

Far As the Eye Can See



Applause Series CURRICULUM GUIDE
CIVIC CENTER OF GREATER DES MOINES

November 8-11, 2010

Far as the Eye Can

Dear Teachers,

Thank you for joining us for the Applause Series presentation of *Far as the Eye Can See*. We are very pleased that you have chosen to share this special experience with your students and hope that this study guide helps you connect the performance to your in-classroom curriculum in ways that you find valuable.

In the following pages, you will find contextual information about the performance and related subjects, as well as a wide variety of discussion questions and activities that tie into several curriculum areas. Some pages are appropriate to reproduce for your students; others are designed more specifically with you, their teacher, in mind. As such, we hope that you are able to “pick and choose” material and ideas from the study guide to meet your class’s unique needs.



See you at the theater,

Civic Center Education Team

Support for Civic Center education programs and the Applause Series is provided by:

Alliant Energy, American Republic Insurance Company, Bank of the West, Bradford and Sally Austin, Bank of America, EMC Insurance Companies, Jules and Judy Gray, Greater Des Moines Community Foundation, Hy-Vee, John Deere Des Moines Operations, Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs, Richard and Deborah McConnell, Pioneer Hi-Bred - a DuPont business, Polk County, Prairie Meadows Community Betterment Grant, Sargent Family Foundation, U.S. Bank, Wells Fargo & Co., Willis Auto Campus, and more than 200 individual donors.

GUIDE CONTENTS

Introduction
Page 2

About the Civic Center
Page 3

About the Performance
Page 4

About the Artist
Page 5

The Prairie
Page 6

Crossing the Prairie on the Oregon Trail
Pages 7-8

Settling the Prairie
Pages 9-10

Native Americans and Western Expansion
Pages 11-12

Surviving the Dust Bowl
Pages 13-14

Vocabulary
Page 15

Activities and Discussion Questions
Pages 16-20

Going to the Theater
Page 21

Civic Center Field Trip Information for Teachers
Page 22

Resources and Sources
Page 23

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ABOUT THE CIVIC CENTER OF GREATER DES MOINES



The Civic Center of Greater Des Moines is a cultural landmark of central Iowa and is committed to engaging the Midwest in world-class entertainment, education, and cultural activities. The Civic Center has achieved a national reputation for excellence as a performing arts center and belongs to several national organizations, including The Broadway League, the Independent Presenters Network, International Performing Arts for Youth, and Theater for Young Audiences/USA.

Five performing arts series currently comprise the season— the Willis Broadway Series, Prairie Meadows Temple Theater Series, Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield Family Series, the Dance Series, and the Applause Series. The Civic Center is also the performance home for the Des Moines Symphony and Stage West.

The Civic Center is a private, nonprofit organization and is an important part of central Iowa's cultural community. Through its education programs, the Civic Center strives to engage patrons in arts experiences that extend beyond the stage. Master classes bring professional and local artists together to share their art form and craft, while pre-performance lectures and post-performance Q&A sessions with company members offer ticket holders the opportunity to explore each show as a living, evolving piece of art.

Through the Applause Series— curriculum-connected performances for school audiences— students are encouraged to discover the rich, diverse world of performing arts. During the 2010-2011 season, the Civic Center will welcome more than 30,000 students and educators to 12 professional productions for young audiences.

Want an inside look? Request a tour.

Group tours can be arranged for performance and non-performance dates.

Call 515-246-2355 or visit civiccenter.org/education to check on availability or book your visit.

DID YOU KNOW?

More than 250,000 patrons visit the Civic Center each year.

The Civic Center opened in 1979.

The Civic Center has three theater spaces:

- *Main Hall, 2745 seats*
- *Stoner Studio, 200 seats*
- *Temple Theater, 299 seats (located in the Temple for the Performing Arts)*

No seat is more than 155 feet from center stage in the Main Hall.

Nollen Plaza, situated just west of the Civic Center, is a park and amphitheater that is also part of the Civic Center complex. The space features the Brenton Waterfall and Reflection Pool and the Crusoe Umbrella sculpture.

The Applause Series started in 1996. You are joining us for the 15th anniversary season!

ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE



“...very effective. The characters in *Far as the Eye Can See* were heartbreaking in the sense of the hardships they endured, but uplifting and inspiring in the strength and resilience shown. It gave me a new appreciation of what [they] had to overcome.”

-Geneva Arts Council, Geneva, Nebraska

Even though forty percent of the United States is prairie, the prairie gets overlooked. Compared to mountains and oceans, and even deserts, the prairie tends to be a forgotten landscape. So do the stories of its people. In *Far as the Eye Can See*, Pippa White celebrates the Great American Prairie with the stories of those who crossed it (the pioneer emigrants on the Oregon Trail), those who settled it (the pioneer homesteaders), those who lost it (the Native Americans), and those who endured it (the survivors of the Dust Bowl).

With the exception of two Native American folktales, all of the stories told in *Far as the Eye Can See* are true. Taken from letters, diaries, memoirs and interviews, the stories span nearly eighty years of prairie history, beginning in the 1840s with the westward expansion along the Oregon Trail, through the Homestead Act enacted in the 1860s and the subsequent decades of settlement, on through the 1930s when dust storms ravaged much of the southern prairie states.

In this one-woman performance, Pippa White singlehandedly portrays a total of nine characters. By interweaving their stories, she brings to light the hopes, struggles, and fortitude shared by the brave men, women, and children who dared to call the prairie home.

THE CHARACTERS

Pioneers:

Amelia- a mother of seven crossing the prairie on the Oregon Trail

Mary Agnes- an eleven-year-old girl walking the Oregon Trail

Edwin Pettit- a thirteen-year-old boy determined to make it West

Homesteaders:

Eli- a young man determined to make something of himself through the Homestead Act

Anna- a twelve-year-old girl supporting her family in their new life

Kate- a spunky young woman of amazing courage

Dust Bowl Survivors:

Grace- a mother fighting to save the family farm

Ann Marie- a young girl living through the ravaging dust storms

Native Americans:

Bright Eyes- a Native American woman determined to help her people

ABOUT THE ARTIST



PIPPA WHITE

Pippa White is in her fifteenth year as a solo performer. She calls her One's Company Productions "part theatre, part storytelling, part history." Audiences call them unique, captivating, and touching. She has toured to twenty-eight states, including California, New York, Connecticut, Texas, Florida, and Alaska. She has performed at colleges, conferences, museums, libraries, festivals, and performing arts centers.

