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Lesson Plan for Fort Robinson workshop

A Frontier Soldier's Diary

The lesson is planned for fourth and fifth grade ELL students. Our main goals in ELL are to teach reading, writing, speaking and listening skills so the student will be successful in the regular classroom. All four skills will be involved in this lesson but it will focus on vocabulary, reading and writing skills.

In my classes, I use historical stories to teach reading. Sometimes they are true stories and sometimes they're fiction. After being at Fort Robinson, I saw two sides to the coin. I saw the hard work and poor conditions the soldiers had in fighting for freedom (or what they thought was freedom) and I saw the disgusting treatment and bad living conditions of the Native American who were also wanting freedom. Zimmer's book shows both sides of this coin. He writes about how the soldier's lived, in poor shelters and many times with little food. His writings also tell us about how the soldier's thought of the Indian and he also gave us some glimpse into the Native American culture.

This lesson, using Zimmer's journal, will allow the student to read for himself the words written by a soldier. They will be able to use various reading strategies to understand the entries we read. I have chosen two short entries from two days that seem to be regular days on the trail. The other entry is a description of a fight the soldiers had with the Native Americans.

Lesson Plan:

1. Introduction: My grandmother kept diaries for many years and I have them in my possession. I will take the one of the year I was born and several others to class to demonstrate what a journal or diary is. We will read some of the entries

and discuss them. If you use a journal, you can use your own or use one from someone you know as an illustration of a diary or journal.

2. I will introduce a man named William F. Zimmer. He was a Private in army. His unit was Company F, Second Cavalry, stationed at Fort Ellis. His journal which was kept by his family covers the span in time from March 1, 1877 to March 1, 1878. The book contains his actual journal entries over that time frame.

I have chosen just a couple entries to use. Depending on the class, reading these entries may take just a day or longer when you include vocabulary and discussion of the ideas. If there is time, more entries could be read. The journal covers the time of the Sioux and Nez Perce Campaigns of 1877. The entries not only give us a look into a soldier's life but it also shows some of the attitudes and ideas of the army and the white people of that time.

3. The first entries to be read are from March 9 and 10 of 1877. They are general entries so the students can get the feel of what life was like for him.

Spotlight Vocabulary—I have a vocabulary sheet called Spotlight Vocabulary. There is a picture of a traffic light and a word written beside it. As the teacher reads the words, the students decide if they will color the red, yellow or green light. The color they use depends on how much they know about the word. If they don't know the word at all, they use red, if they have heard it but don't remember the meaning, they use yellow, and if they know the word and the meaning, they use the color green.

Vocabulary for March 9 entry---Old Washington, Bridger Creek, Crow Indians, agency, moderated

Vocabulary for March 10 entry---ravine, snow-blind,

4. Read the entries. They could be read as guided reading or read together.

Ask the following questions:

1. From the reading, what do you think is the hardest part about being a soldier on those days?

2. Where in the entries could you find something funny in his writing?
3. Without looking, what do you think happened the next day?

5. Read the entry on May 7. There is a fight with the Indians and both Indians and soldiers are killed in battle. The entry is rather long so you may need several days to read it.

Spotlight Vocabulary—co., Custer massacre, ammunition, greatcoats, brisk trot, dismounted, clambered, squaws,

Read the passage.

Questions:

1. How do you feel after reading this entry?
 2. From the passage, how do you think the author felt about what he saw and what happened?
 3. What could the soldiers have done different?
 4. What could the Native Americans have done different?
 5. Could this battle have been avoided?

 6. Choose one of the following ideas to write a journal entry.
 - a. Be the soldier and write what happened the next day.
- OR
- b. Be the Native American. Tell what you think happened the next day.

Using excerpts from the book A Frontier Soldier by William F. Zimmer