Moab Museum School Programs: Sixth Grade Lesson Plan

Designed to complement the Museum’s field trip programs, these core curriculum-aligned stories and activities are intended for use by teachers to help students learn about cattle and sheep ranchers and pioneers who settled the land around the Colorado River corridor near Moab. Teachers may use this material in the classroom or on the bus ride to the field trip.

Stories for the bus ride: The following stories may be told along the bus ride to the Moab Museum field trip, referencing the provided map.

**Taylor Family History:** (point out the Moab Springs Ranch house, the original Taylor family homestead) Brothers Arthur and Norman Taylor and their families were some of the first ranchers to settle this region. They arrived in 1881, moving into the vacant Elk Mountain Mission fort, which had been built and abandoned in 1855 by Mormon missionaries who had tried unsuccessfully to settle in the Valley. They built their home (pictured at right in the early 1900s, now the Moab Springs Ranch). In 1882, Helen M. Knight was the first child to be born in the new house. Norman Taylor established in 1883 a toll ferry across the Grand River (which was renamed to the Colorado River 1921) which brought travelers to the Moab area.

It was an exciting time to live in Moab. One day, June 24th 1889, the infamous outlaws Butch Cassidy, the Sundance Kid, and two Moab men named Matt Warner and Tom McCarty robbed the Telluride bank and got away with $20,000. As they passed through Moab, young Lydia Skewes, who lived in the Taylor homestead, watched Cassidy and his gang sneakily swap out one of their tired horses with one of the Taylors’ from their corrals. Cassidy and his men raced toward the river to meet Lydia’s grandfather Norman Taylor, who ran the ferry. They crossed the river leaving a $20 gold piece with Norman and dashing off to their hideout near Moab!

**Defunct Tram:** (Point out the defunct site at the River Bridge and ask what they know about it.) What would you do with the tram if you owned this land? Discuss with a seatmate and then share comments with the class. We will be discussing later in the day and doing an activity related to the tram...

**Moab River Bridge:** (Point out bridge) Norman Taylor’s river ferry helped transport travelers across the river in Moab’s early days, but as the town grew and technology progressed, a bridge was built. The first bridge at this location was built in 1912. Replacements were built in 1955 and 2000.

**Colorado River:** The Colorado River flows for 1,500 miles through Colorado, California, New Mexico, Utah and Mexico and empties into the Gulf of California. Today, the Colorado River rarely reaches the ocean due to 40 million people in the Western US depending upon its resources. These majestic canyons were formed by the river over 6 million years through the process of water erosion and ice expansion. What do we mean by erosion – can someone point out signs of a changing landscape around us? Rock falls, scree slopes, and even silt in the river all evidence erosion. Elsewhere along the Colorado, the river has been dammed to store water and generate hydroelectricity. Today in Moab, the river is primarily used for recreation a vital part of Moab’s economy and downstream a hydroelectric power source. It played an important role in the lives of native and settler populations and will for future generations to come. What do you like to do on the Colorado River?
John Wesley Powell: An explorer, geologist, geographer and anthropologist, John Wesley Powell was a one-armed Civil War veteran who led a daring expedition in 1869 down the mighty Colorado River. Close your eyes and listen to this quote taken from Powell’s journal: “We are three-quarters of a mile in the depths of the earth, and the great river shrinks into the insignificance, as it dashes its angry waves against the walls and cliffs, that rise to the world above; they are but puny ripples, and we but pigmies, running up and down the sands, or lost among the boulders.” How does Powell’s description of the Colorado River make you feel about traveling the river in 1869?

Grandstaff Canyon: (Point out Grandstaff Canyon)
William Grandstaff was a Black frontiersman and cowboy who was one of the first settlers. He arrived in – and departed – Moab before the Taylors were here. Likely born enslaved in Virginia, he lived in a couple of different places in the 1950s and 1960s and moved westward at a time when many people looking for a better life were moving westward. Arriving in 1877 with a Canadian fur trapper nicknamed “Frenchie,” Grandstaff moved into the abandoned Elk Mountain Mission fort. Grandstaff ran his cattle in the canyon that bears his name from 1877-1881. Grandstaff fled the area in 1881 after being charged with bootlegging whiskey to the Native Americans. It’s impossible to know the legitimacy of such allegations nearly 150 years later, but we know that he left in a hurry, eventually settling in Glenwood Springs, Colorado where he was a prospector and owned a saloon. Why do you think William Grandstaff chose to run his cattle up what is now Grandstaff Canyon? (It’s one of very few with year-round water). What do you think it might have been like to be a Black cowboy on the frontier in the late 1800s?

