

WASAH Lesson Plan/Unit Project Proposal 2009-2010
Neil Hamel
Pulaski Community Schools
5th grade

Westward Expansion

When I think of American Freedom, one of the things that first come to mind is that Freedom is why my family, and almost all immigrants came to this country, to be free. What I hope to accomplish through this unit is to help students explore what people moving west hoped to attain, why did they move, what were they looking for, and did they find it?

1. The scope of history I cover with my students span from 1492 to about 1860. An area of this time frame that I never seem to get to in any depth because of lack of time is Westward Expansion. I would like the students to learn more about the motivations and implications of people moving west.

One of the things I would like to do is to develop a simulation that the class will participate in where they role-play what it was like to move west. I want the students to experience the hardships and sacrifices experienced by immigrants, and the effects and ramifications the movement had on the native and animal populations.

2. Even though Sarah Spitzer and Jon Wood are not involved in WASAH this year, I plan on collaborating with them as I work on this project. I will especially work together with Jon because he covers westward expansion in his teaching of 4th grade Wisconsin History. I hope through this cooperation, that we are able to help students understand the hows and whys behind why people came to both Wisconsin and the whole mid-west and west.

3. I hope to share with my fellow teachers both within my building and with other 5th grade teachers from other buildings both this unit and the unit I did for last year's WASAH project. We have several grade level meetings during district in-services and I intend to share my projects with my colleagues at one of these meetings. At a building level, since we are a small school, I will be sharing more at a unit level.

4. As I envision it now these are the major objectives/topics and questions I plan on exploring/answering:

- How did the Lewis and Clark expedition pave the way to westward expansion?
- What was Manifest Destiny?
- How did the building of the Erie Canal effect early westward expansion?
- What motivated people to want to move west?
- When did westward expansion begin and then become really popular?
- What effects did this movement have on native peoples and wildlife?
- What were some of the actual experiences that people had?

- The Donner party experience
- What was the trip west like?
- What was life like on the frontier?
- What were the differences between the settlers that were successful and those who were not?

Methods used to answer the previous questions:

- Moving West Simulation game (yet to be developed by me)... I imagine it to be similar to the "Oregon Trail" computer game. The difference is that it could be played where small groups work cooperatively to form wagon trains with needed supplies, and food to make the trip successfully.
- Primary documents: I hope to find documents- especially letters that would help students see why ordinary people uprooted their families and moved west and understand what they went through.
- Historical images: Both paintings and early photos that illustrate the westward movement.

5. This unit will target 5th grade students in my own classroom, and possibly other 5th grade teachers in the Pulaski district.

6. The following is a partial list of resources I plan on using to complete the project:

- We the People: *Pioneer families left data trail for researchers*:
<http://newsok.com/article/3174713/1196299480>
- Westward Expansion: <http://www.americanwest.com/pages/wexpansi.htm>
- The Gilder Lehrman Collection (primary documents)
<http://gilderlehrman.org/collection/index.html>
- The Best of History Web Sites:
http://www.besthistorysites.net/USHistory_WestwardExpansion.shtml
- About.com
http://americanhistory.about.com/od/westwardexpansion/Westward_Expansion.htm
- The National Postal Museum: (primary source letters)
<http://www.postalmuseum.si.edu/letterwriting/lw03.html>
- Westward Expansion (American Heritage/American Voices Series)
By David C. King, John Wiley & Sons
- The history of the Erie Canal: <http://www.eriecanal.org/>
- Manifest Destiny:
http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/database/article_display.cfm?HHID=311

I am sure that as I continue to develop this project that I will find many more sources, but I am excited by the depth and variety of sources I have found so far.