



AFTERSCHOOL EXCHANGE ACTIVITY

MOVING TO THE FRONTIER

PREPARATION

Grade Levels: 4-7

This activity is most effective if delivered in at least three separate 30-minute periods with groups of 12 students.

Prerequisite:

If you have not seen the series FRONTIER HOUSE, spend some time on the Web site (<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/frontierhouse>) to get background. If you do not have easy Web access, read through this activity carefully to consider whether it is right for your program -- this activity is best used in a facility with a computer lab.

Materials:

- Handouts of the essay “Getting Started: Packing and Preparing for a New Life” (available at <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/frontierhouse/frontierlife/essay2.html>)
- Flip chart and markers
- 3 computers with Internet access or, if you don't have Internet access, print-outs of Web sites
- Poster board
- Paints, brushes
- Pencils

Academic Goals:

- Deeper appreciation of the challenges of frontier settlement in the American west of the late 1800's
- Application of basic arithmetic skills in creating a budget
- Introduction to economic concepts: eg. wages, costs, inflation

Social Goals:

- Participation in group decision-making and follow-through
- Sharing information in both small committees and larger group meetings
- Listening to and understanding others in a group

STEPS

Introductory Activity (30 minutes):

1. Gather the children in a meeting area with a flip chart. Write: WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT THE AMERICAN WEST across the top. Ask for their reactions to the words “The American West.” Write down their responses. Most of their responses will involve cowboys, Indians and army battles. After about four or five minutes (or when the paper is full), ask questions about things they may not have mentioned:
 - Were there women or children in the West?
 - Where did they live?
 - How did they get food?
 - Would they have gone to school?
 - What kind of work was there? (Contrast life on a homestead with life in a town or city.)
2. Transition to talking about the move from the city to the frontier by asking if they have ever moved, even from one apartment to another. Some will probably have moved from one city to another and even from one country to another. Have them describe the experience. What were the challenges? What work did they have to do for the move? What did they leave behind? How did they decide?
3. Ask them to close their eyes and imagine this scene: You are walking along a path. The path begins in your neighborhood, in an area that is familiar to you. The path leads into some woods. As you walk down the path, you go over hills, around a bend. The woods have gotten thicker, you can’t see where the path goes. Pause here and look back. You can’t see where you came from anymore. How does it feel at this spot?
4. Take a couple minutes to get responses from the participants. Then ask them to imagine that this path is the journey west. There will be no going back, no seeing that familiar place again. There is no way of seeing where you are going except to go there. On top of all that, imagine that you have to bring everything you need with you. This is not a walk. The US Government has offered 160 acres of land to anyone willing to settle and farm it. You and your family are going to move to Montana to start a new life as homesteaders. You must bring wagons filled with everything you will need and oxen to pull the wagons.
5. Explain that, as a group, you will be planning to move to a frontier homestead. There will be time to research the details, but first the group must decide how they will present their plans. The group will be divided in three smaller groups to find information on different aspects of the move: what is needed and what it will cost. Then each group will report back. Finally, the entire project will be presented in some kind of display.

6. Brainstorm what they want the final project to look like. Keep your space in mind: Can it stay on the walls? (In most school-based programs, it can't.) Should it be free standing and portable? Will it be all pictures with an accompanying brochure or do they want to include text in their pictures? Remind the children to keep the project in mind as they look at their websites.

Learning Activities:

Activity 1: Website exploration (30 min):

1. Divide the group into three smaller groups. Let them know that each group needs someone who is comfortable navigating between Web pages, but that everyone needs to get a turn and to try it out. Also, each group needs to record their findings. Get some suggestions of how they can share this responsibility and/or help the person recording. (Note: You will need to move from group to group throughout this activity to gently support and refocus the children in getting their work done.) They will also need someone to report back to the group, or decide who is reporting which part.
2. Each group will take one page of the essay from the FRONTIER HOUSE Web page, "Getting Started: Packing and Preparing for a New Life." Each page contains part of the packing list. They will be responsible for researching:
 - Why they need these things, and
 - What they cost.

(Note: As you move from group to group, you can help the children understand these lists by asking: "Why don't they think they can get this when they get there?" Or "How long is the trip and what do they need along the way?")

You can find many items and their costs on the Doctor Quinn Medicine Woman Web site, www.drquinnmd.com/drquinn/bank.htm.

Activity 3: Report Back (30 min):

Bring the group back together. Remind them what their final project is going to be. Tell them to think about what will make an interesting, attractive "look" when the project is finished. They should keep this in mind as they listen to each other. (This will remind them that they have to listen to each other...)

Activity 4: Preparing the Display (time varies):

Each small group should prepare a piece of the final display, based on their own research and the large group's decisions about the display. The timing on this depends on the group and how elegant you want the display to be. Children should sketch on the poster board first. You may choose to wait until the sketching is completed before distributing

the paint. This will insure that the most impulsive children don't dominate the look of your final product.

Extensions:

1. There is an inflation calculator at (<http://www.westegg.com/inflation/>). You can use this site to compare the costs of items in 1880 to costs in 2002 (when the calculator was posted).
2. Another great extension is to invite other groups to see the display. Let the children take turns introducing their work to the rest of the program. This will both reinforce the learning and give the youth a feeling of success and recognition.

CREDITS

This AFTERSCHOOL EXCHANGE activity was developed by Jonathan Shevin, Executive Director of Standing By Water, based on the Ed Online lesson plan "Math for the Frontier" <http://www.thirteen.org/edonline/lessons/frontiermath/index.html>