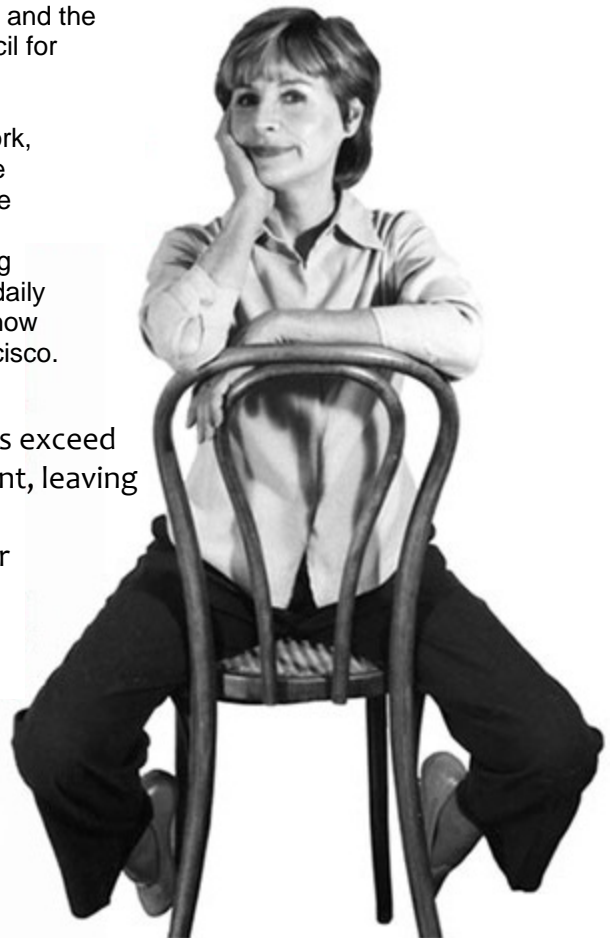
This year's performance at the Civic Center of Greater Des Moines is Pippa White's eleventh engagement as part of the Applause Series. Other venues include the University of Nebraska, Iowa State Center, Gallagher-Bluedorn Performing Arts Center, the University of Colorado Hospital, the Connecticut Hospital Association, SUNY Orange, the Joslyn Art Museum, San Diego State University School of Nursing, the Association for Career and Technical Education, Kansas City Young Audiences, and several storytelling festivals.

White has a BA in English from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. She offers workshops and residencies and has been a teaching artist with the Arts Are Basic Program (associated with the College of Fine and Performing Arts at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln) and the Nebraska Arts Council for eighteen years..

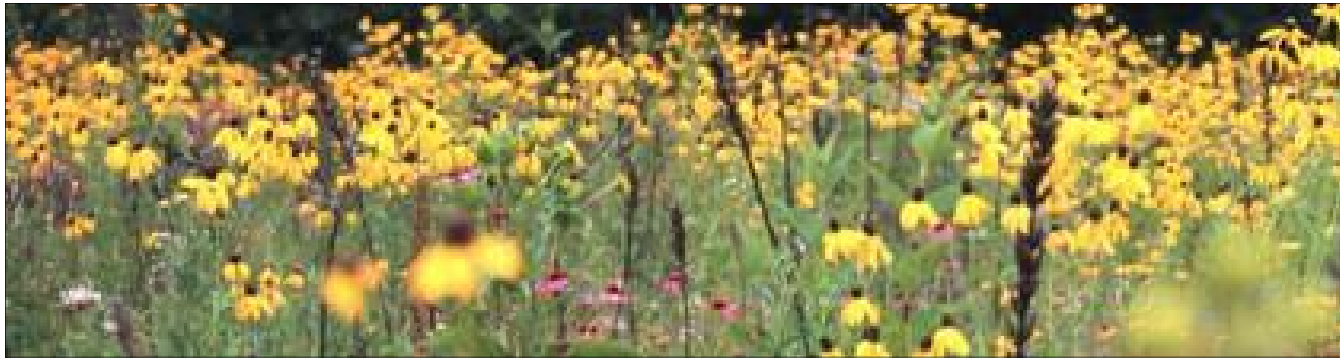
Before doing solo work, she had an extensive background in theatre and television on the West Coast, including five years hosting a daily morning television show on ABC in San Francisco.

"Her presentations exceed mere entertainment, leaving her audience intellectually richer for having heard her."

-Sabrina Riley
Library Director,
Union College



THE PRAIRIE



The prairie is an ecosystem mostly of grasses and forbs (flowering plants) that also includes other types of plants, fungi, the soil, geology, and fire. Together, these elements create one of the most complex ecosystems in the world.

The North American Prairie covers almost 1.4 million square miles, forming a vast triangular shaped area that ranges from the Canadian provinces in the north down to southern Texas. The prairie is almost 1,000 miles wide, beginning in Indiana and expanding to the edge of the Rocky Mountains in the west. Iowa, like much of the Midwest, is settled deep in the heart of prairie country.

Climate

Being so far away from the ocean allows the prairie states to experience a wide range of temperatures. It is very hot in the summer and very cold in the winter.

Rainfall varies from year to year on the prairie. However, about every 30 years or so, the prairie tends to experience a drought period which lasts for several years.

Plants

Prairie plants can grow to 10 feet tall. They also have extremely long roots. The roots of big bluestem may be 7 feet long, and switchgrass roots can be 11 feet long. In fact, more than two-thirds of the living portion of the prairie lies beneath the ground. Large root systems allow prairie plants to draw moisture from deep underground so they can withstand droughts and extreme heat.

Animals

Before settlers moved west, the prairies were covered with herds of grazing animals such as buffalo, elk, and deer. Prairie dogs dug huge tunnel systems which aerated the soil and allowed water to reach several feet below the surface.

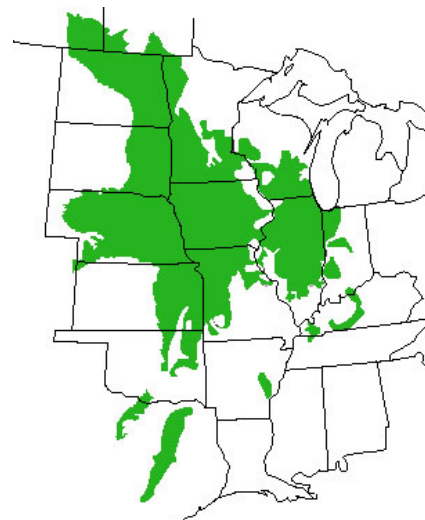
Fire

A given area of land would experience fire at least once every five years. Fire, rather than being destructive, was essential to keep the prairie healthy. A fire would destroy dead grasses above ground, making room for new growth and flowering plants. In addition, fires killed most saplings, which kept trees from overtaking the grasslands.

