



Lesson 5: The Lure of Free Land (Homesteading: A Pull Factor)

Essential Understanding

The lure of free (or inexpensive) farmland brought people from across Europe to Montana. The realities of life as a homesteader were more difficult than the advertisements suggested.

Activity Description

Students will analyze a homesteading advertisement aimed at recruiting Poles to Montana and read excerpts from a Danish homesteader's reminiscence before writing their own "letters home" describing their own imagined homesteading experience.

Objectives

At the conclusion of these lessons students will

- Recognize that Montana was very diverse with many immigrants
- Understand the role of the Homestead Act and the railroads in luring people to Montana
- Recognize the power of advertising
- Understand some of the hardships Montana immigrant homesteaders faced
- Gained reading skills through engaging with a complex primary source text

Time

One to five 50-minute class periods (depending on whether you do the entire lesson or just one of the parts).

Materials

Footlocker/User Guide Materials:

Northern Pacific advertisement (footlocker and Lesson 5 PowerPoint, on CD and at

<https://mhs.mt.gov/education/docs/footlocker/Immigrants/Lesson5.pptx>

Bertha Josephson's reminiscence (pages 54-55)

Treasure Words handout (page 53)

Classroom Materials:

Pencils and paper

Pre-Lesson Preparation

Familiarize yourself with Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS). A brief description of the procedure is on page 87; you can find more information, including videos that show VTS in action at the Visual Thinking Strategies website: <https://vtshome.org/>.

Make copies of the Treasure Words (page 53) and Bertha Josephson's Reminiscence (pages 54-55)

Make copies of the Northern Pacific Railroad advertisement (in the footlocker and on the Lesson 5 PowerPoint) or plan to project it using a document projector or the Lesson 5 PowerPoint.

Procedure

Part 1: Analyze the Railroad poster using VTS (Visual Thinking Strategies).

Start by sharing the Northern Pacific Railroad advertisement on a large screen (or print out multiple copies for students to view at their desks).

Give the students time to observe it individually and silently (1-2 minutes).

Then ask the simple question: What is going on here? It is important to ask this question exactly as you see it written. Once a student volunteers to share what he or she sees, paraphrase his or her answer: I hear you saying...

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You can also have a student expand on what they see by saying: What do you see that makes you say that? Again, paraphrase the best you can the student's answer before moving on to the next student.

After about 5 minutes or so, if things start to become quiet, ask the question: What more can you find? This is important to ask in this exact way, since the question implies that the observation is not only with the eyes (as in what more can you see), but also with the emotions and other senses.

Again, paraphrase student answers before asking (if relevant): What do you see that makes you say that?

Plan on spending about 15 minutes discussing the image, and understand that there will be some silence as students think of what else they can see.

Part 2: Analyze the poster in its historical context.

After your students have thoroughly analyzed this as a group, reinforce the following points (pointing to specific evidence in the image).

- This is an advertisement created by the Northern Pacific Railroad Company to recruit Polish farmers to immigrate to Montana.
- It portrays a very prosperous view of farming in Montana.

Discuss:

Where do students think the poster was distributed? (Answer: Present-day Poland.)

Why does the railroad want Polish farmers to move to Montana? (Answer: The more people living in Montana, the more money the railroad can make. The railroad can make money shipping supplies to Montana from elsewhere and shipping crops grown by Montana farmers to markets outside of Montana.)

Do you think this advertisement gives a complete picture of what life would be like for a Polish farm family if they decide to move to Montana? What is left out of this picture? (Answer: Farming was not as easy

as it was pictured here. The advertisement doesn't talk about schools, churches, stores, neighbors, or other things that will affect the family's quality of life.)

How is this document useful for understanding the history of Montana? (Answer: It shows us how railroad companies recruited overseas for settlers.)

Tell students that railroad companies sent posters, bought advertisements in newspapers, and sent speakers to give lectures about opportunities in Montana to countries across Europe. Land was scarce in Europe. Often the oldest son inherited the farm and the younger siblings needed to find another way to make a living. Because of this (push factor), many people decided to take advantage of the Homesteading Act (pull factor) and move to Montana to become farmers.

Part 3: What was life like for homesteading immigrants? Exploring Bertha Josephson's reminiscence.

1. Hand out copies of Bertha Josephson's reminiscence to your students. Write the following questions on the board:

How many people are in the author's family?

When did she say this happened?

Who is Peter? (This is an inference.)

Where did they go?

Tell students they will need to listen for the answers and also use their imagination to create a movie of this narration in their mind. Then read the story aloud without stopping. Have students answer the questions orally.

2. Tell your students that this piece has many "treasure words." Some of these words are not used anymore. Some are very descriptive vocabulary words that students may not know. Hand out the Treasure Word-list and discuss the words on the list. Then read the reminiscence

again, pausing for students to underline the treasure words.

