Overcoming Hardships on the Plains: Using Humor to Cope with Disaster
7th Grade

Developed for Teaching with Primary Sources from the Library of Congress:
"Not Just Flyover Country: Exploring Kansas History through Primary Sources", 2016
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Overview

This lesson uses one set of primary source documents to give students an understanding of the real devastation caused by grasshopper plagues. It uses an additional set of primary source documents to demonstrate how Kansas settlers sometimes used humor to cope with disaster. The students will evaluate and analyze all documents to identify specific examples of the ways farmers responded to the devastation they faced as a result of grasshopper invasions. Based on their analysis, they will use creative writing skills to author their own letter, poem, or newspaper article. They will also create original art which illustrates their written work. The lesson is designed to be completed over two or three class periods.

Standards

Kansas History, Government and Social Studies

Standard #4 - Societies experience continuity and change over time.

Benchmark 4.1: The student will recognize and evaluate continuity and change over time and its impact on individuals, institutions, communities, states, and nations.

Kansas College and Career Ready Standards

Reading Standards for Literature

RL.7.1 – Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

Writing Standards

W.7.3 – Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

W.7.3b – Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, and description, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

Objectives

Content

- Students will identify descriptive language used in primary source documents.
- Students will describe ways in which Kansans used humor to overcome desolation and destruction.
- Students will identify examples of the use of personification as a literary device.
Skills

- The student demonstrates understanding of the devastation faced by Kansas settlers by creating an original humorous letter, newspaper article, or poem describing an imaginary invasion occurring in the present day.
- The student uses appropriate descriptive language when writing an original composition.
- The student will create a colored drawing illustrating their writing.

Compelling Questions

1. What effect did grasshopper invasion have on Kansas settlers?
2. How did Kansans respond to these natural disasters?
3. Was the use of humor an effective method of overcoming the despair and desolation caused by grasshopper invasions?

Resource Chart

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Image</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Citation</th>
<th>URL</th>
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Lesson Procedure

Day One

1. Introduce the lesson by reading with the class “Grasshopper Plague of 1874” from the KSHS.org/Kansapedia website. Discuss the article to help students understand the devastation caused by a grasshopper invasion. The teacher may access this directly online.

   a. Ask students to consider various ways in which Kansans may have dealt with the disaster. List their ideas on the board or overhead.

2. Divide the class into groups of three or four. Have each group read and discuss the Primary Sources Excerpts. Each student should record observations and responses on his or her own Excerpts of Primary Sources – Grasshopper Invasions worksheet.

   a. Ask students to share out the information collected on the worksheet. Add the responses to the list already on the board or overhead.

3. Close this portion of the lesson by telling students that tomorrow they will take a close look at a type of response they had not considered (humor).

Day Two

1. Review the discussion from Day One by going over the list of ideas and observations recorded on the board. Explain to students that Kansans often used a method of coping with disaster that may seem surprising (humor).

2. Divide students into four groups. Give each group a copy of the four remaining primary sources: Ten Little Grasshoppers poem, Mr. G. Hopper cartoon, Grangers vs. Hoppers cartoon, and Letter from Saline, Kansas. Each student should record observations and responses on his or her own Primary Sources Variety – Grasshopper Invasions worksheet.

   a. After each student has completed the worksheet appoint each group to present to the others their observations of one of the four primary sources. Guide a class discussion following each brief presentation. Be sure to focus on the use of personification as a literary device and effect.

3. Instruct each student to begin writing their own narrative in the form of a letter to a friend or loved one, a poem, or a newspaper article. Their narrative will use humor and personification to describe a fictional grasshopper invasion occurring in their home town in the present day. It is anticipated that students will not complete this assignment during this class period.

Day Three (optional)

1. Students complete their narrative writing assignment using class time or the teacher may wish to make that strictly an assignment to be completed at home.

2. After the written assignment is complete the student should draw and color a cartoon or illustration that both personifies grasshoppers and specifically illustrates their letter, poem, or newspaper article.

