

Trains, Covered Wagons, and Their Own Two Feet: Traveling Through the United States with Sarah and Rachel

Linda R. Granberry
Gallegos Elementary School

We were not at the edge of the world after all. Not in a strange place.
Not in between anymore. We were finally somewhere. We were home.
- Moss, *Rachel's Journal*

INTRODUCTION

One of my favorite programs on television growing up was “Little House on the Prairie.” The way they lived their lives, traveled from one place to another, and did their daily work always fascinated me. Am I saying their lives were easy? Absolutely not! I do, however, feel they had an appreciation for life that we often overlook in today’s times. So many things have been invented for us that make our daily lives quite simple compared to those of people who lived during the 19th century. Where would we be without air conditioning, indoor plumbing, or the cell phone? Things we take for granted were probably not even thought of during the 19th century. People who lived in the “olden” times lived during some of the most difficult times on earth, but when it came down to it, they knew what truly mattered in life. To them having your family and the basics of life were all you really needed in order to survive. Because this time period had, and still has, such an impact on my life, I am hoping it will be the same for my students.

My elementary school is made up primarily of students of Hispanic descent. In fact, out of our roughly 750 students, we have a couple of African-American students, and the rest are of Hispanic descent. We are also a Title I school, which means the majority of our students are on free lunch. They come from low socioeconomic backgrounds and families who have lived in the same neighborhood for several generations. If they do ever leave Houston, it is to visit Mexico, and even then many of the students have a hard time understanding Mexico is a separate country from the United States. To them Mexico is right across the street from our school. As a fourth grade teacher of students with limited knowledge of the United States, my curriculum unit will focus on the United States as a whole.

UNIT BACKGROUND

Having decided it would be best for my students to stay within the United States, this is where our unit of study will be based. It will take roughly a month to complete and will be taught during the month of May. Testing will be over, and we can sit back, relax, and enjoy this unit of study! I have chosen two books for the unit to center around that are each set in the United States during 1850-1910. This will cover the second half of the

19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. They are *Sarah, Plain and Tall* and *Rachel's Journal*. Both books are wonderful examples of historical fiction. A definition of historical fiction by McDougal Littell states:

Historical fiction is fiction set in the past. It contains a rich mixture of fact and fiction. Through novels and short stories, an author may combine factual information about the time, place, events, and real people of the period with fictional characters, dialogue and details. All of these help you experience what it was like to live during the era when the story takes place. (McDougal Littell 706)

Some characteristics of historical fiction that we will find and discuss in both books are as follows:

- presents a well-told story that doesn't conflict with historical records
 - portrays characters historically
 - presents authentic settings
 - includes historical facts
 - provides accurate information through illustrations
 - avoids stereotypes and myths
 - supports plot by historical evidence, and
 - tells a compelling story first and relates historical information second.
- (HISD Appendix 4)

There are two main reasons why I feel a curriculum unit dealing with both travel and historical fiction will be good for the students I teach. First of all, my students have little or no comprehension of anything or any place outside of Houston. At the beginning of the school year, I conducted a survey as part of a social studies unit. About 10 out of my 37 students have never left Houston. Even though the rest of them have traveled someplace, it has not been very far, and they still have a hard time understanding that Houston is just a city. Houston is everything to them, and according to them, every other place out there is just like Houston. Houston as only a part of Texas and Texas as only a part of the United States means nothing to them. Deciding it would be too overwhelming to throw the world at them, I thought a curriculum unit only focusing on the United States would be best at this point. This will give them a chance to study each major region of the United States and learn some of its characteristics. By doing this they will be able to see and understand that other places are very different from Houston and even Texas.

The second main reason for deciding on this curriculum unit is to give my students a feel for a different time period. Everything these days centers on having the best of everything. My students have the latest brand name shoes and are always talking about the video games and video players they own. This all comes from students who do not have money to pay for their lunch. Wants being put before needs is the attitude in today's society. It used to be having the basic food, clothing, and shelter was all that was needed in order to survive, but it is now all about keeping up with the Joneses. There is

also the matter of time. Every part of our day works around the clock on the wall or the watch on our wrist. How much time will this take? Are we going to have enough time for this? I want my students to learn that not too long ago time was not a big factor in peoples' lives. They took and dealt with issues as they came to them, never really stressing about the "time" factor.

