

PRAIRIE LIFE



Unit Five

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UNIT FIVE

The following is background information for creating lesson plans. Activities start on page 81.

HOMES ON THE PRAIRIE

One of the requirements under the Homestead Act of 1862 was that a homesteader had to build a house and live in that building for five years. In some areas building traditional types of houses was difficult to accomplish. Creative alternatives were needed.

In the eastern U.S. early settlers relied upon the forests to provide wood to build *log houses*.



When early homesteaders moved west they too relied upon the forest and tree-covered areas for wood to build houses. Often homesteaders would search for land located near streams and trees so they would not have to haul wood from far away. The early log cabins were constructed by building a base and floor out of wooden planks or clay. Logs were squared on the top and bottom, and laid horizontally on top of each other to build the walls of the cabin. The logs were fitted together so the wind and rain could not come through the cracks. A mixture of clay and grass which was placed between the logs created plaster. This process was called "chinking." The roof of a cabin was made of shingles or sod.

When people began moving out to areas with fewer trees, homesteaders had to develop another type of home that required little or no wood. Two types of houses were developed: the dugout and the sod house. The *dugout*, a cave like structure, was dug into a hill side. Three to four sides were built into the hill. Sometimes a blanket covering the front of the dugout was used instead of a door. This was the quickest way to construct a home on the prairie.

The *sod house* was practical. This type of house used the compact dirt and prairie root system for building bricks. The prairie grass grew very thick creating a strong, interconnected, and tightly compacted root system. Homesteaders would cut the sod into usable bricks about 3 feet in length, 1 foot in width, and 4 inches deep. The thicker or deeper the sod bricks were the less one had to use. The brick would then be laid out into the oblong shape of a house 14 by 16 feet. The walls were 2 rows of sod wide. The sod bricks would be layered 4 rows up. They would then cross brace another 4 layers of sod brick on the previously laid 2 rows. This type of alternate cross bracing created a very sturdy and durable structure. The roof of the house was covered with sod or dirt. Sometimes a homesteader would dig partially into a hillside and then use sod bricks for the front of the house.

Things like doors and windows were very expensive items to the homesteaders. Often the doorways were covered by a blanket until wood could be located or bought to build a door. The windows were framed with wood. Actual glass was rare as it had to be shipped from the eastern cities. People either covered their windows with blankets or used greased oiled paper for the coverings. Homesteaders sometimes used newspapers as wallpaper or made a plaster out of clay and grasses for the walls. White wash was sometimes applied to give a cleaner appearance to these walls.



TOOLS OF THE HOMESTEADER

Homesteaders found that many of the tools they had used in their homelands were not practical on the prairie. Homesteaders still used the *adz* to square logs for a cabin. Because of the lack of trees, adzes and axes were rarely used to build other types of houses as these tools were used mainly for shaping wood. The *sickle* and the *scythe* were used for cutting grasses. Neither hand tools were very economical for the huge expanses of grasslands on the prairie. In the eastern U.S. a scythe could easily be used to cut the few acres of crops one had planted. In the west the few acres cut in a day barely scraped the surface of what was planted. Homesteaders created and improved upon ways to accomplish the tasks faster and better. Improved tools like the *grain cradle* and the *reaper* could cut several acres a day, making it easier to work large tracts of land. Other tools like the *steel plow* and *sod cutter* assisted the homesteader in cutting through the tough, interconnected root system of the prairie grasses. Other plows and cutting tools would bend and break under the strain of cutting through the sod.

Another tool that was very important to homesteaders was the windmill. Since water was scarce wells were dug to supply homesteads with water. Some homesteaders harnessed the wind, which blew nearly all the time, and used it to pump up water from an underground well.

DAILY LIFE

For the homesteaders life on the Plains was rough and hard. Everyone had to pitch in to help the family survive. The men plowed, planted, and harvested the crops. They took the grain to the nearest *mill* which could take several days of traveling. The women took care of the house and the garden. They often sold butter and eggs to supplement the family income. This money paid for the extras the family could not otherwise afford. Children helped out wherever they were needed. They might gather *buffalo or cow chips* or make "*cats*" for fuel, herd the animals, help in the fields, or any other tasks that needed to be done.

Glossary

Adz - an axe like tool with a curved blade, used to shape logs for log cabins

Bee - a gathering of people for a special purpose; sewing bee or husking bee

Buffalo or cow chips - a piece of dry dung used for fueling a fire

Cats - twisted or braided grass used for fueling a fire

Dugout - a rough shelter dug into the side of a hill

Grain Cradle - a tool that has a long handle with a thin blade and a cradle behind the blade to catch the grass or grain being cut

Log House/Cabin - a shelter formed by squaring logs and placing them on top of each other

Mill - a machine for grinding grain into flour or meal

Reaper - a machine used to cut grass or grain

Scythe - a long, thin slightly curved blade on a long handle for cutting grass and grain

Sickle - a tool used for cutting grass or grain

Sod cutter - a tool used to cut the thick root cover of the prairie sod into bricks or square chunks

Sod house/soddie - a house formed by cutting sod into strips and layering pieces on top of one another similar to laying bricks

Steel plow - a large, heavy piece of farm equipment used for cutting and turning over the soil

Helping out one's neighbors was common place on the plains. Settlers held gatherings or *bees*. Neighbors might help plow a field, build a barn or house, or husk the corn. These bees were opportunities for homesteaders to help each other out and socialize at the same time.

