

A Pioneer Journal

Summary

Students will take on the persona of a pioneer boy or girl, and write a fictional series of journal entries describing, from a child's view, some of the events, hardships and adventures of the trek west

Time Frame

3 class periods of 45 minutes each

Group Size

Individual

Life Skills

Communication

Materials

Paper, pencils, colored pencils, crayons.

Background for Teachers

The journey along the Mormon Trail was a difficult yet exciting journey, whether one was in the initial company with Brigham Young, a later wagon company, or with a handcart company. The trek from a child's perspective must have been especially exciting and difficult. Children often shared many of the hardships, diseases and trials of the adults, yet many times did not have the deep understanding of why they were traveling out into the middle of nowhere. Often, the children could only trust their parents when they were told that they were going to a place where they could create a better life for themselves. What parts of the journey would have been exciting to a child? Which aspects of the journey were difficult? Monotonous? Dangerous?

Intended Learning Outcomes

Students will apply the knowledge they have of the pioneer journey along the Mormon Trail to a creative writing exercise in which they fictionally describe the events of the journey in their own words.

Instructional Procedures

Discuss how journals help a reader understand how life is the same and different from the writer's life. Obtain a journal from a pioneer who crossed the west to Utah as a child. Read some of the entries that describe some of the feelings, activities and events of the child while on the trek. Please refer to the bibliography list. Have each student take on the persona of a pioneer boy or girl. Have the students write four or five journal entries describing their hardships, adventures, chores, meals, and sights along the trail. Each entry could correspond to a particular day and year. Students could choose places of historic or geographic significance along the trail for their entries (Fort Bridger/Laramie, Chimney/Independence Rock, South Pass, Martin's Cove, Emigration Canyon, etc.) Encourage students to write as descriptively as possible, describing sights, events and feelings. Similes and metaphors could be used to heighten the descriptions. After a first draft is completed of the four or five entries, revise and edit with class members. Write a final draft of the journal. Include illustrations and/or maps with each entry. Make a cover for the journal. Brown construction paper can be crinkled and rubbed to make it appear leathery. Black

markers or crayons can be used to write the name of the fictional pioneer child. With a hole punch, several holes can be punched along the left side of the journal, and gold yarn can be woven through the holes to make it appear as a stitched leather journal.

Extensions

To carry this activity further, in art the students can draw a picture of their fictional pioneer characters complete in the kind of clothes a pioneer child might wear on the journey and with an appropriate background from the journey.

Bibliography

McCormick, John The Utah Adventure (Gibbs-Smith,)

Jones, Helen Over the Mormon Trail (Children's Press, Chicago,)

Stegner, Wallace The Gathering of Zion, The Story of the Mormon Trail (University of Nebraska Press,)

Nelson, Melba Nadson John Joshua Tanner Family (John Joshua Tanner Family Assoc.,)

Authors

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