

Virtual Capitol Lessons

The Gold Rush, 1849

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Grade Level	Fourth
Class Period(s)	2

This lesson is designed to precede or follow a field trip to Lincoln or a virtual field trip (<http://nebraskavirtualcapitol.org>) to the Nebraska Capitol.

Nebraska Social Studies Standards

SS 4.3.1 Students will explore where (spatial) and why people, places and environments are organized in the state.

SS 4.3.1.a Read local and state maps and atlases to locate physical and human features in Nebraska.

SS 4.3.5 Students will identify how humans have adapted to and modified different environments in Nebraska.

SS 4.3.5.a Describe the impact of extreme natural events in on the human and physical environment.

SS 4.4.1 Students will examine chronological relationships and patterns, and describe the connections among them.

SS 4.4.1.d Examine the chronology of historical events in Nebraska and their impact on the past, present, and future.

SS 4.4.2 Students will describe and explain the relationships among people, events, ideas, and symbols over time using multiple types of sources.

SS 4.4.2.a Describe and explain the relationships among historical people, events, ideas, and symbols, including various cultures and ethnic groups, in Nebraska by era

SS 4.4.2.c Differentiate between primary and secondary sources.

SS 4.4.3 Students will describe and explain multiple perspectives of historical events.

SS 4.4.3.a Distinguish how various sources relate their perspectives of Nebraska history

SS 4.4.5 Students will develop historical research skills.

SS 4.4.5.b Identify, obtain, and cite appropriate sources for research about Nebraska, incorporating primary and secondary sources

Nebraska Language Arts Standards

LA 4.1.5 Vocabulary: Students will build and use conversational, academic, and content-specific grade level vocabulary.

LA 4.1.5.c Acquire new academic and content-specific grade-level vocabulary, relate to prior knowledge, and apply in new situations.

LA 4.1.6 Comprehension: Students will construct meaning by using prior knowledge and text information while reading grade-level literary and informational text.

LA 4.1.6.e Determine main ideas and supporting details from informational text and/or media.

LA 4.1.6.f Use text features to locate information and explain how the information contributes to an understanding of print and digital text.

LA 4.1.6.h Compare and contrast similar themes, topics, and/or patterns of events in literary and informational texts to develop a multicultural perspective.

LA 4.2.1 Writing Process: Students will apply the writing process to plan, draft, revise, edit, and publish writing using correct spelling, grammar, punctuation, and other conventions of standard English appropriate for grade-level.

LA 4.2.1.d Compose paragraphs with grammatically correct sentences of varying length, complexity, and type.

LA 4.2.2 Writing Modes: Students will write in multiple modes for a variety of purposes and audiences across disciplines.



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LA 4.2.2.b Provide evidence from literary or informational text to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Overview

Many who sought California gold crossed Nebraska on their way west. They faced challenges from nature and had an impact on the native cultures they encountered.

Key Vocabulary

Big Muddy-the Missouri River

Breaking-taming and training an animal so that it can be ridden or do work

Ferry-a boat used to take people, wagons, and goods across a river or lake

Forded-crossed

Habitation, habitat-a place where people or animals live

Hubs-center part of a wheel

Keeness-intelligence

Lashed-tied

Manifest Destiny- belief that the expansion of the US throughout the American continents was both justified and inevitable

Obtain-get, receive

Play-use

Profited largely thereby-made a much better difference because of it

Quicksand-a deep bed of soft sand saturated with water that will suck down objects

Reminiscence-a story told about a past event remembered by the narrator

Torrents-a violent downpour

Trades-occupations/types of work

Materials

US map

Student Atlas of Nebraska p. 23

Copies for each student:

- Gold Rush Document A Shimer and Conwell, "JAMES SHIMER'S TRIP TO CALIFORNIA IN '49," 1915
- Gold Rush Document B Jacob Allender, "Adventures and Experiences of a Forty-Niner"

Procedures

SESSION ONE

1. Explain to students that they will be reading original documents in order to understand the Gold Rush and the role it played in Manifest Destiny (define for students). Two of the documents are reminiscences (define). The documents have been modified so they are easier to read.

"A **reminiscence** is written later in life, long after the events being described. Reminiscences are the most suspect form of 'eyewitness testimony' to history because of the many years that have passed. Historians generally check their accounts against diaries and journals, which were usually written only hours or days after the events they chronicle, as well as other forms of primary documentary evidence ... (<http://www.octa-trails.org/search/oregon-trail-diaries>)

***It is important for students to know that the two men who wrote the documents were part of a group that traveled together from Ohio hoping to reach the gold fields of California. They faced many challenges but persisted.



