

Raising the Mormon Battalion

Summary

The decision to send 500 Mormon soldiers to fight in the War with Mexico was a very difficult one for Brigham Young, and for his followers.

Time Frame

2 class periods of 45 minutes each

Group Size

Individual

Life Skills

Thinking & Reasoning

Materials

Copies (for teacher and each student) of excerpts from Pioneer journals, letters, and role play script (available from links below).

Background for Teachers

In 1846, as the impoverished group of Mormons prepared to move west from Iowa, Brigham Young asked the president of the Eastern States Mission, Jesse C. Little, to see what financial help the federal government might provide for their emigration to the west coast. The result of his inquiries was the formation of a battalion of 500 Mormon soldiers to fight in the war with Mexico. The Mormons were understandably nervous about the arrangement.

Intended Learning Outcomes

Students will simulate (role play) some of the original emotional responses to this request for soldiers. Students will list and evaluate reasons for and against creating the Mormon Battalion. Students will justify their own decision under such circumstances.

Instructional Procedures

Prior to class assign students to take the parts for which you have historical excerpts and role play parts (make copies of all linked items below). They can either be memorized, or read in class. Present background information to the class concerning the location and condition of the Mormons, their recent persecutions, and the hope Brigham Young had for receiving federal support. Introduce Jesse C. Little and the purpose of his meeting with President James K. Polk. (Refer to section entitled, 'Authorization of the Mormon Battalion' of the link, Background, in step 2.) Have the assigned students act out the meeting. Write 'For' and 'Against' on the board. Explain that as the army moved through Mormon camps to recruit for this battalion, most people had strong emotional feelings about the issue of whether to join or not. As students recite or read excerpts from some of these people's journals, the class lists (on the board) reasons for and against participating.

Suggested Order of readings: Wilford Woodruff Journal, June 26, 1846; Hosea Stout Diary, June 28, 1846 Brigham Young, July 1846 Orson Pratt Record Brigham Young Letter, July 1, 1846 As a class, discuss the points for and against joining. Evaluate the emotional cost against the financial gains. This could be done in the form of a debate between those with opposing ideas. Each student is to decide how they would have responded in the same situation. They are to justify this response, in

writing, hopefully basing their arguments on the discussion in step 5. Read Henry Bigler's journal entry and discuss the following points:

The battalion was formed and marched to fight in the war.

Many of those who joined did so only out of support for their leader, Brigham Young.

Even after this experience, although relatively positive for both parties, some of the same ill feelings between the Mormons and the federal government followed the Mormons to Utah. These feelings contributed to the Utah War--another story. Encourage students to do follow up study on the Mormon Battalion and its members.

Extensions

Students could write a full play about the recruiting of the Mormon Battalion, using excerpts as a basis.

Bibliography

Crockett, David Saints in the Wilderness: A Day-by-Day Pioneer Experience (Crockett--Privately Published,) Van Orden, Bruce The Raising of the Mormon Battalion (,)

Authors

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