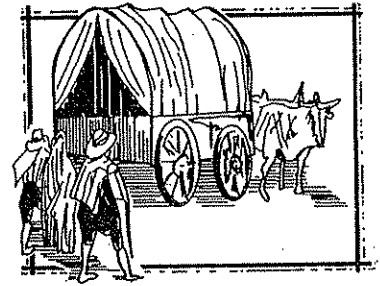


LESSON 3

TOPIC

Packing the Wagon Train



TIME

45 minutes

MATERIALS FROM TRUNK

Trunk
Immigrant Guides
Inventory of Essential Outfit
Photographs #1 and #2

OBJECTIVES

- 1) Students will be able to compare and contrast the ways that people have traveled to Kansas.
- 2) Students will be able to discuss the effect of the Homestead Act and the settlement of Kansas.
- 3) Students will be able to imagine what living conditions were like for pioneers.
- 4) Students will be able to assess the reliability of immigrant guides as a historical source.
- 5) Students will be able to compare and contrast the value of bringing certain items on the wagon train.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Historically, emigrants to the Kansas frontier have been able to purchase public land in three ways:

The Pre-emption Act of 1841 allowed settlers to purchase up to 160 acres of land for \$1.25 per acre.

The Homestead Act of 1862 offered settlers an even better deal. Anyone who was head of a household, or twenty-one years of age, could acquire 160 acres of land for a \$10 filing fee if he/she lived on the land for five years and made improvements. This was a particularly appealing prospect to Civil War veterans, farmers with limited land-holdings in the East, and European immigrants.

Settlers could add 160 acres to their homesteads by taking advantage of the Timber-Culture Act of 1873. To acquire land through this act the owner was required to plant 40 acres in trees and maintain them for ten years. The motivation behind this tree-planting movement in the West was multifold. Some hoped it would show the "adaptability of the Plains climate and make contributions to changing it." Others thought trees added to the civilized appearance of the area and it was even rumored that they contributed to better health. In any case, it was another motivational tool for promoters but not widely acted on by settlers.

Many would-be emigrants learned about settlement opportunities in Kansas through guidebooks. The reports on geography and climate kept by early explorers, such as Lewis and Clark, provided the first cross-country emigrants with instructional material for making their trip. As travel increased along the overland trails in the 1840s, there was a parallel development with guidebooks. Adventurers who had successfully traversed the trail recorded their experiences and then published them.

These records were particularly helpful since they provided practical advice and information to future emigrants. Guidebooks usually included information on what to bring, how to pack a wagon, amounts of food needed to make the trip, locations to stock up on provisions, supplies needed at your destination to start up a farm, as well as information on terrain, the trail, climate, watering spots, and hazards. The major drawback to the guidebooks was that the information was purposely biased or not always the most accurate since early writers had limited experience with the trail.

The railroads were particularly guilty of publishing biased literature. Through an arrangement with the federal government, some railroads were deeded hundreds of thousands of acres along their rights-of-way. The profits from the land sales helped finance the railroad companies. New settlers would soon become the railroad companies' freight customers. With these incentives, guidebooks were published and distributed throughout the United States and Europe. In the 1870s and 1880s the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad was a major promoter of Kansas lands in this manner.

What emigrants were told in the guidebooks and what they found were often quite different. Settlers choosing sites in Kansas west of Wichita and Salina had the most surprises. For many, the greatest shock was the treeless prairie that stood in stark contrast to their Indiana or Ohio farms. In place of log homes that had been built as primary dwellings in the East, settlers relied on dugouts and sod houses. Alternative fuels were also necessary. Corn cobs, twists of hay and even buffalo chips were used in place of wood.

Source: Miner, Craig. *West of Wichita: Settling the High Plains of Kansas, 1865-1890*. Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1986.

VOCABULARY

Dugout	A house dug into the ground and roofed with sod. Many early settlers in western Kansas built dugouts for their first homes.
Emigrant	A person who leaves his or her country to settle somewhere else.
Frontier	A territory unsettled by non-Indian peoples.
Guidebook	Publication that gives advice to emigrants as to provisions, outfits, routes to follow, etc. Many guidebooks gave bad advice.
Homestead	The Homestead Act of 1862 allowed any person who was the head of a family, or twenty-one years old, to acquire up to 160 acres of public land by paying a \$10 fee, living on the land for five years and making improvements. The homestead is the home and land occupied by the family.
Immigrant	A person who comes to a new country to settle.
Log Cabin	A home built from logs. Many early settlers in eastern Kansas built log cabins for their first homes.
Pioneer	A non-Indian person who is one of the first to settle in a territory.
Sod House	A home built from blocks of sod (earth and grass) cut from the native prairie. Many early settlers in western Kansas built sod houses for their first homes.

ACTIVITIES

1) Discuss and compare how people have come to Kansas. Have the students make a list of ways people came to Kansas in the past and come to Kansas now. This activity can be done in small groups.

a) When the territory was open for non-Indian settlement, people came on horseback, covered wagons, trains, and boats (nineteenth-century emigrants came down the Missouri River to Kansas City in boats but people could not travel through Kansas on boats because the rivers were too shallow.)

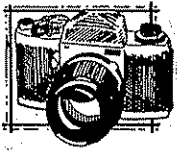
b) Today people come to Kansas by cars, planes, trains, buses, and moving vans.

