

Centennial: What's In A Name: UTAH

Summary

by Sheri Sohmi. History is constantly redefined.

Materials

Utah history books.

Deseret News article, 'Utah, The Riddle Behind the Name', Lynne Arave staff writer, Sunday July 10, 1994.

Background for Teachers

The indigenous people of the Salt Lake Valley and northeast Utah, were the Ute Indians. Tradition and some history books claim that 'Utah' comes from the name of this tribe. Students will understand that even published information might not contain the entire truth. Word of mouth, legends, and inaccurate research can obscure the truth. This incorrect information may then be passed from one source to another. Students will better understand how more than one source should be considered in order to get closer to the truth.

Intended Learning Outcomes

Students will discuss the possible origins of the word 'Utah.'

Students will use multiple resource sources to present a more accurate picture.

Students will discover that historic ideas change as new information is discovered or reexamined.

Instructional Procedures

See preface material for the Utah Centennial Lesson Plans book.

Ask students, 'Where did the name, Utah, come from?'

Ask teachers and parents for their opinions about the origin of the word. Ask students to look up the answers in history books and encyclopedias. Share findings to see if the sources agree.

Play the Gossip Game. Students sit in circles. One student is asked to think of a word or phrase to whisper to the nearest neighbor. This student whispers to the next, until the whispered phrase goes around the circle and comes back to the original speaker. The last person will tell what they heard. Has the wording remained the same? Discuss what happens when people repeat something over time.

Explain that history goes through much the same process. Except where specific facts are recorded on the spot, changes come about each time a person perceives an idea through their own eyes.

Read sections of the Deseret News article, 'Utah, The Riddle Behind the Name.'

Count and list the variations on the name, 'Utah.'

Ask students, 'What can we conclude from reading this article?' (Definitions have been passed from source to source. Writers did not attempt original research, there might not be a correct answer and sometimes things seem true because they are repeated many times.). Ask students, 'How might we best find true historical facts?'

Discuss the need for additional sources when seeking accurate information.

Brainstorm a list of resources to use when doing research. Dictionary, encyclopedia, magazines, subject specific books, library research files, primary sources, interviews, experts, etc.

List three possible sources that might give accurate answers to, 'Where did Utah get its name?'

Research or contact the sources.

Share findings.

Extensions

Ask students to write down the name their community and several street names near their home.

Ask students how they might discover the origin of the names of their city, community, and street.

Brainstorm possible sources. (Neighbors, developers, city records, plans etc.)

Ask students to use at least three sources while seeking the answer to the questions above.

Have students share their findings. Did all students receive the same answers? (Teachers will provide several sources for the students to use during this activity.)

To show how difficult it is to get everyone to agree on details, ask all students to write a one page paper on the events of a single school day. Compare student reports noticing the striking differences.

Look at the street names around the school. Give the streets new names that relate to the environment or history of the neighborhood.

Authors

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