Soil

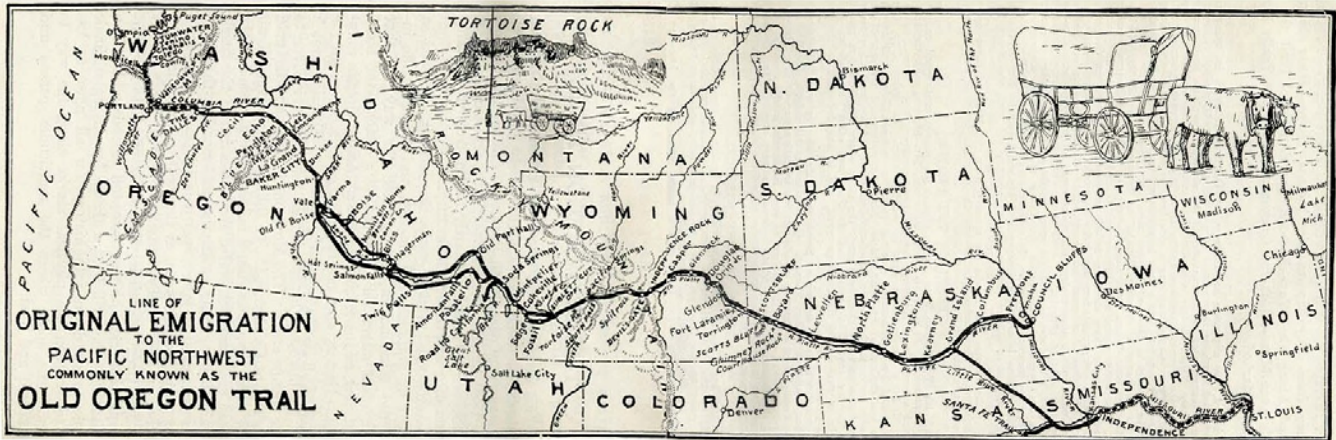
Because prairie plants have such massive root structures, the plants contribute to the richness of the soil. Each year the plants create more roots to absorb moisture underground, and, each year, some of these roots die off and decompose beneath the ground. This process adds important nutrients to the soil. Over thousands of years, this process created some of the most fertile soil in the world.

The French called the rolling plains of grass “prairie,” a word for a meadow grazed by cattle.



This map shows the estimated extent of the prairie in the year 1800. Due to farming and development, less than 2% of the original prairie exists today.
Map courtesy of iowaprairienetwork.org

CROSSING THE PRAIRIE ON THE OREGON TRAIL



Until the transcontinental railroad was completed in 1869, the Oregon Trail was the only practical corridor to the lands that now make up the states of Washington, Oregon, California, Nevada, Idaho and Utah. With the promise of land and a better life, more than 400,000 individuals decided to make the **2,000 mile journey** across the prairie and the Rocky Mountains to reach the bountiful lands of “Oregon Country” between the years of 1843 and 1869. Many did not survive the treacherous journey, but those who did forever changed the landscape and history of our country.

During the early years of the Oregon Trail, “Oregon Country” was not yet part of the United States. Pioneers traveling the trail were called **emigrants** because they were leaving one country to enter another.

ABOVE: Map of the Oregon Trail by Ezra Meeker, 1907. Image courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries.

GETTING STARTED

Emigrants from the east would begin their journey from one of several small towns along the Missouri River which were called “jumping off” places. Each spring these small towns would become an overnight boomtown as thousands of emigrants gathered and camped on the town outskirts for weeks as they prepared for the journey.

Timing was very important. Emigrants would arrive in the jumping off cities by mid-April and then be forced to wait several weeks. Heading west too early in the spring meant that the grass wouldn’t be long enough for the animals to graze along the way—a mistake which could be fatal. Waiting too long to leave was also dangerous as emigrants risked not making it across the mountains prior to the fierce winter. As soon as the grass was long enough, usually in late April or early May, the jumping off towns would empty quickly as the great crowds of people started off along the trail.

Independence, Missouri was the most popular jumping off city. (Council Bluffs, Iowa was also an important jumping off place for emigrants.)

WHAT YOU NEEDED

Supplies

800 pounds of flour and cornmeal
200 pounds of lard
25 pounds of salt and pepper
700 pounds of bacon
100 pounds of dried fruit
75 pounds of coffee
200 pounds of dried beans
Cooking and eating utensils
Guns and ammunition
Linens and clothing
Furniture and farm implements for starting your new life in the west

Wagon

The wagon box measured only four feet by ten feet. Cotton covers were typically drawn closed at both ends to try to keep out dust and rain. Most wagons had several handy features such as a toolbox located on the side for easy access, a water barrel, and hardwood brakes.

Oxen

Emigrants’ wagons would usually be pulled by 4-6 oxen. Unlike horses, oxen could live off grass and sage along the trail. They were also very strong and less expensive than horses. The biggest drawback to using oxen was their speed. Oxen were slow, only moving at about 2 miles per hour.

(Crossing the Prairie, cont. page 8)

CROSSING THE PRAIRIE ON THE OREGON TRAIL, cont.



Image courtesy of nwhistorycourse.org

DANGERS AND HARDSHIPS

Over-packing

Most emigrants packed too much. With their wagons too heavy, most had to abandon some of their belongings to lighten the load.

River Crossings

Many drowned trying to cross the Kansas, North Platte and Columbia Rivers. Important supplies were often lost or damaged if the wagon tipped in the water.

Walking

With their wagons packed to capacity, there usually was not room for anyone to ride. Instead, most emigrants walked the 2,000 mile journey on foot. Many children did not even have shoes.

Accidents

If someone fell under a wagon's massive wheels, death was instant. Most often, the victims of such accidents were children.

Life on the trail was not easy, and in many cases, it was fatal. Of the 400,000 emigrants who set out west along the trail, nearly 50,000 died along the way. Many were children.

Broken Axles

Wagon axles sometimes broke under the weight of the supplies. If a family did not have a spare axle, they would be forced to abandon their wagon or try to convert it to a two-wheel cart.

Weather

Great thunderstorms and hail storms were difficult as there was no shelter for travelers out on the open prairie. Pounding rains often leaked into the wagons and damaged supplies.

Lawlessness

There was no authority of law along the trail. Thieves would sometimes steal oxen and other vital supplies.

Running Out of Supplies

Many emigrants ran out of supplies before they reached the end of the trail. Replacing those supplies was extremely expensive as the further one got along the trail, prices rose steeply due to the high demand.

Cholera

A mysterious and deadly disease called cholera swept the trail and killed more emigrants than anything else. Cholera was caused by unsanitary water. Often, an emigrant would go from healthy to dead in just a few hours.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH NATIVE AMERICANS

Many emigrants' greatest fear was the possibility of being attacked by Native Americans, but the expected attacks did not come. Instead, there were many instances of Native American kindness— helping pull out stuck wagons, rescuing drowning emigrants, and even rounding up lost cattle. Emigrants often traded clothes, tobacco, or rifles for Native American horses or food.

Within a few years, the emigrants had overgrazed the prairie grasses and burned all of the firewood. The great herds of buffalo were nearly wiped out as the emigrants hunted the animals for sport, often leaving the carcasses to rot. As a result of the emigrants' actions, many of the Native Americans residing in the lands surrounding the Oregon Trail became impoverished.

SETTLING THE PRAIRIE



Although thousands passed through the prairie on their way to “Oregon Country,” few realized at the time that the prairie held some of the most promising farmland in the world. With the development of heavy-duty plows that were able to break up the thick tangle of prairie roots and the promise of affordable land through the Homestead Act, the prairies eventually became a popular destination for settlers looking to start a new life.

