

Exploring the West Using Fiction

Summary

The purpose of this activity is to use works of fiction to help explore post Civil War development of the American West. A secondary purpose is to integrate Language Arts curriculum with Social Studies.

Enduring Understanding: Students will understand the development of the American West following the Civil War.

Essential Questions:

What were the factors that brought people west?

What were the factors contributing to the settlement of the West?

What were some of the conflicts that arose among various groups involved in the settlement of the West?

Time Frame

2 class periods of 45 minutes each

Group Size

Small Groups

Life Skills

Thinking & Reasoning, Communication

Materials

Western novel by Louis L'amour or other western writer.

Overhead projector or whiteboard

Background for Teachers

Teachers must be knowledgeable about the development of the American West, specifically as it relates to the objectives in the state core curriculum. A knowledge of the works of Louis L'amour or other western novelists would also be helpful.

Student Prior Knowledge

In order for this lesson to be successful, students need to be able to work cooperatively.. Students need knowledge of how to write a multi paragraph essay.

Instructional Procedures

Pre lesson activity:

Step 1 Ask the class what they think of when they hear the term American West.

Step 2 Record all answers on the board or on an overhead transparency.

Step 3 When students have exhausted their knowledge; begin grouping responses into categories such as myth and reality.

Step 4 Poll students as to where they acquired their knowledge and categorize the usefulness of those sources for academic purposes.

Step 5 Direct students to select a novel by a western writer and complete questions from the Exploring the American West worksheet outside of class. (attached)

Lesson activity:

Step 1 Divide the class into small groups of 3-5 students.

Step 2 Each group selects a group leader and a scribe.

Step 3 Each group member shares what they found in their novel as directed by the worksheet with the other members of the group.

Step 4 Each group compares and contrasts the findings of the individual group members.

Step 5 The scribe records the findings of the group on a master list to be turned in to the teacher.

Step 6 The teacher brings the class back together when all groups have completed their lists.

Step 7 Each group leader shares the findings of their group with the class. The teacher will record similarities and overall themes to help the class make connections.

Step 8 Assign each student to write a multi paragraph essay outlining their new knowledge of the American West. Essays should include individual findings, group findings and a comparison with other sources, notably the text or other teacher introduced material.

Strategies for Diverse Learners

For gifted students: Expand the assignment to include a movie and an academic work comparing the access of information between visual and verbal styles and accuracy of information.

For struggling students: Assign all students the same book and simplify the assignment eliminating the essay and focusing only identifying conflicts and the railroad.

Assessment Plan

Students will be assessed in three ways.

- completion of a novel

- active participation in a group

- completion of a multi paragraph essay illustrating their new knowledge of the American West including individual findings, group findings and a comparison with other sources, notably the text or other teacher introduced material

Rubrics

[6+1 Trait Writing Rubric](#)

[Exploring the American West Using Fiction Essay](#)

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