Corn was an important crop for many homesteaders. Corn formed the staple of their diets with such items as cornmeal, corn soup, corn pancakes, corn mush, hominy, dried, baked, and boiled. Children made toys and dolls out of the cobs and husks. Corn was not only an important food to the homesteaders, but the husk and cobs were also used. The leftovers could be burned for fuel.

THE FACES OF ADVERSITY AND DISASTER

Hardships abounded on the prairie. Homesteaders faced many difficulties while living on the Great Plains. Isolation and loneliness created some of the most difficult moments especially for women who seldom left their homesteads.



The climate of the plains was harsh to the homesteaders. One year a homesteader might face a drought. The next year a flood might ruin every hope of an abundant crop. In the 1880s rain was abundant and crops grew. In 1889 and 1890 hot winds blew across the prairie, withering crops. The drought continued through much of the 1890s. Throughout the 1880s blizzards swept across the Plains burying homes, travelers, and livestock for days, weeks, and sometimes even months. The blizzards would pile drifts of snow as high as 11 feet. These drifts blocked railroads for days or even months. People stepping out of their front door could be lost and frozen in their yards.

Prairie fires were a constant threat to homesteaders. A fire started by lightning, a campfire or the spark of a gun could sweep across the plains fanned by the prairie winds. Whole farms, even towns could be devoured by the flames.

Grasshopper invasions were another test of the homesteader's endurance. In 1874 huge swarms arrived in the Great Plain's region and devoured every plant in their path. Homesteaders spoke of trying to cover their gardens as the hoppers stripped their fields. But the hopper ate through the covers to get to the greens below. Stories were told of hoppers eating the onions from the tops down and the inside out, leaving just the shell. The grasshoppers ate every green thing including stripes on clothes. They even ate the wooden handles of farm tools. The grasshoppers, or Rocky Mountain Locust, departed, but not before they laid their eggs in the soil. The invasion happened again the following year with the hatching of the eggs, but it was not as devastating as the year before.

HEADING BACK OR STAYING

Many homesteaders could not handle the overwhelming obstacles in their path. Those who came to homestead with the lure of cheap lands left, "busted and disgusted" at the hard life on the prairie. In several areas almost half the homesteaders left. Others stayed to "tough it out." Those who stayed were joined by others from the east. As the stream of people for the "free land" of the west continued, they did not listen to the stories and hardships they were about to face.

At one time or another many homesteaders had to face making the decision to stay on their homestead or head back east. The decision was based on what they expected to find, what they found and faced, and what they gained or lost. There is no doubt that life was hard. For many the cost of staying was too high.

UNIT 5, ACTIVITY 1

BUILDING A HOME

THEME:

Homesteaders were very resourceful and imaginative when creating and building a home on the prairie.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Students will be able to name 3 types of homes that the homesteaders built.
2. Students will be able to state two conditions that helped a homesteader decide what type of home to build.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

strips of paper, popsicle sticks, clay or play dough, Land Claim Card #3, Activity Sheet: Homes on the Prairie

SUBJECT: art, social studies

SKILLS: understanding, building, putting things together

METHODS: Using the information on their land cards the students will build a model of a home on their claim.

1. Ask students to remember and list the requirements to gain title to their claims. Explain that they are going to learn about the types of homes homesteaders built. Hand out Land Cards #3 to all students.
2. Show the three types of houses the homesteaders had: log cabin, sod, and dugout. Use the Activity sheet: Homes on the Prairie. Ask students why a homesteader would build a sod house instead of a log cabin. Have them think about this question while you read the narrative's building experience.

Narrative:

After I had filed my claim at the land office, I knew I was required to build a house on the land. I had left my wife back east until I had built a good home. I was getting very tired of my own cooking . . . my wife's a much better cook! My claim had only two trees and a small creek, nothing with which I could build a cabin. The nearest stand of trees was 30 miles away, too far to haul logs for a cabin. I went over to Rick Thomas' and looked his place over. The Thomases lived in a dugout, a hole dug into the side of a hill. I didn't have a hill high enough to make a dugout, and besides I didn't think my wife would like it very much. Rick Thomas told me about the sod shanties some homesteaders were building. The prairie sod out here is down right thick. If you cut it up into squares it would make good bricks. The grass roots hold the soil together better than nails! I figured this was the home for my family and me. Rick Thomas said he'd come help me cut the sod bricks and lay it out for a house. He suggested I get Max Clancey and his three boys to help out too. I did just that. It took us a couple of days to cut the prairie sod. Boy, was it tough to cut. The Clanceys brought their sod cutter to help me. They all stayed around to lay the house out. We had a high time, laughing and joking. I sure appreciated everyone's help. I told them to let me know if they needed any help and I would give a hand. I built a sod house that was 16 X 20 foot. My wife, she darn near cried when I brought her out, but she put on a stiff upper lip and was determined to make the soddie our home. Often I'd see her shaking her head and muttering to herself about what possessed me to build a home out of dirt. It was quite a shock from how we lived before in a nice wood-framed home back east.