Our lives today are rushed and about having the best of everything. I feel it is imperative for our students to know that life is really about the simple things and learning how to work for what you need and want. The best way this can possibly be done is through a unit based on historical fiction and comparing and contrasting then to now. Both *Sarah, Plain and Tall* and *Rachel's Journal* have at least one character who is the age of, or close to, that of my students. The books also have one character, or several families, who travel throughout parts of the United States. Through the teaching and study of this unit, it is my hope that my students will learn more about the different regions of the United States, while also learning how people survived in a time period much different than the one in which we live today.

THE NORTHEASTERN COAST OF MAINE TO THE MIDWEST: *SARAH, PLAIN AND TALL*

A very common practice during the 1800s and on into the 20th century was that of advertising for a wife. The women who answered these ads became known as mail order brides. The ads were generally placed by single men who had hopes of finding a wife. More often than not, these ads were placed by men who lived in remote areas of the country where women were not found around every corner. Living in untamed areas of the country was difficult, and many people, including women, did not want to go through the hardships it involved.

The reasons for men placing an ad for a wife were numerous. It may have been the man was simply tired of being alone and wanted companionship, or perhaps it was a widower who was just looking to marry again. The reason for the practice was also for more practical reasons. Sometimes the man needed more help on the farm or at his place of business. It also may have been that he simply wanted a mother for his kids. Whatever the case, mail order brides were more common than people realize. Several of these reasons form the basis for *Sarah, Plain and Tall*.

Summary of *Sarah, Plain and Tall*

This wonderful and very touching story written by Patricia MacLachlan is a perfect example of the mail order bride practice. The book begins with Caleb Witting asking Anna, his older sister, if mama sang every day. Caleb and Anna's mama died the morning after Caleb was born, so Caleb remembers nothing about his mama. He only knows what Anna has told him. Caleb is a very curious boy who questions everything and eventually he asks his father why he never sings anymore. Jacob responds, "I've

forgotten the old songs, but maybe there's a way to remember them" (MacLachlan 7). He then tells Anna and Caleb he has placed an advertisement not just for a housekeeper but a wife. To Caleb, however, this means only one thing...a mother.

This brings us to Sarah Elisabeth Wheaton of Maine who has answered Jacob's advertisement. Jacob reads Sarah's letter in which she tells him of her situation. She lives with her older brother who is about to be married and has decided it would be best if she no longer lived with him. She goes on to say, "I have always loved to live by the sea, but at this time I feel a move is necessary" (MacLachlan 9). She says she is strong, hard working, and willing to travel, but that she is not mild mannered. Towards the end she questions whether or not he has an opinion on cats because she has one.

After Jacob reads Sarah's letter, Anna and Caleb are interested in only one thing, whether or not she can sing. After exchanging letters with both Jacob and his children, Sarah agrees to come and stay for a month, "To see how it is. Just to see" (MacLachlan 14). Even after reading Sarah's letters and then meeting her through the family's eyes, it is very clear that Sarah is very much in love with her home by the sea. The decision Sarah is ultimately faced with is whether or not to return to her home by the sea which she knows and loves or to stay with the family she has come to know and love.

Traveling by Train with Sarah

Sarah's chosen mode of transportation from Maine to the Midwest is by train. It is crucial for students to understand why the train was so important to this time period. Basically, it was the fastest way to travel. Trains are still used today, and students know this, but to them they are used mainly for transporting goods such as cars and trucks, animals, supplies, etc. They probably also know by watching television or movies that people still use trains to travel in and around some of the larger cities in the United States. But what they truly need to understand is that since its invention and up until the time when the automobile became available to everyone, not just those in upper class society, trains were the way to travel. Besides transporting goods and supplies elsewhere, they carried people.

No one really knows who came up with the idea of railroad tracks, but we do know that the ancient Greeks, Romans, and Assyrians understood that wheels could be easily rolled on a smooth track. They would cut grooves in stone slabs and roll wagons along those tracks. Although the vehicles they used are no longer around, some of the tracks can still be seen (Hakim 116).

Railways in the United States began popping up during the 1820s. In 1827 the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad was chartered and began expanding in the 1830s. Much of the east coast was covered with railways by the 1850s, and they were reaching towards the Midwest. Railway lines had grown from 3, 300 miles in 1840 to 17,000 miles in

1854, and 12,000 more miles were being built. The building of railroads was opening up the coal country of Pennsylvania and the cattle ranches in the west (Jenkins 93).

