

Activity 13: Arrival in Dawson City

Activity Description:

1. Begin with a whole class discussion with teacher saying the following:

Finally! Finally, after days of being on the river in our boats we arrive at Dawson — the city of GOLD! People called us "Cheechakos," an Indian word for newcomers. But we didn't mind because we were so excited to stake our claim! To our dismay, we found that every gold-bearing creek and hillside for miles around have been staked for months. As we walked around Dawson we found many happy people celebrating spring clean up. We found ourselves among thousands of people roaming the city without anything to do because much of the land was claimed. The city had a huge population by 1898. The population had grown from 1,500 to 30,000 in only one year. We found some people selling their supplies for money to get back home. Dawson was not what we expected!

What are we going to do? We have to make a decision. Are we going to stay in Dawson City, go back home or try to find land? If we stay in Dawson City that means we need to set up a business or find jobs and build ourselves homes. We could try to find someone who is trying to sell his claim and buy his land. Or, we could sell our supplies and head back home.

2. Share photographs of Dawson in the early day of the gold rush to give a visual to students. Ask students to share what they think life was like in Dawson at this time. Continue discussion:

3. Students write in their journals about this experience. Students should begin by describing their arrival into Dawson using descriptive language and details about the experience. Students should include factual information given during the discussion. Each student should also include his or her individual plan for the future. Are they planning on staying in Dawson? What will they start a new business in Dawson? Will they try to buy a piece of land already staked? Or, will they sell their supplies and head back home?

TEACHER NOTES: Students will be surprised to learn that not everyone found wealth in gold. In fact very few people did.

OBJECTIVE: To help build a mental picture of the town of Dawson in the spring of 1898; To understand that only disappointment awaited many of the newly arriving Stampeders; To make a final decision — should the Stampeders stay in Dawson or return back home?

MATERIALS:

1. Students' Journals
2. Pencil
3. Photographs of Dawson

TIME: 60 minutes