HOMESTEAD ACT

To encourage settlement of the prairie states, the United States government passed the Homestead Act in 1862. For a very small fee, settlers could stake a claim to 160 acres on which to start a farm. Thousands of people, who never would have been able to afford land in the east, jumped at the chance.

To be eligible, a settler had to be 21 years old or considered the head of the household. To keep the land, a settler was required to make “improvements” on the land. The improvements included building a dwelling that was at least 12 feet by 12 feet in size, planting and maintaining a crop, and living on the land for five years.

THE SETTLERS

The Homestead Act provided new opportunities for settlers from all walks of life— including single women, recently freed slaves, and immigrants. Many had never farmed before.

Most settlers who came to the prairie simply wanted a little bit of land to raise their family on. Beyond raising enough crops and livestock to support their family, the most many settlers hoped for was to make just enough extra money for a piano, a family Bible, or some lace.

Homesteading was very hard work. Fields had to be plowed, crops had to be harvested, and livestock needed to be cared for. Every member of the family contributed. Children helped with chores around the house and on the farm. In addition to traditional cooking and housekeeping duties, women worked in the fields right beside the men.

About 2 million individuals filed claims through the Homestead Act. Only one in three were able to meet the requirements and ultimately gain the deed to their land.

HOMES ON THE PRAIRIE

One of the basic requirements of the Homestead Act was that a family must construct and maintain a dwelling on the property.

Settlers’ first homes were very basic. Still far from the railroads and with limited access to trees for wood, many settlers built homes out of sod— the ground just beneath the surface that was held together by the prairie’s root system. Settlers would cut blocks of sod out of the ground and use them as building material. Sod houses were cool in the summer and kept out the cold winds in the winter. They also had many drawbacks. Made of grass and dirt, sod houses attracted snakes and mice. During rain storms, the ceilings would often cave in.

If close enough to a river where trees were more plentiful, settlers could haul their own lumber to build a cabin or simple frame house. Many families had to save money to buy logs that were shipped via railroad from forested areas out east to build their homes.

(Settling the Prairie, cont. page 10)

TOP: A family in front of their sod house.
Photo courtesy of okhistory.org.

SETTLING THE PRAIRIE, cont.



DANGERS AND HARDSHIPS

Open Spaces

For many settlers, who were used to the cultivated farmlands of the eastern United States or Europe, the prairie's wide open spaces were a disturbing sight. The lack of mountains, hills, or trees to break up the horizon left many feeling unsettled. Some were unable to cope completely and returned east or went mad.

Isolation

In the earliest years of the Homestead Act, many settler families lived in extreme isolation. Some homesteads were more than 100 miles from the nearest railroad, 40 miles from the nearest post office, and 6 miles to the nearest neighbor. When the snows fell in the winter, making travel difficult, it was possible for a family to see no other people for several months at a time.

Farm Accidents

Farm accidents were common on the prairie. Working with livestock and other farm equipment caused many injuries and occasional deaths. For a family alone out on the prairie, there was not always enough time to fetch the nearest doctor in time to help the victim of an accident.

Weather

Hail and drought could destroy a family's crops, keeping them from making a profit. In the winter, blizzards on the prairie were also very dangerous. With no hills or trees to break the wind, falling snow could be blinding. Settlers could easily lose their way, sometimes just trying to find their way between their house and barn, and freeze to death.

Grasshoppers

During 4 straight summers during the 1870s, vast plagues of grasshoppers descended on the prairie and devoured the settlers' crops. Settlers also reported that the grasshoppers ate their clothing, blankets, curtains, and leather horse harnesses.

Prairie Fires

Although prairie fires were a natural part of the prairie, they could be devastating to a homestead family. If a family's home and crops were destroyed by fire, it was very unlikely they would be able to recover enough to keep their homestead claim.

LOCAL RESOURCE

You can see an example of an early Iowa farm at Living History Farms, located in Urbandale, Iowa. The '1850 Farm' represents what a four-year-old farm would have been like at the time of Iowa statehood.

Did you know?

Most Iowa farms in 1850 were about 160 acres in size. Farmers would cultivate between 25 and 40 acres.

The three major crops grown were corn, wheat, and potatoes. Wheat and hogs were sold for a profit. Corn was grown to feed to the pigs. Potatoes were a staple food for the family and were eaten for almost every meal.

Although wood-burning cook stoves were available, most farm women in 1850 still prepared food over an open fire.

Early Iowa barns were rarely used to house animals. Instead, most pioneers used their first barns to store farm equipment and crops. It wasn't until the 1870s that many families began erecting large barns for their animals.

Learn more about Living History Farms and their school programs by visiting lhf.org.

NATIVE AMERICANS AND WESTERN EXPANSION



Image courtesy of uiowa.edu

Native Americans were the first people to live on the prairie and utilize its resources. Many tribes had lived on the prairie for centuries before the arrival of settlers. *Far as the Eye Can See*, however, focuses on the experiences of Native Americans during the time of western expansion. As settlers moved west along the Oregon Trail and settled in the prairie states through the Homestead Act, the traditional lives and ways of Native Americans were greatly affected.

Many Native American peoples have lived in Iowa since the first nomadic hunters came to the area 12,000 years ago. In the 1700s, the Ioway, Oto, Sauk (Sac), Mesquakie, Potawatomi, Winnebago, Omaha, and Dakota Sioux were some of the groups that lived here.

FIRST PEOPLES OF THE PRAIRIE

Native Americans were the first people to use the prairie's resources and had a special relationship with the land. They used the prairie's plants for food and medicine. By burning the prairie, Native Americans could drive bison, elk, and buffalo during a hunt. The fires also kept the prairie open grassland with few trees, allowing the complex grass system to continue to thrive.

Over the course of hundreds of years, many different Native American tribes lived on the prairie. Each group was unique. The tribes had different systems of government, different religious practices, and different roles for men and women. Some tribes were nomadic and would travel the plains following the herds of buffalo. Others, like the Ioway (whom the state of Iowa is named after), hunted buffalo but also lived in villages and practiced agriculture. Their crops included maize (corn), squash, melons, gourds, sunflowers, and beans. No matter how diverse, each tribe had a sense of community. Individuals did not own land, and all resources were shared by the group.

DIFFERENT VALUES

The traditional lives of Native Americans across North America were greatly affected by the arrival of European settlers. The Europeans brought with them a very different value system. Unlike the Native Americans, the Europeans valued private property.

As more settlers came to America and moved westward, they wanted access to the lands and resources that the Native peoples were using. To many of the Europeans, who did not understand the Native Americans' relationship with the land, it seemed as though the Native Americans were not using the land to the fullest. Therefore, they considered the Native Americans to be savages and felt that they had the right to take possession of the land that Native Americans had lived on for centuries. As a result of the greed of settlers and very different mindsets about land and property, Native Americans experienced great injustices and faced many hardships.

(Native Americans, cont. page 12)

TOP: A member of the Ioway beside a traditional winter home made from bark and woven cattail reeds.

NATIVE AMERICANS AND WESTERN EXPANSION, cont.