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Distribute Document A, preview vocabulary, and guide students through the reading. Allow students time to think and share something they found interesting in small groups followed by a class discussion. Students must record some of their thoughts or have them note their thinking directly on the documents as they read.

2. Repeat the procedure for Document B. Check for understanding and clarify as needed. After reading about just a few of the challenges they encountered, ask students to predict whether the men reached California (they did) and explain reasons for their predictions.

SESSION TWO

1. Provide time for student to review Documents A and B. Use a t-chart to compare the two documents. Note the differences in the men's accounts, especially the events that each remembered as significant.

Allender-focused on crossing the Missouri River, expressed unfounded concerns about Indians
Shimer-recalled torrential rain, mules being able to "smell" water

Ask students to consider whether the two men's accounts would have been more similar if they had recorded their thoughts in a journal within a day or so of the events or if they had maintained a regular diary.

"A **journal** is usually written in on a more irregular schedule to record events which struck the writer as significant or interesting. Journals have a certain element of storytelling in them which diaries often lack..."
<http://www.octa-trails.org/search/oregon-trail-diaries>

2. Remind students of a significant event at your school where all or most of them were present. It could be something like a class party, assembly, or concert. Ideally it would have occurred at least a month prior so memories may not be clear. Without discussing it, give students a minute or two to record on paper something they recall from the event. Then have them share and see which occurrences most remember and if they recall them in the same way. (For example, one student might remember a solo at the concert while another recalls the microphone squealing or a music stand falling over.) Compare this experience to the reminiscences of the Gold Rush seekers.

Assessment

Students should write a paragraph describing their experiences with the documents. They must cite evidence from the documents to support their thinking. Prompts may include:

Did you feel the reading was easy compared to your usual daily reading experiences? Why, why not?

Was the content interesting to you? Why, why not?

Do you think it is important for students to read primary documents or are secondary documents such as textbooks enough? Why, why not?

Extensions

Go to the Virtual Capitol Tour and enter the Foyer. Click on the mosaic "United States Survey."
Study the image and read the description, which says in part, "The deep, textured mural shows surveyors at work, with the bright, advancing world of the East behind them. Ahead of the surveyors lies the changing world of the bison, Native Americans, and homesteaders, under a setting sun."

<http://nebraskavirtualcapitol.org/>

Also, view "The Coming of the Railroad" in the Foyer.

Discuss how the mosaics illustrate the documents the students read.

The following link shows and describes the "United States Survey" mosaic in detail.

https://www.scribd.com/document/48509772/The-United-States-Survey-A-Capitol-Mural-by-Charles-Clement#download&from_embed



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Sources/Resources

<http://www.octa-trails.org/search/oregon-trail-diaries>

The Oregon-California Trails Association

<http://nebraskavirtualcapitol.org/>

Virtual Capitol Tour Website

<http://nebraskahistory.org/lib-arch/research/manuscripts/family/jacob-allender.htm>

Jacob Allender reminiscence

<http://www.mariposaresearch.net/SHIMERchron.html>

James Shimer's Trip To California In '49

http://nebraskastudies.unl.edu/0400/media/0404_0701trail_b/Forty-NinersTrail.html

This map shows the route followed by gold seekers from Independence, Missouri, across Nebraska to California.



Gold Rush Document A (Modified)

Background

The following is a reminiscent account by James Shimer and Colonel John Conwell of their trip to the gold fields of California. The group left Cadiz, Ohio, on March 20, 1849. This reminiscent account was published in the Evening Gazette in Reno, Nevada, on July 7, 1915, and in the Cadiz, Harrison County newspaper on July 22, 1915.

Shimer and Conwell, “JAMES SHIMER’S TRIP TO CALIFORNIA IN ’49,” 1915

One of the many adventures across the plains and over the mountains: when they were camped in North Platte Valley, one night there was a terrific storm. The tents were blown down and could not be made fast. Rain fell in torrents and hail covered the ground to a depth of three inches. In the morning they found themselves on a bed of quicksand. The wagons sank in the sand up to the hubs. The mule teams could not get close enough to the wagons. A long rope was attached to the wagons and boards were laid on the ground and placed near the wagon wheels. The men stood on the boards to prevent them from sinking in the sand. The mules were hitched to the rope, by pulling and the men by lifting, the wagons were finally brought out on safe ground. On the average they made twenty mile a day, one day fifty miles were covered. This was necessary in order to reach a place where they could obtain water.

