

Outdoor Education Series—California History 4th Grade

Outdoor Education is fundamental to the school's goal of making knowledge come alive for its students, and is artfully integrated into each grade's curriculum.

Parents' contributions to the Class Fund make these rich experiences possible:

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Destination</u>	<u>Curriculum</u>
3rd	Working farms	Practical Life
4th	Gold Country	California History
5th	Yosemite	Botany
6th	Mt. Lassen	Geology
7th	Shakespeare Festival	Renaissance
8th	Open	

We continue our Outdoor Education Series with the study of California history in the fourth grade by Meenu Pal.

The Waldorf curriculum offers an organic structure that mirrors the developmental changes that take place over the grade school years. It is seen that fourth grade children start to become independent as they undergo the nine year change. They are now able to meet the world with new capacities of thinking and feeling. The children are truly able to experience the world beyond their immediate families. The curriculum addresses the students growing need to move beyond themselves. This is the perfect time for students to connect with their environment. Thus, subjects like local and regional history and geography are taught. This study begins with a map of the classroom, with subsequent lessons expanding to the larger community and then the entire state of California.

A field trip is a many-faceted jewel. It makes learning memorable, and helps develop a personal connection between the child and the natural world. It plays an important role in the curriculum as a vehicle for sensory experiences such as smelling the air, experiencing the environment, listening to the sounds, and living like the indigenous people of the place and time under study. It truly sketches deep images in a child's being. Keeping this in mind I decided to use the state parks as classroom to help expand our knowledge of the state's history.

We began by studying about the life and culture of the coastal Miwok people. To deepen our understanding, we visited the Miwok park and museum in Novato. At the park the docents led the children through many activities. The children heard stories about the hunting rituals of the Miwoks and then they role-played. Those that were hunters threw deer skin over their backs and stuck deer horns on their heads. They then rubbed their bodies with natural herbs to get rid of their body scents and crept slowly towards their prey. The children then sat in

groups and drilled holes in abalone shells using simple, indigenous tools. At the end they visited the museum and saw samples of their beautiful baskets, obsidian arrow heads, their skin and fur clothing, hollowed rock pastel and mortar, etc. In the end children sang Miwok songs to the beats of their drums.



While studying about Spanish missions in California, we discovered that the Russians had also arrived in California. To learn more about them we visited Fort Ross on the Sonoma County coast, for an overnight field trip. Each child took on the role of a person from history who had actually lived at the fort between 1812 and 1841. They were divided into four

groups: cooks, artisans, hunters, and the militia. Each student researched and wrote a short biography of the person he/she was role playing. Donning Russian hats on our heads and dressed in traditional clothes, we set off for Fort Ross on a cold December morning.

At the fort we were greeted by our docents who quickly called upon the militia to check everyone's travel documents. Upon entering the fort, everyone quickly slipped into their role. The militia first hoisted the company flag that we had made in the classroom. The cooks quickly got hold of pots and pans. They peeled and



chopped vegetables and soon prepared a delicious, authentic Russian dinner over open pit fires. After starting the fires the militia secured the fort by marching around, and cleaned their weapons. The hunters first learnt to make rope on a

simple rope machine. Then taking their fishing poles and bait they went to the reef for fishing. In the evening, the hunters came back radiant having caught a fish and ready to feed the hungry troops. The artisans wove bas-





kets, decorated candles, made hard rock candies and tin lanterns. They sold their wares the next day at the company store. After dinner, the children heard stories about the Russian soldiers, the Alut hunters, and the Pomo and Miwok Indians that lived at the fort.

During the night each group was woken up for a two-hour night watch. During the night watch, the children marched around the fort with tin lanterns securing the fort, played chess, drank hot chocolate and ate Russian tea cakes. Next morning, after a sumptuous breakfast all the students were paid authentic wages. Everyone was shocked to see how small the wages of the fort residents were. They also learnt about trade at the fort and experienced it first hand by trading the various crafts they



had created with the money they had earned. After morning cleanup, we gathered in the courtyard where we sang Russian folk songs and performed Troika, a Russian folk dance. The crown-

ing moment of this trip was the firing of the fort cannon by the students. The children truly lived history!

To study the life of the pioneers during California Gold Rush, fourth grade students visited the Old Oak Ranch in Sonora for a four day trip. The students dressed up as pioneers and stayed in log cabins. They were divided into groups/wagon trains. Each group decorated the cloth bonnet of their wagon. They learnt about Conestoga and farm wagons, trails used by pioneers to migrate to California, and the use of



oxen to pull the wagons in place of horses or mules. Next day, the wagon trains set off under the guidance of their scouts.

Throughout the long journey the scouts made sound decisions after scouting various trails before leading their wagon trains to-



towards their destinations. We also visited various pioneer camp sites. At one of the sites the children experienced firsthand the use of a rocker and long tom in separating gold from the dirt. They also panned for gold.



In the evening while sitting around a campfire the children watched a pantomime about the effect of gold rush on the Native Indians. They were greatly moved by the story and one of them comment-

ed, "I wish gold was never found in California. It destroyed the lives of so many natives." Next morning the students painted bear flags and learnt about the revolt which had lasted 26 days, at the end of which the U.S. Army arrived to occupy the area. That evening the students gathered around an American flag flying high. They stood solemnly with right hands crossed over their hearts and participated in lowering the American flag.

At the end of our journey through California history the fourth graders learnt about the building of railroads and the role they played in the development of the state. To my surprise most students had never used this mode of transportation. To understand its significance, we travelled on a train to visit our state Capitol. We walked to the Capitol building and learned about the governor and his cabinet. Students sat in the visitors' gallery and watched the proceedings of the house. At the end of the day, we visited the rail museum and found how the railroads had changed the lives of thousands of people and revolutionized the economy of the American West.

