

Pioneer Journals – Traveling Trunk Lesson Plan

Standards

Grade 4: Nevada Past and Present

- SS. 4.2: Generate and answer supporting questions and use them to construct arguments about the past.
- SS 4.6: Construct responses to compelling questions using reasoning, examples, and relevant details.
- SS 4.8: Participate in a structured academic discussion using evidence and reasoning to share and critique ideas.
- SS 4.10: Use deliberative and democratic procedures to take action about an issue.
- SS. 4.12: Analyze how Nevada’s population and culture have changed over time.
- SS 4.13: Analyze the diverse population of Nevada’s early inhabitants, natives, and settlers, and discuss their unique experiences and contributions.

Lesson Objectives

Understand: Much of what historians now know about the pioneers on the California Trail is because they left their stories behind for us in journals and diaries.

Know: The kinds of things the pioneers wrote about in their journals and what we can learn about their lives because of their journals.

Do: Read selected quotes from an emigrant journal and discuss the contents and what can be learned. Next, use writing prompts to allow the students to write their own journal entries using the information they learned from Sallie Hester’s journal and the contents of the trunk.

Assessment for Objectives

1. The students could be assessed based on their participation in the discussions.
2. They could also be assessed based on the contents of the pioneer journal entries they write themselves.

Introduction (10 minutes)/Discussion Questions

- Why did Americans move west to California?
 - Land
 - Gold Rush
 - Better Opportunities
 - Adventure
 - Religion
- What is the California Trail?
- How many of you keep a journal or a diary?
- Without getting too specific what kind of things do you write about in your journal?
- How do we know so much about the pioneers' experiences on the California Trail?
 - They kept journals. They wrote about the weather, road conditions, illness, people they met, miles traveled, their thoughts and feelings about their adventure and many other things.
- What were some of the reasons the emigrants would have kept journals on the trail?
 - To share with family and friends back home.
 - For future emigrants to use as guidebooks in the coming years.
 - For personal reasons

Activities and Transitions

- **Activity One (20 minutes)**
 - Take turns reading selected journal entries from Sallie Hester's journal.
 - Discuss the experiences she writes about and what we can learn from her journal.
 - Ask students what they would write about if they kept journals on the trail.
- **Activity Two (30 minutes)**
 - Using their knowledge of life on the trail and what they learned from Sallie Hester's journal have students complete their own page of pioneer journal entries.

- Students can write out their answers using their own pencil and paper
- As a writing prompt or inspiration, you could have the students each pick 5 items out of the trunk to include in their diary entries.
- Make sure to have the students include their thoughts and feelings about the trail, stories about the people they might have met (other emigrants or the Native Americans), the landscapes they encountered, any hardships they faced, miles traveled
- If your class has time and resources, you could make printer paper look like old fashioned paper by coating it with a light layer of cold coffee and allowing it to dry.

Closing (10 minutes)

- Discuss what the students wrote in their journal entries. A few students could read some of their journal entries aloud to the class. They could also compare them in small groups.
- The pioneers would have been writing in their journal after a long, hard day on the trail and after finishing their work around camp. It is really amazing that we have as many pioneer journals still available as we do today.

References and Materials Needed

- Provided in Trunk
 - Sallie Hester's Journal
 - Ink well
 - Writing desk
 - Quills
 - Example Journals
 - Other contents of the trunk
 - Pictures and Maps included on flash drive
- Not Provided in Trunk
 - Paper and pencil for writing project
- **Further Research and Resources**
 - <http://overlandtrails.lib.byu.edu/>

- <https://www.californiatrailcenter.org/bob-pearce-memorial-digital-library-catalog/>
- <https://www.loc.gov/collections/california-first-person-narratives/about-this-collection/>
- <https://www.californiatrailcenter.org/for-teachers/>
- <https://www.californiatrailcenter.org/for-kids/>
- <https://www.californiatrailcenter.org/resource-links/>