The building of railroads also helped to improve technology because the west was being brought closer to the east. In 1840 it would take about five months for news to make it across the continent. The Pony Express provided a quick way of delivery in 1860, but by 1861 this system was no longer needed because of the transcontinental telegraph. President Lincoln then signed the Pacific Railroad Act in 1862 which would have railways built from the east and west and would eventually link together across the entire country (Jenkins 120). The Central Pacific Railroad headed east from Sacramento while the Union Pacific was built west from Omaha between 1865 and 1869. The task seemed almost impossible because of the conditions they were undertaking, but in May 1869 the two lines met at Promontory Summit in Utah. The states were now united (Jenkins 121).

It will be important for students to understand what made the train so crucial to people who lived during the 19th and 20th centuries. This was the fastest and safest way to travel. Even after the invention of the automobile, the train was still used as the main way for people to travel. Most people could afford the cost of traveling by train, and just about every major city was connected to the smaller cities, which made it easy for most people to catch the train to their destination.

Introducing *Sarah, Plain and Tall*

There are two very important points students need to understand before beginning this book. First of all, there is the importance of location of the book. Sarah is from Maine, which is located by the sea, and then travels to the Witting farm, which is located somewhere in the mid western United States. Even before starting to read the book, it may be best to go ahead and inform students of this. This will give them a chance to do a little brainstorming on what they already know about the areas in which the book takes place. Sarah comes from Maine and has always lived by the seaside. She then moves to somewhere in the Midwest and lives on the prairie with the Witting family. Ask students what they already know about the sea and the prairie. A list with some sample responses follows:

***Things you see on the prairie**

grass tumbleweeds
horses sheep
farms ponds
flat land cows
wind blowing dirt roads

***Things you see at the sea**

shells waves
seaweed sand castles
people swimming boats
sand dunes cliffs
sunbathers fishermen

Since my students live in Houston, more than likely they will understand things from the sea list more easily. However, I come from an area in Texas which is more like the

prairie so I will be able to help them with the prairie list as well. Either way the students are going to be exposed to new vocabulary. Getting through this starter activity will help students see the difference in places around the United States, or at least two different areas, the sea and the prairie. This will also give the students a chance to do some research on the types of landforms found between Maine and the Midwest which they will need to know in order to do the relief map activity.

The second important point students need to understand before beginning this book is that people, even kids their own age, lived in a different way during the time period in which *Sarah, Plain and Tall* takes place. Perhaps a way in which students could focus on this would be to complete a Venn diagram. A wonderful topic for the diagram could be chores. Students could work with a partner to compare and contrast chores done by today's kids and chores done by children such as Anna and Caleb. An example of those chores that may be somewhat different from those of today (unless they live on a farm or have visited relatives who live on farms) are as follows:

*Farm Chores

milking cows	cooking dinner
gathering eggs	washing clothes (the old fashioned way!)
stacking hay	picking crops
feeding horses	cleaning out the barn
plowing the fields	chopping the wood

Many of these chores the students may be familiar with, but the question is have they ever done any of them themselves? Students today feel they have it "tough" because they are made to clean their rooms and take out the trash once or twice a week. Introducing them to chores done by kids the same age as them only about 100 years ago will hopefully open their eyes to the fact that they have it quite a bit easier than children used to.

Something else for students to think about at this point would be the inventions we have today that make our lives much easier. Have students brainstorm things we have today and do a little research as to when these things were invented and discuss how much easier life would have been for Sarah and the Witting family if they had these "simple" inventions themselves. A list of sample inventions follows, but more than likely, the students will be able to come up with even more.

*Inventions that have made our lives easier

light bulbs	stoves
faucets	indoor bathrooms
washing machines	tractors
telephones	air conditioning

Doing some, if not all, of these starter ato overcome on the Oregon Trail, such as Native Americans, some friendly and others not too friendly, stampeding buffalo, thunderstorms, and having to cross some unpleasant rivers. Through Rachel's eyes we see the difficulties of traveling the Oregon Trail, but we also see her family's determination to make a better life for themselves.

Establishment of the Oregon Trail

In *Sarah* we see the importance of the train to the time period, and looking at *Rachel's Journal*, we will learn the importance of the establishment of the Oregon Trail. Like the importance of Loop 610 to Houstonians, the Oregon Trail was the way to go if you were an emigrant heading towards California.