Assessment

- Observe the student’s ability to analyze and discuss the ways in which Kansans responded to grasshopper invasions.
• Evaluate the student’s ability to identify the various features, literary devices used, and main points of primary sources.
• Evaluate the student’s ability to create their own narrative of a fictional grasshopper invasion with a focus on the use of personification as a literary device.

For the Teacher

If you are using the textbook, *The Kansas Journey*, this lesson is designed to correspond with page 19. It could also be adapted for use in Chapter 6, pages 128-129.

This lesson examines several ways in which some Kansans chose to respond in the face of desolation and disaster, including the use of humor and personification. Pioneers on the plains of Kansas faced all sorts of weather related hardships: drought, blizzards, tornados, etc. Most students living in Kansas are familiar with each of these natural disasters. However, none has ever experienced a grasshopper invasion.

Notes about primary sources:

Primary sources are original items or records that have survived from the past. Examples include diaries, letters, photographs, paintings, artifacts, and newspaper articles. They are part of a direct personal experience of a time or event.
Primary Source Excerpts

Excerpt from *Life Sketch of Mrs. Pauline (Floeder) Wickham* – text version

“...In seventy-three, we bought a few hogs and by spring had a nice bunch. The prospects for corn were good that year, and we planned to use our resources to purchase a team of horses. Alas, in August 1874 came the invasion of the migratory grasshoppers. They appeared like a dense cloud of smoke from the northwest, and soon began to light and as they got nearer the wings glistened in the sunlight and looked exactly like a mighty fall of snow, in gigantic flakes. They covered everything and devoured everything in the way of green vegetables. There was nothing left to feed the hogs and they all starved to death.”

kansasmemory.org, Kansas State Historical Society

Excerpt from *My experiences with the grasshoppers in 1866-1867* by Mary F. Brown

“...In the spring of 1867 the little grasshoppers began to hatch in large numbers. They were tiny dust colored things with the same voracious appetites as their parents and soon began on our vegetables, grass, weeds, etc. I was especially anxious to save my currants and rosebushes, and spread over and around them my calico skirts, aprons, etc. but the little pests knew by instinct or the sense of smell that shrubs were under those calicos and persistently gnawed their way through. Their persistence was rivaled by my own efforts, for I gathered the wraps again and again about the plants, pinning over the gnawed places, and finally saved many of my most valuable shrubs. When I gathered in my clothes that summer some of the skirts had been devoured to the seams, others hung in shreds, like carpet rags sewed to the waist bands.”

kansasmemory.org, Kansas State Historical Society

Excerpt from J.W. Honey letter – text version

“...It was about noon one beautiful day, I don’t remember the exact date, but it was just as the corn was in fine “roasting ear” – that the grasshoppers began to appear, and in much less time than it takes to tell it, the ground and everything else, was covered with the little pests. I remember the first thing I wanted to do was take my father’s shotgun and see how many I could kill at one shot. My father said never mind the gun, there is something more important on hand, and without stopping for dinner we got our horses hitched to the wagon and was on our way to the corn field as soon as possible. We were at that time living in what was called a double log cabin, That is there were two log houses built facing each other and about 10 or 12 feet between them and both joined together by a roof over the opening. As soon as we got to the field we began “snapping” the ears of corn and as soon as we could get a load we would haul it to the house and unload it in one of the rooms, but work as hard as we could we were only able to get a very small part of our corn, for before night the hoppers had eaten by far the biggest end of that corn crop. If they had only have stopped with the corn it would not have been so bad, but they cleaned up about everything green, and some things that were not green, before they took flight to other “pastures green”. Our corn field, the next day, looked more like a big field of short stakes stuck in the ground than it did a corn field.”

kansasmemory.org, Kansas State Historical Society
Ten Little Grasshoppers

Ten little grasshoppers
Sitting on a vine;
One eat too much green corn—
Then there were nine.

Nine little grasshoppers,
Just the size for bait;
A little boy went a fishing—
Then there were eight.

Eight little grasshoppers,
Stayed out after seven,
A white frost nipped one—
Then there were seven.

Seven little grasshoppers,
Lived between two bricks;
There came a hurricane—
Then there were six.

Six little grasshoppers,
Roosted on an old bee hive;
One found a bumble bee—
Then there were five.