3. Have students read what kind of house they will have to build on their claim. Some will have a log cabin, some a sod house, and some a dugout. Now they have to build their home. Remember to keep it simple. Homesteaders did not have a lot of money with which to get fancy. The log cabin people should use popsicle sticks. The sod house people should use either paper bricks or clay bricks.

The dugout people should use either a box or clay mound and then make the front of the dugouts out of popsicle sticks or strips of paper.

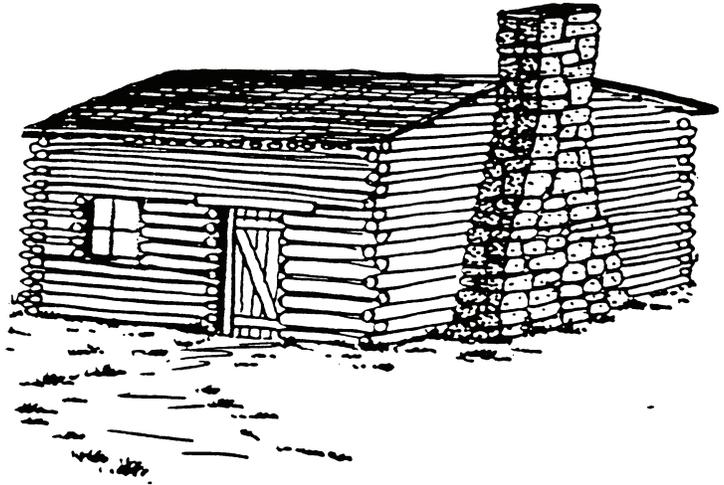
AN EXPLORING EXPERIENCE: Have students furnish their house through drawings and descriptions.

HOMES ON THE PRAIRIE

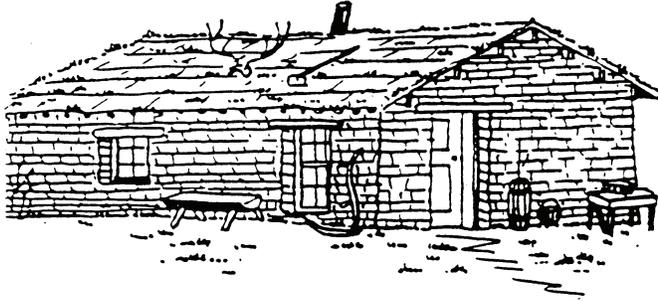
ACTIVITY SHEET

LOG HOUSES

The earliest homesteaders decided to settle along the streams where they were able to find trees. These trees were important because from them the homesteaders were able to make wooden logs for use in building their homes. There are several steps in building a log house. First, they built a base and then put in a floor made of logs, clay or dirt. The floor was not very smooth when they were initially built, but after being swept and scraped many times they became smoother. The walls of the log house were made by squaring the sides of logs. Then the logs were cut at the corners so they would fit together without any wide cracks between them. When the walls were high enough, the roof was put on. They did this by placing logs across the top. To stop the rain and snow from coming in they covered the roof with sod. To keep the wind out the cracks between the logs in the wall were filled with clay and grass mixed together. This kind of plaster tended to drop off as it dried. This left holes and openings through which the wind whistled through in the winter. Sometimes log houses had a loft where family members could sleep. The homesteaders left holes in the log walls for windows and a door. There was no glass for homesteaders to use in their windows so they either used paper dipped in fat or else hung a deerskin or buffalo robe at the window openings. The door was made of wood and was attached with leather hinges made from skins. They made a hole in the door and ran a leather string through it which was fastened to the latch on the inside. During the daytime the string could be pulled to lift the latch and open the door. At night the family would pull the string inside and then the door could not be opened from the outside. This was called a latchstring.



