

Heritage: Seeking Land or Gold

Summary

Students write a persuasive letter home defending their decision either to settle in Utah and farm the land, or to go on to California to seek gold.

Time Frame

1 class periods of 45 minutes each

Group Size

Individual

Life Skills

Communication

Materials

Reference books and texts about the gold rush and the westward migration; Writing materials

Background for Teachers

On January 24, 1848, gold was discovered at Sutters Mill in California. By 1849, thousands of pioneers were streaming west to seek their fortunes. The gold seeking pioneers became known as Forty-niners. Competition was fierce. Claims were staked wherever a miner thought there might be gold. If the miner could not prove there was gold in his claim he eventually had to move on and stake another claim. Many pioneers heading to Utah were enticed with the thoughts of riches. Life was hard and they had lost much when driven from their homes. Many weighed the decision: travel to the gold fields and possible riches, or settle in Utah where they would have their own homesteads and an opportunity to live peacefully with their families away from the hostile element that had driven them west.

Intended Learning Outcomes

Students will demonstrate skills of persuasive writing by analyzing a problem, making a decision, and writing a letter defending their choice.

Instructional Procedures

Teacher directs a class discussion on pros and cons of life as a forty-niner versus life as a community dweller and land owner in Utah. Go to essential questions in this unit. Review elements of persuasive writing. Students divide a paper into four columns. List the advantages and disadvantages of each choice. Students make a choice and write a letter to their imaginary family at Winter Quarters in Nebraska convincing them that they have made a good decision. Share letters with classmates.

Extensions

1. Divide into two groups: miners or settlers. Debate your choice.
2. Students determine how they will send their letters and how long it will take for delivery.

Assessment Plan

Use the historical narrative assessment rubric with persuasive writing. Include the use of pro and con arguments in highest level. Then no pro or con arguments in lowest level.

Authors

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