Tell My Story Too

Summary:
Through reading, writing, exposure to actual pioneer journals and participating in a pioneer journal activity, students will gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of life and trials the Mormon Pioneers faced in coming to Utah.

Time Frame:
Ten 30-minute periods

Curriculum Ties:
Social Studies – Fourth Grade – Standard 2 – Objective 1
Language Arts – Fourth grade – Standard 8 – Objective 5 – (Write in different forms and genres)

Materials:
Paper, pencils, pioneer journal planning outline, packing your wagon instruction sheet, supplies/cost sheet, pioneer trek game cards, wagon cards, and map of the route to use as a gameboard, pioneer journal entries to share with students, Pioneer Journal grading rubric. If desired, yarn or heavy string to sew/bind the completed pioneer journals. “Utah, This is the Place” CD from Classroom Classics (Utah Pioneers song), Song lyrics, Incomplete lyrics.

Background for Teachers:
The journey on the Mormon Trail was difficult as well as exciting. The journey from a child’s perspective must have been excruciating as well as triumphant and exciting. Children in the families shared in the hardship, diseases, and daily chores that were trials to the adults making the journey. As with children of today, they didn’t always understand why their parents were making the decisions they were, and had only to trust and follow their parents and other adult family members. They, like the adults of the Mormon Pioneer wagon companies were told that they were going to a place where they could create a better life for themselves, away from the anger and hatred they’d experienced. As you plan, consider what you think would have been exciting, difficult, dangerous, and monotonous to children of nine or ten years old.

Student Prior Knowledge:
Due to religious background, some students may have prior knowledge of pioneer events, yet not all students will have this.

Intended Learning Outcomes:
Students will apply knowledge gained while playing the pioneer journey game to create their own Pioneer Journal. The journal will contain historically accurate, yet fictional (historical fiction) entries that they create using pioneer voice.

Instructional Procedures:
Begin this unit by playing “Utah Pioneers” and having students follow along to the lyrics. Then, using copies of actual pioneer journal entries, discuss how reading these helps us understand how life was for the Mormon Pioneers. Compare and contrast the daily events of a pioneer’s life with that of students today. Specifically pick entries that share activities, feelings, thoughts, and events as they were on their actual journey to Utah. As you work through playing the game, have students begin the writing process
to create entries. You’ll want to specifically point out the use of pioneer voice in writing. They use terms such as Ma, Pa, or Mama and Papa, sickness or illness as they didn’t have the scientific knowledge and names for specific diseases that we have today. Also, create class lists for chores, hardships, celebrations, activities, landmarks they passed, inventions pioneers made. You’ll also want to point out that when the first pioneers arrived they had to construct homes, plant gardens, and other crops, figure out ways to divert water for irrigation purposes, etc. Although the pioneers had reached Salt Lake, their trials, although different, weren’t over yet. They were settling a new territory and needed to create everything. They’d done this many times before, so they weren’t strangers to what it would take, yet they were farther away from other settlements than they’d been before.

Strategies for Diverse Learners:
When creating “family” groups for playing the game, group students with a variety of academic abilities. Students with limited English proficiency may be allowed to submit shorter entries or even illustrate and label entries using correct pioneer vocabulary.

Extensions:
For fast finishers, or as a way to extend knowledge, you could have materials available, such as heavy cardboard, large popsicle sticks, lath (small strips of lumber), cloth, etc. and allow students to construct wagons or handcarts. Teach square dances and point out that this was one of the activities that virtually all members of the handcart and wagon train companies did for enjoyment and relaxation along the trail.

Assessment Plan:
At the conclusion of the pioneer life lessons, students will submit a completed pioneer journal they’ve written. Dates, events, and activities all have to be authentic as written from the perspective of a pioneer. All entries must contain word choice that conveys the voice of a pioneer.

Bibliography:
Tell My Story Too, Donnor Party: A Survivor’s Diary, The Utah Adventure, Pioneers of Utah by Paul Thompson

Author: Stephanie Galt, Nebo District, April 26, 2009