SOD HOUSE

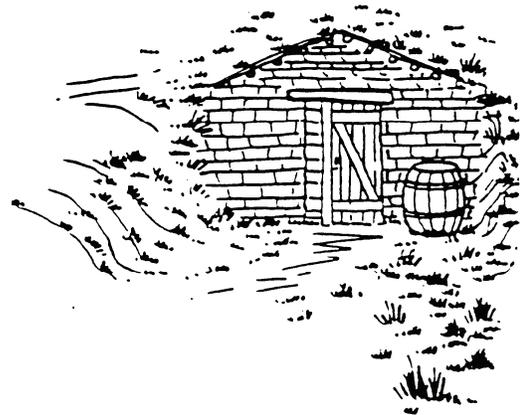


As people settled further west, there were not enough trees to build log cabins. The homesteaders had to use other items in their environment to build a house. These homesteaders chose to build their houses out of the prairie sod. Before the homesteaders arrived the prairies had never been plowed; so the grass grew very thick. The roots held the soil together very tightly and could be used to make sod "bricks." Using a plow or sod cutter, the homesteaders would cut the sod into large pieces twelve to eighteen inches wide, two to three feet long, and four inches thick. These pieces were placed on top of one another just as bricks are laid for a house today. The roof was built by

running a long pole across the center of the house. From this, poles or boards were laid to the side walls. On top of these more sod was placed to keep out the rain and snow. The roof of a sod house was built to slant very sharply so the rain would run off quickly. The walls on the inside of a sod house were covered with a kind of plaster made from clay soil. The floor was dirt, but in time, with wear, it became very hard and smooth. It could be swept and even mopped if it was done quickly. An added benefit of this type of flooring was that rats and other rodents could not hide under the floor as they did in log houses. The sod homes were very comfortable. They were warm in the winter and cool in the summer. These homes were often called "soddies."

DUGOUT

Dugout houses were built by digging into a hillside. Homesteaders would dig out a space and then cover the top of the hole with poles, grass, and earth. A space was left at one end which was used for a door. The homesteaders who lived in dugouts usually put the door facing south to protect their home from the north winds. If there was no wood available a buffalo robe or a blanket might be used to cover the doorway until a wooden door could be built.



**LAND CARD #3
CLAIM #1**

Your land is rolling hills. The creek is 2 miles away, and the nearest trees are 10 miles away. You build a dugout .

**LAND CARD #3
CLAIM #2**

Your land has a creek running through it and 3 trees. The ravine might be perfect for a dugout.

**LAND CARD #3
CLAIM #3**

Your land is flat and is a mile from the nearest creek. Trees are 10 miles away. You build a sod house.

**LAND CARD #3
CLAIM #4**

Your land is mostly flat. There are 2 creeks running through your land. Trees are numerous. You build a log house.

**LAND CARD #3
CLAIM #5**

Your land is very flat and has a creek running through it. The nearest trees are 12 miles away. You build a sod house.

**LAND CARD #3
CLAIM #6**

Your land is mostly flat with a creek. Trees are ½ mile away. You haul logs for a log cabin.

**LAND CARD #3
CLAIM #7**

Your land is hilly and has a creek with a steep bank. There is only 1 tree. You build a dugout.

**LAND CARD #3
CLAIM #8**

Your land has a creek and is partially hilly. There are trees 1 mile away, and you haul timber for a log cabin.

**LAND CARD #3
CLAIM #9**

Your land is half flat and half rolling hills. There is a creek, but no trees. You build a dugout.

**LAND CARD #3
CLAIM #10**

Your land is rolling hills. There is a creek on the claim and a few trees. The nearest trees for building are 6 miles away. You build a dugout.

**LAND CARD #3
CLAIM # 11**

Your land is flat. The nearest creek is 1 mile away. Trees are 5 miles away. You build a sod house.

**LAND CARD #3
CLAIM # 12**

Your land is partially flat with lots of trees. You are a ½ miles from a creek. You build a log cabin.

**LAND CARD #3
CLAIM # 13**

Your land is half flat and half hilly. You are 2 miles from a creek and 8 miles from trees. You build a sod house.

**LAND CARD #3
CLAIM # 14**

Your land is flat. The creek is a mile away, and trees are 8 miles away. You build a sod house.

**LAND CARD #3
CLAIM # 15**

Your land is flat with one hill. You are a mile from the nearest creek and there are no trees. You build a dugout.

**LAND CARD #3
CLAIM # 16**

Your land is partially flat with a creek. You are 2 miles from trees. You haul the trees and build a log cabin.

**LAND CARD #3
CLAIM # 17**

Your land is half flat and half hilly. There are two creek running through your land. The nearest trees are 6 miles away. You build a sod house.

**LAND CARD #3
CLAIM # 18**

Your land is flat and has a creek. The nearest trees are 1 mile away. You haul the logs to build a log cabin.

**LAND CARD #3
CLAIM # 19**

Your land is partially flat with no creeks nearby. There are a few trees and other trees are 2 miles away. You decide to haul the logs for a log cabin.

**LAND CARD #3
CLAIM #20**

Your land is hilly and 2 miles from the nearest creek which has trees. You haul timber for a log cabin.

**LAND CARD #3
CLAIM #21**

Your land is flat with a creek and 3 trees. More trees are 10 miles away. You build a sod house.

