

Mountain Men Museum Education Kit

Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- describe how and why the United States territory grew during the 1800's
- explain how the Fur Trade had an effect on growth

Connection to Colorado Social Studies Standards:

- 4th grade: 1.1.c, 1.1.d, 2.2.b, 2.2.c, 3.1.c, 4.2.a, 4.2.b, 4.2.d

Materials: Crayons, markers, or colored pencils; regular pen/pencil; copies of U.S. map; access to the Internet or resources in the library

Time: 1 class period

Background

Exploring a land that few of their countrymen had dared enter before them, the mountain men and the tales of their adventures quickly became a source of wonder in the east. Only small bits of news about the West had trickled through to Americans before the trappers arrived, so they still imagined it to be a dark, forbidding country.

Lewis and Clark had seen parts of the West when they made their expedition to the Oregon area in the first years of the 1800's, and they described it as decidedly uninviting. Zebulon Pike followed in 1810, calling the land a desert; and in 1823, Major Stephen Long also traveled through the area and claimed that it was not a place for "civilized" men to live. Soon, the West became known as "The Great American Desert" – hardly a name that would make anyone want to move there.

Thanks to the trappers, though, the truth came out. They were the first group of European Americans to explore the whole area and to describe both its harshness and future promise. They marked out routes of travel into this vast area along older Indian trails, and it would be the trappers who would eventually guide the U.S. military into New Mexico and the Rocky Mountains.

Later still, it would be their job to escort early wagon trains to Oregon and California, and to guide government exploring parties through the West, not only showing them where to go, but also helping them negotiate with the Indians. Because the mountain men dared to explore this land and tell about its wonders, more and more people were feeling an urge to see it for themselves, and it wouldn't be long before the rush was on.

In the early years of the 1800s, there were two different points of view in the East about moving the nation westward. To some people, such as Thomas Jefferson, there was no question that the United States should expand. They were very much in favor of the fur trade since they understood that this was the first way to explore the new area. They had also supported the Lewis and Clark expedition and were eager to learn more about their discoveries.

For others, there was a concern about adding more new states to the Union. They pointed to Zebulon Pike's 1810 report which described the West as a desert and an uninviting place to live, and they said we were better off developing trade across the Atlantic. But whatever their views, it would have been almost impossible to hold the country back. There was an overall urge to move ever westward—for new opportunities and to explore the unknown.

The United States government at first tried to strictly regulate the fur trade. Between 1796 and 1822, legal trade with Indians took place at government-sanctioned “factories,” in part to prevent the exploitation of Indians by unscrupulous traders. As the years passed, private fur companies became very successful. Much of the profits poured into New York City, where John Jacob Astor dominated the western fur market, and St. Louis.

The fur trade helped extend American territorial claims to the rest of the continent. In 1818, the United States and Great Britain agreed on a boundary with Canada. They also agreed to jointly occupy Oregon Territory. The United States used the fur trade as one means of keeping the British economic interests out of the American West. Congress voted to limit the Indian trade to American citizens only. The British would have to leave the fur business in the American West to the United States.

Suggested Procedure:

The western half of the United States was explored and mapped partly because of the fur trade. The maps created by mountain men and the U.S. Army made it easier for settlers to move to the western territories. Once a territory had a population of 60,000 or more its citizens could apply for statehood. People moved west for many reasons but one of the most popular was Manifest Destiny, the belief that the United States had the right and the duty to occupy all of North America and to spread democracy. The fur trade ended in 1840 and by 1848 the country had moved as far west as the Pacific Ocean.

1. Have students research when each state entered the Union.
2. On the map provided have students fill in the name of each state and the year that each one was admitted to the Union.
3. Using a yellow crayon, marker or colored pencil, have students color in the states that joined the Union before the start of the western fur trade, 1787–1819.
4. Have students use orange to color the states that were admitted during and a little after the fur trade, 1820–1850.
5. The states that joined the union after 1850 should be colored in red.
6. Now that the map is colored in have students discuss the pattern of settlement.
 - a. For example: Why did California become a state before Colorado? Why were people moving west? Why didn't they stay in the East? Etc.

Teacher Quick Reference

Delaware - 1787	Vermont - 1791	Florida - 1845	South Dakota - 1889
Pennsylvania - 1787	Kentucky - 1792	Texas - 1845	Montana - 1889
New Jersey - 1787	Tennessee - 1796	Iowa - 1846	Washington - 1889
Georgia - 1788	Ohio - 1803	Wisconsin - 1848	Idaho - 1890
Connecticut - 1788	Louisiana - 1812	California - 1850	Wyoming - 1890
Massachusetts - 1788	Indiana - 1816	Minnesota - 1858	Utah - 1896
Maryland - 1788	Mississippi - 1817	Oregon - 1859	Oklahoma - 1907
South Carolina - 1788	Illinois - 1818	Kansas - 1861	New Mexico - 1912
New Hampshire - 1788	Alabama - 1819	West Virginia - 1863	Arizona - 1912
Virginia - 1788	Maine - 1820	Nevada - 1864	Alaska - 1959
New York - 1788	Missouri - 1821	Nebraska - 1867	Hawaii - 1959
North Carolina - 1789	Arkansas - 1836	Colorado - 1876	
Rhode Island - 1790	Michigan - 1837	North Dakota - 1889	

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