitive answers. We do not have replies. We also may not have any other information about a letter's concern beyond what that letter may state. Similarly, it is not our goal to fill in the biographical gaps of the individuals who wrote or read the letters as if they are characters in a novel. Simply, we want to learn about the issues presented, or glossed over, in the letters and think of the issues in terms of their effect.

We can read about coal mining, how it works, and the history of it. Having this foundational knowledge of the subject matter can aid our understanding about the fragments of conversations surrounding it in the letters. However, we must be careful not to impose our emotions or assumptions. There is no thesis statement, no conclusion.

So, what can we do with the letters? We can ask what topics are presented and how they are presented. We can ask questions about representation and privilege: who is speaking as well as who is not. We can ask what information isn't explicitly there but is alluded to, or what information is dismissed. We can ask about power dynamics. We can explore how these questions are still being asked today. Archival historical records are both illuminating and important but are also incomplete, not only because information is fragmented but also because of silences.

Our goal is to have a conversation about the history of coal and the web of issues surrounding it.

PRIMARY SOURCES

- **Coal, Gas and Petroleum:** These are part of a collection of documents on the CWGK site curated by staff. There are additional documents available through discovery.civilwargovernors.org.

ACTIVITIES

- **Effects of Coal Mining on the Environment and Economics:** Watch the *Coal in Kentucky* documentary by the University of Kentucky and answer the questions.
- **Artifact and Archival Analysis:** Divide into groups. Review the letters to the governor. Answer the three questions to prepare you for a class discussion on energy and the environment.