**LAND CARD #3
CLAIM #22**

Your land is partially hilly with a creek. The nearest trees are a mile away. You haul the trees to build a log cabin.

**LAND CARD #3
CLAIM #23**

Your land is partially hilly. It is 2 miles to a creek and 15 miles to the nearest trees. You build a dugout.

**LAND CARD #3
CLAIM #24**

Your land is rolling hills with 5 trees. The nearest creek is 1 mile away. You build a dugout.

**LAND CARD #3
CLAIM #25**

Your land is mostly flat with lots of trees and a creek. You build a log cabin.

**LAND CARD #3
CLAIM #26**

Your land is mostly flat and has a creek. You have the only tree for miles. You build a sod house.

**LAND CARD #3
CLAIM #27**

Your land is flat. The nearest creek is a mile away and has a few trees. You build a sod house.

**LAND CARD #3
CLAIM #28**

Your land is rolling hills with a creek. The nearest trees are 10 miles away. You build a dugout.

**LAND CARD #3
CLAIM #29**

Your land is rolling hills with 2 creeks. The nearest trees are 7 miles away. You build a dugout.

**LAND CARD #3
CLAIM #30**

Your land is partly hilly and partly flat. There is a creek that has 5 trees. You build a sod house.

ACTIVITY 2

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A HOMESTEADER

THEME:

Homesteaders had many different types of work they had to complete each day.

OBJECTIVE:

1. Students will be able to name three types of work a homesteader would have to do each day.
2. Students will be able to understand the routine in the daily life of a homesteader.

MATERIALS:

period clothing, 2 butter churns, wooden eggs, 2 bowls and spoons, 2 split rail fences, a bucket and 2 washboards, 2 hoe, cow chips and corncobs, 2 canvas sacks and seeds, 2 baskets, 2 sod cutters, Material Sheet: Day in the Life of a Homesteader

SUBJECT: social studies, physical education

SKILLS: running, coordination, comprehension

METHODS: At Homestead National Monument of America, students will experience a day in the life of a homesteader through participation in a relay race.

1. Gather students together. Ask what they think a homesteader did each day? Who did these chores? (Teacher note: you will get a variety of chores listed and students will probably state a gender with each one). Explain to students that everyone on the homestead pitched in to do all the chores. Ask if there were circumstances when boys and girls, and men and women did many different kinds of work?
2. Explain to students that they are going to learn about the daily life of homesteaders through a game or relay race.
3. Go through each chore in the course and explain its significance to homesteaders.
4. Once each chore has been explained to all of the students return to the start line where the baskets of period clothing and other props are ready.
5. Split students into two teams. Explain they will each have the opportunity to do at least one of the chores they just learned about. In order for them to do homesteader chores they must dress like homesteaders. Boys will wear hats and vests, and girls will wear bonnets and aprons. (Each student must dress themselves.)
6. Hand out the numbered chores to each team. Explain that the chores must be completed in sequential order, so once they get their chore they must stay in order.
7. Have them cheer their teammates on as the relay is conducted.
8. Gather the students together. Ask what they learned about the daily life of homesteaders and the work they had to complete? (Teacher note: students should be able to explain what they did and the purpose of each chore)
9. Take students to the Implement Shed room of the park museum. Have students look at the different tools. How were the different tools used by the homesteaders? Then take the students to the tool section in the museum and ask the same question.

AN EXPLORING EXPERIENCE: Have students choose a tool and research the tool for information about what it was made of and how it was used. They can give a report to the class. Second activity: Have students compare the day in the life of a homesteader and a day in the life of a Plain's American Indian.

MATERIAL SHEET

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A HOMESTEADER

This relay race requires the students to wear portions of a pioneer wardrobe. When doing the relay race the boys and girls will wear the following clothing:

Boys - Wear a felt hat and vest

Girls - Wear an apron and a bonnet

1.	Gathering Eggs	gather up all eggs	7 wooden eggs, 2 baskets
2.	Washing Clothes	scrub the cloth 10 times	bucket, 2 washboards, 2 articles of clothing
3.	Butter Churning	move the handle up & down 10 times	2 butter churns
4.	Hoeing the Garden	hoe the row 3 times	2 Hoes
5.	Planting	plant all seeds	2 canvas sacks & seeds
6.	Gathering Cow Chips and corncobs for fuel	gather all cow chips and all corncobs	cow chips and corncobs, 2 buckets
7.	Fixing Fence	Put two rails in slots	2 boards & posts
8.	Stirring Batter	stir the batter 10 times	2 bowls & spoons
9.	Sod Cutting	drag the sod cutter to the other side and back	2 sod cutters
10.	Gather Watermelons	Gather two watermelons	4 watermelons

UNIT 5, ACTIVITY 3 FACING DISASTERS

THEME:

Homesteaders faced many disasters on their claim and learned to adapt their lives to these hardships. After facing disasters homesteaders had to decide whether to stay on their claim and "tough it out" or head back to the east to "civilization."

