

Cultural History along the Natchez Trace Parkway



On-Site Lesson:

Role Playing on the Natchez Trace Parkway (code 34RP)

➤ **Grade Level:**

3rd & 4th

➤ **Subject Area:**

Social Studies
Language Art

➤ **Setting:**

Historical site
along the Natchez
Trace Parkway (call
662-680-4027 for
site info.) and
classroom

➤ **Duration:**

45 minutes for
activity, 30
minutes for trail,
one class period
for the paragraph

➤ **Skills:**

Hiking, role-
playing, mapping
skills, writing skills

➤ **MS Objectives:**

MS Social Studies:
3rd grade: 3b, c
4th grade 3a, d
MS Language
Arts: 3rd grade: 3b
4th grade: 3b

➤ **Vocabulary:**

Boatmen,
Kaintuck

Summary: If necessary, this lesson can be done in two parts, one at school and the second on a Natchez Trace trail. First, the students will role-play boatmen, American Indians, outlaws, and bears and then second, they will walk down a short trail.



Materials Needed:

Flag football belts or substitute for every student (3 flags for every student), 1 MS state map, 1 AL state map, and 1 TN state map, 1 map of the Natchez Trace Parkway (call 662-680-4027 or 800-305-7417 for maps), paper, pencils, and crayons .

Instructional Information

Mississippi Objectives:

Third Grade:

Social Studies: 3) Demonstrate the ability to use social studies tools, 3b) Demonstrate an ability to show movement of products/people in a community and surrounding areas, 3c) Identify time and space relevant to a student's community by using social studies tools.

Language Arts: 3) the student will express, communicate, or evaluate ideas effectively, 3b) The student will compose descriptive text using specific details and vivid language. 4) The student will use Standard English to communicate.

Fourth Grade:

Social Studies: 3) Demonstrate the ability to use social studies tools, 3a) Identify time and space relevant to the student's environment by using social studies tools. 3d) Locate Mississippi in relation to other states.

Language Arts: 3) The student will express, communicate, evaluate, or exchange ideas effectively, 3b) the student will compose descriptive texts using specific details and vivid language. 4)The student will apply Standard English to communicate.

Learning Objectives: The students will 1) have a better understanding of the Old Natchez Trace and the struggles people traveling on it had to overcome in the 1800s, 2) compose text, 3) use social studies tools

Teacher Set: If necessary, this lesson can be done in two parts. The teacher will orient the students with an official map of the Natchez Trace Parkway. State maps may compliment this exercise.

While the flag-football type game would be more effective if played at a trailhead, it may be played at the school. The trail hike will be used to stimulate imagination and establish a mental picture with descriptive words. The best trails to use are portions of the sunken or Old Natchez Trace trail.

Prior to playing the game, the teacher will need to obtain “flags” and write character assignments on slips of paper. The students should keep their characters secret. In the flag-football type game, the students will role-play boatmen, American Indians, outlaws, and bears. The slips of paper will also tell students whose flags they may take.

Slips of paper should read:

Boatman – Take American Indians and bear
Bear - Take boatman and outlaw
Outlaw – Take American Indian and boatman
American Indian – Take outlaw and bear

There should be as many pieces of paper as students with the characters divided more or less evenly. So if there are 20 students in the class there would be 5 slips of paper that said boatmen, 5 that said bear, etc. The students will draw the names from a “hat”. The game will be played in a large outdoor area.

Teacher Overview: Boatmen, or Kaintucks, floated down the Mississippi River on flatboats to Natchez, Mississippi where they sold many different items. They broke apart their boats and sold the wood too. They could not use their boats for the trip home as paddling upriver was too difficult. Some had to go as far home as Pennsylvania. The Natchez Trace is the route many chose to take because it was a direct route to Nashville, Tennessee. Over the years, American Indians had made trails from frequent use and the boatmen followed their paths. Eventually, the Natchez Trace turned into a sometimes dangerous road. Sometimes the boatmen and American Indians did not get along. The boatmen felt the American Indians were getting in their way and the Indians felt the boatmen were invading their homeland.

Outlaws were sometimes another difficulty. After selling all of their goods and the wood from their boats, the boatmen were carrying a lot of money. Outlaws knew that the boatmen had large amounts of money and would steal from them while they were asleep. Sometimes the outlaws would even kill the boatmen for the money. Some of the first serial killers are believed to have started their killing sprees on the Natchez Trace. The Harpes brothers were very vicious outlaws and murders. These two men killed anyone and everyone who stood in the way of what they wanted, even their own children.

There were also natural obstacles such as snakes, bears as well as hunger and fatigue. The most common threat however, would have been from the weather, especially heavy rains that caused floods.

Student Instruction: The students will locate the Natchez Trace Parkway and the Old Trace (gray line on official map). The students will locate the trail they will visit. The students will receive the instructions to the game, learn the boundaries of the game field and receive their flags and game character assignments.

When walking the trail, the students will be encouraged to share words that describe the trail and the trail surroundings. They should try to imagine what it would have been like to travel the Old Trace two hundred years ago.

Student Task: Sunken Trace Game Instructions:

1. The students will learn the boundaries of the game play area.
2. The students will attach their flags to themselves.
3. The students will secretly choose a slip of paper that will assign their character. They will be either a boatmen, American Indian, outlaw, or bear.

4. Students will learn who can take which flags.
5. The student will learn how to make enact a “stand-off”.

Boatmen may take flags from American Indians or bears.
Bears may take boatmen or outlaw flags.
Outlaws may take American Indian and boatman flags.
American Indians may take outlaw and bear flags.

Initially, the students should not tell each other the role he or she is playing because people did not know who they were meeting when they were traveling the trace.

To steal a flag: A student will approach another student and say, “You’re Sunk!” This is called a stand-off. The two students in the “stand-off” will reveal their paper slips to each other. If the “attacker” can steal a flag from this type of character, they may do so (only ONE flag at a time). However, if able, the “attacked” student may also take a flag from the would-be attacker. They may not enact a stand-off with the same student more than one-time in a row.

After everyone is assigned a role, the students will begin to roam within the boundaries set by the teacher at the site. They will initiate stand-offs and collect flags. The goal for the students is to steal as many flags as possible from other students, while protecting their own flags.

When a person loses all of his or her flags, that person is “dead” or out. When someone “dies”, they will sit and wait until the end of the game. When there is just one student left with flags or after everyone has “died”, the game is over.

The teacher will then take the students on a short hike to show the students the traveling conditions and terrain the boatmen, outlaws, and American Indians had to overcome. Before they enter the trail, the students will be told they should look around and think of words that describe the areas they are seeing. The teacher should stop after each 2 or three minutes of walking and have the students share some of their descriptive words.

OPTION for a milder/low key game:

Instead of flags, the students will carry 3 cards scripted with their “character name”. When there is a “stand-off”, the students quietly collect the cards from other students rather than try to steal flags.

Student Assessment: Fair play in the game. Participation in the hike descriptions. Quality of text composition.

Suggestions for re-teaching: To reinforce the lesson, the teacher will assign the students to draw a picture of the Natchez Trace and write a paragraph about what the student saw while on the trail.

Extension: For an interpretive program on the boatmen of the Natchez Trace Parkway, call 662-680-4027 or 1-800-305-7417 for information.

