

Centennial: Ghost Riders And Rest Stops

Summary

by Sheri Sohm. The need to communicate has caused many programs and systems to be invented. Communities come and go as human needs change.

Materials

Thompson, George, *Some Dreams Die - Utah Ghost Towns and Lost Treasures*, Dream Garden Press, Great Salt Lake City, 1982 (permission granted by Dream Garden Press). This book has wonderful stories about historic settlements in Utah. They tell the history of the area and also give suggestions for locating lost treasure!

Teacher Preparation: Selections are to be cut apart and put in envelopes to be read over a period of days. The shorter selections might be grouped in twos or threes.

Envelopes for selected readings (teacher provided)

Introductory letter in historic dialect

Selected readings to be placed in envelopes as daily letters

Map from the lesson material

Obtain or draw a large wall map of Utah to be used to track the progress of the Pony Express and Overland Stage. Map should suggest major geographic features and county divisions (teacher or student provided)

Individual maps of present day Utah. These can be obtained from Utah Travel Council - preferably one per student (teacher provided).

Background for Teachers

Early Utahans missed far away friends and family just as we do today. The Pony Express and Overland Stage were created to help the settlers communicate with and visit the rest of the country. Although a good idea, the horse powered express and stage line was fraught with complications and hardship.

Communities and rest stops were created to support the venture. Some settlements prospered while others failed when telegraph lines and the railroad replaced the need for the Pony Express and stage lines. Left behind are scattered foundations, shacks, and other remnants as ghostly reminders of the past.

This lesson is comprised of small selected histories to be shared with students over several days. Each selection describes communities or 'stops' along the route. The teacher might use the selections as a daily reading lesson with older students, or as 'story time' with younger students. The teacher might wish to alter the language and content level to appropriately match the maturity of the class. Use the stories and accompanying map to trace the route and compare present day communities with those of the past.

Intended Learning Outcomes

Students will gain information about the Pony Express and Overland Stage. They will understand why small communities or rest stops 'popped' up along the trail.

Students will find that the Pony Express was an exciting but short-lived solution to the problem of long distance communication.

Students will discover that the development of communities is fluid. Towns come and go as situations change.

Students will learn that problem-solving is an on-going task. Although the Pony Express was a good idea it was quickly replaced by more effective means of communication. Ideas are

consistently updated and made more efficient as knowledge and available resources improve.

Instructional Procedures

See preface material for the Utah Centennial Lesson Plans book.

Place the first letter in an envelope and tell students that a letter addressed to their class was found this morning. Make the envelope look old, worn and dusty! Ask students to guess where it might have come from. Read letter to the students. (This letter introduces the topic to the students. It explains that letters will be coming to the class on a regular basis.)

Create a wall map of Utah and explain that the class will mark the map each day the letters arrive. Students will be charting the trail of the Pony Express across Utah.

Create a Pony Express 'Delivery Stop' within the classroom. This can be a 'mail bag' or a mail box. Ask students to decide where future letters should be delivered and leave a sign so the rider can find it.

On the second day, 'deliver' the next letter to the place identified by the students. Read the letter and show the accompanying map. Use this map to approximate where communities would be found today and mark the settlement on the classroom map. Discuss the readings.

Skip the third day delivery. When students arrive and check the mail drop, have them brainstorm the many varied problems that would have interfered with Pony Express delivery. This list will include: Indian and bandit raids, a sick rider, delays in postal delivery further up the line, wounded or lame horse, getting lost, etc. Ask students to make suggestions that might solve these problems. Have students write the suggestions as letters to leave in the box for the Pony Express rider (review appropriate letter writing form).

Continue to deliver the mail daily. Daily letters might include a single selection or several. (Teachers may choose how many and which selections to include in these lessons. Just make sure that they follow the same order of inclusion so that map recordings will remain sequential.)

Discuss what has been learned from the daily readings. Questions might include: How do these settlements compare with our community? What rest stops do we have today? (Rest stops along the road are provided during a long drive, the 7-11 stores and other fast food places are a form of rest stop.) Brainstorm others.

Discover which communities exist today and which have become ghost towns by comparing the community names within the present counties of Utah using present day maps.

After all letters have been read, explain that the Pony Express and stage lines disappear after the introduction of the telegraph and railroad met the need for communication and travel in a more efficient way. Discuss the more recent means of communication and travel. How are computers and Cellular phones changing today's world. How will communication continue to change in the future?

Extensions

Students will plot the progress of the Pony Express as they read about each settlement in the daily letters.

Students will analyze the problems facing the Pony Express and offer their solutions in written letters. Students will research a present day map in order to determine which communities were part of the Pony Express route and which have now disappeared.

Students will add contemporary town names to the map. Find present day towns close to the 'stops' used by the Pony Express.

Students will discuss what elements are needed to keep a community alive.

Students will describe the problems facing mail delivery and travel in today's world.

Students may wish to explore the reason why their community was settled. Were the early residents assigned to their area by religious leaders, did the community grow because of mining, industry, farming, or due to proximity to the railroad or a highway?

Research the local and adjoining communities. Are there areas that have become 'ghost towns?' What is left of the community? What can be discovered about the area? Brainstorm ways in which these communities could have avoided becoming ghost towns. Students may wish to study the present postal service. Invite a postal worker to speak to the class and discuss the present method of mail delivery. Schedule a field trip to the local post office and ask for a tour. Compare and contrast the problems facing the past and present mail systems.

Authors

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