

Trappers, Traders, and Trailblazers Lesson (Grades 4-8) Teacher Guide

Skype Lesson Description

Explore the adventurous culture of the West during the time of the trappers, traders, and trailblazers. Discover the tools and techniques that mountain men used to survive in the wilderness, and see how they influenced the American West. Presenter will immerse students in the history, art, and natural history collections that tell the story of the mountain man.

Objectives

- To introduce students to mountain men, who they were, how they lived, and the tools they used in order to survive.
- To teach the role of the beaver in history, and its importance as a natural and economic resource.
- To explain how influential the mountain man was in the history of the American West.

Pre-Lesson Activities

Introduce Vocabulary

Discuss the following vocabulary terms.

Habitat – a place where plants and animals live with four important requirements for survival (food, water, shelter, and space)

Felt cloth – cloth made from the soft under fur of beavers

Explorer – someone who travels into relatively unknown areas

Rendezvous – gathering of mountain men, American Indians, fur companies, and suppliers in the summer

Entrepreneur – a person who takes risks to run a business or make money

Flint and strike – tools used by mountain men to start fires

Plew(/ploo/) or pelt – a word mountain men used to refer to a beaver skin

Possible bag – carried the mountain man's necessities, such as a knife, flint, trade items, spoon, and fork

Trade goods – the items that mountain men and American Indians exchanged with each other

Becoming a Mountain Man

Materials: whiteboard or chalkboard

Discuss the different reasons a young man might have become a mountain man. Responses may include:

- *Self-sufficient and independent*
- *Hardy and willing to be alone*
- *Courageous*

Ask students to make a list of characteristics that would not be well suited to a mountain man. Write list on the whiteboard or chalkboard. Take a vote asking students if they think they could have been a mountain man. Allow students time to explain why or why not with their classmates.

Mapping It Out

Materials: map of the United States, access to the internet

Look at a map of the United States. Identify the major rivers mountain men may have used to travel into the American West. Conduct a search on the internet of maps of the mountain men routes. You may find maps of the rendezvous and maps of individual mountain men, such as Jedediah Smith. Compare your results. Engage students in a discussion about the importance of rivers to the mountain men.

Note to Teachers: *Snake River, Bighorn River, White River, Powder River, Wind River, Sweetwater River, Green River, Bitterroot River, and Missouri River may come up in students' research.*

Post-Lesson Activities

Research Fur Companies

Research the American Fur Company and the Hudson's Bay Company. Discuss the similarities and differences of the companies. Ask students:

- *What are the advantages and disadvantages of working for each company?*
- *What would it have been like to work independently and not have to report to one of these companies?*

Learn More about Individual Mountain Men

Material: as necessary for group presentations

Research the different mountain men of the Rocky Mountain West. Have students present their findings to the class in a presentation, skit, or other creative format. Students can work individually or in groups.

Journal Entry of a Mountain Man

Materials: journals or materials to make journals, pencils, colored pencils

Ask students to contemplate having been a mountain man in the Rocky Mountain West. Encourage them to brainstorm what their life would have been like. Ask the following questions to help in their brainstorm:

- *What would your daily and nightly routines have been?*
- *What would you have eaten?*
- *How would you have defended yourselves?*
- *What types of animals and people would you have encountered?*

Have students make their own mountain man journal. They can then record what their life might have been like if they were a mountain man. Ask them to include answers to these questions using writing and sketches.

Illustrate a Mountain Man

Materials: drawing paper, pencils, paints, or other art materials

Review the artwork depicting mountain men that students viewed and discussed in the accompanying Trappers, Traders, Trailblazers PowerPoint included in our lesson resources and during the Skype lesson. Have students draw, sketch, or paint their own artwork based on what they learned.

Resources

Buffalo Bill Historical Center Resources

The History of Yellowstone: The Discovery – available on DVD through our lending program

This film takes you through the initial discovery of Yellowstone in 1806 to the foundation of the park in 1872. Learn how fur trappers, mountain men, prospectors, and mapmakers laid the groundwork of the park and its protective legal system.

Trappers, Traders, Trailblazers Trunk – available through our lending programming

The words mountain men conjure up vivid images of rugged individuals who traveled, explored, and lived in the Rocky Mountains in search of valuable animal pelts. This trunk contains tools and equipment characteristic of trappers, traders, and trailblazers. It also includes reproductions, classroom activities, games, and a NEW teacher guide.