Moab Museum School Programs:
Fifth Grade Lesson Plan

Dewey is now the site of a campground and boat ramp, but it used to be a small settlement and an important transportation link during the region’s settlement in the late 1800s. Designed to complement the Museum’s field trip programs, these core curriculum-aligned lessons are intended for classroom use by teachers to help students learn about the history of the Dewey area prior to their field trip. Pages 3-6 may be printed and passed around, or displayed digitally to supplement the lesson.

Human History:

The area around Moab is the traditional and ancestral homeland of Ute people, and numerous Native American groups have lived on this land for millennia before them. The first residents of this region are referred to by archeologists as the Palec-Indians, followed by the Archaic people and then the Fremont and Ancestral Pueblo peoples. Our field trip will mostly focus on settlement which occurred in the late 1800s and early 1900s by pioneer families who colonized Utah.

There are two versions of how this place got its name, “Dewey,” from settlers in the 1800s. The first story alleges that the name comes from Dewey Smith, a prospector who camped near the river in 1880 where Utah Highway 128 now crosses the river. The second story is that the name was taken from a raft used to ferry supplies down the river to the mouth of Professor Creek. The raft was named for Admiral George Dewey, a Navy Admiral who served in the Spanish American War.

When ranchers and settlers first arrived in Utah, the river was called the Grand River. In 1921, it was renamed the Colorado River. The river was a formidable barrier to travel and commerce, making it challenging to transport goods, livestock, and people that needed to get to Moab and beyond. The Denver Rio Grande Western Railroad had two different stations in Grand County, one north of Thompson, which Moab residents would use to move their goods and people. The second station in Cisco, which provided the steam locomotive trains with water pumped from the Colorado River, served people who lived in the remote communities of Dewey, Castleton, Richardson, Castle Valley and Miner’s Basin.

In the 1800s, a settler named Samuel King built and operated a ferry across the river near today’s Dewey Bridge. A small community sprang up around the ferry to provide travelers and their goods to cross the river. Samuel King owned the ferry and Dick Westwood, Moab’s Sheriff, operated it. He was paid $20 per month plus tolls. Dick and his wife Martha also ran a post office and halfway house. Their children attended school with children from the area across the river in Dewey Schoolhouse. What would it be like to take the ferry across the river each day to attend School? What were the dangers of crossing the river each day? Years after starting the ferry and the settlement in Dewey, Dick Westwood was tragically killed by prisoners escaping from the local jail. (See photos of Dick & Martha Westwood).

In 1915, the ferryboat broke loose and floated 15 miles downriver and was never replaced. Construction of the Dewey Bridge was completed in 1916 and the new 10 feet wide and 502 feet long bridge was designed to carry 6 horses and 3 wagons (9,000 pounds) all at once. It remained in use for 72 years.

A new bridge was built in 1985 near the old bridge, allowing traffic on Highway 128 to increase, and by 1988 the original suspension bridge was closed to vehicle traffic. In 1997, some local folks were interested in restoring the old suspension bridge and raised money and reconstructed it in 1999 using the original methods. The bridge burned 2008 in a fire accidently started by a child playing with matches. The Grand County Historic Commission tried to raise funds to restore it, but never got enough money.
Geology:

On our field trip, we’ll be looking at the rock layers surrounding us. The flat-lying layers of sedimentary rock in the Moab area are like pages of a book: they tell us stories about the long geologic history of the earth’s crust. Lots of pages are exposed in canyons, where the river cuts through many vertical feet of rock, making steep cliffs. These layers tell the story of what creatures lived and what events took place in bygone days. All these sedimentary formations were formed when wind and water over long periods of time wore away high mountains of igneous rock and previously deposited and uplifted sedimentary rock; the sediment was deposited in the lowlands and the seas which at various times covered this area. When the last uplift of the Colorado Plateau occurred, the Colorado and other rivers cut through the many sedimentary layers, making them visible for us to study today. We’ll be talking more about this during our field trip!

Photo: Numerous rock layers are exposed along the Colorado River from Moab to Dewey.

Activities:

River Crossing Game:

Materials:
- 2 buckets full of “cargo” (rocks, etc)
- 2 pieces of ~10’ rope
- 4 small rubber mats (about placemat size)

We’ve been talking a lot about the river crossing at Dewey... let’s practice ourselves! The point of this game is for students to get to the other side of the “river” and bring back a bucket of cargo without falling into the river. Divide the class into 2 teams and set up two ropes for the “riverbank” 20 feet apart. Both teams will start on the same side of the river, with the bucket of cargo on the other side. Each team gets 2 rubber mats to step on to get to the other side. One person at a time will cross the river using the 2 rubber mats to get to the side with the bucket of rocks and use the mats to get back without falling into the river. They may move the mats multiple times. If anyone falls in the river, they must go back and start over. Each person on the team must cross the river and bring the rocks across. The fastest team wins. Advanced game: Hop on one foot to get across or only use one arm (like John Wesley Powell).

Questions for discussion:

Conversations & questions for the bus ride on the way to the field trip.

1. In canyon country, the dramatic landscape has a lot to do with the human history. Why is the Moab bridge where it is? Why is the Dewey Bridge where it is? (Easiest places to approach and cross the river!)

2. Why are towns located where they are? Today, the only major settlements in Grand County are in Moab and Castle Valley. Ghost towns include Dewey, Cisco, and Castleton. Why do you think some towns disappeared? (Dewey disappeared once the bridge made travel so easy! Travelers no longer needed the ferry and halfway houses that Dewey settlers built.)

3. The canyons that make Southeast Utah’s scenery so unique were carved by the Colorado River over the past 6 million years. What evidence can we observe of erosion along the drive? (Point out talus slopes, evidence of rock falls, discuss flash floods in canyons, etc.)
Martha Westwood and Dick Westwood (above) were early settlers of Dewey. Dick operated the toll ferry (pictured below, circa 1914) and served as the county Sherriff, and Martha helped run the ferry, post office, and halfway house. (Photos from Canyon Legacy, Volume 44.)
Above: The original Dewey Bridge shortly after it was completed in 1916. Completed in record time, this bridge was a significant engineering feat for its time and dramatically improved access for the transport of people and products across Grand County. (Photo from Museum Collection)

Left: The Dewey Bridge on fire in 2008. This tragic accident was the result of a child playing with matches. (Photo from Canyon County Zephyr)
Above: The new Dewey Bridge under construction, with the original visible in the background. (Photo from Museum Collection)

Right: The newer bridge in the foreground with the original Dewey Bridge in the background. (Photo from Museum Collection)
Above: This map of Dewey depicts the settlement during the time that the Westwoods lived in the area. (Map from Neil Westwood: A Biography, by Richcard E. Westwood, grandson of Richard D. Westwood.)

Left: Aerial view of the Dewey Bridge area today. (Photo from Google Maps.)