White Ranch History: (Point out Red Cliffs Lodge)
Today, Red Cliffs Lodge is a resort destination and ranch. It was once a working ranch owned by George and Essie White. George and Essie received the land to build the ranch as a wedding present from Essie’s parents, Lottie and Amasee Larsen, who owned a ranch in nearby Fisher Valley. This spot has played a big role in many movies, and today, the owner has made the Moab Museum of Film and Western Heritage in the basement, which provides an awesome look into the movie history of the region. We’ll make a stop there today.

John Ford, a famous actor in many western movies “discovered” the Moab area in the 1940s. Since then, many movies and commercials have been filmed in this region. The front gate of the White Ranch’s driveway was constructed by movie crew to look like a fort entrance for the movie Rio Grande, which came out in 1950 and starred John Wayne and Maureen O’Hara. Tommy and Patrick Wayne were little boys in the movie together. The ranch was a filming location for advertisements and Marlboro cigarette promotional materials.

Castle Valley: (Point out the road to Castle Valley)
Castle Valley, like the Moab Valley, has a long history of human habitation due to its favorable geography and access to water. Native Americans were the first residents of the Castle Valley area and archaeological evidence indicates a long history of native presence in the area. Trappers, traders, explorers and travelers on the Old Spanish Trail and outlaws also visited Castle Valley throughout history. Brothers John and Matt Martin were surveyors who settled in Castle Valley in 1887, and later began the construction of the road to Moab that we’re driving on today. Castle Valley had several ranching families throughout its history, and today there is still some agriculture happening in Castle Valley: The Seventh Day Adventist church has a school and an organic farm there. There’s something very unique about the land - the farm is on it, it has an artesian well. How do you think that the different groups of people living here would have used an artesian well throughout history?

Geology: (Point out the mountains)
Does anyone know which is younger geologically speaking, the red rock layers around us or the La Sal Mountains? The mountains are younger! The La Sal are what geologists call a volcanic intrusion, and they are relatively new – a mere 24 million years old. They formed when a big mass of magma rose upward from deeper in the earth, slowly cooling before reaching the earth as a volcano. Even though they’re high above the rest of the rocks here today (because they’re very resistant to erosion!), they never made it to the surface of the earth when the magma cooled into rock. That means that there was once a few thousand more feet of sedimentary rock above us and above the mountains today! Erosion slowly removed a lot of material from above us.
**Professor Valley:** The former town of Richardson, named for an early settler Dr. Sylvester "Professor" Richardson, was at the mouth of Professor Creek. The Professor's ranch changed ownership several times and was eventually purchased by Bates Wilson.

Today Bates Wilson's daughter Anne and her husband live there and the land has been turned into a solar farm. Who is Bates Wilson and how is he significant to Moab? (Bates Wilson founded Canyonlands National Park.)

*Photo: Richardson Post Office, Moab Museum Collection.*

**Fisher Valley:** An iconic geological landform, Fisher Towers stands over Fisher Valley. In 1880, a geologist allegedly discovered a feature he called a "fissure" in the valley and named it Fissure Valley, which evolved into Fisher Valley. Onion Creek, which runs through Fisher Valley, was once known as Stinking Creek. The water is still unfit to drink or use because it contains arsenic and sulfur. Where do you think these poisonous chemicals came from and how did the people living there deal with it? (They erode out of the rocks)

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**Moab Tram Town Hall Activity:**

Remember the abandoned tram on the drive in? We're going to be having a town hall meeting about it on the bus today—much like what actually happens in city government when the community makes decisions about things that happen in town.

Everybody will assume some different identities today: I have in this bag today slips of paper with different identities of people in the community who have different opinions about the abandoned tram and what could be done with it. You'll each select a piece of paper, consider what the person might think about it, and become that person in a town hall meeting where we will discuss and respectfully debate about what we think should be done with this site. In real life, town halls are a forum for candid communication—and they only work when people are respectful of one another's voices, everyone's input is sought, and side conversations don't happen so that everyone is paying attention to the debate.

Have students draw a slip of paper. (People for Town Hall Meeting include: Mayor, County Council (one for the tram and one against), hotel developer and owner, raft guide, National Park rangers, BLM Park Service employee, Forest Service employee, downtown shop owners, jeepers, bikers, rock climbers, hikers) Facilitate debate. What would it be like if this was something everyone could vote on? What if only the county council voted on it? What if only the city council voted on it? How do you think conversations like this actually get decided on in real life?

*Materials: premade slips of paper with above identities written on them.*

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**Utah State Social Studies Core Curriculum Standards**

**Standard 1:** Students will understand how early civilizations developed and how they contributed to the current state of the world.

**Objective 1:** Explain why physical geography affected the development of early civilizations.

**Objective 4:** Analyze how the earliest civilizations created technologies and systems to meet community and personal needs.