DANGERS AND HARDSHIPS

Disease

The European settlers brought with them diseases that the Native Americans had never before encountered. With no natural resistance to these diseases, such as small pox, hundreds of thousands of Native Americans died.

Starvation

For Native peoples of the prairie who relied on the herds of buffalo for their food, the arrival of settlers—who overhunted the herds for sport—led to extreme shortages of food. Many starved as a result.

Relocation

As settlers moved westward and demanded more of the Native people's land, tribes were forced by the U.S. government to leave their homelands. The journey by foot to the lands set aside for them was often extremely difficult. Many did not survive.

Battles

Some tribes fought settlers and U.S. soldiers to try and keep their land and ways of life. Native Americans were typically outnumbered by the better-equipped U.S. forces.

Assimilation

Many white settlers believed it was their duty to “civilize” the Native Americans and tried to force them to give up their beliefs and traditions. Some Native Americans believed that by giving up their native ways and adopting the ways of the settlers, they would be given more rights, but this was rarely the case. Whether by force or choice, the pressure to assimilate led to many difficult questions for Native Americans on how to preserve their identities, cultures, and families.

Boarding Schools

In the 1800s, thousands of Native American children were sent to boarding schools where they were taught English and forbidden to speak in their native languages. They were also taught Christianity, the religion of the settlers, and European-based ideas about civilization and agriculture. Whites believed this was the most effective way to assimilate them into American society. Despite the boarding schools, many students held on to their tribal identities and later returned to their reservations to become leaders in their community.

LANDMARK CASE

The 1879 trial of Standing Bear, chief of the Ponca people, caused huge national and international interest. After being forced to relocate to Oklahoma, Chief Standing Bear and his followers decided to return to their home in Nebraska without permission. They were arrested. Although Standing Bear did not speak English, he made an eloquent plea to the court during his trial through his interpreter, his niece Bright Eyes. He stated:

“That hand is not the color of yours, but if I pierce it, I shall feel pain. If you pierce your hand, you also feel pain. The blood that will flow from mine will be the same color as yours. I am a man. God made us both.”

The judge agreed. His ruling found that a Native American was a person in the eyes of the law and that the government had no legal authority to force Native Americans to relocate. Although Native Americans were still treated poorly after the case, it marked the first time that they were given legal rights under the U.S. law.

ABOVE: Standing Bear and his family in later years.

Image courtesy of nebraskastudies.org.

SURVIVING THE DUST BOWL



Dry spells on the prairie, particularly in the southern regions, are common. They occur about once every 25-30 years. The nine-year drought that lasted from 1931-1939 was one of the worst in U.S. history, but it was not the dry weather conditions alone that made the “Dirty Thirties” so devastating. Instead, it was a combination of drought and misuse of the land.

BACKGROUND

Thousands of settlers came to the southern prairie states during the late 1800s and early 1900s to begin their new lives through the Homestead Act. Lush with shrubs, grasses, and dark soil, the land appeared to be the perfect farmland. Few realized that they were experiencing a rainy period between cycles of drought.

As the settlers plowed vast areas of land, they tore up the grasses whose roots held the soil in place. Wheat crops, which were in very high demand worldwide during World War I, exhausted the top soil. Furthermore, the settlers allowed their herds of cattle and other livestock to overgraze the land, damaging the vital grass system.

THE DUST STORMS

In the summer of 1931, the rains ceased and crops began to die. The prairie had always experienced extremely strong winds, but the over plowing of the land now created a disastrous phenomenon. Unlike past droughts, the land itself began to blow away. Powerful dust storms picked up millions of tons of black dirt and swept it across the plains of the panhandles of Texas and Oklahoma, western Kansas, and the eastern portions of Colorado and New Mexico. In the storms, an entire inch of topsoil— which had taken thousands of years to build— blew away in minutes.

Dust storms were terrifying to experience. They would come up quickly without warning and were so dark that day seemed to turn to night as the sun disappeared behind the huge clouds of blowing dirt. People hung wet sheets and towels in front of doorways and windows to try to keep out the dirt, but the dust managed to get in through even the smallest cracks and crevices. Afterward, the storms would leave dust everywhere—in food, in water, even in the lungs of animals and people.

During the nine-year drought, farmers kept plowing and planting their fields, hoping that the rain would come and the winds would stop, allowing them to grow a successful crop. Instead, the wind and the storms kept coming. In 1932, the weather bureau reported a total of 14 dust storms. The following year, the storms increased in number to 38. By 1934, the Great Plains had been turned into a great desert. When it did rain, it rained mud; winter storms were called “black blizzards.”

(Dust Bowl, cont. page 14)

“We have been trying to rescue our home from the wind-blown dust which penetrates wherever air can go...There is rarely a day when at some time the dust clouds do not roll over. ‘Visibility’ approaches zero and everything is covered again with a silt-like deposit which may vary in depth from a film to actual ripples on the kitchen floor.”

**-Letter by an
Oklahoma woman**

TOP: A dust storm approaches a town in Oklahoma. Image courtesy of carleton.edu.

SURVIVING THE DUST BOWL, cont.



DANGERS AND HARDSHIPS

Death to crops

The extreme heat during the drought killed the crops. Each season, when farmers tried to re-plant their fields, the wind would simply blow the seeds and topsoil away.

Inhaling the dust

Animals and people breathed in dangerous amounts of dust during the storms. After a storm, animals were sometimes found dead in the fields, their stomachs coated with two inches of dirt. People spat up clods of dirt as big around as a pencil. The sickness caused by inhaling the dirt was called "dust pneumonia."

Living with the dust and heat

Even between storms, the dust never went away. Instead, it hung in the air and settled everywhere, coating the floor, dishes, furniture, and clothing. Survivors report wearing handkerchiefs over their faces to try to keep from breathing in the dust; many relied on putting Vaseline in their nostrils to keep their noses from drying out in the extreme heat.

Foreclosure

Without being able to raise a crop, many families lost their income and were unable to make payments on their home or land. Many were forced to leave when banks foreclosed on their land.

Getting lost

Dust storms often came up without warning and caused the sky to turn black as night. In some storms, even car headlights couldn't penetrate the darkness. Travelers, either in car or on foot, could easily get lost in the blinding dust which could have fatal consequences.

During the Dust Bowl years, 2.5 million people moved out of the Plains states. It was the largest migration in American history. For this reason, most people think of the people who left when they think of the Dust Bowl. It is equally important to remember that despite the hardships, three out of four farmers endured the dust and stayed on their land.

RELIEF AND CONSERVATION

Beginning in 1936, the U.S. government began federal conservation programs to try to improve conditions in the Dust Bowl states. Farmers were asked to change their techniques by seeding some field areas with grass, rotating their crops, using new plowing techniques, and planting rows of trees to break the wind.

Many farmers were very defensive about the way they had used the land and did not want to use the new techniques. As an incentive, the government offered to pay farmers \$1 for every acre on which they used the new conservation methods. The money allowed many farmers to keep their land. By 1937, the soil loss had been reduced by sixty-five percent, but the drought dragged on. Finally, in the fall of 1939, the rain returned. The drought that had ravaged the country for nearly a decade was over.

