Overview

In this lesson students will learn about the challenge of isolation felt by early settlers in western Kansas, particularly women, and how they adapted. Students will read quotes from early pioneers and then determine if they describe a challenge or an adaptation. Students will draw or select an appropriate historical image to illustrate the quote and then write a caption.

Objectives

Content:
- The student will be able to explain how isolation affected the way people lived on the Kansas prairie.

Skills:
- The student will be able to identify an author’s point of view.
- The student will be able to write a caption.

Essential Questions

- How does the environment affect the way you live?
- When you are in an unfamiliar place, what can you do to make yourself feel more comfortable?
Activities

This activity uses the following Read Kansas! cards:
• Pioneer Women

1. Ask students how we know what life was like long ago. One answer should be reminiscences. These are stories by the person involved in the event but who recorded it many years after the event.

2. Have students read the Pioneer Women Read Kansas! card. Discuss why the letter-writing project is important to historians.

3. Introduce the topic of settling Kansas, particularly western Kansas, in the late 1800s. Discuss what types of hardships students think the pioneers encountered and how people would have adapted to the new environment and challenges. Explain that the letters sent to Lilla Day Monroe were filled with stories of both. Students will read actual quotes from the letters for this exercise.

4. Provide each student with one quote. The quotes need to be copied and cut apart before the lesson begins. Students will read the quote and then decide if it describes a challenge or an adaptation. They will also explain their reasoning in their own words on the lines provided.
   a. Ask for a show of hands of students who think they have challenge quotes. Select students to read their quotes and reasons for their decisions. Continue until all challenge quotes are read.
   b. Repeat exercise with the adaptation quotes.

5. For an assessment, have students either draw a picture or find a historic photograph or graphic on Kansas Memory, kansasmemory.org, that illustrates their quote. The student should write a caption for his or her image.

Assessment

Evaluate the students’ ability to illustrate and caption their quotes.

For the Teacher

If you are using the textbook, The Kansas Journey, this lesson can be used with pages 128 and 129. The book Pioneer Women by Joanna L. Stratton is an excellent source for additional information about pioneer experiences in Kansas.

For more primary sources on the topics of drought, depression, grasshoppers, lack of some natural resources, and isolation, visit Kansas Memory, kansasmemory.org and the Kansas Historical Society website, kshs.org.
Challenge Quotes

“Imagine, if you can, these pioneer women so suddenly transplanted from homes of comfort in eastern states to these bare, treeless, wind-swept, sun-scorched prairies with no comforts, not even a familiar face.” Lizzie Anthony Opdyke

Challenge or adaptation? Explain: ______________________________________________________
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… “the unbroken prairies stretched for miles outside, and the wistful-faced sheep were always near at hand. Often mother used to go out and lie down among them for company, when she was alone for the day.” Esther Clark, daughter of Allena A. Clark

Challenge or adaptation? Explain: ______________________________________________________
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“When our covered wagon drew up beside the door of the one-roomed sod house that father had provided, he helped mother down and I remember how her face looked as she gazed about that barren farm, then threw her arms about his neck and gave way to the only fit of weeping I ever remember seeing her indulge in.” Carrie Lassell Detrick

Challenge or adaptation? Explain: ______________________________________________________
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“Mr. Hilton, a pioneer, told his wife that he was going to Little River for wood. She asked to go with him. …She hadn’t seen a tree for two years, and when they arrived at Little River she put her arms around a tree and hugged it until she was hysterical.” Mary Furguson Darah

Challenge or adaptation? Explain: ______________________________________________________
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“In the summer of 1872 and '73 the gray wolves and coyotes were very numerous. It was not safe to go out across the prairies without a weapon of some kind.” S.N. Hoisington

Challenge or adaptation? Explain: ______________________________________________________
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“A man by the name of Johnson had filed on a claim just west of us, and had built a sod house. He and his wife lived there two years, when he went to Salina to secure work. He was gone two or three months, and wrote home once or twice, but his wife grew very homesick for her folks in the east, and would come over to our house to visit mother. Mother tried to cheer her up, but she continued to worry until she got bed fast with the fever.” S. N. Hoisington

Challenge or adaptation? Explain: ____________________________________________________
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“In the days of endless sweep of prairie, of grass without limit for many, many miles, the ripening of the grass in early fall or its premature drying from drought was signal for renewal of nightly vigilance in watching the horizon all around. . . . The last act at night, after seeing the children were all asleep, and all quiet among the livestock in sheds, pens and corrals, was to sweep the entire horizon for signs of flame.”