The Oregon Trail was first established in 1812 by a trapper by the name of Robert Stuart. Footpaths did already exist in parts that would eventually become the United States and had been first established by Native Americans. Robert Stuart, however, was one of the first mountain men to actually walk the Oregon Trail. Stuart and a group of trappers sailed around South America and landed at the mouth of the Columbia River in 1811. The Columbia River flows from the Rockies to the Pacific Ocean. It was here that Stuart founded a trading post that he called Astoria. It was named after the man for whom Stuart worked, John Jacob Astor. While traveling, the expedition's ship exploded leaving the trappers stranded and unable to return to Astoria. However, another group of Astor's crew eventually stumbled upon them, and they had traveled on land by crossing the Rocky Mountains and then floating down the Columbia River (McNeese 7).

Both groups decided this would be the only way for them to return. Robert Stuart led a group that started out in June of 1812. All was well until unfriendly Native Americans stole their horses, leaving them unsure of how to cross the Rocky Mountains. Eventually on October 22, 1812, Stuart and his group found a way through the mountains. They came across a pass at the south end of the Wind River range, which is in what is today Wyoming. They also noticed the pass was wide enough for wagons to pass through, a fact which would later become very important to travelers (McNeese 8).

Stuart and his group finally reached St. Louis, Missouri, in March of 1813. Although he had no idea of what he had just done, Stuart had established the Oregon Trail, which would later help tens of thousands of settlers to travel through the Rocky Mountains (McNeese 9).

Reasons for Moving West

There were additional reasons for moving West besides the ones stated earlier. Economic opportunity was obviously the most compelling reason of all. People felt there would be more of an opportunity to be successful if they were to go to an area that had not been settled. There was also the matter of gold and silver. Gold had been discovered in

California in 1849, in Colorado in 1859, and in the Black Hills of South Dakota in 1874. Silver had also been found in 1860 in Nevada. People who wanted to “get rich quick” came running when this was announced. Another reason for moving West was the financial collapse that had occurred. On May 10, 1837, banks closed, and that caused people to panic. They headed west in order to start over because of this economic depression. Another financial panic in 1857 caused the people in the Midwest to head even further west (HISD 2).

There was also the matter of sickness and epidemics. During the 1830s a cholera epidemic that had begun in Asia, moved through Europe and eventually reached the United States. People were still dying twenty years later with 30, 000 dying in 1850. To get away from all of this in the crowded cities, people moved west. It may have helped them, but it hurt everyone they met along the way. People from the cities ended up bringing the cholera with them and infecting others, including the Native Americans with whom they came in contact (HISD 2).

The last two reasons for moving West had to do with religious persecution and slavery. Driven out of Illinois in 1846, the Mormons headed west in hopes of finding a place to settle and practice their religion. Slavery was also a big issue at this time. Even though the Emancipation Proclamation had been issued, slavery was still legal in some states until the end of the Civil War. Before the Civil War began, people trying to escape slavery traveled west in hopes of escaping their past as slaves (HISD 2).

The Trail Traveled by Thousands

Like Rachel’s family, thousands of emigrants followed the same basic route. The departure point for the Oregon Trail was Independence, Missouri, and most wagon trains left in April. The trains would follow the Santa Fe Trail for about two days, and then head off on the road to Oregon. After about a month they would reach Fort Kearney on the south bank of the Platte River (McNeese 25).

The pioneers were now in Nebraska Territory, and they were able to see landmarks such as Courthouse Rock and Chimney Rock. Once they passed the landmarks, the train reached Fort Laramie. Laramie was purchased by the U.S. Army in 1849 and was one of the few stops where supplies could be bought. They were also able to get help with their wagons and get information about Indians in the area, river crossings coming up, recent weather conditions, and any cholera outbreaks (McNeese 26). This time at Fort Laramie basically gave them a chance to catch up on what was going on in the rest of the world.

