



Video/English/Subject Lesson Plan and Guide

Turn our videos into exciting and informative ENGLISH as well as subject experiences using our lesson plan below.

Building a house of soil

Where does the video go when it's not on the home screen?
New and recent videos appear on the home screen. But then they always go to and stay in the subject areas.

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Building a home when you are poor

Teacher guide

This Lesson Plan and Guide matches the video *Prairie Sod House* (and in search under prairie).

As most children live in towns and cities, they may not be aware of the way people still have to build elsewhere or how they built in the past.

Early prairie homes

Objective

To understand why homes have varied down the centuries and across the world

What you build with depends on

- what is locally available
- how much time you have
- how much skill you have
- how long you intend to stay there
- the kind of climate it is
- the technology you have available
- and how much money you have

This video focuses on the first poor immigrant settlers who moved west across America in the 19th century.

This can be linked to how life changed in Victorian times.

Those immigrants came from England, Wales, Ireland, Scotland, Russia, Germany, Sweden and more.

They included skilled people, but what they all had in common was a lack of money. So they had to do was to take advantage of the land grants the United States government were offering and grab a piece of farmland - quickly.

Then they had to figure out how to make a home and then start turning the land from prairie into farmland they could live from.

So while many others went to cities and worked in factories and lived in slums, many also went to start up new farms.

There were huge numbers of problems connected with this.

Ask the class: can they find out what prairie climate is like (hot summers, bitterly cold winters). Does the fact that it is grassland tell us anything about rainfall (low and unreliable, so trees won't grow)

So by looking at the natural environment, you can learn about many of the challenges of new settlers.

What did people around the world often have to build with? Stone or wood. On the prairies there were neither.

All they had was soil.

But the soil was bound together with grass roots, so it was possible to build with it.

Chunks of turf like this are called sods. These people built sod houses.

The grass is not strong, and there was no cement, so to compensate, the sods had to be wide. Now this turned out to be an advantage because the thick soil walls kept out the heat of summer sun and also the cold of winter.

So this is a very good example of how and why homes were made.

There are many more: for example, tipis for the nomadic native Americans, and longhouses for the Amazon rainforest tribes. They are all covered in our various books.

You can link this to slum housing as well as to historic native culture housing, for example, by using our video in native Americans about 'woodland living'.

Here is the transcript of the video so you can use it for comprehension and gps.

Transcript

There were many problems settling on the American prairies in the 19th century. There were no roads and very few towns so you could not easily get supplies. And in any case, most people were too poor to afford to buy much. As a result, they had to make do with what was on their farmstead. And that essentially was just prairie.

Pioneers of American who had made the journey west from the east coast at the start of the 19th century, had settled in a land that was forested. So as they cleared land for farming, they also used wood to make log cabins. The same was true on the west coast. But new pioneers had to move farther and farther inland to claim land, and in the middle of America it is simply too dry for trees to grow reliably except near rivers. So what were the pioneers to do about building a home? The answer was the sod house. A sod is a slab of prairie, roots and all. In the prairie, the grass grows deep roots, so a sod a foot deep would still be meshed with roots. The pioneers cut these sods by hand with spades, turned them upside down to stop the grass growing, and began to pile one on top of the other until they had a wall a foot thick. And they made another, and another, and another, until they had a simple home. Now – if they could find some precious timber from somewhere, they could make rafters to lay across the walls and support, you guessed it, a layer of sod to act as a roof.

So, if you had just arrived in the prairie, within a few days you could have a house that was well insulated from the hot summer days, and more importantly, from the freezing cold and snowy winter days and nights.

Once they had a simple home, the pioneers moved on to make more walled enclosures in which to keep their animals. Even field fences were made of sod to begin with.

But it had its problems. Every time it rained, some of the sod wall got soggy and was washed away, so the pioneers had to repair their homes quite often. But that was preferable to no home, and it was only needed until the homesteaders could make some money and afford to buy a proper house frame.

It was no exaggeration to say that in these places the west was won – on sods.



Worksheet

How do you make a simple home when you are poor?

1. What does the word prairie mean?
2. Using the picture, say how you know this is a home.
3. Where is wood used?
4. What seems odd about the way this 19th century farmer-settler is dressed?
5. What do you know about how poor people dressed in the 19th century?
6. Why was a sod turned upside down?
7. What were the advantages of a sod house in winter?
8. What happened after heavy rain?
9. Write a short journal telling of how you came to this bare area of prairie and made your own home.

Teachers: here are some generic gps questions you could add yourself by copying this text and adding appropriate words where there is an under-score:

14. Find and copy an example of a _____ from the video. (Noun, verb, fronted adverbial, adjective, conjunction)

15. Why do the words _____ have capital letters?

16. Write down a sentence from the text that contains punctuation. What is this punctuation used for?

17. The word _____ is a compound word. Write down the two root words it is made from.

18. Make a list of synonyms for the word _____

19. Write down any word that has a prefix in the text. Then think of two other words that have the same prefix.

20. Choose any word from the text and add a suffix.

21. Find a sentence that contains a subordinate clause. Write out the sentence and underline the clause.

22. Write down three words that come from the same word family as _____

23. Write the word _____ as a noun.

24. Write down all the compound words that have the word _____ in them that you can think of (ex: way)

25. Write down three adjectives from the text. Describe what each of them means.

26. Are there any modal verbs in the text (verbs that help to modify other verbs).