J. C. Ruppenthal, Wilson

Challenge or adaptation? Explain: ____________________________________________________
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“There was just a cotton-wood cabin on the farm with one room and a loft reached by a ladder. There was not a tree nearer than the little creek, and our nearest neighbor lived in a ‘ravine’ out of sight about a half a mile away. We were as much isolated as if we were miles from a neighbor, and not a dwelling in sight. I never saw a light from a home at night all the time we lived on the farm.”

Anne Bingham

Challenge or adaptation? Explain: ____________________________________________________
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Anne Bingham recalled “days and days of [loneliness] when my husband was obliged to go to town. . . . A woman sits alone. Her work is done and she looks anxiously at the time to see if the hour has not arrived when her loved one will be at home, for she has been alone all day with just a little child to bear her company.”

Challenge or adaptation? Explain: ____________________________________________________
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“Don’t think that all our time and thoughts were taken up with the problems of living. We were a social people. We never waited for an introduction or invitation to be neighborly, any day or any night might see a wagonload of neighbors drive to the door and introduce themselves. And they never stayed a less time than the day, and possibly all night. Our houses were small but they had a wonderfully expansive quality, and I never heard of anyone being turned away for want of room.” Mary Lyon

Challenge or adaptation? Explain: _____________________________________________________
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“The pre-eminent law of the land was hospitality. No stranger was ever turned away from the shelter afforded by the little log cabin. A buffalo tallow candle burned all night in the unshaded window to light some luckless wayfarer to warmth and shelter. Many a time it served its merciful purpose.”

Anna Biggs Heaney

Challenge or adaptation? Explain: _____________________________________________________
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“[My mother’s] little melodeon set up in the crude new home became a shrine of delight to the family and to the neighborhood as well. I have never seen more graceful or instant response than she was wont to give to a request for music, whether from a family guest, a child, or some crude stranger under our roof for the night and hungry for the solacing and almost forgotten pleasure of music.” Katherine Elspeth Loiver

Challenge or adaptation? Explain: _____________________________________________________
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“Ours was a favorite place for social gatherings. We had a nice grove on a creek, that was an ideal place to picnic, and then we had such a commodious house with a great big room 14 by 16 feet—with a floor, which was a fine place for dancing. Our door was never locked, and it happened sometimes that there was a party at the house and a picnic in the woods when the host and hostess were away.” Mary Lyon

Challenge or adaptation? Explain: _____________________________________________________
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“The fourth of July celebrations of those days were the meeting place of the whole county, where once a year old friends met and new friends were made and new settlers were welcomed to the county.”

Unknown woman

Challenge or adaptation? Explain: _____________________________________________________
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“…my father [the justice of the peace] was asked to preside at a wedding ten miles away from our home and my mother received an invitation to accompany him. Upon arriving at their destination they were ushered down six steps into a dugout, where the mother of the bride was preparing a wedding feast. There was but one room and the furniture consisted of two chairs, one with only two rounds to the back and bottomless. A bed made of scantlings, a board table, a short bench, a stove and a motto hung over the door, ‘God Bless Our Home.’” Jessie Hill Rowland

Challenge or adaptation? Explain: _____________________________________________________
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“Surprise parties were frequent. A wagon load or two of people would suddenly invade the house, of an evening. If the children were in bed, it took but a few minutes to hustle them out, take down the bed, and then ensued an evening of frolic, enlivened by the strains of the violin by an expert who was a blacksmith for every day; and perhaps he was accompanied by a young farmer as second.” Mary Lyon

Challenge or adaptation? Explain: _____________________________________________________
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“Our joy rides were horseback rides! Wild dashes across the prairie, the wind painting our cheek with nature’s red! Western women and girls were expert riders … .” Catherine Cavender

Challenge or Adaptation? Explain: _____________________________________________________
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