

Out in the Middle of Nowhere: Inevitable Lifestyle Changes from the Mormon Migration

Summary

Mormons sought isolation from the U.S. by settling in an unwanted remote region of the west. Mormon leaders' decisions of place and purpose created misunderstandings that resulted in U.S. government action against the Mormons. Examining cause and effect helps to interpret what happened in the 'Utah War.'

Time Frame

2 class periods of 45 minutes each

Group Size

Small Groups

Life Skills

Thinking & Reasoning

Materials

1) Role definition Card for each of the three groups: Mormons in Utah in 1850's, U.S. Government under President Buchanan, and territorial officials and travelers that went back east.; 2) Discussion Sheets that allow small groups to rank-order the issues.

Background for Teachers

Isolation breeds misunderstandings. The 'Utah War' of 1857-58 is the culminating event caused by the Utah Mormons' isolation. This isolation created a stronger group identity, a desire to establish a theocratic leadership, a false sense of safety and independence, and poor communications with the rest of the world. Meanwhile the U.S. Government felt threatened. They were undergoing state's rights issues that eventually tore apart the nation. They were looking to the west for gold and land, and they were hearing (and believing) scandalous reports of tyranny and lawlessness from disgruntled Federal officials and travelers going back east. This simulation deals with these issues as three groups of students role-play these various positions, reenacting the cause and consequences of this time period.

Intended Learning Outcomes

Students should be able to:

- a) recognize reasons for isolation of the early Mormons,
- b) recognize reasons the U.S. felt threatened by the Mormons,
- c) see how these factors set in motion a series of confrontations, and
- d) understand how looking at cause/effect relationships is an example of historical thinking.

Instructional Procedures

Have students relate to a time they wished to be alone or with a small group of close friends. Discuss the reasons for wanting to be left alone, and how others may have wanted them to join the larger group or family. Point out group dynamics -- how we deal with the loner, how we rely on pressures to conform. Tell the students that this same kind of dynamic created something we call the 'Utah War.' Have them think about group dynamics as they go through the simulation of the early Mormons and

U.S. government group dynamics of the 1850's. Refer to the list of essential questions and themes for the Heritage Gateway Project for related lesson ideas. Assign students to three groups: Mormons in Utah under Brigham Young's direction, President Buchanan and the U.S. government, and territorial officials and travelers going back east.

Have students read and understand their Role Cards that describe the basic beliefs and attitudes about government, autonomy, and group dynamics. Supplement the statements on the Role Cards with specific eyewitness accounts or journal entries from some of the internet sites listed below.

Role Card should include these basics:

Mormons:

- 1) Non-mormon communities and mobs had persecuted, destroyed, and harrassed Mormon communities for several years. Escaping this persecution geographically was a way of protecting themselves.
- 2) Previous governors and even the President of the United States chose to ignore or even abet the persecutions against the Mormons.
- 3) Mormons followed a prophet. When Brigham Young spoke, believing Mormons saw this as the word of the Lord.
- 4) Polygamy was a divine law that allowed for many women to be married, build up families, and support the growing settlement.
- 5) Sacrifice was the way to show commitment to God's Kingdom on earth. If the Lord required great hardships, they would be able to prove their faith.

U.S. Government Officials and Travelers from Salt Lake:

- 1)Mormons stuck together, seeing people not of their faith as 'gentiles' or unbelievers.
- 2)Their church controlled the supplies and trade for the entire region -- which meant travelers on the California Trail were at the mercy of the Mormons at this important stop-over.
- 3)Many Mormons had nothing good to say about the U.S. and wanted to be a separate 'State of Deseret.'
- 4)The real power was in church courts, with church leaders, and the final word was Brigham Young. People couldn't find justice outside of the church.
- 5)Not everyone was happy with the government by Brigham Young. He was not allowing people to have their rights of true citizens with his rule over every aspect of people's lives, and rebellion against him was forming. Many people wanted to be free of the power of the church.

The President and Washington officials:

- 1)Two 'relics of barbarism' still existed that the government was elected to destroy: slavery and polygamy. The Mormons were still practicing polygamy, and needed to be brought in line with the morality of the rest of the nation.
- 2)State's rights were being used as an excuse for many states to hold slaves. If the Mormons wanted to have their own state, they needed to be under the firm control of the federal government.
- 3)The U. S. Territorial government should be the arbiter and final law of the land, not someone who professed to be a prophet. We believe in a democracy, not a dictatorship of someone not elected by law. Supply each group with a Discussion Sheet. This is what the group uses to decide and record their ideas about what is most important for their group. Included on these sheets should be situations and position statements that they agree or disagree with, rank-ordering the importance of these statements. The Discussion Sheet can have these issues on it:
 - 1) A group of people should be governed by majority rule.
 - 2) If a man were caught stealing irrigation water, he should be tried in a local court of his ecclesiastical (religious) leaders instead of government courts.
 - 3) Total control over a people by a religious leader should not be allowed, even with freedom of religion.
 - 4) Land rights are a federal government responsibility.

5) People should be allowed to worship as they wish. If this means doing strange things and following a lifestyle that may be opposite of what others expect, but they are not breaking the law, they should be left alone.

6) A group of people that control an area through which many people travel should be governed by someone that has everybody's best interests in mind.

(Some of these statements should include specific clashes that the Mormons had with the U.S. in governmental, cultural, and religious difference.) Isolate all three groups as they discuss their issues. Then have the third group, the territorial officials and travelers back east, communicate between the other two groups. They are to give their version of how they see issues defined by the two groups, from their own position on the issues. Guide them to see how they can incite emotions if they exaggerate both sides. Ask each group how to resolve the conflict. Have them write down a solution. Then debrief. Have each group share their positions and solutions. Then give them direct instruction on the events building up to the Utah War of 1857. Let them see how things got out of hand, similar to what the three groups of students just did. Include the accounts of Col. Kane and how he averted a conflict. Demonstrate on the board how each incident/attitude created causes and effects by drawing a cause/effect flowchart. Assess understanding with a group essay or discussion: What do you think Col. Kane said to each group that allowed them to come to a peaceful compromise? What issues remain that were unresolved?

Extensions

Possible related projects: students could research the powers of territorial government and determine why the people of Utah would rather it be a state than a territory. Students could also research biographies of President Brigham Young, President Buchanan, Col. Johnston, Capt. Van Vliet, Governor Cumming, Orin Porter Rockwell, Lot Smith, Col. Thomas Kane.

Assessment Plan

A rubric for the group essay or group discussion of how Col. Kane mediated the conflict should include various levels of competency: supporting assertions with specific and accurate information, clear logic, and getting the main ideas.

Bibliography

Powell, Allan Kent Utah History Encyclopedia (University of Utah Press,) Poll, Richard D. Utah's History (Brigham Young University Press,) Arrington, Leonard J. Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints (University of Nebraska Press,)

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