

Activity 6: Gimmicks and Inventions

Activity Description:

Students' characters need to make money in order to buy their supplies (outfit). They learn some background information about the products developed during the gold rush, study advertisements from the gold rush, and then create advertisements in order to sell a gimmick they have invented.

Part One (Background):

1. Read the following excerpt from *Gold! The Klondike Adventure*:

The Stampeders often paused on the streets of Seattle to watch street salesmen show off the newest products designed for those traveling north. There were Klondike medicine chests, Klondike blankets, and Klondike electric gold pans. There were portable Klondike houses, which the peddlers told their customers were "as light as air," even with the double bed and special Yukon stove that folded up inside. Dried food was sold in large quantities to future miners who wanted to save weight and space in their backpacks. Although most of the food was colorless and tasted bad... Many dishonest merchants made money during the gold rush by selling worthless products or taking advantage of the innocent gold seekers. One Klondiker, Arthur Dietz, stopped on the street to watch a salesman pour some yellow powder from a sack and make a plate of scrambled eggs. Dietz was so impressed that he bought 100 pounds of evaporated eggs for himself and his traveling companions. It was not until the group was on its way to the Klondike that Dietz opened the sacks. He realized that the yellow powder inside was really not egg at all. The deceitful salesman had switched sacks and sold him 100 pounds of cornmeal. (p. 26, Rey)

2. Pass out copies of "Things that Worked, Things that Didn't," *Seattle Post Intelligencer*, Special Edition, September 13, 1990. Instruct the students to look for information regarding gimmicks and inventions created for the miners as they read. For a quick assessment after they've read, have students define the word "gimmick" and identify two gimmicks mentioned in the article.

Part Two (Jigsaw):

1. Tell the students they will create their own inventions or gimmicks to sell in order to make enough money to buy the supplies they'll need in the Yukon. In order to sell it they must make an advertisement. Put students in small groups. Give each group one or two pages of advertisements from *Klondike Gold Rush Historic Resource Study*. Each page has a different theme.

2. Assign each group to identify the topic of the advertisements and name one observation about how the advertisements were written and one observation about the layout of the advertisements.

3. Each group presents their findings to the whole class. Have copies of each page available for students to use during their presentation. List their discoveries about the wording and layout of the advertisements to refer to when they create their own advertisements.

4. Compare a few of the advertisements (select at least one that has few words and one that is too wordy). Have students identify which advertisements they think would be more effective than others. Have them explain why. Point out the importance of word choice and how the words and images are laid out. In general, advertisements that are too wordy are less effective than ads that

keep focused on a single clear message and leave enough white space so the eye doesn't get overwhelmed.

Part Three (Creating Gimmicks):

1. At this point invite the students to think of their own inventions or gimmicks to sell. Hand out the large newsprint. Using pencil, students should sketch out their ads, paying attention to lettering size and style. When students are satisfied with the advertisement give them a black marker (Sharpies work best) to outline all wording and drawings.
2. Post the completed advertisements.
3. Have students examine the completed ads and reflect on which ads they find attractive or powerful. Tell the students to turn to a neighbor and share one thing they think they would do differently if they could redo their ad.

TEACHER NOTES: Creating your own advertisement in advance to show as an example can really help the students envision what the finished ad may look like. This activity can easily be broken into three parts and spread over three different work periods.

OBJECTIVE: To learn about innovations and inventions developed in response to the craze of the gold rush; To help characters raise money in order to pay for the supplies; To use the writing traits of word choice and presentation.

MATERIALS:

1. 14 x 24 in. Newsprint or drawing paper
2. Black pens
3. Overheads of [advertisements from the Klondike Gold Rush Historic Resource Study](#), pages 72 - 87 (PDF)
4. [Seattle Post-Intelligencer](#) article (PDF)

TIME: 60 to 90 minutes (in 3 parts)