ABOVE: A farmer and his children try to escape the dust.

VOCABULARY



acre: a unit of land that is equivalent to 1/640 of a square mile, (about the size of a football field). Through the Homestead Act, a settler could claim 160 acres for a small fee.

assimilation: a process by which members of a minority group lose the cultural characteristics that distinguish them from the dominant cultural group or take on the cultural characteristics of another group. Native Americans were pressured to assimilate into white society by giving up their traditional way of life in favor of the lifestyle of the settlers.

conservation: the act of preserving natural resources through careful management. Conservation efforts led by the United States government in the 1930s helped to improve conditions in the Dust Bowl states. New farming methods such as seeding field with grass, rotating crops, contour plowing, and planting windbreaks helped slow soil loss.

covered wagon: a large wagon with a high canvas cover used by pioneers to transport themselves and their possessions.

drought: a period of very dry weather that often causes damage to crops. The drought of the 1930s was extremely severe.

Dust Bowl: the southern prairie states that suffered devastating dust storms in the 1930s due to a nine-year drought and poor use of the land.

emigrant: person who is leaving one country to enter another. Pioneers in the early years of the Oregon Trail were called emigrants because most were leaving the United States to enter the unorganized "Oregon Country."

foreclosure: process by which a person loses his or her property because he or she is unable to make the payment due. Many families lost their farms to foreclosure during the 1930s. Due to the drought and dust storms, many were unable to raise a crop to pay what they owed the bank on their farm.

Homestead Act: a special act of Congress enacted in 1862 that made lands in the west available to settlers for a very small fee. Through the act, settlers could claim 160 acres on which to start a farm.

Oregon Country: a large territory that was originally not a part of any other nation. Oregon Country encompassed all of what is now Oregon, Washington, and Idaho; much of British Columbia; and small parts of Wyoming and Montana.

pioneer: An early settler in a new territory. All the people on the Oregon Trail were pioneers, but there were many other pioneers who did not go to Oregon. For example, settlers who homesteaded on the prairie were also pioneers.

prairie: A complex ecosystem of grasses, flowering plants, fungi, the soil, geology, and fire. The North American Prairie forms a triangular shaped area that ranges from the Canadian provinces in the north down to southern Texas; it begins in Indiana and extends to the edge of the Rocky Mountains in the west.

relocation: a policy of the United States government used throughout the 1800s to gain control of land that belonged to Native Americans. Through relocation, Native Americans were pressured or forced to leave their homelands for lands set aside for them by the United States government. This left their traditional lands open to be settled by whites.

Standing Bear: chief of the Ponca people who was arrested for returning to his homeland. In his trial in 1879, the judge ruled for the first time that Native Americans had legal rights under the U.S. law.

topsoil: the fertile, upper layer of soil. Prairie topsoil is naturally rich due to the cycle of growth and decay experienced by native plants' extensive root systems. Much of the prairie topsoil has been lost due to farming and the removal of the prairie root system.

TOP: A family poses with the covered wagon in which they live and travel daily during their pursuit of a homestead, 1886. Image courtesy of archives.gov.

ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION: Crossing the Trail



Image courtesy of visitidah.org

ACTIVITY

Goal: To understand many of the difficulties of life on the Oregon Trail

Curriculum Connections: Social Studies, Math, Literacy, Character Development

Explanation: The six-month, 2,000 mile journey undertaken by emigrants on the Oregon Trail was completed mostly on foot. The supplies and belongings a family could take were limited to what could fit in a small covered wagon. Numerous other obstacles and hazards caused many hardships and even death. In this activity, students will perform two exercises to help them better imagine life on the trail and then journal about the experience.

Activity:

1. Mark out a 4 foot by 10 foot box on the floor in your classroom with masking tape.
2. Invite students to take turns standing in the area, both individually and in small groups.
3. Tell them that the taped off area is the same size as most of the covered wagons emigrants used to travel the Oregon Trail. Invite them to consider how it compares to their house or room at home.
4. Ask students to write a list of the things they would pack with them if they were to go on six-month, 2,000 mile journey with their family. Encourage them to think about what they will need to survive, how much their items will weigh, and how large the items are. Remember, everything they pack has to fit inside the taped off area.
5. Once students have completed and shared their lists, remind them that few wagons on the trail had room for passengers to ride. Most emigrants walked to Oregon.
6. Tell students their next task is to figure out how many steps it would take them to walk the Oregon Trail.

7. Divide students in pairs and direct them to come up with their own strategy to come up with the solution. Remind students that they will need to figure out the average length of their steps. Other important measurements to consider include:

- The Oregon Trail was 2,000 miles long.
- There are 5,280 feet in a mile.
- There are 12 inches in a foot.

8. When completed, ask students to share their results and methods. Discuss the results as a class and what their results tell them about life on the trail.

9. After these two introductory activities, ask students to journal about the experience. They can write from their own perspective thinking about the Oregon Trail or from the perspective of one of the emigrants.

Discussion

Before the Show/After the Activities:

1. How might you have felt in 1845 to hear that you were going to live for eight months in a covered wagon? Would you have been afraid? Excited?
2. What did you choose to pack for your journey? Was it hard to decide? What considerations did you take when deciding what to bring?
2. How did your perspective of the Oregon Trail change after figuring out how many steps you would need to take to complete the journey?
3. If you could meet someone who traveled the Oregon Trail, what would you ask them about their experience? Why?

After the Show:

1. What do you remember from the stories in the show about life on the Oregon Trail?
2. What did you need to survive the Oregon Trail? Did you need more than supplies, a wagon, and oxen? What? (Think about intangible things as well.)
3. How did the Oregon Trail change the history of our country?

ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION: Scenes from Pioneer Life



ACTIVITY

Goal: To understand aspects of pioneer life on the prairie

Curriculum Connections: Social Studies, Literacy, Theater

Explanation: In this activity, students will conduct independent Internet research about pioneer living and create tableaux depicting scenes from pioneer life.

Tableaux: a dramatic convention in which individuals use their bodies to create a “frozen picture” that expresses actions, locations, feelings or situations.

Activity:

1. Review pages 9-10 with students about the pioneers who settled the prairie.
2. Tell students they will learn more about pioneer life. Divide students into groups of 3-4 and assign each group one of the following topics:
 - Recreation and entertainment
 - Preparing and cooking food
 - Farming
 - Chores at home
 - School
 - Homes (i.e. sod houses, cabins, furnishings)
 - Transportation (i.e., covered wagons, horses)
3. Provide students with time in the computer lab to research their assigned topic. Helpful websites can be found on page 23.
4. Each student should then write a one-page letter to a friend, describing their experiences as a pioneer. Each letter should reveal at least five new things students have learned about their researched topic.

5. Next tell students that they will be creating tableaux that reveal different aspects of pioneer life. You may find it useful to provide props that represent aspects of pioneer living to use in their tableaux. Examples: bonnets, farming tools, brooms.
6. Each group will depict a scene from their assigned topic area. Students should pay attention to the character they are trying to portray.
7. Once a group is “frozen,” tap students on the shoulder one at a time. When a student has been tapped, they should “unfreeze” and present a short story that describes their actions and how they feel about those actions.