OBJECTIVES:

1. Students will be able to name two reasons why homesteaders headed back to the eastern U.S.
2. Students will decide, given the information on their claims, whether they will stay or return east.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

Material Sheet: Disasters of the Homesteaders, land card #4

SUBJECT: science, social studies, geography

SKILLS: brainstorming, group skills, analyzing, reasoning, contrasting

METHODS: Through the use of historical disasters as examples, students will see what types of disasters homesteaders might have faced, the effects of the disasters, and how to adapt to the disasters. Students will have to decide whether to stay or return east when they are given additional information about their land claims.

1. Ask students to define a disaster? Explain that homesteaders faced many disasters and adverse situations.
2. Divide students into five groups. Hand out two disasters from the Material Sheet: Disasters of the Homesteaders to each group.
3. Students are to brainstorm together to answer the following:
 1. How would these disasters affect homesteaders?
 2. How would they deal with each disaster?
 3. What could they learn from the disasters?
4. Have students relate their disasters and what they decided to the entire class.
5. Have students name other possible disasters homesteaders might have faced.
6. Tell students that many people failed on their homestead claims and were never able to prove up. Why do they think this might happen? Have them think about this while they complete the activity. Tell them that Claimsey will be sharing his disasters with the class and will tell them whether he stayed on his claim or headed back east.
7. Hand back to students their land cards from previous activities with land card #4 attached to it. Explain that students have to look at the disasters they have on their claims. They must decide whether to stay and "tough it out" or to head east. On a sheet of paper, they need to list what was good and bad on their claims to help them decide whether to stay or go.
8. Have students share with the class the disasters they faced on their homesteads and their decision to stay or go. They have to give reasons why they decided to stay or go. The class can make suggestions to the student to try to influence their decisions the other way.
9. Share with the class the narrative about disasters.

Narrative:

When I first came out for my "free land," I thought it would be easy. Just build myself a home, plow my land, sow the seeds, and harvest the crops. But it didn't work out that way. I faced many tough situations as did many of my neighbors.

I think all in all it was easier for me than my wife. I left the soddie every day to work in the fields. Sometimes I ran into several neighbors who were passing by. My wife stayed home with the children working hard. She missed the social life we had back east where there were people just across the street or down the road. At first, my nearest neighbor was 5 miles away, but as the land was claimed up, the neighbors were only a couple of miles away. The money my wife made from selling eggs and butter was her saving grace and in a way mine too. It paid for a pair of boots for our oldest son and cloth to make new clothes for all of us.

Just when we both were settling in the hoppers appeared. The day was bright except for a dark cloud way off in the distance. As the cloud got closer and closer it blotted out the sun, and then they came down. Grasshoppers were everywhere, in the garden, the well, the house, on every green thing, even the clothes. And they ate it all. There was nothing left. We didn't know how we would make it, but we survived. The next year the hoppers returned. They'd laid eggs in the ground the year before, and the eggs all hatched. It started all over again only not as bad as the year before. Heading back east crossed my mind several times, but the hogs were good, and I was able to get a good price. With the hog money I was able to buy a hand corn planter which saved me time in the fields.

That winter the blizzards hit, and they hit hard. There were huge drifts over the top of a man's head burying everything in sight. Half my cattle were frozen in their tracks. It nearly wiped me out. I went out digging in the snow for days. I came back with very few of my stock animals left alive.

The next year went well, and I talked my wife out of leaving for the east. She was itching to go. Life seemed better. The crops were good, and we had a little extra from the butter and eggs my wife sold. The following summer the drought hit. There was no rain for days on end. Crops dried up and withered in the fields. Even the shade was hot. It became so dry the prairie caught on fire. The fire went right over the soddie, but that soddie held together and kept us safe. Finally the rain came and the fire was doused.

My wife and I decided to stay. The place was nearly ours, and we had put in years of hard work. I was almost ready to go back to blacksmithing, but after the fire my wife decided the soddie wasn't so bad. Like I said, this place, it grows on you.

AN EXPLORING EXPERIENCE: Have students write one of the following: If they decided to head back, how did they travel to the east? What did they do with their claim? If they decided to stay, what did they do to survive?

MATERIAL SHEET
DISASTERS OF THE HOMESTEADERS

Disaster #1 - Grasshoppers

"I thought to save some of my garden by covering it with sacks, but the hoppers regarded that as a huge joke, and enjoyed the awning thus provided, or if they could not get under, they ate their way through... They had a neat way of eating onions. They devoured the tops, and then ate all of the onion from the inside, leaving the outer shell."

- Mary Lyon *Pioneer Women*, page 102

Disaster #2 - Drought

"When the hot winds blew like a simoom for days together, and no clouds scudding across the blue sky made grateful showers, one could almost believe that what had been in late geographies called 'The Great American Desert' was within walking distance. The leaves on the trees shriveled and dried up, and every living thing was seeking shelter from the hot rays of the sun. The earth opened in great cracks several inches across and two feet deep. We used to play these were earthquake crevices and scores of imaginary people met an untimely end."

