



Mrs Alderson's Early Lessons in Water Conservation

Grade Level:
Upper Elementary

Subject Areas:
Social Studies, Science,
Language Arts

SD Standards:
Science

Social Studies

Language Arts

Setting:
Classroom

Skills:
Applying, interpreting
information, analysis,
presenting

Prior Preparation:
Review materials. Make
copies of the "script" for
play participants.

Vocabulary:
Water Dowsing, Artifact,
Washboard, Stomper

Objective: Students will identify water artifacts from the turn of the twentieth century and relate their functions and connection with water conservation measures.

Materials:

Artifacts (*found in this trunk*)
Laminated artifact pictures and descriptions
Laminated Warm-Up story
Laminated "Recipe for Washing Clothes"
Script for play
Costume for Mrs. Alderson

Background:

Water has been an important resource throughout history. Early men and women carrying drinking water in skin bags or hollowed-out gourds had the same need to quench their thirst as a modern backpacker with a water bottle. Pueblo Indians at the time of Columbus were experimenting with irrigation systems. Homesteaders who settled the West struggled to grow crops, raise families, and build communities in an often dry land.

We sometimes forget that the past holds the key to the present. The reflection of the past helps us prepare for the future. By studying water through history we can better understand present trends, beliefs and practices. Surprising wisdom and important lessons can be found in the past. Our ancestors used far less water per person than we do. Their technology, although basic, was often elegant in its simplicity. The folklore and old practices surrounding water use may seem funny to us, but if we look close enough we can discover its importance of the time.

Procedure:

1. Read the warm-up story about dowsing. Using the suggestions, discuss the story and present questions to the students.
2. Continue with the two-part activity:

Part I

1. Organize students into groups. Give one item (referenced in the script) to each group. If the actual item is not available, then give the group a photograph of the item.
2. Ask students if they have ever used the item or observed anyone using it. Ask the students to speculate on how they think the item was used in the early 1900's. Have student share, discuss, and record their ideas within their groups.

3. Distribute the descriptions of the artifacts and have the students compare and contrast the information with their own interpretations. Have each group report to the class on how they thought the item was used and its actual function.

Part II

1. Tell the students that they will be acting in a play that is set in the early 1900s in the West.
2. Ask if any student would be willing to play the character of Mrs. Alderson, or hold auditions.
3. Use the script provided.
4. Use the costume provided to outfit Mrs. Alderson.
5. Have the other students contribute by making background scenes and other props.
6. Have the students watching the performance record the water-saving habits of the early homesteaders.

Wrap-Up

Ask students to review the list they compiled of water conservation habits. Do students think any of these practices would work today? Do students think people in other parts of the world still use these methods? If so, is it because of the availability of water, the quality of water, or the level of technology? How do a culture's attitudes and lifestyles affect water conservation practices?

Extensions:

- ✓ Adapt the play script to reflect settlement patterns and water history of South Dakota
- ✓ Perform the play for other classes or the community
- ✓ Assemble a Water History scrapbook by collecting old photographs, documents, stories, letters, and pictures that represent water use of the past
- ✓ Compare amount of water used by appliances in the late 1800s with those we use today
- ✓ Have students select one of the artifacts and write a short fictional story about it