California Geographic Alliance
Lesson Plan

The Impact of Geography

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Grade: 4th grade
Subject: History-Social Sciences

California Academic Content Standards:  

History-Social Science Standards:

Content Standard
4.3.2-Compare how and why people traveled to California and the routes they traveled...

Analysis Skill
Chronological and Spatial Thinking:
4-Students use map and globe skills to determine the absolute locations of places and interpret information available through a map’s or globe’s legend, scale and symbolic representations.

English-Language Arts Standards:
1.0 Listening and Speaking Strategies
Comprehension
1.1-Ask thoughtful questions and respond to relevant questions with appropriate elaboration in oral settings.

Organization and Delivery of Oral Communication
1.8-Use details, examples, anecdotes, or experiences to explain or clarify information.

Also, reinforcement of the Grade 3 Standard:
2.3-Write personal and formal letters...

Objectives:
1. Students will be able to identify geographic factors that impacted travel to California in the first half of the nineteenth century.
2. Students will be able to use latitude and longitude coordinates to locate places on a map.
3. Students will be able to present and learn information through an oral interview process.

Instructional Strategies:
1. Pairing visuals and maps
2. Grouping for map interpretation and oral presentations
3. Note-taking using a graphic organizer
4. Letter writing
NOTE - This lesson is set up to be done over two days with the assessment done as homework or in class on Day 3 so review the information for both days before beginning and decide which activities your students can do on their own and which you will have to adapt to their specific learning needs.

1. Prepare a review of California’s physical geography from Content Standard 4.1 and Atlas Lesson 1 above (Where I Live).
2. Prepare packets of information about the experience of traveling via each of the common routes to the Gold Fields (overland, via Panama, or around Cape Horn)—see Attachment #1 for references.
3. Duplicate the Oral Interview Instructions (Attachment #2) and the graphic organizer (Attachment #3).

Students will need to have basic knowledge of map reading, including the use of latitude and longitude coordinates (see p. 9 in the Atlas) and an understanding of how a physical map represents surface features.

This activity should be used after a brief introduction to the discovery of gold in California but before discussion of the consequences of that discovery.

How does geography affect the movement of people?

- World Physical Wall Map
- CGA Atlas, specifically:
  - Gold Rush Routes Map, p. 26 with sticky notes used to cover the text box
  - Latitude and Longitude Lines, p. 9
  - California and the World Maps, p. 4-5
  - Physical Geography Map, p. 12
  - Drainage Area Map, p. 14
  - Minimum and Maximum Temperature Maps, p. 16-17
  - Annual Precipitation Map, p. 19
  - Water Resources Map, p. 36
- Photos and/or drawings of environments along the three main Gold Rush routes (see Attachment #1)
- 4th grade social studies textbooks

2 sessions, 45-60 minutes each plus a homework
assignment or classtime on a third day

Procedures

Introduction/Anticipatory Set:

1. Post a world physical map.
2. Project pictures of environments representative of areas between Missouri and California as well as of the Isthmus of Panama and Cape Horn. See Attachment #1 for sources to supplement the textbook.
3. After sharing the photos, select students to post copies of the projected images, labeled with their latitude-longitude coordinates, on the wall map with a piece of yarn connecting each image to its location.

Day 1

Instruction:

1. Divide the class into thirds; then divide each third into smaller groups of three (trios) or four (quads) and give each group an atlas.
2. Refer to the Gold Routes map on p. 26 with the text box covered as indicated above, and review the common routes of the prospectors, who arrived in various parts of California from the East Coast (including Europeans who sailed to the US, then continued to the gold fields using the routes described below), from Chile, and even from China and Australia. Explain that some people traveled from East Coast ports like New York to Panama, then crossed the Isthmus on foot or (for part of the way) in canoes on the Chagres River, and finally picked up steam or sailing ships to complete the trip up the Pacific Coast to California ports, primarily San Francisco. Others took overland routes starting mainly in Missouri (Independence and St. Joseph), and still others sailed from the East Coast, around Cape Horn at the bottom of South America and up to California. Be sure students know that overland travel was via horseback, wagon (usually pulled by oxen), or walking and that water travel was via steamboat (on rivers and near the coast) and sailing ship (for lengthy ocean voyages).
3. You may want to lead a class discussion and chart one “starter” fact that would have helped or hindered travel on each route 160 years ago, or you may prefer to have the students just discuss and investigate this in their groups (see below), depending on class needs.
Day 1
Guided Practice:

1. Review the routes across Mexico on the Gold Routes map. Ask the students to look carefully at this map and at the drainage area map on p. 14 and suggest possible problems travelers on that route would have encountered [crossing mountains, possibility of salty water because of internal drainage per text on p. 14, etc.].
2. Using a textbook or other map with latitude and longitude lines, review how to label two locations on the Mexico route with those lines.

Day 1
Independent Practice:

1. Tell the students they will be investigating and reporting on the experiences of gold prospectors as they made their way to California on other routes after word of the gold strike spread. Assign one of the common route options (overland, Panama, Cape Horn) to each group.
2. Have them discuss and list likely advantages and disadvantages with their assigned route by referring to the Gold Rush Routes map and the other Atlas maps listed in the Instructional Materials/Resources section above. Box that list so you can later identify their original answers.
3. Pass out the folders of information on each route and have the students add to their lists based on the readings.
4. At the bottom of their lists, they should write two locations on their route with latitude-longitude coordinates.

Day 1
Closure:

1. Have all the groups assigned to the same route share responses to expand their lists.
2. Collect the lists to check the accuracy of the latitude-longitude coordinates, to evaluate whether or not the difficulties and advantages are logical, and to note clarifications needed on Day 2, which follows.

Day 2
Instruction:

Review the basics of asking Oral History questions (Attachment #3).

Day 2
Guided Practice:

You may want to model an oral history interview with a traveler on the Mexico route using a script you have prepared.
California Geographic Alliance
Lesson Plan

Day 2
Independent Practice:
1. Hand out the graphic organizer (Attachment #3) and have the students list questions in Column 1 for a person who investigated a different route.
2. Form groups of three students, each from a different route, to conduct interviews about the advantages and disadvantages of the routes studied. As questions will likely appear on more than one list, point out that everyone will need to be attentive and take notes on all interviews so questions that have already been answered are not repeated.

Day 2
Closure:
1. Have the students return to their original route groups to share information from the interviews.
2. Hold a discussion with the whole class about the questions that elicited the best answers and chart these for future oral interview activities.

Assessment:
For homework or in class on Day 3:
1. Review the personal letter form that was taught in third grade.
2. Students will write letters to their families, explaining which route they have decided to take to California. It could be the route they were assigned or one they learned about in their interviews. The letters should include comments on how that route is superior to other options.

Extension Activities:
Have the students look at the historical map showing California as an island on the back of the atlas.
   a. Ask them to compare it to a North America map and identify the errors, pointing out that the mapmaker had clearly not traveled to all the places on the map. Discuss how early maps were made [often based on reports from travelers, who frequently reported legends about areas even they had not visited, etc.].
   b. Introduce the Fremont Map (widely available online), one of the first detailed and accurate representations of the West. Have the students compare Fremont’s routes, delineated on p. 24 of the atlas, to the areas covered on his map. Discuss how Fremont might have known how to represent those parts of the map that he did not himself explore. [By the time Fremont was exploring, he had access not only to reports of other travelers but existing maps that had been drawn by skilled mapmakers.]
   c. Note that during the Gold Rush, there were areas along
the way that had still not been mapped so travelers often became lost, even if they had a map with them.