

Grade Level

6-8

Class Periods

5

Goals/Objectives/Student Outcomes:

Students will:

- Create a hypothetical travel journal that describes a German family moving to America and an Iowa county.
- Explain the historical development and growth of a community within the context of 19th century Euro-American immigration.
- Discuss sensitivities to various assumptions about different ethnic groups (European background and language) and aspects of community diversity.
- Explain how stereotyping and ethnic hatred was publicly expressed in the 19th century.

Materials:

1. Paper
2. Pencils or pens
3. Detailed county maps of Iowa
4. County history
5. Readings about the ethno-cultural context

Background:

In the 1840s, political unrest and economic depression led hundreds of thousands of Europeans to migrate to America in the hopes of a better life. The largest ethnic group was comprised of German settlers. By 1850 the new state of Iowa had 192,214 people with 20,969 foreign-born settlers. Thirty-five percent of these foreign-born—four percent of the state's inhabitants—came from German-speaking countries. By 1860, there were 674,913 Iowans with 106,081 foreign-born. Thirty-six percent of all immigrants or six percent of all Iowans were German-born.

The most significant area of German settlement was in the river cities along the Upper Mississippi River. Before the railroad connections to Chicago in 1856, the primary method of movement was by steamboat up the river from New Orleans.

Keokuk, Burlington, Muscatine, Davenport, Lyons, and Dubuque all operated as corridors of urban channeling, sending German settlers westward toward the frontier. The railroad lines that moved west after the Civil War created the second wave of German settlers into all areas of the state.

In these river towns, American settlers viewed most immigrants with suspicion. As part of the self-defined municipal leadership, these earlier settlers from the eastern regions of America viewed with alarm the different languages and behavior of the newly arrived Europeans.

In the decade of the 1850s, thirteen different German-language newspapers in Iowa reflected the state's cultural diversity. Unknown to the American inhabitants, the foreign language press contained news of political meetings, serialized novels, and news from the homeland.

The observance of "Continental Sunday," a traditional German day of rest, worried the earlier settlers. From the German perspective, this day meant relaxing with one's family and drinking beer in a park-like atmosphere. From the American perspective, it meant dancing, inebriation and criminal behavior.

Not all German immigrants were disdained by the earlier settlers. An indeterminate number of people of German heritage—the so-called "Pennsylvania Dutch," who were Americanized Germans who still spoke a German dialect—moved west to Iowa City for new farmland.

Another group belonged to Pietistic sects, known as Mennonite or Amish settlers. They first appeared during the Iowa Territorial days, but later settlements near Iowa City and the Pennsylvania Dutch farms occurred in the 1850s. This statistically unimportant but culturally significant group gained approval from local groups unlike the "river town German rowdies."

Various colonies of Germans also settled in Clayton County, including the socialistic Communi under the leadership of Wilhelm Weitling. The best known were the Hessian settlers of Amana who believed in the interpretations of Christian Metz. This type of religious communitarianism succeeded until 1934 and continues to be very well known.

The "defining moment" for the German settlers of Iowa was their involvement in the Civil War. Their interest in shooting societies and marching groups inspired many of them to volunteer for the first three-month enlistments in Iowa's many regiments. After

1865, those survivors received free land and helped to settle the area west of Des Moines and Fort Dodge.

Procedure:

1. Read selections from letters, diaries, and journals kept by German immigrants.
2. Discuss the conditions and people that the Germans encountered on their journeys, and their goals in coming to the United States.
3. Read the historical background concerning the widespread political oppression in Europe around 1848, the economic conditions of Scandinavian farmers, and the British policy in Ireland.
4. Discuss the conditions in Iowa during the Sesquicentennial period of the 1840s.
5. Begin to create draft copies of fictional journals, showing the differences between diaries and journals.
6. Work with students so they can decide if they want to be a man or a woman, married or single, leader or follower. They need to select the area of their county, the period of time and the weather factors considered in traveling.
7. In addition to actual stories in the county histories, students may want to read early newspaper accounts of the German settlers who moved into a community. This will require coordination with the local librarian.
8. Some of the journaling may become the basis for role-playing or dramatic improvisation.
9. The culminating activity could be the reconstruction of a newspaper article, written from the perspective of the decade the county was settled.

Assessment of Outcomes:

The students can evaluate their journal perspectives by means of guided small group discussion.

Particularly imaginative passages can be read out loud.

Compare and contrast the German immigrants to other groups moving to North America: the Puritans to Massachusetts Bay Colony as religious refugees, or West Africans to Virginia as slaves.

Extensions and Adaptations:

The students can:

Visit a regional museum to see exhibits on the settlement period in Iowa history.

Develop geography skills to enhance their historical analyses.

Learn primary source research skills in their local community library.

The students can learn creative writing skills by preparing the reconstructed journals.

Resources:

7th-10th U.S. Census (1850-1880)

Laura Longley Babl. "Iowa's Enduring Amana Colonies." *National Geographic* (December 1975): 863-878.

Melvin Gingerich. "Mennonite Family Names in Iowa." *Annals of Iowa* 42 (Summer 1974): 397-403.

Hildegard Binder Johnson. "German Forty-Eighters in Davenport." *Iowa Journal of History and Politics* 44 (January 1945).

Hildegard Binder Johnson. "The Location of German Immigrants in the Middle West." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 41 (March 1951).

Carl Schneider. *The German Church on the American Frontier*. St. Louis: Eden, 1939.

Theodore Schreiber. "Early German Pioneers of Scott County, Iowa." *German-American Review* 8 (December 1941).

George Schulz-Behrend. "Communi, Iowa, a Nineteenth-Century German-American Utopia." *Iowa Journal of History and Politics* 48 (January 1950).

Bela Vassocy. "New Buda: A Colony of Hungarian Forty-Eighters in Iowa." *Annals of Iowa* 51 (Summer 1991): 26-52.

Carl Wittke. *The Utopian Communist A Biography of Wilhelm Weitling, Nineteenth Century Reformer*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1950.

Sanford Calvin Yoder. *The Days of My Years*. Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1959.