

THE CONQUEST OF THE WEST

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Grade 6

Central idea:

The conquest and colonization of the territory in the western United States of North America was an achievement full of dangers and changes in fortune, which cost the lives of thousands of human beings. The first explorers and pioneers, who ventured forth from their homes to make a long, laborious trip toward the unknown, needed to have determination, strong values and tough spirits to overcome adversity and arrive at their destiny.

Subjects: History, Geography, Literature.

Time: Six weeks

Materials: Notebooks, thin cardboard, books related to the subject, computers with access to the Internet, map of the United States of America.

Abilities:

- Elaborate on relevant questions.
- Collect, organize and process data.
- Summarize.
- Analyze.
- Compare
- Know and respect different points of view.
- Use maps to locate different places.
- Develop the four basic abilities of communication: write, listen, read and speak.

Objectives:

- Know and understand the causes that led to the pioneers to make their trip.
- Investigate the routes they followed and the means of transport that they used.
- Analyze how the preparation, organization and division of work were fundamental for their survival.
- Learn about the different relations, from friendly periods to hostile ones, that occurred between native and pioneer. In addition, analyze how the life and culture of the natives were threatened as colonization kept expanding.
- Recognize that the territory of the United States was not as vast as is today. See how the 1803 Louisiana Purchase from the French, the annexation of Texas in 1845 and the annexations of California, New Mexico, Nevada and Utah in 1848, at the end of war with Mexico, extended the border of the United States west to the Pacific Ocean.

Sustenance:

Explorers and trappers were the first persons who ventured across unknown territory between 1820 and 1840. They were adventurous, nomadic, solitary men who went from one place to another without stopping or putting down roots. It was at the end of the

American Revolution that a great mobilization and expansion occurred towards the west, that would extend throughout the 19th century.

The search for new territories, the necessity to have cultural freedom, the desire to have better living conditions, or simply the adventurous spirit inspired thousands of people to undertake long and laborious trips towards the west.

The discovery of gold John A. Sutter's mill in the California territory gave rise to the famous Fever of the Gold in 1849, which increased the number of people who decided to travel west to a great extent.

The pioneers were people of great worth, who decided to undertake a new life. They had to leave most of their possessions because of the conditions in which they traveled; they only could take that which was indispensable to survival.

The trip was generally made in groups. Several families, each one in a wagon which carried food, water, clothes and firearms, crossed many miles to arrive at their destination. When supplies were reduced, the space left in the wagons was enough for injured pioneers to travel inside, others made great part of the passage on foot.

Working as a community was extremely important in this era. All the members of a caravan, including the children, had tasks to fulfill to obtain a better quality of life.

The pioneers followed several routes to arrive in the west. These routes were not well made, like roads we have today, but simple tracks marked by the carts that journeyed them. Some of those routes were: National Road, Oregon Trail, Trail Santa Fe, Old Spanish Trail, California Trail, Overland Trail and Mormon Trail.

The encounter with the natives of those territories were frequent; some were friendly, but others were difficult, since sometimes the Indians felt threatened by the presence of the pioneers. Therefore, when pioneers made contact with the natives, they reacted in an aggressive way.

Other adversities that the pioneers had to face were diseases, wild animal attacks, bad climate, and crossing rivers, mountains or deserts. Nevertheless, nothing managed to stop them, and by the end of 1900 the pioneers had managed to colonize not only the west, most of the territory of the United States.

Presentation of the subject:

Beginning:

The teacher will present a map of the United States and will ask the students to explain why the first colonies were based in the east. Later, the teacher will ask them to locate the western North American territory, and will ask them what form they think it had as it began to be colonized.

Development:

The teacher will inform the students that a great number of people, looking for better opportunities in life, decided to travel to the west after the gold discovery in the territory of California. They will ask them to imagine how life was for the pioneers. What was the average form of transport? How did they prepare for a trip to the west? What qualities did they have to develop to be able to survive so difficult an experience? What obstacles did they have to overcome throughout their trip? How were their encounters with the native inhabitants?

The students will begin their investigation using the previous questions as their base.

