

Centennial: Hunt For The Blind Miner's Mine

Summary

by Sheri Sohm. Authentic documents connect education to the real world and encourage curricular integration.

Materials

Reading material and map from the Forest Service Publication on Big Cottonwood Canyon. The blind miner story and drawing taken from a restaurant called 'The Blind Miner,' once found within the Brighton Ski resort (permission: Don Despaine).
Ruler, pencils and paper.
Authentic gold pan or a pie tin to represent this prospecting tool (optional: teacher provided).

Background for Teachers

Mining has an important place in the history of Utah. The stories behind each mine tell of individuals who risked their lives in search of treasure. The Blind Miner worked his mine in Big Cottonwood Canyon, an area now famous not for mineral treasure but for great skiing! His story shows tenacity and creativity in the face of hardship.

Real life demands an integration of skills often taught in isolation during school studies. This lesson uses authentic documents to help students piece together historic information and make a hypothesis. It also provides the opportunity for integrating lessons using math, map reading, reading comprehension, analysis, synthesis, and creative problem solving. Depending on student interest and class time, the lesson might be extended over several days.

TEACHER'S NOTE: This lesson provides students with information about a real mine. It will be important to explain that these old mine shafts are very dangerous. Although most open mines have now been locked and closed, students must understand that they should never attempt to explore any of the old mines that are found throughout Utah. At some point in the lesson it might be helpful to take students to a room that can be completely darkened to impress on them the fact that the shafts are disorienting and dangerous.

Intended Learning Outcomes

Students will use authentic readings to understand a subject from different points of view.

Students will comprehend vocabulary and content. Students will use multiple sources to approximate the site of the Blind Miner's mine.

Students will become familiar with map reading skills, identifying compass points, using the key, measuring mileage, and approximating distances.

Students will use math, reading comprehension and map skills to complete the lesson.

Instructional Procedures

See preface material for the Utah Centennial Lesson Plans book.

Show students the gold pan or pie tin. Explain that many of Utah's early settlers were prospectors looking for gold and silver.

Explain that each prospector had his own story and method of looking for treasure. Some panned for gold using a pan with ridges to catch gold dust, others dug mines throughout Utah.

Use Authentic Documents to Broaden Historic Understanding: Explain that history is not only found in history books, but in publications such as newspapers, brochures, pamphlets, newsletters, tourist information publications, oral histories, maps, etc. Multiple sources give information from different points of view and broaden historic understanding.

Pass out three documents. The Big Cottonwood Canyon information page, The Blind Miner Story and the map. Read the marked section on the information page with students following along. This article describes mining experiences in the canyon. It makes reference to a blind miner who worked his claim in the canyon for several years. It does not specify the location of the Blind Miner's mine but sites the approximate location of the nearby Maxfield mine. (This section can be read by the teacher or a student depending on reading ability.) Ask students to note the facts of the story. What were names of significant sites, names of people working in the canyon, where was the Maxfield Mine and the Blind Miner's mine located in relation to sites, etc. Now read the story of the Blind Miner. How does a this source compare and differ from the other information?

Ask students to describe what they know about the area after reading both sources.

Assign students to act as detectives and locate the approximate site for the Blind Miner's mine by using the information gleaned from the sources.

Study the map of Big Cottonwood Canyon.

Ask students to identify north, south, east and west on the map and within the classroom.

Review the purpose of map's key, and discuss specific sites on the map.

Ask students to use what they know about the area to measure the map and present a hypothesis about the location of the Blind Miner's mine. Students will mark the site and justify their decision.

Notice the approximate location of the mine noted on the small map.

Discuss student findings.

Discuss the advantages of multiple sources when studying a subject. Recognize the fact that the lesson does not include the exact location of the mine. Students may choose which site seems the most accurate by the logic used in the student papers.

Extensions

Students will mark the site where they think the Blind Miner's mine could be located today. Students will hand in the map and a written paper justifying their location by referring to the facts in the readings. Students will write a short story using the Blind Miner as a character.

NOTE: Present use of The Blind Miner's Mine. The Blind Miner's Mine has been closed and locked to the public but it does still perform a useful purpose. It is an excellent home for bats! The mine is studied as a local bat habitat.

Research local mining. Invite speakers interested in present or past mining ventures to meet with the class.

Discover what was mined locally and ask students to bring samples of the material. Find products showing how the material is used. Encourage students to use authentic reading material as an educational source. Select an interesting subject and assign an information 'scavenger hunt' where students accumulate relevant information from a variety of sources. Assign teams to see which group can collect many, varied and unusual types of information.

Act out the situation faced by the blind miner. How did he create straight shafts? How would the students make a straight line if they were blind? Ask students to act out or describe how they would overcome the same handicap.

Authors

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