After leaving Fort Laramie, the train followed the North Platte and Sweetwater rivers and entered mountain country. They also came across Independence Rock which they would take time out to put their names on. In a way it served as a record of emigrants going west (McNeese 26). They then reached the South Pass, discovered by Robert

Stuart in 1812, and crossed through the Continental Divide. Crossing the Continental Divide was important according to Rachel. In the July 28th entry, she says:

When we came to the Continental Divide, we celebrated with a noon treat of strawberries and cream, but my heart felt sad. This was our final good-bye to our family back east. We have passed an important boundary, and I wonder if I will ever see my grandparents again. From now on, all rivers and streams flow west, as if pulling us with them. There is no turning back. (Moss 25)

Once the Continental Divide was passed, Fort Bridger was reached. Fort Bridger was the point where the emigrants decided whether or not they were heading toward Oregon or California. If California was their destination, they headed south. They went around the Great Salt Lake and took Hastings's Cutoff to the Humboldt River, then went through the Sierra Nevada to California. Those going to Oregon went north to Soda Springs, Utah and then to Fort Hall. They then traveled northwest to the Snake River. The Snake River was followed for about 250 miles. After crossing the Snake River, it was about 100 miles to Fort Boise. At this point the travelers also had to cross the Blue Mountains before reaching the Columbia River and Fort Walla Walla. After this point they only had to cross the Dalles in the Willamette River Valley, and they then had reached Fort Vancouver. Their trip was over (McNeese 29).

Traveling by Wagon with Rachel

Traveling by wagon was difficult, but during the 1800s when people went along the Oregon Trail, this was the way to go. One of the better known wagons at this time was the Conestoga wagon, which was named for the Conestoga Valley in Pennsylvania, where it was built in the early 1700s by German immigrants. Pioneers later used covered wagons much like the Conestoga, though smaller and sleeker, to cross the Plains. The white top of the wagons looked like the sails of a ship from a distance, which gave them the name "prairie schooner" (Williams 23). The prairie schooner used by many travelers had a box that measured 10 feet long by 4 feet wide by 2 feet deep. They generally weighed 1,000 pounds when empty and could carry up to 1,500 pounds of goods and supplies. The weight carried depended on the number of animals pulling the wagon (McNeese 17).

The wagons used by many people traveling was made of hardwoods such as maple, hickory, or oak. The wood used was important because the wagons had to be light enough to be pulled by animals but sturdy enough to hold several thousand pounds of goods. They also had to be sturdy enough to go over uneven ground, hold up through violent hailstorms, high desert temperatures, and winter snow. Some of the parts of the wagon included (Herb 74):

- canvas top-soaked in linseed oil to keep out rain,
- front wheels-were smaller so they could be turned sharply,

- jack with a hand crank-lifted the wagon off the ground so a broken wheel could be fixed, and
- wagon axles – cone shaped with the bottom one carrying the most weight. (Steedman 13)

Preparing for a journey that could take anywhere from six to seven months (maybe longer if trouble arose) and covered around 2,000 miles was tough. Because they knew they would probably never return to their old homes, it was hard deciding what to take and what to leave behind. Things such as books, dolls, mirrors, rocking chairs, silverware, and fine linens were not necessary but often held a special place in the owner's heart. Important supplies that were taken along included bedding, extra clothing, dishes, utensils, gunpowder, lead for making bullets, tools, and smaller pieces of furniture. Deciding on what food to take along was another important consideration. While traveling, the pioneers hoped to hunt deer, antelope, buffalo, and wild birds, to pick berries, and to catch fish, but they couldn't depend on getting enough to last for the entire length of the trip (Herb 74). The guidebooks that were being published at the time suggested taking along several hundred pounds per person of the following:

- 200 pounds flour
- 75 pounds bacon
- 30 pounds pilot bread
- 5 pounds coffee
- 2 pounds tea
- 25 pounds sugar
- 1/2 bushel dried beans
- 1 bushel dried fruit
- 2 pounds saleratus (baking soda)
- 10 pounds salt
- 1/2 bushel cornmeal
- 1/4 bushel parched or ground corn
- 1 keg vinegar (Herb 76)

Another important aspect of traveling by wagon was the livestock. Wagons were usually pulled by horses, but these wagons heading west needed to be pulled by stronger animals. Most of the time six oxen were used (three yokes pair). It was usually enough to have four oxen pulling the wagon so the third pair was used to rotate out with the others. Oxen were the chosen animals for several reasons. They were usually stronger than other animals, and they would eat the prairie grass (you had to buy feed for horses and donkeys which gave you something else to pack and carry). They also wouldn't run away like horses tended to do, thieves wouldn't steal them like they did horses, and oxen tended to be cheaper than horses or other animals strong enough to pull a wagon (McNeese 18).