2) Explain the Homestead Act of 1862 to the students.

a) Any person who was the head of a family or twenty-one years old could acquire up to 160 acres of public land by paying a fee of \$10, living on the land for five years, and making improvements.

b) Discuss why people would want to take advantage of the Homestead Act. (Many people could not afford to buy land outright, people wanted to leave the poverty of their homeland, etc.)

3) Discuss what the early settlers found when they came to Kansas and how they built their houses. Use *photograph #1* (a dugout) and *photograph #2* (a sod house).



a) Explain to the students that the types of houses settlers built depended on which part of Kansas they came to and what resources were available to them. It is important to emphasize that the early settlers had only what existed in the natural environment, what they brought with them, and what could be mail ordered.

b) The western part of Kansas did not have a great many trees, therefore the early settlers were forced to use other types of materials with which to build. The dugout (*photograph #1*) was often a first home. The house was dug into the ground and roofed with sod.

c) The sod house (*photograph #2*) is another example of early home construction in western Kansas. Sod can be explained as a mixture of earth and grass. The sod house is built of blocks of sod, resembling bricks.

4) Explain to the students that immigrant guides were published to help pioneers and settlers plan for their journey to the frontier. Some of these guides were published specifically for people who were traveling the trails west. Other guides were developed to help people prepare for settlement. These guides offered travel tips much like modern day travel books do.

a) Read sections of one or both of the *immigrant guides* aloud or have a student do so. Lead a discussion of the reliability of these guidebooks. One point that might be explored is the motivation of the authors.

b) Help the student imagine what it would be like to travel to Kansas during the early days. Remind the students of how they would be coming to Kansas and what living conditions would be like when they arrived. Show the students the *trunk* and explain that this is about how much room they would have to pack their belongs. Lead a discussion on what you would bring if you were coming to Kansas in the territorial period or during the early days of statehood. Remind the students that they would have to pack all of their belongings into a space the size of the *trunk*.

c) Have the students either as a group or as individuals make a list of supplies they would bring with them to Kansas. The major categories of items to bring on a trip to

a frontier would be bedding, clothing, cooking utensils, food, and tools. Have the students explain their reasons. The reasons should be both practical and sentimental. Point out that some items were packed for use on the trail and other items were packed for use upon arrival. Help the students evaluate their list(s). Could they survive with only the items on their list(s)? Are there items on their list(s) that they can survive without?

d) Show the students the *inventory of essential outfit*. Does this list agree or disagree with the ones that the students developed?

e) Discuss why a quilt would be a very useful object to bring along. It might be mentioned in the discussion that quilts were commonly brought because they have many uses. What can you do with a quilt? The answers include sleep under it as a blanket, use it as a tent, a door, a roof, a mattress, a pillow. A quilt can be used to cover and wrap possessions. It can also be used as a cover for a wagon or a curtain for privacy. Also remind the students that quilts are special because they are often gifts from someone we love, and sometimes the fabrics in them have memories of the clothing of someone special or from a special occasion.

ASSESSMENT

Levels of Achievement

For Objective 1

- a) Students recognize simple differences in the ways people have traveled to Kansas.
- b) Students recognize differences and some similarities in the ways people have traveled to Kansas.

For Objective 2

- a) Students recognize connection between the Homestead Act and increased settlement.
- b) Students recognize why the Homestead Act was attractive (plus, where the people came from: farmers in the East, veterans, Europeans, etc.)

For Objective 3

- a) Students provide a narrative account.
- b) Students show some imagination.
- c) Students convey empathy and realism.

For Objective 4

- a) Students recognize either usefulness or limitations of immigrant guides.
- b) Students give specific examples of advantages and disadvantages of immigrant guides (e.g., advantages: first hand evidence, useful historical information; disadvantages: biased, motives of author, based on experience of one person.)

c) Students recognize that the best use of immigrant guides is in conjunction with other historical sources.

For Objective 5

- a) Students choose items without sufficient reasoning.
- b) Students choose items with sufficient reasoning.



EXTENDED ACTIVITIES

1) LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE NOTEBOOK:

During this unit students can keep a notebook of pieces they write about family history and Kansas history.

- a. Have students ask their families how and why the family came to Kansas, and have the students write about it.
- b. People brought quilts to Kansas because they had important memories. If you were going somewhere else to live, say Mars or the moon, what things would you take because of their memories. Ask students to describe three items they would be sure to pack and their reasons for choosing those three.

2) DIARY:

It might be helpful to have the students write a diary about their imagined trip to Kansas during the early days. Have them begin with the days leading up to the trip. How did the student plan for the trip? What did the student bring with him/her? What did the student experience "on the trail?" What did he/she find when they got to Kansas? This project could be extended over several weeks, with the student writing one diary entry each day.

3) A LETTER HOME:

Have the students imagine that they have left their homes in the East and have traveled to Kansas to receive land under the Homestead Act. Have the students write letters to someone back home. Have them express their feelings about their new homes.

4) A NEW IMMIGRANT GUIDE:

In small groups have the students develop modern-day immigrant guides to Kansas. Explain to the students that most guidebooks exaggerated the good points of the land. Remind them that it is their job to convince people to move to Kansas. Therefore, they can say anything they want that makes Kansas sound like a good place to live. After the immigrant guides are written, have

each group share its guide with the class. The class discussion might center around how accurately the guidebook depicts Kansas.