- *Pioneer Women*, page 100

Disaster #3 - Blizzard

"...by ten o'clock everyone realized that the country was in the grip of a terrible blizzard, the wind blowing a gale and the snow coming in a blinding rush. By morning, nothing could be seen, and in order to care for the stock in the barns, it was necessary to draw a rope from house to barn. The cold was so intense that fires had to be kept going in the house day and night, and many people suffered from a lack of provisions and fuel. This continued for four days. Cattle on the range could not be cared for and it was not possible to search for them until after the fourth day of the storm. Losses were extremely heavy and searchers would find them frozen to death, some with their mouths frozen shut, some with their feet frozen."

- Ary Johnson, *Pioneer Women*, page 92

Disaster #4 - Tornado

"One afternoon the sky took on a peculiar coppery hue and to the southeast small clouds of dust kept rising above the swells and ridges that marked the horizon line, expanding and thinning until lost in the surrounding air, similar clouds constantly rising to take their places. ...they stood watching this curious display of color and formation, when suddenly they saw a well defined funnel-shaped cloud separate itself from the dusty mass and move rapidly in their direction. They were almost panic stricken when they saw it so near that it obscured from their view and old sod house that stood two miles to the south-east. ...the teacher seized the kindling hatchet with the idea of chipping a hole in the floor or prying up some boards."

- Cyrus Russel, *Pioneer Women*, page 166-167

Disaster #5 - Hail

"A mass of black clouds loomed up in the west, distant thunder boomed and lightning streaked the sky and cut through the landscape and then with a rush and roar came the hail, devastating everything. After the storm had passed, the Groves ranch was damaged thousands of dollars, the acres of feed beaten into the ground, there was no pasture for the thousands of white faces."

- Susan Proffitt, *Pioneer Women*, page 101

Disaster #6 - Prairie Fires

“In those days of endless sweep of prairies, when the tall grass became dry from premature drying from drought or early frost, it was a signal for close vigilance in watching the horizon all around for prairie fires. A light against the sky told of a prairie fire in that direction and great anxiety was felt if the wind happened to be in your direction. At times the fires would be such that the flames could be seen creeping up the hillsides, and would spread over great stretches of ground. The Saline River which almost surrounded our place was considered a security, but sometimes the gales of wind blowing masses of loose grass or weeds would cause the fire to ‘jump’ the river.”

- Agnes Berry, *Pioneer Women*, page 82

Disaster #7 - Flash Floods

“The creek was up to the house and still pouring down. My husband investigated and found that the underpinning of the house was going and that we had to get out. We took a lantern and matches and some blankets, and started for the side hills. When we opened the door to get out, the water came up to our necks. We had a struggle to get out and I can’t tell to this day how we ever made it out. My husband carried the baby girl in his arms as high as his head. We soon got out of the deepest water, as there was a turn in the creek. We went by way of the horse stable and found we would be safe in it. Still the water was up and it was pitch dark. The matches were wet, so we couldn’t light the lantern. We stayed there until the storm abated and the water went down. When daylight came it was a sad sight to behold. Our cow barn and ponies were swept away, also our stack of millet. Practically everything we had was gone or ruined.”

- Emma Mitchell New, *Pioneer Women*, page 90-91

Disaster #8 - Dust Storms

“There was no sound by the roar of the wind, and the rattle of dust and sand on his cap. He shouted again, and then stopped with his back to the wind to listen, by there was no reply. He pulled his muffler back from his ears, and shouted once more. He thought he heard voices...just an instant...then the din of the wind drowned everything. He ran frantically back and forth, shouting and peering in every direction, through half closed eyes; but he heard no answering call, and he saw nothing by clouds of dust driven by the raging wind.”

- *Sod and Stubble*, page 256

Disaster #9 - Failed Crops

“One year in particular I recall. It was along in the nineties. We had a large field of corn as fine as corn could grow. One Sunday we drove around the field admiring and rejoicing. It was like a garden, not a weed to be seen and all in the tassel. To us it looked like payment, then came a hot wind and by sun-down that corn wasn’t worth cutting. Grasp a handful of leaves and you could powder it all up in your hand almost like charred paper. Such things happened far oftener than a crop was grown successfully and harvested without some loss.”

- Jessie Shepard, *Pioneer Women*, page 60

Disaster #10 - Accidents

“One afternoon of this day, ...the hem of my dress caught on an axle-handle, precipitating me under the wheels both of which passed over me, badly crushing the left leg, before Father could stop the oxen. Seeing me clear of the wheels he picked me up and carrying me in his arms ran to stop the team, which had become unmanageable fro fright. A glance at my limb dangling in the air as he ran revealed to him the extent of the injury I had received...”