It was also important to keep the livestock healthy while traveling the Oregon Trail. To give the animals a chance to rest and eat, wagon trains would stop around noon for several hours. Doing this every day caused the trip to go slowly, but if they did not do this, the animals would wear out before the end of the journey. When the oxen were well rested, they were able to pull a wagon about two miles an hour on flat land. On a typical day, 15 to 20 miles were covered. The emigrants made sure the wheels on their wagons stayed well greased. Well greased wheels made it easier for the wagon to be pulled (McNeese 19).

Rachel's Daily Life on the Trail

Even though *Rachel's Journal* is a piece of fiction, her life on the trail was much like those pioneers who really did travel the Oregon Trail. Traveling over two thousand miles of land probably sounded like one big adventure, but the days got boring after a while because it was the same thing over and over again. The pioneers' day began around four in the morning. They would dress, get the livestock together, ready the animals for the day, and eat breakfast (McNeese 31). Everyone and everything was usually ready to go by 7 o'clock.

The pioneers did not just ride on the journey. Those who were not driving the wagon would knit or walk and visit with others. The children would also walk and usually played games with each other along the way. The younger children who could not walk or keep up stayed in the back of the wagon and played. Finding little things to do and keep busy allowed the pioneers from getting bored from day to day (McNeese 32).

After traveling for about four hours, the wagons would stop around noon for lunch and a break. Besides the animals having a chance to rest and graze, it gave the pioneers time to do chores such as washing clothes. They would also check over the wagons for any problems. They would break until about two and then get moving for the second part of the day. They usually traveled until it got dark and would then set up camp for the night (McNeese 32).

For entertainment at night the pioneers would read or listen to a preacher give a sermon. Sometimes pioneers had brought along musical instruments like fiddles or harmonicas. This gave people a chance to sing or dance or do both. This was a way to wind down before going to sleep for the night (McNeese 33).

Dangers Encountered on the Trail

When setting out for the more than two thousand mile journey, hardships and problems were expected. Many things could and would occur that brought death. Disease was a major threat. Such diseases that occurred were smallpox, measles, dysentery, and the most deadly, cholera, which is a gastrointestinal illness (McNeese 37). Besides diseases, accidents also occurred. People drowned while crossing rivers, they fell from mountain

trails, children fell out of wagons and were rolled over, and people died from gunshot wounds. Women also died during childbirth because of all the difficult traveling (McNeese 38). Other than diseases and accidents, people were killed by lightning, trampled by buffalo, poisoned from bad water, and suffered heart attacks. It is estimated that about 34,000 people died on the trip out west (McNeese 39).

CONCLUSION

The amount of information here is only a glimpse of what one will find when researching the Oregon Trail and information for *Sarah*. Hopefully doing a curriculum unit on the above will do two things for students at the 4th grade level. First of all, they will be able to see and study different parts of the United States. Many students in the area I teach do not get the opportunity to travel, so therefore, all they learn will be through school. They see every part of the United States looking like it does in Houston. This will give them the chance to see everything else that is out there.

Secondly, a curriculum unit of this nature will teach them that their lives are not half bad. Children today think their lives are hard because they have to do little chores and get grounded when they do not listen. Studying books that are set in the 19th and 20th centuries will give them the opportunity to see how others before them lived. It helps when both books contain characters around their own age. It is in this way that they are able to relate to these characters. By studying *Sarah*, *Plain and Tall* and *Rachel's Journal* it is my hope that my students will become better people. How is this possible? They will see that they do have a pretty good life and come to appreciate all they have in their lives, particularly their family.

LESSON PLANS

Lesson Plan 1: Where Exactly in the United States Do the Wittings Live?

Objectives

- Students will use resource books to determine where particular plants are located in the United States.
- Students will locate states on a United States map.
- Students will use maps to fill in information researched.

Materials

Resource books with plants and their locations

Maps of United States

Map colors

List of plants and wildlife from *Sarah*, *Plain and Tall*

Introduction

One thing we know for sure about Sarah is that she comes from Maine and travels somewhere in the Midwest. We also know that the Wittings live on a farm on the prairie, but what we do not know is where their farm is located, for example, in what state. MacLachlan does a wonderful job of using various plants and wildlife throughout the book. While reading have students keep a class list, or students can keep their own, of the different plants that MacLachlan talks about. This list will be important in order to do this activity. Some of the plants she does talk about are prairie violets, bride's bonnet, zinnias, wild feverfew, tansy, etc. This is only a small part of what she does use.