3. Have your students play “Hot Seat.” To play, divide the class into two teams. Choose someone from Team 1 to sit in front of the class with her back to the board in the “hot seat.” Write one of the treasure words on the board. Team 1 teammates will take turns trying to describe the word to their teammate in the hot seat using only one to three words but **WITHOUT** using the actual word or any of its derivatives. (You may need to remind the person in the hot seat to call on many different teammates.) After one minute or when the student guesses the word, choose someone from Team 2 to sit in the hot seat.
4. Have students fold a piece of paper in fourths (fold it in half, then fold it in half the other way) and put their names on the back of the paper. Tell students they are going to illustrate this reminiscence.

Model the exercise by drawing a rectangle on the board (which represents one of their squares). Place a 1 in the left-hand corner of the rectangle (because you are going to illustrate Paragraph #1).

Read Paragraph 1 aloud. Ask students: What should I draw that helps tell what happened in the paragraph I just read? Have them refer to the text for details (water, boat, baby, mother, bunk beds). Ask them who Peter is. Add him to the picture. (Use stick figures so students know this

is not a test of artistic ability.) Then ask students for suggestions for one-sentence summaries. Write your sentence beneath your picture.

Give students 15 minutes to reread the memoir and draw their favorite paragraph in the top square. Remind them to put the paragraph number in the upper left-hand corner and to write a one-sentence summary. After 15 minutes are up, give them 7 minutes to choose, draw, and summarize a different paragraph. Repeat the process until students have completed three or four pictures.

After everyone has completed the assignment, ask student volunteers to share their pictures and summaries with the class in paragraph order. Ask one student to share paragraph 2, another to share paragraph 3, etc. Simply skip any paragraphs that were left undrawn.

Part 4: Letters home

Review what students learned from analyzing the Northern Pacific Railroad advertisement and from reading Bertha Josephson’s reminiscence. Then ask students to imagine that they have moved to Montana from a foreign country to homestead. Have them write a letter back home to their family recounting their experience, using both their imaginations and their new knowledge gained from working with primary sources.

Treasure Words and Definitions

Baggage: Suitcases, luggage, or trunks that are carried by someone who is traveling.

Boom: A length of time of great prosperity or rapid economic growth.

Cabin: A small room on a ship where you live or sleep.

Chain migration: When family or friends join those who are already established in a new country.

Coulee: A dry streambed.

Decision: A choice that you make after a period of talking and thinking.

Diversity: Variety, especially the inclusion of different types of people.

Economy: Buying and selling of products and services.

Emigrant: Someone who leaves his or her own country to live in another (**Hint:** Emigrant starts with E as in Exit.)

Emigrate: To leave a place (like a country) to settle elsewhere. (**Hint:** Emigrate starts with E as in Exit.)

Ethnic: People of a particular race or country who share a distinctive culture.

European: Someone from Europe.

Famine: Extreme scarcity of food.

Foreign-born: A person born in a different country than the one they are currently living in.

Heritage: Legacy, something that has been passed down from an ancestor.

Homeland: One's native land.

Homesteader: Someone who received land from the U.S. government in exchange for farming that land.

Hymn: A religious song praising God.

Immigrant: A person who has come to a foreign country to live. (**Hint:** Immigrant starts with I as in In)

Immigration: The process of entering another country in order to live there permanently.

Leavings: Leftovers.

Memoir: A form of nonfiction in which an author recounts experiences from his or her life.

Nausea: The feeling of wanting to vomit.

Neighbor: Someone who lives next to or near you.

Passenger: Someone who is traveling in a vehicle, but is not driving or working on it.

Rod: A unit of measure; about 16.5 feet.

Shack: A small building that is not built very well.

Shanty: A shack, usually built from thin sheets of wood or tin. A place very poor people live in.

Signing note: A written promise to pay a certain amount of money. It is sometimes called a *promissory note*.

Sober: Serious; thinks carefully about things.

Sparingly: Using just a little of something.

Spring seat: A wooden bench that sits on springs attached to the body of a wagon.

Steerage: The part of a ship where passengers with the cheapest tickets travel.

Tier: One of a series of rows placed one above another, like a bunk bed.

Vermin: Small animals or insects like rats and cockroaches that are destructive, annoying, or unhealthy.

Voyage: A long trip.

Immigrant Memoirs

1 By 1890, 12,000 foreign-born emigrants had settled in Montana's sixteen counties. Mining settlements absorbed the majority of Europeans and Asians – the Cornish, Irish, and Chinese, specifically. Railroading and farming attracted Scandinavians – Danes, Swedes, and Norwegians – who settled along rail lines and adapted to life as best they could, given language difficulties and America's bewildering customs. Bertha Josephsen Anderson, her husband, Peter, and their children were among the first Danish families to settle in the vast farming region close to the North Dakota border. The following excerpt is from the memoirs of Bertha Josephsen Anderson.

