

Theme 4: Farm Life in Frontier Iowa

Learning Goals:

Students will understand the five-step method for conducting historical research

Students will distinguish primary source materials from secondary sources

Students will use primary source materials to develop a historical narrative

Iowa History Benchmarks:

4. Pioneer Life on the Prairie

- c. For most settlers, living on the prairie meant a change in farming and household practices.**
- d. Pioneer raised or made most of the items they needed for daily life.**
- e. Pioneer families developed a sense of social community and interdependence by sharing work and social events.**

Materials:

Life in a Log Home

Iowa Farm Letters

1870 Iowa State Almanac

Pioneering at Bonaparte and Near Pella

Diary of a Young Girl

Activities:

1. Introduce this theme by Section off a 16' by 20' area of the classroom. (This was a typical size for pioneer log homes. String could be used, tied to chairs or desks. Have students enumerate what activities would need to be done within this structure. Have 6-10 children role-play taking different places within the "log home." Discuss present-day homes, comparing sizes with pioneer homes.
2. Read to students from the following three primary source selections and discuss the large number of people who frequently occupied a small living space:
 - Life in a Log Home that addresses the crowded conditions of the pioneer cabin (pages 2 and 3).
 - Nov. 1-November 10 from Diary of a Young Girl. Note numerous references to staying with other families along the way.
 - Paragraph 14 from Pioneering at Bonaparte and Near Pella. Note the large number of people staying in the home.
3. Define the term *primary source*: this term the term generally refers to official documents, letters, diaries, photographs, advertisements and about any other print materials found in their original form. These materials may be transcribed and/or reproduced. However, for purposes of historical accuracy the content will reflect the original document.
4. Introduce five primary sources related to Farm Life in Frontier Iowa. Provide students the opportunity to explore the documents. Share background information on each of the five

historical resources. Point out the five varying formats: *Diary*, *Memoirs*, *Letters*, *Narrative*, *Almanac*.

Life in a Log Home--An article originally published in the *Annals of Iowa*. The author summarizes the living conditions and problems faced by early Iowa settlers who built and lived in log cabins.

Iowa Farm Letters-- This is a collection of letters written by two pioneer farm families to their relatives in New Jersey and Rhode Island. The letters describe the many problems faced by early Iowa settlers and the ways they solved them.

1870 Iowa State Almanac-- This almanac simulates those published for farmers in the middle part of the 19th Century. It describes changes in Iowa farming between 1830 and 1870. It contains information about the livestock breeding, new seeds, and new machinery.

Pioneering at Bonaparte and Near Pella—The reminiscences of Sarah Nossaman about life on the early Iowa Frontier in the late 1830's and early 1840's.

Diary of a Young Girl—The diary kept by Ellen Strang in the early 1860's. She kept a record of pioneer farm life including information on household chores, planting and harvesting crops, illnesses, and travel.

5. Point out dates of writing and relate these dates to national and state events. For instance, the Civil War was underway during much of the writing of the *Iowa Farm Letters*. Iowa was just beginning to be settled during the period of Sarah Nossaman's memoirs.
6. Next, present the method historians use to discover and retell the past:
 - a. Start with key questions
 - b. Gather historical evidence to answer the questions
 - c. Confirm the authenticity of the evidence
 - d. Explore patterns in the evidence
 - e. Build a story from the collected evidence
7. Given the topic "Farm Life in Frontier Iowa," have students raise key questions to guide their research.
8. When questions have been generated, categorize them topically and make copies of them. The questions will likely fall into categories including but not limited to the following:
 - a. Food
 - b. Clothing
 - c. Shelter
 - d. Work
 - e. Recreation
 - f. Social Activities
 - g. Transportation

- h. Economics
 - i. Education
9. Subsequent activities will involve primary source research structured around these questions. Point out to students that at this point students have addressed the first two of the five research questions:
- a. Start with key questions;
 - b. Gather historical evidence to answer the questions;
 - c. Confirm the authenticity of the evidence;
 - d. Explore patterns in the evidence;
 - e. Build a story from the collected evidence.
10. Assign key topics or key questions to pairs or groups of students. Then have students begin their research. *Life in a Log Home* will provide the backbone of the study from which departures will be made to the other materials to substantiate and confirm ideas found in *Life in a Log Home*. The following list provides beginning primary source references for five key research topics.