Procedure

Students can work in groups to complete this activity. Every group will have a resource book to work with, and the groups can share as they work. Students will begin by looking up one of the plants used in the resource books. Once they find out what part of the United States it is located in, they will take a map color and color in that part of the United States. That being done, they will then start a legend in which they keep track of plants already found and colors already used. They will then move on to the next plant, only they will use a different color, and again, add it to the legend.

After working for a while students will begin seeing the colors overlap. The plants MacLachlan uses are not found just anywhere in the United States. Once this activity is complete, students can determine where the Witting farm is located. Another way this can be done is being assigning each student or pair of students one plant. It will be their job to research that plant and find where it is located. They can then share with the whole class where their plant is found and a whole class map can be filled in.

Evaluation

- Students will be given a participation grade on how well they work with a group.
- Students will be graded on the neatness of their map.
- Students will be graded on whether or not their legend is complete and accurate.

Lesson Plan 2: Relief Map of Sarah's Journey

Objectives

- Students will create a relief map of Sarah's journey from Maine to the Midwest.
- Students will study different regions of the northeastern and midwestern states.
- Students will research states and their landforms.

Materials

Resource books of states and their landforms

Flour

Salt

Water

Bowl

Putty knife or butter knife
Cardboard or poster board
Newspaper
Paint/markers/material for decorating relief maps

Introduction

Before beginning this activity it is important for students to have completed the first one. This way they will know exactly, or close to, what state the Witting farm is located. Students will also need to know the basic landforms found in the states starting from Maine and going on through the Midwest. They will be completing a relief map of the journey Sarah took when traveling to the Witting farm. A relief map is a special map that shows the physical features of an area. Some examples are mountains, plains, valleys, etc.

Procedure

Students will work with a partner and be assigned one state in which Sarah traveled through going to the Witting farm. The partners will be in charge of creating the relief map of that state and then adding details to it. Once all states have been completed, they will be fitted together, and then the route in which Sarah traveled will be traced.

Students will cut a piece of cardboard or poster board the size and shape of their state for their relief map. They will also outline the features of their state. Once their dough is ready, they can add it to their outline.

Students will then mix 2 parts flour to 1 part salt in a bowl. They will add small amounts of water to the mixture until it resembles cookie dough. The dough will need to be somewhat stiff in order to form mountains.

Once the students have the basic relief map done, they can then add the details of that particular state, i.e. rivers, lakes, mountains, forests, railroad tracks, and anything else they wish to add. However, it must be something found in that state. Students can use a putty knife or a butter knife to help in forming the mountains. The maps should also dry overnight before students begin anything extra.

Evaluation

- Student maps will be graded based on a rubric designed for the maps.
- Students will write a composition in which they describe their state and its features.
- Students will be given a participation grade on how well they worked with their partner.

Lesson Plan 3: Lights, Camera, Action!

Objectives

- Students will work as a team to reenact a scene from *Rachel's Journal*.

- Students will demonstrate speaking skills when presenting to a whole group.
- Students will demonstrate acting ability or their “behind the scenes” ability to put a play together.

Introduction

Students at the 4th grade level love being able to play around. Doing this activity will give them the opportunity to do this, yet how well they do it will determine their grade. Students will also have to work in a group where everyone must participate in order to get the job done.

Materials

Copies of *Rachel’s Journal*

Scripts written by students

Material for props

Materials for background scenery

Procedure

Before students can act out a scene they must pick a scene to act out. This can be done in two ways. If the students can handle it themselves, let them pick what they want to do. However, the teacher can assign each group a scene to act out. This will cut back on groups arguing amongst themselves. Once a scene has been picked or assigned students will need to work together in order to write a script. To make this easier on them, you may want to do one as an example and show them or do one whole group first.

Once the script has been written, students will need to be given plenty of time to practice and to also get props and such ready. For the students who do not like being in front of others, they can be the ones to work on props and background scenery.

When all groups are ready to present, they can then take turns presenting to the rest of the class. Before starting it may be important to tell students watching a play is like going to the movies. If you talk and make noise the others around you cannot hear what is going on.