1915 -- 1849

This wagon train had an easier trip than most of the pioneers. They attributed this to their mules. A majority of the pioneers crossed the plains with oxen, all the way from the Missouri River, they passed carcasses and skeletons of these animals. They had died of thirst and exhaustion. These pioneers knew nothing of how or where to locate water. The Shimer party did not have the know how either, but their mules did. When they were within four miles of the Humbolt River, the mules were on the point of dropping. Suddenly one of them whinnied, and the team stopped automatically, the mules sniffed and as if a starter had said “go” they took off at a terrific pace. There was no stopping them, they had smelled water. They ran right into the Humbolt River and did not stop until they had found the deepest place. In the river they again demonstrated their keenness. Instead of committing suicide as a horse or man would do when so nearly dead of thirst, they drank sparingly and remained in the middle of the river for more than an hour.

In this group there were several experienced hunters and they had no trouble killing two or three deer a day so they had plenty of food. They also did not have any trouble with the Indians.

Vocabulary

Torrents: a violent downpour

Quicksand: a deep bed of soft sand saturated with water that will suck down objects

Hubs: center part of a wheel

Obtain: get / receive

Keeness: intelligence

Source: Mariposa County, California History and Genealogy Research; created Nov, 2001; Jan 2015

Gold Rush Document B (Modified)

Vocabulary

Trades: occupations/types of work

Breaking: training and taming an animal so that it can be ridden or do work

Ferry: a boat used to take people, wagons, and goods across a river or lake

Big Muddy: the Missouri River

Habitation / Habitat: a place where people or animals live

Forded: crossed

Lashed: tied

Play: use

Profited largely thereby: made a much better difference because of it

Historical Background

The following is an undated reminiscent account by Jacob Allender, a member of the Cadiz, Ohio, group that included James Shimer and Colonel John Conwell. The group left Cadiz, Ohio, on March 20, 1849 for the California gold fields.

Jacob Allender, “Adventures and Experiences of a Forty-Niner”

In the year 1848, I was living in Cadiz, the county seat of Harrison County, Ohio, when the news came that gold had been discovered in California. The excitement was high; and nearly everybody was going to dig it out by the ton. People of all trades sat nearly every night and consulted, planned, and signed agreements to go in the following spring. Only 13 came forward and signed, out of more than 50 who talked the loudest at first.

Then we appointed a committee to go West and purchase mules. After their return with the mules, all but two were unbroken, never having been haltered. We then had a lively time breaking mules and getting firearms and knives with which to kill Indians.

(Continued on next page.)

3.

When we left Bear Lake, our next stop was St. Joseph. We tried to get across the River, but found that there was no chance without getting in line and waiting our turn - which would keep us there two weeks longer, so concluded to go on up the River and run our chances of getting over. We drove on up about 100 miles, crossed a corner of Iowa, bought as much corn as we could haul for feed, found a private ferry, and crossed the "Big Muddy". The first habitation of whites after crossing the River was what was then called Fort Childs or New Fort Kearney on the Platte River (Nebraska). Before we reached the Fort, we encountered quite a number of Indians - chiefly Pawnee - gave us no trouble. We forded the South Platte a little way above the Fort, then traveled up between the rivers before we crossed the North Branch, which we had to ferry in canoes lashed together; we swam our mules, had ropes which we fastened to the canoes, two mules to the other end and landed them safely one at a time. It took lots of rope; but we were provided with it, and it came in good play many times afterwards. We traveled then on the north side of the Platte for quite a distance with fairly good roads. Met Indians nearly every day; had no trouble with them, and got along fine. Plenty of game in sight most of the time, and we got our share of it. I remember when I killed the first blacktailed deer I ever saw, and the same day sage turkey. We had a fine feast the next day (Sunday) as we had made a rule not to travel on Sunday when we could avoid it. We cooked and washed on Sunday, and rested our mules, and profited largely thereby.

Source: Ropes/Kolstad family papers and the Nebraska State Historical Society, RG1134.AM: Jacob Allender

Gold Rush Document B (Allender - unmodified page)