BUILDING A LOG HOME

Historical Resources:

Life in a Log Home--page 3, paragraph 3 through page 7, paragraph 1

Other historical resources related to homes include:

1870 Almanac--pages 21 and 24. Sod homes were common in NW Iowa.

1870 Almanac-- page 25, I-Type Houses

Iowa Farm Letters--paragraphs 35.3, 46.2 and 47.5

THE CROWDED CABIN

Life in a Log Home--paragraph 2, page 7, through paragraph 1, page 8. The home was the center of social activity particularly when bad weather would strike.

Iowa Farm Letters-- paragraphs 1.3, 1.10, 4.3, 4.5, and 40.2. Describes the interior conditions of the log home in winter, as well as the description of blizzards on the prairie.

Diary of a Young Girl—December 20 through January 19. Includes numerous references to the weather and the impact on their lives.

EDUCATION

Life in a Log Home—page 7, last paragraph

Iowa Farm Letters-- paragraphs 13.4, 14.2, 14.4, and 30.5. Includes references to schools and the implication that school was not always held.

Diary of a Young Girl-- December 20 through January 19. Includes references to schools or reciting lessons. School resumed again on January 19.

1870 Iowa State Almanac-- miscellaneous collection of school-related items on pages 3, 4, 39, 42, and 47. Page 7--the 16th section of each township was reserved for education.

SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

Life in a Log Home—pages 6-7

Diary of a Young Girl—page 5, Thursday December 25 through Thursday, January 1.
Little mentioned about Christmas customs as many know them today.

Diary of A Young Girl-- December 20 through January 19. References to visitors found on the following dates:

Thursday, November 20th
Sunday, December 7th
Wednesday, December 10th
Friday, December 12th
Sunday, December 14th
Sunday, December 28th
Sunday, January 4th
Sunday, January 11th
Saturday, January 17th

PREPARING FOOD

Life in a Log Home-- paragraph 2, page 8, through paragraph 5, page 9

Iowa Farm Letters--See the subject **index for references to subtopics for FOOD**

Pioneering at Bonaparte and Near Pella--paragraph 13

1870 Almanac--pages 3, 15, 17, 19, 27, 35, 37, 42, 46, 47

CLEANING AND CLOTHING

Life in a Log Home--paragraph 6, page 9, through paragraph 3, page 10.

Iowa Farm Letters--sections 2.5, 3.4, 4.3, 11.2 and 14.3

11. As students find materials related to their key questions, have them compose responses with references to the primary sources used.
12. At the beginning of each subsequent class period, begin with a review of the task and updates on what students have found thus far.
13. As students complete their research, web the questions responses into a narrative describing Iowa pioneer life on the frontier.
14. Culminating Activity: Surviving in Frontier Iowa
 - a. Provide the setting for the lesson by having the students imagine they are leaving Indiana and moving west to settle in Iowa. Have them discuss what goods they would need to take with them in their wagons.
 - b. Divide the class into groups with five students in each. Provide each group with a list of the following items:
 - 1) breaking plow
 - 2) barrel of water
 - 3) 100 lb. bag of potatoes
 - 4) extra pair of boots
 - 5) bushel of shelled corn
 - 6) flint lock and musket
 - 7) pedal organ

- 8) stove
- 9) ax
- 10) change of clothing
- 11) canvas tent
- 12) china
- 13) hoe
- 14) silverware
- 15) matches
- 16) 5 lbs. tea
- 17) bag of mixed herbs
- 18) Bible
- 19) tobacco
- 20) spinning wheel
- 21) whiskey

- c. Emphasize that they are only able to take 10 items with them and the whole group must agree on the group's selection.
- d. Have groups share their lists of items and the reasons why they chose each item.

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