Evaluation

- Students will be given a participation grade on how well they worked with their group.
- Students will be graded on creativity.
- Students will be graded on the scripts they write.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Works Cited

- Edwards, Cheryl. *Western Expansion: Exploration and Settlement*. Massachusetts: Discovery Enterprises, Ltd., 1995.
This book contains writings of Thomas Jefferson, Lewis and Clark, Davy Crockett, and others who worked as scouts, trappers, and traders.
- Hakim, Joy. *A History of Us: Liberty for All? 1800-1860*. New York: Oxford UP, 1999.
Provides information and first-hand accounts of pioneers taking the westward trail.
- Herb, Angela. *Beyond the Mississippi: Early Westward Expansion of the United States*. New York: Lodestar Books, 1996.
Includes first-person narratives accompanied by archival photographs, newspaper headlines, documents, letters, and illustrations telling how the United States stretched its borders from the Mississippi frontier to the Pacific coast.
- Houston Independent School District. *Project CLEAR Curriculum: Model Lessons for Historical Fiction*. Language Arts, Fourth Grade. Houston, TX: Houston Independent School District, 2003.
Sample lesson plans for Language Arts based on historical fiction.
- Jenkins, Philip. *A History of the United States*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997.
Provides information of westward expansion and also includes maps and timelines of when states joined the United States.
- MacLachlan, Patricia. *Sarah, Plain and Tall*. New York: Scholastic, Inc., 1985.
This book is based somewhere in the Midwest and focuses on a young woman's struggle to try and adapt to a new way of living.
- McDougal Littell. *Language of Literature*. Evanston, Illinois: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2000.
A guide for both teachers and students on various types of literature.
- McNeese, Tim. *Western Wagon Trains*. New York: Crestwood House, 1993.
This book is based on traveling the Oregon and California Trails.
- Moss, Marissa. *Rachel's Journal*. New York: Harcourt, Inc., 2001.
This is a book in the form of a journal kept by a young girl as her family leaves Illinois and travels toward California. The book also contains descriptions of various things along the way.

Steedman, Scott. *A Frontier Fort on the Oregon Trail*. New York: Peter Bedrick Books, 1994.
Provides information on traveling westward with a wagon train of pioneers seeking new land to settle and daily life of the pioneers.

Williams, Brian and Brenda, ed. *World Book Looks at the American West*. Chicago, World Books, Inc., 1997.
Provides information on pioneer trails and life on the trail and frontier. Includes maps and colorful illustrations depicting the information given.

Supplemental Resources

Collins, James. *Exploring the American West*. New York: Franklin Watts, 1989.
This book contains information on explorers of the West. It also contains maps of the early unsettled western territory.

Erickson, Paul. *Daily Life in a Covered Wagon*. New York: Puffin Books, 1994.
This book is based on diaries and letters and explores what life was really like traveling in a covered wagon.

Freedman, Russell. *Children of the Wild West*. New York: Scholastic, Inc., 1992.
Freedman describes what life was really like for children living in the West.

Gosnell, Kathee. *A Guide for Using Sarah, Plain and Tall in the Classroom*. Westminister: Teacher Created Materials, Inc., 1993.
Includes activities such as curriculum connections, vocabulary, unit tests, and critical thinking.

Hakim, Joy. *A History of Us: The New Nation 1789-1850*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
Gives information and first-hand accounts of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark and their experiences exploring the Louisiana Purchase.

Levine, Ellen. *...If You Traveled West in a Covered Wagon*. New York: Scholastic, Inc., 1986.
This book explains what it would be like to be a pioneer and having to travel west to Oregon during the 1840s.

Ritchie, David. *Life in America 100 Years Ago: Frontier Life*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1996.
Provides a more realistic look at life on the frontier 100 years ago. Also explores the hazards and problems of life on the frontier.

Filmography

Sarah, Plain and Tall. Dir. by Glenn Jordan. Videocassette. Hallmark Home Entertainment, 2003.

Movie based on the book by Patricia MacLachlan. Shows a young woman trying to adjust to life in a new place.

Seasons of the Heart. Prod. by Don A. Judd and Scott Swofford and Dir. by T.C. Christensen. Videocassette. Rekab Tserrof, L.C., 1993.

Jed and Martha Richards agree to raise orphaned Daniel after their own two girls died on the trek across the American Plains.

Skylark. Prod. and Dir. by Joseph Sargent. Videocassette. Sarah Productions, 1993.

Second part to *Sarah, Plain and Tall*. Sarah has officially become part of the Witting family and they face new obstacles.