Activities:

The students:

- They will make a large poster elaborating what they already knew, what they would like to learn later and what they have learned on the subject.
- They will use a map to locate the different routes that the pioneers used to travel to the west. They will write a paragraph to answer the following questions: If you had been a pioneer what route would you have chosen to travel to the west? Why?
- They will think about some representative symbol of the subject to design a pennant. They will write a paragraph to explain why they chose this symbol for its design.
- They will investigate about gold fever in California and will write a summary.
- They will read and analyze the song *Clementine*, later in teams, they will write songs on the life of the pioneers.
- They will create a pamphlet inviting to people to travel to the old west.
- They will pretend to be an Indian boy or a pioneer boy and will write a diary in which they will describe five days of their lives.
- They will see the video *The Ingalls Family* (Little House on the Prairie) and will write a comparison on the ways the pioneers took care of their surroundings and the way we do it today.
- They will make a comparison between the obligations and duties of pioneer boy and their own.
- They will debate on the different points of view between Indians and pioneers on the possession of land.
- They will read a text on colonization in Texas. They will create, in teams, a large poster which will list differences and similarities between the way in which colonization was carried out in Texas and the West of the United States.
- Throughout the unit, the students will choose books relative to the subject whose titles are listed below. In order to encourage the experience of reading, the student will have the freedom to only read the books chosen according to their interests and level of reading. As part of the evaluation of the subject they will present/display a report of the book they liked most.

Jimmy Spoon

Kate's House

The First Four Years

Prairie Visions

Study Links:

- The students will read the article [Anglo-American Colonization](http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/AA/uma1.html) in the *Handbook of Texas Online*. They will make a list of similarities and differences of colonization between Texas and the eastern border of the United States.
<http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/AA/uma1.html>
- The students will read the Cattle articles in the *Handbook of Texas Online*; in teams they will discuss how some traditions and customs at that time are still effective in our days.
Cattle Brands: <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/CC/auc1.html>
Cattle Feeding: <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/CC/aucrw.html>

- They will look at the Benjamin Franklin Duren Common Book, and will try to find documents that talk about how the people took care of their health in those days.

Flux prescription by Dr. Meriweather. 1865:

<http://tides.sfasu.edu:2009/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/EastTexRC&CISOPTR=312&CISOSHOW=283>

Recipe for curing rheumatism. 1867:

<http://tides.sfasu.edu:2009/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/EastTexRC&CISOPTR=312&CISOSHOW=288>

Remedy for snakebite and cancer salve:

<http://tides.sfasu.edu:2009/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/EastTexRC&CISOPTR=312&CISOSHOW=289>

Horse remedy:

<http://tides.sfasu.edu:2009/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/EastTexRC&CISOPTR=312&CISOSHOW=296>

A Recipe for curing rheumatism. 1883:

<http://tides.sfasu.edu:2009/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/EastTexRC&CISOPTR=312&CISOSHOW=297>

Closing:

The teacher will ask the students to use what they have learned throughout the unit to write a team presentation over the life of the pioneers; they will present/display to the rest of the class.

Activity of Evaluation:

The evaluation will be continuous, that is to say, the teacher will use, in addition to the evaluation activities, those activities made throughout the subject that, in his opinion or in opinion of their students, is most significant to evaluate the subject.

- In teams, the students will pretend to be pioneers having to organize their trip to the west.
- They will create large posters in which all the details in the preparation of their trip will be written, such as:
 - A list of food and utensils.
 - A map in which they will locate the route that will be followed to arrive in the west.
 - The cities in which they will stop to rest and to re-supply food and water.
 - Qualities that will be considered to name the leader of the caravan.
 - Reasons to travel to the west.
 - Division of the work between the different members of the caravan.
 - Ways that will be used to take care of their health.
- The team will share the conclusions with the rest of the group.

Bibliography:

Dixon, Robert J., The Land and the People, Ed. Regents Publishing Company, Inc., 1975.
Scholastic Banners, Growing up on the Frontier, Ed. Scholastic Inc., 1993.