- *Women’s Diaries of a Westward Journey*, page 39

**LAND CARD #4
CLAIM #1**

Between 1916 -1921, you had floods (1916, 1920), received low prices on crops (1920, 1921), and your crops failed (1920, 1921).

**LAND CARD #4
CLAIM #2**

Between 1903 -1908, you had hail which destroyed your crops (1904) and 3 poor crop yields (1906, 1907, 1908).

**LAND CARD #4
CLAIM #3**

Between 1892 -1897, you had drought (1893-1897) and your crops failed (1893-1897).

**LAND CARD #4
CLAIM #4**

Between 1868 -1872, you had a fire (1873) and 2 blizzards (1871, 1873).

**LAND CARD #4
CLAIM #5**

Between 1908 -1913, you had a hail storm (1910) and a tornado (1912).

**LAND CARD #4
CLAIM #6**

Between 1869 -1874, you had a fire (1873), 2 grasshopper invasions (1869, 1874), and 2 blizzards (1871, 1873).

**LAND CARD #4
CLAIM #7**

Between 1907 -1912, you had a blizzard (1907), a hail storm (1910), and 2 tornadoes (1911, 1912).

**LAND CARD #4
CLAIM #8**

Between 1880 -1885, you had a fire (1880), blizzards (1880, 1881), a flood (1880), and received low prices for your crops (1880-1885).

**LAND CARD #4
CLAIM #9**

Between 1917-1922, you had a flood (1920) and received low prices on your crops (1920, 1921, 1922)

**LAND CARD #4
CLAIM #10**

Between 1883 -1888, you had a blizzard (1886), a flood (1883), and received low prices on your crops (1883-1885).

**LAND CARD #4
CLAIM # 11**

Between 1902 -1907, you had a blizzard (1907).

**LAND CARD #4
CLAIM # 12**

Between 1872 -1877, you had a fire (1873), 2 grasshopper invasions (1874, 1875, 1876), and a blizzard (1873).

**LAND CARD #4
CLAIM # 13**

Between 1905 -1919, you had a blizzard (1907) and 2 tornadoes that did a little damage to your house (1906, 1908).

**LAND CARD #4
CLAIM # 14**

Between 1919 -1924, you had a flood (1920) and received low prices on your crops (1920, 1921, 1922, 1923).

**LAND CARD #4
CLAIM # 15**

Between 1903 -1908, you had a sandstorm (1905) and a blizzard (1907).

**LAND CARD #4
CLAIM # 16**

Between 1894 -1899, you had drought (1894-1897) and your crop failed (1894 -1899).

**LAND CARD #4
CLAIM # 17**

Between 1913 -1918, you had a tornado that destroyed your crops (1915) and a flood (1916).

**LAND CARD #4
CLAIM # 18**

Between 1880 -1885, you had a fire (1880), a flood (1880), 2 blizzards (1880, 1881), and received low prices on your crops (1882-1884).

**LAND CARD #4
CLAIM # 19**

Between 1872 -1877, you had a fire (1873), a drought (1875), and 3 grasshopper invasions (1874, 1875, 1876).

**LAND CARD #4
CLAIM #20**

Between 1910 -1915, you had a tornado that destroyed your house (1914).

**LAND CARD #4
CLAIM #21**

Between 1896 -1901, you had a drought (1896, 1897) and your crops failed (1896, 1897, 1898).

**LAND CARD #4
CLAIM #22**

Between 1885 -1890, you had drought (1889, 1890), your crops failed (1889, 1890), a blizzard (1888), a flood (1880), and received low prices on your crops, 1886-88).

**LAND CARD #4
CLAIM #23**

Between 1891 -1896, you had a drought (1893-96) and your crops failed (1894, 1895).

**LAND CARD #4
CLAIM #24**

Between 1918 -1923, you had a tornado destroy your crops (1919) and a flood (1920).

**LAND CARD #4
CLAIM #25**

Between 1875 -1880, you had a fire (1880), a drought (1875), 2 blizzards (1880, 1881), 2 grasshopper invasions (1875, 1876), a flood (1880), and received low prices on your crops (1880).

**LAND CARD #4
CLAIM #26**

Between 1899 -1904, you had a drought (1899) and your crops failed (1899).

**LAND CARD #4
CLAIM #27**

Between 1910 -1915, you had a hail storm that destroyed your crops (1912).

**LAND CARD #4
CLAIM #28**

Between 1901 -1906, you had a sandstorm (1901), hail damage (1902, 1904), a flood (1906) and a blizzard (1907).

**LAND CARD #4
CLAIM #29**

Between 1884 -1889, you had a drought (1889), failed crops (1889), a blizzard (1886) and received low prices on your crops (1887-1889).

**LAND CARD #4
CLAIM #30**

Between 1920 -1925, you had a fire (1925), 2 floods (1921, 1923), and hail destroyed your crops (1923).