

LIFE AT A FRENCH FUR TRADING POST

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GRADE LEVEL: Elementary

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LESSON PLANS

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INTRODUCTION

The study of history can be an abstract and "boring" experience for elementary-aged students if the textbook is the basis of the curriculum. The typical textbook designed to teach Indiana history, for example, is so condensed and summarized that students obtain only superficial knowledge at best. Elementary students need to be actively involved in first-hand experiences in order to enrich their understanding of the rich heritage of their home state.

Taking part in a festival such as the Feast of the Hunters' Moon is one way that fourth grade students can experience life as it was in the 1700's at a French Fur trading post in what is now the state of Indiana.

Fort Ouiatenon was established by the French in 1717 as a military outpost to prevent British expansion into the Ohio and Wabash country. With an abundance of fur-bearing animals in the area, the fort served as a trading post and a stopping point for the voyageurs from Quebec. French missionaries also converged on Ouiatenon hoping to convert the Indians. The fort grew and prospered between 1720 and 1760. The fort fell into the hands of the British during the French and Indian War. In 1763 Ottawa Chief Pontiac attacked and captured eight frontier posts, including Ouiatenon. Pontiac's control of Ouiatenon came to an end when he signed a treaty with the British in 1765. Following this period the fort was not regarrisoned. It remained a

small French trading and trapping settlement with a large Indian community nearby. A British agent occupied the post briefly in 1778, but abandoned the fort to George Rogers Clark's men. Governor Henry Hamilton stopped at the fort in 1778 with his plan to recapture Vincennes. For a while after the Revolutionary War, the fort remained a settlement for a small number of French. Indians met at Ouiatenon and actually used the fort as a staging ground for raids on Kentucky settlers. Inhabitants of the fort evacuated the post in 1786 for fear of their lives. Finally President George Washington ordered the fort burned in 1791.

Each fall the Tippecanoe County Historical Association sponsors a two-day celebration, the Feast of the Hunters' Moon. Participants reenact various aspects of French, Indian, and British life at the fort. Craftsmen create, display, and sell wares typical of the era. Demonstrations and ceremonies recreate activities of the time. Voyageurs paddle down the Wabash River to symbolize the arrival of French fur traders. In addition to the activities on the grounds, the Blockhouse Museum is open featuring a display depicting the history of the post.

A trip to the Feast of the Hunters' Moon, then, can serve as a culminating activity for students who have been investigating 18th century life around a French fur trading post.

OBJECTIVES

1. Fourth-grade students will take part in a festival such as the Feast of the Hunters' Moon and will take photographs of activities that represent life as it was at Fort Oulatenon in the 1700's.

2. Fourth-grade students will categorize photos and make photo essays to show various aspects of life at a French fur trading post.
 Categories may include crafts, foods, arrival of the voyageurs, British drill teams, fur trading, Indian life, and/or costumes of the period.

3. Fourth-grade students will write essays explaining how the Feast of the Hunters' Moon reenacts life at a fur trading post.

4. Fourth-grade students will prepare a bulletin board displaying the photo essays and written essays about the Festival.

TEACHING STRATEGIES:

1. Students will read and discuss textbooks accounts of the French fur trading era.

2. Students will view Trappers and Traders, a video explaining the relationship between the French Traders and the Indian Trappers.

3. Students will listen actively as the teacher reads A Totem for Ti-Jacques, a historical fiction adventure of a young French boy who traveled the Wabash River to join his father at Fort Ouiatenon.
4. Students will attend the Feast of the Hunters' Moon to experience life as it was in the 1700's.

Due to the size of the crowds at the Feast, students will go to the Feast with their parents. They will go either Saturday or Sunday, depending on their family's schedule. Arrangements will be made for any child who needs transportation.

5. Students and/or parents will photograph various aspects of life as depicted at the Festival.
6. Students will categorize photos and make photo essays depicting aspects of life at the fort.

Volunteer parents will assist with the making of the photo essays. The photos will be mounted on large poster board and will be appropriately labeled.

Photo essays may portray things such as fur trading, arrival of voyageurs, craft making, food preparation, Indian life, and/or British regiments marching.

7. Students will write essays describing their experiences at the Feast.

STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING THE ESSAY WRITING

1. PRE-WRITING ACTIVITIES

After the follow-up discussion of the trip, students will brainstorm categories of words which will be listed on the chalkboard by the teacher. The list will include words about foods, crafts, demonstrations, and ceremonies. Two other lists will be generated-- one list will include phrases describing the Festival in general, the other list will include phrases about the history of the fort. These lists will be recorded on the word processor. Students will be given copies of the lists to use for rough-draft writing.

2. ROUGH-DRAFT WRITING

Students will be instructed to write five paragraphs, each paragraph will contain a minimum of three sentences. The essay will consist of:

Paragraph 1-----A brief description of
the feast.

Paragraph 2-----A brief history of the fort.

Paragraphs 3 and 4--Choose two categories, such as food and crafts, and write a three-sentence paragraph about each.

Paragraph 5-----A concluding paragraph. Students will write paragraphs 1 and 2 the first day. Paragraphs 3 and 4 will be written the second day. The concluding paragraph will be written the third day.

3. WRITING CONFERENCE/REVISION

Small groups of students will meet with the teacher. Each student will read his/her essay. Under the guidance of the teacher, students will suggest ways essays could be improved. As an alternative to small group sessions, the teacher could hold individual conferences, or a qualified volunteer parent could assist in conferencing students.

4. FINAL-DRAFT WRITING

Word processors will be utilized for final-draft writing. At this time essays should be checked for correct English mechanics.

CULMINATING ACTIVITY

Students will arrange photo essays and written essays on a bulletin board display and will take part in class discussions on various aspects of life at Fort Oulatenon.

EVALUATION

1. The photo essays depicting life around a 1700 French fur trading post will be evaluated by the students and teacher together using criteria set up by the students and teacher.
2. The written essays will be evaluated for accuracy of information and correct format by the teacher using professional judgment.
3. The bulletin board display will be evaluated by the students and teacher together using pre-determined criteria.

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- McGroarty, Jean. The French Period in Indiana. Lafayette, IN: Tippecanoe County Historical Assn., No.7. (No date)
A brief description of French explorers, voyageurs, trappers, and missionaries whose lives centered around Fort Wayne, Fort Ouiatenon, and Fort Vincennes.
- McGroarty, Jean. Ouiatenon and the Establishment of the Northwest. Lafayette, IN: Tippecanoe County Historical Assn., No. 8. (No date)
A pamphlet summarizing the history of the fort. A helpful bibliography is included.
- Tippecanoe County Historical Assn. Search for Ouiatenon. Lafayette, IN. Tippecanoe County Historical Assn. (No date)
A pamphlet with a brief history of Fort Ouiatenon.
- Trappers and Traders. Pioneer Pete's History of the Northwest Territory Series.
A 15-minute video explains the business relationship between the French Traders and the Indian Trappers. Available through Wabash Valley Education Center, 3061 Benton Street, West Lafayette, IN. 47906.