

Mountain Man Rendezvous

Summary

The mountain man rendezvous were unique occurrences, associated with fur trappers, where many cultures joined in the intermountain west from 1825 to 1840 and made exchanges of goods, services and skills that influenced all who participated. These events also had great impact on westward expansion of the United States.

Time Frame

4 class periods of 45 minutes each

Group Size

Small Groups

Materials

Materials vary according to the stations available at the rendezvous.

Trading Post- small trinkets, candies, beads, drinks, etc. to barter with the students for 'pelts' they earn at various activities.

Ash Cakes- frozen rolls to use as the cakes, butter, honey, sticks to remove and turn the cakes, a fire with good coals.

Rope-making- a hand-cranked rope-making machine and twine to make the rope.

Trapping- some large traps similar to those used to trap beaver, several small traps that students can learn to set.

Muzzleloading- muzzleloaders, black powder, caps, patches, wadding.

Hawk Throwing- (optional: only if activity is well-supervised and safety measures have been taken) several tomahawks, wood stump to throw hawks at.

Traditional Games- materials vary according to games played.

Tepee Tour- if a tepee is available, it could be demonstrated how to put it up and purposes for different parts.

Story Telling/ Mountain Man Vocabulary- Stories to tell and mt. man vocabulary and their meaning.

Fire-starting- flint and steel sets, char cloth, tinder.

Beadwork- seed beads, beading loom, beading wire, thread, fishing line or dental floss.

Other stations can be organized depending upon the expertise of those in charge of the station and student needs.

Background for Teachers

The best way we have found to do this activity includes all of the 7th grade students that are currently in Utah Studies classes. We work together with as many teachers, staff, administrators and community people as we can. As we divide the responsibilities of the activities, it becomes easier to manage.

Students are organized into activity groups and they rotate through about eight stations (each lasts approximately fifteen minutes) at the rendezvous.

During the week of the rendezvous, teachers hand out pelts or pelts (small printed papers that represent hides) that the students can use in their bartering at the rendezvous. Students can earn more pelts by good behavior, participation, doing well on an assignment, or anything the teacher determines worthy of awarding additional pelts. Teachers should look for opportunities to give the pelts as positive reinforcement. Make it fun!

Pelts can be traded for trinkets, candies, drinks, shooting a muzzleloader, honey on an ashcake, marshmallows, etc.

Remember that the value of pelts varied according to supply and demand as well as many other reasons.

Intended Learning Outcomes

Participating in a rendezvous, students will gain hands-on experience with some activities relating to this time period. Students will demonstrate a working knowledge of basic mountain man skills as they go from station to station at the school rendezvous.

Instructional Procedures

The introductory set that we use is a set of slides depicting re-enactments of mountain man rendezvous. As we show the slides to the students, we discuss some of the activities, clothing, equipment and skills associated with mountain men. Most of the slides were taken at the Fort Buenaventura (Ogden) and Fort Bridger, Wyoming rendezvous.

1st day- slides are shown of mountain man rendezvous re-enactments and discussion is conducted concerning the reason for a rendezvous, skills, equipment, dress, and activities of the mountain men. Encourage students to dress in period clothing for the rendezvous the next day.

2nd day- organize students into activity groups, take them to their first station, continue all afternoon through the rotation of stations at the school rendezvous. This will take the last two or three class periods of the day.

Extensions

The rendezvous can be very flexible to meet the needs of your students. You will find that some students, which may not excel in the classroom, do very well with this activity. Especially the outdoor-oriented students tend to do well at the rendezvous. Almost all students enjoy and learn from the activity.

Bibliography

Ellsworth, S. George The New Utah's Heritage (Peregrine Smith Books,) Montgomery, David Mountainman Crafts and Skills (Horizon Publishers and Distribut, 1992) Gowans, Fred Rocky Mountain Rendezvous (Gibbs Smith, 1985)

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