Life on the Prairie Through the Eyes of a Pioneer Child

Mary McDonald
EDUC 546
April 7, 2010
Overview

- This lesson will look at what life in the mid-late 1860-1890s on the American plains might have been like for a young person, based on the stories of American author Laura Ingalls Wilder.
- Students will consider housing, families, transportation, communication, and sources of income as they compare and contrast pioneer life with their own.
The goal of this lesson is to compare and contrast life in America 120-150 years ago with how our world looks and works today.
Objectives

- View, analyze, interpret primary source photos
- Discuss 19th and 21st century social life in the United States.
- Discuss their ideas about what Pioneer Life in America was like for children their age, and how things like education, transportation, housing, clothing, entertainment and communication are different now.
- Relate what they have learned from inquiry and observation to their own American life
Investigative Question

What was it like to live in the days of the American Pioneer?
Time Required

- One week of 40 minute class segments
- One day field trip
- One period of reflective writing
Recommended Grade Range

Third-Fourth Grade
Subjects Covered

-Social Studies
-History
-Language Arts
Standards

Language Arts
1.C.2a Use information to form and refine questions and predictions
1.C.2b Make and support inferences and form interpretations about main themes and topics.
1.C.2d Summarize and make generalizations from content and relate to purpose of material.
1.B.2b Identify structure (e.g., description, compare/contrast, cause and effect, sequence) of nonfiction texts to improve comprehension.
Credit

Mary McDonald
Materials Used

On the Banks of Plum Creek book

Power point

Library of Congress images

Midway Village Museum
Resources Used


Midway Village Museum, Rockford IL

Procedure

1. Connect – Costume worn by the teacher in a style representative of 1860-s, Daily selected readings of specific events in the book On the Banks of Plum Creek that describe housing, transportation, communication, clothing and commerce. Students will view photos from LOC American Memory collection to fuel discussion.

2. Wonder – Discussion in groups about what changes in the world changed the way that we now dress, live, communicate go places and make money.

3. Investigate - what did kids do then for fun? How did they meet?

4. Construct - Students will “walk in the shoes” of the Pioneer children by visiting the hands on Midway Village Museum park.

5. Express - students will compose a short 3 paragraph essay describing what they saw on the field trip and what they thought would they would be like if they lived during that time.

6. Reflect discussion of experience of visiting the museum, listening to Laura Ingalls Wilders’ stories and comparing their lives in 2010 to children in the late 1800’s.
Evaluation

- **General Assessment**
  - Participation in daily discussions
  - Quality of essay

- **Specific Assessment**
  - Each student shall write a three paragraph essay detailing three different ways that their life is different from the lives of Pioneer Children.
  - After completing the book readings, assess the students' understanding of vocabulary, events, and concepts using multiple choice quiz.
Field Trip

The culmination of a weeks study of life in pioneer days will end with a field trip to Midway Village, in Rockford, where the students will get to visit a blacksmiths shop and see them work with the metal, to see an old hospital, to see a general store, a church, a house, a school house, gardens and horse drawn carriages.

Midway Village features twenty-four historic structures including a hardware store, general store, print shop, blacksmith shop, one-room schoolhouse, general store, hotel, fire station, police station, hospital, bank, carpenter shop, town hall, law office and a variety of homes.
Evaluation

- Students will be graded on:
  - Essay detailing 3 aspects of pioneer life
  - Ability to compare and contrast pioneer life with their life
  - Attentiveness while attending the tour guided trip to the museum
  - Participation in discussion of selected readings from On the Banks of Plum Creek.
On February 7, 1867, Laura Elizabeth Ingalls, the author of the beloved semi-autobiographical *Little House* series, was born in Wisconsin, the second daughter of Charles and Caroline Ingalls.

The basic facts of her life correspond to those related in her books about her family's experiences on the American frontier during the 1870's and 1880's.
Carrie, Laura and Mary Ingalls as they may have looked during the time of On the Banks of Plum Creek
On the Banks of Plum Creek

Tells of the adventures of Laura Ingalls and her family as they leave their little house on the prairie and travel in their covered wagon to Minnesota. Here they settle in a little house made of sod beside the banks of beautiful Plum Creek. Soon Pa builds a wonderful new little house with real glass windows and a hinged door. Laura and her sister Mary go to school, help with the chores, and fish in the creek. At night everyone listens to the merry music of Pa's fiddle. Misfortunes come in the form of a grasshopper plague and a terrible blizzard, but the pioneer family works hard together to overcome these troubles.
Observation

- What do you see?
- Who lives here?
- What do you think is inside?
- How do they get their water?
- How do they get their lighting?
- What kind of floor do you think they might have?
- What happens if it rains?
Observation

- How is this family similar to your family?
- How is this family different from your family?
- Do they dress like you dress?
- Where did they get their clothes?
- How many dresses/outfits /pairs of shoes do you think they have?
Observation

- What kind of mode of transportation is this?
- How did it get there?
- Who built it?
- Where do you think it is going?
- How is it powered?
- What kinds of safety issues did trains have?
- How is this different from trains we ride today?
Observation

- What is this instrument?
- What did Laura’s pa do with his fiddle?
- How did he learn how to play it?
- Why would this be considered a way of entertainment?
Observation

- What is a plague?
- What did the grasshoppers do to the crops in this photo?
- Why would a plague be devastating to a farmer?
- What did the grasshopper plague do to the Ingalls family?
- Do you think a plague would hurt farmers today?
Observation

- What is the vehicle used in this photo?
- How is it powered?
- Do you use the same kind of vehicle?
- How fast do you think it can go?
- What sort of fuel do you need?
- Where do you get the fuel?
Observation

- Have you ever experienced a blizzard?
- How did you finally get out of your house when it was over?
- How long was the Ingalls family stuck in the blizzard?
- How did you keep warm?
- How did they keep warm?
- What did they eat?
- What did they do for their animals?
Observation

- What has happened in this family?
Observation

- Where are the two sisters going?
- What kind of transportation are they using?
- Why do they have hats on their heads?
- Have you noticed the females all have long hair, but keep it tied back or braided? Why?
- Have you noticed that the females all wear long sleeves and skirts? Why do you think they do this?
Observation

- Who do you think she is waiting for?
- What is the name of the room she is in?
- What does it mean when a man calls upon a single female during this era?
- Did her male caller have to ask permission from her father?
Observation

- What is the street made of?
- What are streets made of today?
- What kind of business is in this building?
- How did the people get downtown?
- How do you go downtown?
Observation

- What is going on in this picture?
- Does this look like your classroom?
- What is different?
- What is the same?