

Manifest Destiny: Empire upon the Trails

NCSS thematic strand: time, continuity, change
Grade 8

Background

This lesson explores moral, ethical and historical questions about America's westward expansion. Students will consider whether America's expansion was destiny or invention, whether expansion was justified, and what life was like for American settlers, Native Americans, and Mexican settlers and the interactions between these groups. They will do this first by reading and discussing two quotes about Manifest Destiny. Students will also analyze two paintings that portray westward expansion.

Following this discussion, students will participate in a state naming game using the classroom's smart board. In learning about manifest destiny student will learn the names and locations of all fifty states (by the end of the unit, around 1850, the territory that would become the lower 48 was all claimed by the U.S.).

Objectives

Students will:

- ❖ Analyze images to gain a stronger understanding of Manifest Destiny
- ❖ Read and discuss documents about American expansion
- ❖ Develop knowledge of American geography
- ❖ Increase their understanding of different perspectives on westward expansion
- ❖ Synthesize knowledge of Mexican-American War with the ethics behind Manifest Destiny

Materials

Projector/Smart board

Procedures

Procedure 1

By this point in the unit, students will have exposure to westward expansion. Review what manifest destiny means. Ask students to define both words.

Procedure 2

Examine this quote from William Gilpin, an English artist, which can be accessed at <http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/program/episodes/two/>

“The American realizes that Progress is God. The destiny of the American people is to subdue the continent- to rush over this vast field to the Pacific Ocean...to change darkness into light and confirm the destiny of the human race...Divine task! Immortal mission! The pioneer army perpetually strikes to the front. Empire plants itself upon the trails.”

Some questions to consider:

- ❖ What is an empire?
- ❖ Are there any modern-day empires (nation state, corporate, etc)?
- ❖ What do you think he means by “subdue the continent?” Do you think this makes room for American Indians and Mexican settlers?

Procedure 3

Examine this quote from Nez Perce Chief Joseph, which can be accessed at <http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/program/episodes/six/>

“My father was the first to see through the schemes of the white men...He said: “My son...when I am gone...you are the chief of these people...always remember that your father never sold his country...this country holds your father’s body. Never sell the bones of you father and mother.” I pressed my father’s hand and told him I would protect his grave with my life...a man who would not love his father’s grave is worse than a wild animal.”

Some questions to consider:

- ❖ What problems might American settlers have caused for American Indians in the West?
- ❖ Does Chief Joseph consider the land he lives on important?
- ❖ What do you think Chief Joseph thought about Manifest Destiny?

Procedure 4

Image analysis: “American Progress” by John Gast

- ❖ Who are the people moving from the right side of the painting to the left side of the painting?
- ❖ What do you notice is different about the left side of the painting compared to the right side of the painting?
- ❖ Who lived in the West during this time?
- ❖ How would you describe the woman at the center of the painting?
- ❖ What does the artist think about Manifest Destiny?
- ❖ Do you agree with that position? Do you think that the West was dark and American settlers spread the light?
- ❖ What would Native Americans and Mexican settlers have thought?

Procedure 5

Image analysis: “The Oregon Trail” by Albert Bierstadt

- ❖ How are these people travelling?
- ❖ Who are these travelers?
- ❖ What are the livestock doing? What might that say about the land?

- ❖ What adjectives would you use to describe the land that they are moving toward?
- ❖ If you were a Pennsylvania farmer who had a rough winter, what might this painting mean to you?
- ❖ How does this image relate to Manifest Destiny? What does this say about American progress west?
- ❖ What was American settlement in the West actually like?

Procedure 6

State game: (use smart board)

Go to <http://www.purposegames.com/game/states-of-the-usa-quiz>

Assessment

End of unit assessment:

For this assignment you will be taking on the persona of one of the individuals we have encountered as we've considered the march west. A list of people to select from is listed below. The students will tell the story of this person. Write a paragraph about each of the following: background of the person, their experiences with westward expansion, and their feelings about the expansion.

People: Jedidiah Smith, Jim Beckwourth, Brigham Young, Mary Austin Holley, Stephen F. Austin, General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, Juan Seguin, Luzena Wilson, Mariano Vallejo, Native Americans in California, Chinese miners in California.

Students will provide the following information before writing the essay:

- ❖ Who are you? Name, background, family, hopes, dreams, etc
- ❖ Why the West? If you are going west, why? If you are already in the West, what is your reaction to westward expansion?
- ❖ What is your "take" on Manifest Destiny? Do you support it? How are you personally affected by it?