

Lesson Plan for Third Grade Social Studies: Pioneer Research

Story: “Oh, That’s Good. No, That’s Bad” from Stories in My Pocket by Mitch Weiss and Martha Hamilton

“Pioneers” is a unit of study that is included in the third grade social studies curriculum. The media center director and the gifted teacher met with the third grade team of teachers. As we discussed possibilities for the unit, our gifted teacher suggested that the group identified as gifted and talented would find a research project to be a challenging activity. The media center director and the gifted teacher decided to collaboratively plan and co-teach this small group.

Our building strategic goal is differentiation. One activity states: “Each grade level will demonstrate new differentiation strategies and methods in each of the following areas: content, process, and product.” This small research group would meet the goals of a differentiated curriculum with a focus on process and product.

The group helped the library media center staff locate books about pioneers. Books were placed on a cart to allow easy access to information. A web page of pioneer links was already in place, because children may use only pre-selected sites at school.

The first assignment was to find something they could get really excited about. Children began to browse through books, looking for topics of interest to them. Nonfiction is more difficult for kids to read and comprehend than fiction, and even some members of this group struggled to understand passages in these books. We felt the best way to help readers was to provide opportunities for them to help themselves. Nonetheless, facts about diseases, disasters, food, clothing, games, houses, early schools, and relationships with Native Americans soon filled the air.

Note-taking would be kept simple: write down the source and record interesting facts. Students developed their own notes, reflecting their own ideas about what was important to them and their topic.

Group discussions were held to brainstorm interesting manners of presenting facts to their peers. Creating a context for information to be shared with their peers was the challenge that each child faced.

Jesse and Jeremy were researching disasters that the pioneers faced on their way to Oregon. The students were amazed that the pioneers could possibly have faced all those dangers and still made it Oregon. They talked with me about what they’d learned and said they’d like to tell a story about everything the pioneers had to overcome. Jesse told me about how pioneers faced dangers from wild animals like rattlesnakes. I said, “Oh, that’s bad.” She replied, “Not really. They knew how to take care of rattlesnake bites.” I said, “Oh, that’s good!” She jumped up and down shouting, “I know what to do! I know what to do! We’ll do the *Oh, that’s good, No, that’s bad story!*” And so began the process of writing a story that utilized the facts they had gathered in their research.

Jesse and Jeremy’s enthusiasm was contagious. Soon, other stories began to emerge.

Caroline presented herself a 40-year-old woman who was hosting “Caroline’s Kitchen,” a TV program featuring pioneer cooking. She told about how she began cooking at age six when her grandmother taught her how to make Raspberry Quencher. Now, her own mother cooks with Caroline’s own three children.

Hailey was exploring her aunt's attic and discovered a letter written by a pioneer child in which she describes her day at her one-room school.

Dr. Elizabeth had wanted to attend medical school but found that these schools were not accepting. She became apprenticed to a doctor; she learned about diseases and cures from his. She also learned about herbal cures from a fur trapper who learned about them from Native Americans.

A pioneer realtor had four homes for sale: a soddy, dugout, log home, and ----- She explained the construction and the advantages of owning each one.

The most practical fashions for men, women, and children were shown by a neighborhood seamstress named ----- who was a wonder at creating comfort for the person with a pioneering spirit.

Faced with a seemingly overwhelming amount of information, how could the children make sense of all the fact? Telling stories helped them make sense of the pioneer world, putting facts into a form that is easily understood and remembered by audiences.