DISCUSSION

Before the Show/After the Activity:

1. How did the Homestead Act change America?
2. What did you discover during your research that surprised you about pioneer life?
3. What did you learn by watching other groups’ tableaux? How did you feel when you were depicting your tableaux for the class?

After the Show:

1. In *Far as the Eye Can See*, the character of Anna says “We were poor, but not deprived.” What is the difference? Why does she say this about her experience growing up on the prairie?
2. Who were Anna’s heroes? Have you heard of any of them before? How are they similar or different to your heroes today?
3. Do you think children today work as hard as pioneer children did? Why or why not? Is this a good thing or a bad thing?

Activity adapted from ARTSEEDGE: Pioneer America: Pioneer Living from artsedge.kennedy-center.org.

ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION: Identity and Way of Life



ACTIVITY

Goal: To better understand the difficulties faced by Native Americans in the face of western expansion

Curriculum Connections: Social Studies, Literacy

Explanation: With the arrival of white settlers, Native Americans were pressured to give up their way of life and forced to relocate from their homelands. In this simulation activity, students will explore how it feels to have an outside force dictate how they should live.

Preparation:

To prepare for the lesson, cut pictures or “items” from magazines or write the names of “items” out on small pieces of paper for each of your students representing ways of life that are different from what students are accustomed to. Ideas include: languages other than English, land areas outside the United States, older/conservative styles of clothing such as ankle-length dresses or skirts, music from other countries, different hairstyles, etc.

Activity

1. Have students create a collage by cutting words, pictures, and symbols that they feel reflect what is important to their identity from magazines. Students should write a paragraph on the back of the collage explaining why the pictures, words, and ideas they included are important to them. Have them share their collages with the class.
2. Review pages 11-12 as a class and discuss why many whites felt Native Americans should give up their traditional ways of life.
3. Next, walk around the room and take the students’ collages from them. One by one, tell the students that this is no longer who they are and that they will no longer be able keep what they value.

4. Hand out “items” you cut from magazines or wrote down. Tell students that a new government has taken over and is forcing them to change their lifestyle to the “items” you have handed them. Anyone who does not cooperate will be arrested.

5. Divide students into small groups to discuss what is happening to them. As a group, students should decide whether they want to resist the new orders or whether they are willing to adjust to the new culture.

6. After 5-10 minutes, bring the class together to report on their group discussions and decisions.

Discussion

Before the Show/After the Activity:

1. How did you feel when your collage was taken away? How do you think this compares to how Native Americans felt when they were asked to give up their traditions and homelands?
2. Some Native Americans felt that they should give up their ways and try to adopt the ways of the settlers. Why were some willing to do this? Were they accepted into American society? Why or why not?
3. What point did Standing Bear make at his trial? Do his words still contain important lessons for us today?

After the Show:

1. Pippa White began her performance of *Far as the Eye Can See* by sharing a Native American myth about the creation of mankind. What does the story suggest about the people who told the story and their relationship with the prairie?
2. Why do you think Pippa White chose to tell the story of Bright Eyes and her uncle Standing Bear? What did their stories tell us about the experiences of the Native Americans during western expansion?
3. How were the experiences of the Oregon Trail pioneers, the homesteaders, and the Ponca alike? How were they different? What factors led them to move? Did they each have a choice?

Activity adapted from “Lesson Plan– Assimilation” by Nicole Menard. *Indian Country Diaries*. PBS.

ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION: Images of the Dust Bowl



Image courtesy of agenteditions.com

ACTIVITY

Goal: To gain an understanding of life in the Dust Bowl through examining photographs from the period

Curriculum Connections: Social Studies, Literacy

Explanation: Photographs of the Dust Bowl were published in newspapers around the country to help people in cities understand the severity of the dust storms and why the government was investing important resources in conservation programs. In this activity, students will examine Dust Bowl-era photographs as a way to understand what it was like to live in the Dust Bowl.

Activity:

1. Review with students the information about the Dust Bowl (pages 13-14).
2. Explain to students that photographs of the Dust Bowl have helped generations of Americans gain a deeper understanding of what it was like to live in the Dust Bowl.
3. Show students a number of examples of images taken in the Dust Bowl found in books or online resources. (Online suggestions listed on page 23.)
4. Ask students to write a short paragraph reacting to the images as a whole. This initial paragraph should capture their first impressions and emotions. It does not need to be in complete sentences.
5. Next, have students work in pairs and choose one image to study in detail. Each pair should fill out an 'Analysis Worksheet' found on page 20 for their chosen image.
6. When groups are finished, draw the class together and have each pair report on the photograph that they studied.

DISCUSSION

After the Activity/Before the Show:

1. Have you ever experienced a frightening weather-related event? If so, how long did it last? What were the effects to people, animals, and property?
2. How was the Dust Bowl similar to this frightening weather-related event? How was it different?
3. How would you have felt the first time you lived through a dust storm? Would you have been scared or shocked? What would you do when you realized that there would be more dust storms?
4. How do you think people living in the Dust Bowl states felt as the drought dragged on? Was it easy to hold on to hope that things would improve? Why or why not?

After the Show:

1. What do you remember from the performance about the Dust Bowl?
2. Was Pippa White's use of images in the show effective? Why or why not? How did the images change the way you felt about the stories she told?
3. What was challenging about living in the Dust Bowl? What character traits did the Dust Bowl survivors exhibit?
4. How did the Dust Bowl change Americans' relationship to and understanding of the land? Does the Dust Bowl still have important lessons for farmers today? For non-farmers?

Questions on the accompanying 'Analysis Worksheet' are based on the Library of Congress [Photo Study Guide](http://memory.loc.gov/learn/lessons/98/dime/pguide.html) for "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime" <http://memory.loc.gov/learn/lessons/98/dime/pguide.html>

NAME: _____

Images of the Dust Bowl– Analysis Worksheet

1. What is happening in this picture?

2. What are the circumstances this photo represents?

3. *If there are people in your photo:*
 - A. How are these people dressed?

 - B. What can you infer from the expression on their faces and their posture?

4. *If there are **no** people in your photo:*
 - A. Describe the condition of any man-made objects in the photo.

 - B. What seems to have led to these circumstances?

5. Is there anything interesting or surprising about the situation represented here?

6. What problems or frustrations are suggested by this image?

7. What adaptations can you assume or infer people are making to these conditions?

8. What help seems to be needed here?

9. What is unique about this image that the photographer wanted to capture?

GOING TO THE THEATER . . .



YOUR ROLE AS AN AUDIENCE MEMBER

Attending a live performance is a unique and exciting opportunity. Unlike the passive experience of watching a movie, audience members play an important role in every live performance. As they act, sing, dance, or play instruments, the performers on stage are very aware of the audience's mood and level of engagement. Each performance calls for a different response from audience members. Lively bands, musicians, and dancers may desire the audience to focus silently on the stage and applaud only during natural breaks in the performance. Audience members can often take cues from performers on how to respond to the performance appropriately. For example, performers will often pause or bow for applause at a specific time.