2 “— The trip across the Atlantic was very hard, as we had to take steerage, because that was the cheapest, and the ship was very crowded. We had only one bunk for the five of us. My baby, little Dagmar, who was then ten months old, was cross the whole trip. She was used to nurse my breasts, but being seasick I had no milk. The other two, Mary and Niels, were as good as gold, but it was hard for we could not undress on the whole trip. We did not have a cabin for ourselves, but were in a large room, big enough for one hundred to one hundred sixty or maybe more, which was all filled with two tier bunks—one about the other.

3 Most of the passengers in that room were Polish or southern Germans, with a very few Scandinavians, but little we cared who they were, just so we were left alone. That was nearly impossible for if the party in the bunk above us felt nauseated, as most of them did, he just vomited right past the bed underneath and down on the floor. There it stayed until twice a day some sailor came and tried to sweep it up with a coarse broom made of birch branches.

Many of these people would sit and pick vermin out of their clothes and throw them on the floor...

4 But all things come to an end and so did that voyage. When we were a few days from New York, we learned that the Danish liner that we had hoped to go with but had missed was lost at sea. Then I knew why the money was lost and we were delayed. Though we were sick and weary, thanksgiving to God filled our hearts that we were safe...

5 When we reached Glendive, Montana, our destination, it was not far from midnight. It was only a small border town between North Dakota and Montana.... We were in a strange place with three little children, it was midnight, and we could not talk with anyone or make ourselves understood. They finally guessed we were Scandinavians for they sent out to find a Swede they knew lived in Glendive...The Swede finally came and all was well, for he took us to a rooming house.

6 The next day a Mr. Otis came to take us along with him to Sidney, and he brought with him a letter from my brother Carl.... This was the last hop of our journey. It was a lumber wagon loaded with all kinds of boxes, with a spring seat without any backrest.... When the time seemed long I sang Danish hymns, and Mr. Otis soon was whistling them, for he, too, knew them in the English language. However, we looked with great longing toward the evening of the second day for the place we were going to call home.

7 On the twentieth of April 1889, we had our first meal in our own log shack... It was not easy to get along, since the two rooms were entirely bare except for a little homemade table, but we found a discarded stove and enough old boards lying around to nail together some kind of a bed for ourselves.

8	<p>The chest we had brought our baggage in from Denmark had split and could not be repaired again. I took the top with its curved lid and used it for a cradle for the baby, for that was what I seemed to miss most. The bottom I used for the clothes we did not wear every day. During the day I folded over (it) the quilts the children slept in on the floor, and that made a place to sit down on. We nailed a bench together for the children, and for the rest...we used the ends of trees that were sawed off straight. We had our tin dishes from the ship, and a neighbor loaned us a kettle and a frying pan.</p>	11	<p>During that summer and also during the winter when we could get time, we studied our Danish-English book and an old Montgomery Ward catalogue that was in the shack when we came there, so by this time we were getting along real well in the English language....</p>
9	<p>We were not bad off, or at least we got along. We soon became used to the bare log walls and cracks in the floor wide enough to stick a knife or fork through... We got our water from the Yellowstone River which was only a few rods from the shack, but we still had to carry it a long way because we had to go around by a coulee to get down to it. We used only one of the two rooms because we had nothing whatever to put in the other... What bothered us most was how we should get started to earn something. About a week went by before any decision was made, and we had to eat, even if it was sparingly. The settlers from thirty to forty miles around came to see the strange people who had come so far to settle in such a shanty. Luckily we could not understand them. There was one thing we soon got clear: that they nearly all had something they wanted to sell.</p>	12	<p>(By early spring) there was literally nothing in the house to eat. Our cupboard was bare. The children had the leavings from the morning meal, and went to bed and to sleep, but sleep wouldn't come to me. I thought it was strange that God didn't in some way interest himself in us. I knew we had tried our best.</p>
10	<p>As I could milk and there were several companies of soldiers about twenty-five miles north of us at Fort Buford, an Indian reservation, we soon figured out that we should buy cows and make butter and sell at the Fort. Therefore, we first bought ten milk cows, paying down a little and signing notes for the rest... There was no way of starting to farm that spring.</p>	13	<p>When morning came Peter and I got up as usual, but there was no breakfast to get, so I was glad the children slept late. They had just dressed and were asking for something to eat, when a man living near us came riding into the yard, and stopped for a little visit with Peter. When he saw the children crying and us with sober faces he somehow surmised what was the matter. He left at once and inside an hour he was back again, and he brought with him all kinds of necessary things so we could get along until spring. He even brought a couple of dollars in cash, so if need be we could get more. It was the only time we have been without food in this country.”</p> <p><i>From: Not in Precious Metals Alone: A Manuscript History of Montana.</i></p>