Five little grasshoppers,
Hopping on the floor;
Pussy took one for a mouse—
Then there were four.

Four little grasshoppers,
Found a green pea;
Had a fight about it—
Then there were three.

Three little grasshoppers,
Sighed for pastures new;
Tried to cross the river—
Then there were two.

Two little grasshoppers,
Sitting on a stone;
A turky gobbler passed that way—
Then there was one.

One little grasshopper,
Chirped good by at the door;
Said he'd come next summer,
With nine millions more.

Several communications have been received by its Readers during the past year.

One Cent a Day!
The order of the hour, every ex-

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lax. Every family requires one a

family newspaper. If such an

procured for less than one cent

nine days of the year, we are not

Family Newspaper should con-

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Publisher of the Sun,

New York City.

H. B. Be

Livery, Feed and Salt

Dodge City times. (Dodge City, Kan.), 24 Nov. 1877. Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers. Lib. of Congress.
“Mr. G. Hopper – Kansas”

KansasMemory.org, Kansas State Historical Society
Letter from Saline, Kansas – Sept. 8, 1876

This letter appeared on September 23, 1876 in the *St. Louis Dispatch*. The unknown author wrote the following about the invasion of grasshoppers:

Saline County, Kan.,
Sept. 8, 1876

Dear Father:

No man can successfully fight against nature. The contest is unequal — nature caring no more for a man than for a grasshopper. Ah! the "hopper." Today, I lost sixty acres of wheat, eaten into the ground in less than an hour…. At about ten o'clock this morning, I noticed a heavy smoke rising in the West. I said to myself, "this is strange looking smoke. What causes it?"

...Soon the low hum, as of a distant threshing machine, filled the air — the advance of the locusts. Louder, louder, even louder the hum, till in a roar the countless billions of devourers were on us, all around us. The air was stiff with them. I could look at the sun without blinking….For six hours, they flew, a solid cloud; and tonight there is not a wheat plant left in any of the counties about here.

I sat on a hill and watched them, and smiled as I saw hundreds tackle a sunflower, and laughed as I saw that sunflower vanish. How thick they were! How harmless they looked, but great Jove, how they ate! Ah! what appetites they have.

...I have joy in saying that I have 80 acres of corn that will try their teeth somewhat. It is as hard as corn can be. I walked down this afternoon to see how they were making out with it. They had the stalks all stripped of leaves and were sawing at the corn. But I could see that it was no go. Their teeth slipped over the bright yellow surface.

Our garden is perfectly cleared; beans, cabbages, tomatoes, melons, everything utterly gone. The vines to the potatoes are gone, and I am expecting a boss hopper up here at any minutes to request the loan of a spade to dig up my potatoes with. I shall refuse his request with scorn.
“Grangers versus Hoppers – Kansas 1874”

kansasmemory.org, Kansas State Historical Society
## Primary Sources Variety – Grasshopper Invasions

(Day Two)

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**Personification:** to attribute human characteristics to things such as plants or animals for literary or artistic effect.
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<td>“Mr. G. Hopper – Kansas”</td>
<td>Cartoon</td>
<td>Answers should resemble: Grasshopper is standing up with a crutch, eye patch, and a sling holding his left arm. By his side is a small suitcase. The countryside in the background has been completely stripped of all greenery, with only tree trunks and twigs surviving.</td>
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<td>“Grangers versus Hoppers – Kansas 1874”</td>
<td>Drawing on Postcard</td>
<td>Answers will vary but may include: Grasshoppers are stealing wheat, tools, etc. from farmer. One is taking a photograph. Another is about to punc the farmer.</td>
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<td>Letter from Saline, Kansas – Sept. 8, 1876</td>
<td>Letter</td>
<td>Answers will vary but may include:                                                                                                                                                    He writes the boss grasshopper is going to ask for a spade to dig up what crops are underground.</td>
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<td>“Ten Little Grasshoppers”</td>
<td>Poem</td>
<td>The grasshoppers “fight” over a green pea.                                                                                                                                                                                                      Last grasshoppers “said” goodbye and that he’d be back next summer.</td>
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