The Closing of the West: A C3 Lesson

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During the second half of the nineteenth century, many groups went west in hopes of a better life. This unit begins with a brief overview of “westward expansion” and how the United States gained territory as it fulfilled its goal of “manifest destiny.” The unit then examines the reasons various groups traveled westward in hopes of a prosperous new life, what their lives were like, and how they impacted the Native Americans already on the land. Students develop their literacy skills by reading primary and secondary sources, and responding to questions that they have generated. This particular lesson will focus on one of the groups that went west during this time period, the pioneer farmers known as sodbusters.

Introduction

Dimension 1: Questioning

Post the photo, Holding Down a Lot in Guthrie, 1889, (see p. 359) on a large screen in front of the classroom and make desk copies available to students. It can be obtained from https://www.archives.gov/research/american-west/images/136.jpg.

Using the Question Formulation Technique of the Right Question Institute, http://rightquestion.org/educators/resources/ have students work individually for two minutes to write questions they have about the photo. The Question Formulation Technique includes (1) designing a question focus; (2) having students produce as many questions as possible; (3) improving the questions by categorizing them as open or closed and the advantages of each; (4) choosing the most important questions of those written; and (5) planning what you are going to do to use those questions. Ask each student pair to share their “best” question. Repeat as time permits. As students share their questions, save these questions and post them somewhere in the room to guide the lessons and investigation related to this lesson.

Dimension 2: Use of Disciplinary Tools

Give a short overview of the events leading up to this point in U.S. history. Discuss the idea of manifest destiny, how it developed, and why it was important to the United States. Using a territorial map of the United States, ask students to explain how the U.S. gained the land that makes up the current nation. (Students should already be aware of this from previous study.) The teacher may even read excerpts of the journals of Lewis and Clark, kept during their expedition to explore the Louisiana Purchase (http://lewisclark.net/journals) to model disciplinary literacy strategies. This is an opportunity to make sure that all students have the same background knowledge needed for this unit of study.

As part of this overview using primary sources related to the early expansion of the United States, model for students the use of historical thinking skills such as sourcing, contextualization, and corroboration as discussed by the Stanford History Education Group, which can be found at https://sheg.stanford.edu/intro-materials under the “classroom posters.”

Dimension 3: Evaluate Sources and Use Evidence

Divide students into small groups. Using a text set of 4–6 documents and resources for each group, have each student group examine some of the following documents and resources using the appropriate Primary Source Analysis Tools from the Library of Congress (found at www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/guides.html) while keeping in mind the historical thinking skills modeled by the teacher. Give different resources to each group.

Resources to be evaluated and analyzed

1. Homestead Ads: Millions of acres. Iowa and Nebraska. Land for sale on 10 years credit by the Burlington & Missouri River R. R. Co. ... Buffalo. N. Y. Commercial advertiser
above: The David Hilton family near Weissert, Custer County, Nebraska. (Solomon D. Butcher, 1887)

right: “Holding Down A Lot In Guthrie.” By C. P. Rich, ca. 1889. 48-RST-78-77
PRODUCTS WILL PAY FOR LAND AND IMPROVEMENTS!

MILLIONS OF ACRES

View on the Big Bluff, between Camden and Grete, representing Valley and Rolling Prairie Land in Nebraska.

A SECTIONAL MAP, showing exact location of our IOWA LAND for sale for 30 Cents, and of NEBRASKA LAND for 30 Cents.

IOWA AND NEBRASKA

LANDS

FOR SALE ON 10 YEARS CREDIT

BY THE

Burlington & Missouri River R.R. Co.

AT 6 PER CT. INTEREST AND LOW PRICES.

Only One-Seven of Principal Due Annually, beginning Four Years after purchase.

20 PER CT. DEDUCTED FROM 30 YEARS PRICE, FOR CASH.

LAND EXPLORING TICKETS SOLD

and Cost allowed in First Interest paid, or Land bought in 30 days from date of ticket.

Thus our Land Buyers GET A FREE PASS in the State where the Land bought is located. These TERMS are BETTER at $5. than to preempt United States Land at $2.50 per Acre.

EXTRAORDINARY INREMENTS on Freight and Passage are AFFORDED to PURCHASERS and their FAMILIES.

Address GEO. S. HARRIS, LAND COMMISSIONER,
or T. H. LEAVITT, Ass’t Land Comm’r, Burlington, Iowa.

Or apply to

FREE ROOMS for buyers to board themselves are provided at Burlington and Lincoln.

COMMERCIAL ADVERTISER PRINTING HOUSE, BUFFALO, N. Y.

Burlington & Missouri River Railroad Co.; Buffalo. N. Y. Commercial advertiser printing house [1872].

Social Education

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First Homestead Certificate which was given to Daniel Freeman—https://www.docsteach.org/activities/student/the-settlement-of-the-american-west

Building a house on the prairie, 1884, http://digitalvaults.org/#/detail/1061/?record=1061

3. Read the Picture Book, Dandelions, by Eve Bunting for an overview of life on the prairie.


Family on the Nebraska prairie—http://memory.loc.gov/award/nbhips/lca/145/14567v.jpg


Gayville in Deadwood Gulch, Black Hills, Dakota, 1876—https://www.archives.gov/research/american-west/images/156.jpg


Midland, Texas, 1894—https://www.archives.gov/research/american-west/images/162.jpg


Prairie Settlement: Nebraska Photographs and Family Letters http://memory.loc.gov/ammmem/award98/nbhihtml/pshome.html


As each group collaborates on the resources given to them, the teacher should move about the classroom, asking questions and clarifying their work. After the allotted time working in groups to analyze the resources they have been given, students should reference the posted questions to see if they can answer any questions related to their group.

After each student group has finished, the teacher should direct a whole class discussion of what the students found in their review of the resources. Each student should then complete a summary graphic organizer of the information.

Dimension 4: Communicating Conclusions

As a summative assessment for this unit, students should complete a RAFT (Role, Audience, Format, and Topic).

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