As you experience the performance, consider the following questions:

- What kind of live performance is this (a play, a dance, a concert, etc.)?
- What is the mood of the performance? Is the subject matter serious or lighthearted?
- What is the mood of the performers? Are they happy and smiling or somber and reserved?
- Are the performers encouraging the audience to clap to the music or move to the beat?
- Are there natural breaks in the performance where applause seems appropriate?

THEATER ETIQUETTE

Here is a checklist of general guidelines to follow when you visit the Civic Center:

- Leave all food, drinks, and chewing gum at school or on the bus.
- Cameras, recording devices, and personal listening devices are not permitted in the theater.
- Turn off cell phones, pagers, and all other electronic devices before the performance begins.
- When the house lights dim, the performance is about to begin. Please stop talking at this time.
- **Talk before and after the performance only.** Remember, the theater is designed to amplify sound, so the other audience members and the performers on stage can hear your voice!
- Appropriate responses such as laughing and applauding are appreciated. Pay attention to the artists on stage—they will let you know what is appropriate.
- Open your eyes, ears, mind, and heart to the entire experience. Enjoy yourself!

*GOING TO THE THEATER information is adapted from the Ordway Center for the Performing Arts study guide materials.

CIVIC CENTER FIELD TRIP INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS



Thank you for choosing the Applause Series at the Civic Center of Greater Des Moines. Below are tips for organizing a safe and successful field trip to the Civic Center.

ORGANIZING YOUR FIELD TRIP

- Please include all students, teachers, and chaperones in your ticket request.
- After you submit your ticket request, you will receive a confirmation e-mail within five business days. Your **invoice will be attached to the confirmation e-mail.**
- Payment policies and options are located at the top of the invoice. (Complete payment and cancellation policies may be viewed at civiccenter.org/education.)
- The Civic Center reserves the right to cancel unpaid reservations after the payment due date.
- Tickets are not printed for Applause Series shows. Your invoice will serve as the reservation confirmation for your group order.
- Schedule buses to arrive in downtown Des Moines at least 30 minutes prior to the start of the performance. This will allow time to park, walk to the Temple for the Performing Arts, and be seated in the theater.
- Performances are approximately 60 minutes unless otherwise noted on the website and printed materials.
- All school groups with reservations to the show will receive an e-mail notification when the study guide is posted. Please note that study guides are only printed and mailed upon request.

DIRECTIONS

- The Civic Center's Temple Theater is located in the Temple for the Performing Arts located at Tenth and Locust Streets in downtown Des Moines.
- Directions from I-235: Take Exit 8A (downtown exits) and the ramp toward Third Street. Travel south on Third Street approximately six blocks to Grand Avenue. Turn west on Grand Avenue and travel to Thirteenth Street. Turn south on Thirteenth Street and then east on Locust Street.
- Buses will park on the south side of Locust Street in front of the Nationwide building. See next column for additional parking information.

QUESTIONS?

Please contact the Education department at 515.246.2355 or education@civiccenter.org. Thank you!

PARKING

- Police officers stationed at the corner of Tenth and Locust Streets will direct buses to parking areas with hooded meters near the theater. Groups traveling in personal vehicles are responsible for locating their own parking.
- Buses will remain parked for the duration of the show.
- Buses are not generally permitted to drop off or pick up students near the theater. If a bus must return to school during the performance, prior arrangements must be made with the Civic Center Education staff.

ARRIVAL

- When arriving at the theater, please have an **adult lead your group** for identification and check-in purposes. A Civic Center staff member may be stationed outside the building to direct you.
- Civic Center staff will usher groups into the building as quickly as possible.
- Seating in the theater is general admission. Ushers will escort groups to their seats; various seating factors including group size, grade levels, arrival time, and special needs seating requests may determine a group's specific location in the theater.
- We request that an **adult lead the group into the theater and other adults position themselves throughout the group**; we request this arrangement for supervision purposes, especially in the event that a group must be seated in multiple rows.
- Please allow ushers to seat your entire group before rearranging seats or taking groups to the restroom.

IN THE THEATER

- In case of a medical emergency, please notify the nearest usher.
- We ask that adults handle any disruptive behavior in their groups. If the behavior persists, an usher may request your group to exit the theater.
- Following the performance groups may exit the theater and proceed to their bus(es).
- If an item is lost at the Temple Theater, please see an usher or call 515.246.2355.

RESOURCES AND SOURCES

Activity Resources:

Scenes from *Pioneer Life*, pg. 17:

“Homesteading in a Sod House”: <http://theautry.org/explore/exhibits/sod/daily.html>

“*Laura Ingalls Wilder*”: <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/today/feb07.html>

Images of the *Dust Bowl*, pg. 19:

Kansas State University: http://www.weru.ksu.edu/new_weru/multimedia/dustbowl/dustbowlpics.html

Classroom Resources:

“Farming During the 1930s”: http://www.livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthe30s/water_02.html
Photos, information, and audio interview clips about living through the Dust Bowl

“The Freeman School: Building Prairie Communities” from the National Park Service:
<http://www.nps.gov/nr/twhp/wwwlps/lessons/80homestead/80homestead.htm>
Study the homesteaders of Blakely Township, Nebraska and their one-room schoolhouse.

“The Oregon Trail”: <http://www.isu.edu/~trinmich/Oregontrail.html>
Information about the Oregon Trail, maps and descriptions of historical sites, and text from trail diaries.

“The Trial of Standing Bear”: http://www.nebraskastudies.org/0600/frameset_reset.html?http://www.nebraskastudies.org/0600/stories/0601_0100.html
Information about Standing Bear, Bright Eyes, the Ponca, and the effects of their landmark case.

Study Guide Sources:

Czajka, Christopher W. “Uncle Sam is Rich Enough to Give Us All a Farm: Homesteaders, the Frontier, and Hopscotching Across America.” Frontier House. PBS.
<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/frontierhouse/frontierlife/essay1.html>

“Homes on the Prairie” from *Death of the Dream*, PBS: <http://www.pbs.org/ktca/farmhouses/homesprairie.html>

“Indian Country Diaries” from PBS: <http://www.pbs.org/indiancountry/history>

Iowa Prairie Network: <http://www.iowaprairienetwork.org>

Living History Farms: <http://www.lhf.org>

“Prairie is Complex” from MuseumLink Illinois: <http://www.museum.state.il.us/muslink/prairie/htmls/intro.html>

Pippa White One’s Company: <http://www.pippawhite1co.com>

Prairie Voices: Iowa Heritage Curriculum from the State Historical Society of Iowa:
<http://www.uni.edu/iowaonline/prairievoices>

“Surviving the Dust Bowl” from *American Experience*, PBS:
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/introduction/dustbowl-introduction>

“The Trial of Standing Bear” from NebraskaStudies.org: <http://www.nebraskastudies.org>