

Grade Level

5

Class Periods

3-4

Goals/Objectives/Student Outcomes:

This lesson will give students of the community a sense of place, providing a "bridge" to the past. The project will be accomplished through the interaction of community members with the students and the use of an interdisciplinary approach involving the social studies, math, science, music, art, and language arts teachers. It will enable students to see how different disciplines relate to each other and give them a real life foundation for their lessons.

Students will:

- Look at the Des Moines River and its importance to the settlement of our county.
- Examine settlers' ingenious solutions to the problem of crossing rivers and their uses for these crossings.
- Appreciate advances in and advantages of the "modern" architecture of bridges.
- Develop a sense of ownership in the project by building their own model of the village.
- Use their creativity to write poetry and songs about their town.
- Share what they have learned with the community.
- Further develop their writing, math, science, art, music, and research skills through a community awareness project.

Materials:

1. Storytellers and other volunteers from the community
2. County engineer
3. Parent chaperons
4. Science, math, art, music, and language arts teachers
5. Video camera to document project
6. Map of river or aerial view of community from the assessor's office
7. Materials to build replica of village: plywood, paint, brushes, paper mache, graph paper, pencils, glue, clay, etc.
8. Piano

Background:

The first village to be studied will be Douds where, our school is located. Even after the 1993 flood nearly devastated the town, the people in the community have a strong sense of pride. There are many local storytellers willing to visit the classroom and provide the students with stories about the area that will whet their appetites for research. The project will use the local bridges and river as the focus of study.

The land on which Douds was settled was purchased from the Sac and Mesquakie (Fox) Indians in the 1837 Second Black Hawk Purchase. When surveyors began their work many settlers already lived in the area. The town of Portland (Leando) already was established, and the area was noted for its fertile land and its location along the Des Moines River.

Leando, which is located directly across the Des Moines River to the south of Douds, was platted in 1834, 32 years before Douds. Originally known as Portland, the town's name changed in 1840 when the post office name became Leando.

Douds became a city in 1866. The Doud Brothers, Eliab and David, Jr., settled the area in 1843. Lots were laid out on both sides of an old territorial road that connected Fairfield, Iowa to the north and Memphis, Missouri to the south.

Residents originally believed that transportation would be easier if the Des Moines River were navigable year-round. The river was the primary mode of transportation for many years until the railroad made travel and the transportation of goods easier, faster, and more reliable.

The people of Douds were very interested in the construction of a railroad through their community. Eliab Doud gave the company the right to cross his land in order to get the railroad through town. The company built a station at the intersection of the tracks and what is now Main Street.

Before it was platted as a city, the community was called "Alexandria," after Alexandria, Ohio, where the Doud family had lived previously. But railroad officials began referring to the village as "Douds Station," and sometime later the postal department shortened "Douds Station" to "Douds."

A ferry operated between Douds and Leando until a bridge was completed in 1898. There was much opposition to the construction of the bridge by Leando residents who believed the bridge would mean an end to their business community. Unfortunately for Leando, they were correct, and today Leando has few businesses.

The Civil War divided the people of the area—with many of the founding fathers' sons fighting on the side of the North and Leando primarily siding with the South.

Procedure:

1. After general lessons on Iowa history, a more detailed selection is presented on The Villages of Van Buren County. A detailed sketch of each village is developed through student research and interaction with community members. Each year the lessons will focus on another one of the nine villages in the county.
2. Several "old-timers" and resource people visit the class to share information and stories about the Des Moines River, the bridge, and the importance of both to the area. The guest speakers help the students develop a sense of the notion of community and a perspective of what their town was like in the past.
3. The county engineer provides information regarding the importance of the bridge crossing and the class investigates the area for information on the original site of the bridge.
4. The science teacher works with students to examine the river itself.
5. To better understand historic changes in the area, students work together to reconstruct the original settlement using the river and bridge as the focal point. Students are divided into 4 groups covering past Douds, present Douds, past Leando and present Leando.
 - Students work with the math teacher to develop a scale for the village, draw it on graph paper and transfer their plans from the graph paper to the plywood.
 - Using the plans the art teacher works with students to create models of the four villages.
6. Through speeches, songs, poems, artwork and the model of the settlement, students develop and present the information they have gathered to the community, helping to maintain a true sense of place.
 - To write poems students brainstorm ideas based on the facts they have learned about the community.
 - The music teacher works with students to put some of their poetry to music.
 - The results are recorded on videotape as a historic resource to be shared with others.

Assessment of Outcomes:

The project successfully provided students with the opportunity to explore and learn more about their area. It also was a vehicle for interaction among teachers, and between the school and the community.

Students had an opportunity to share with "old timers" from the community in an interesting and educational way.

By gathering information about topics such as early factories, feuds, skunk farms, crops, and transportation, students became familiar with the history of their own area. This was accomplished in an exciting and innovative way that gave students a more personalized history of the area.

Educators and community members worked together to make the project a success.

Students practiced skills in a number of disciplines, which allowed them to see how the information and skills learned in different classes can fit together.

Students presented their song at a school assembly.

Extensions and Adaptations:

Due to time constraints this year the model was a paper and poster board replica of the villages, but next year we hope to make three-dimensional models.

Next year the students will focus on another village and will videotape and document their findings. We will be creating a library of information on all nine villages in the county.

Resources:

History of Douds-Selma. The Van Buren County Historical Society, 1968.

Davis Pollock, local historian.

Clay Lanman, local historian and chairman for the Van Buren Chapter of the 1996 Iowa Sesquicentennial Celebration Committee.

Ralph Arnold, local historian.

Mary Muir, director of the Villages of Van Buren.