



The Four Corners Region of the United States Cultures, Ruins and Landmarks

Curriculum Unit 90.03.08
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The goal of this unit is to broaden the horizons of the inner city children. I would like to use a holistic approach to teaching this unit. The children have very little experience in the following areas: map skills, origin of the states, regional cultural differences and similarities, and the historical landmarks that exist in our world today. I would like the children to use their creative side of the brain. An experiential, hands-on approach to teaching this unit is suggested, since most children tend to lose interest quickly unless stimulated to learn.

The curriculum can be used for kindergarten through eighth graders. My population consists of fifth to seventh graders in a special education classroom. They range from non-readers to fourth grade readers. These students are fascinated by drama, music, art, dance, imagery and affective educational learning techniques.

After this unit is completed, I intend to discuss a unit on the Quinnipiac Indians of New Haven. There are many Indian landmarks to explore in our area. This would provide for a very real closure activity.

The area I will be focusing on will be the Four Corners Region of the United States. This area is comprised of Utah, New Mexico, Arizona and Colorado. The children of New Haven know about their surroundings; this unit will allow them to venture out of New Haven upon unknown territory. They have no knowledge of the distance of the United States; this unit will provide some meaningful experiences as to our whereabouts as compared to the states in the United States.

Long before Columbus first saw America, this land was occupied by Indians. They lived here for about 1300 years until they were driven out by a long drought which lasted years. However, the Indians left stories behind them without having anything written. Archeologists read by studying the baskets, pottery, weapons and dwellings of the ancient inhabitants. These remnants of a past civilization have been well preserved.

Children can become amateur archeologists and learn more about our earlier cultures in a land that still exists.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Arizona

The name Arizona comes from an Indian word meaning “Arizonac” or Little Spring. It is a big state in the Southwestern United States. Throughout Arizona you can see relics of ancient people. In 1863, Arizona was made into a territory. It was a land filled with gold mines and Indians, and people came there looking for metals such as gold, silver and copper.

Arizona is known as the Grand Canyon state. Most of the land is high, flat land gouged out by canyons; it is considered a plateau region filled with mountains.

There are Indian nations in this land that are almost a thousand years old. The Hopi and Navajo are just two of these nations living there now. Much of Arizona is desert land with cactus plants. These plants can live up to five years without rainfall since they store juices for the time when there is no rain. These cactus bloom in the spring and bear fruit in the summer. The actual state flower of Arizona is the white flower from a sequoia cactus plant.

Various animals live in Arizona, including mountain lions, bobcats, deer, black bears, foxes and antelopes. The pack rat is quite unique because he steals things but in return leaves a pine cone or piece of cactus. Snakes, scorpions, tarantulas and many kinds of lizards exist in the Arizona desert.

Throughout Arizona you can see the influence Mexicans have had on this area. This influence is reflected in buildings, foods, festivals, and schools which teach Spanish as well as English. Indians are also a large population in Arizona. Many of Arizona’s Indian nations have lived there for hundreds of years on reservations. Some live modern lifestyles, and some follow the traditional ones of long ago. The Navajo are an Indian nation of Arizona who are famous for making rugs that are weaved, and blankets. They are also very good business people. There are also Hopi Indians living in a village that is said to be over 800 years old. The Hopi village of Oraibi may be the oldest American town. It was started in 1200 A.D. and people still live there.

New Mexico

New Mexico is the 47th state and was established on January 6, 1912. The capital is Santa Fe, and the state is called the Land of Enchantment. Most of New Mexico’s land consists of high plateaus or mesas, mountain ranges, canyons, valleys and dry arroyos.

New Mexico is one of only four states whose water flows into three major river systems. The most important river in the state is the Rio Grande, which flows clear across New Mexico to become one of the five major river systems of the United States. New Mexico is dry and has elevated surfaces that were once covered with water. Much of the land was raised or lowered by forces from below. Mountain ranges were formed, but seas swept in and wore down the area. Then, in the west and northwest areas of the state, came volcanic activity. Volcanic ash accumulated and flows of lava poured out over the land. As the land continued to rise, parts of the region became mountains. The country’s biggest range, the Rocky Mountains, was formed. During the Ice Age glaciers covered the peaks of mountains, valleys were shaped, and canyons were cut.

A wide variety of fossils of animals have been found in present day New Mexico. These include fish, reptiles, and dinosaurs.

New Mexico is often known as the Sunshine State. The sun shines as much in winter as in the summer. Clean air, high mountains, level prairies, valleys and fields make New Mexico quite unique.

The ancient people of New Mexico have been among the most studied anywhere. Things they left behind thousands of years ago tell the story of the land. Some of the oldest remains of people have been found there. Cave dwellers roamed the area, and the Basketmakers were a group of people that came in next. They hunted and raised crops, and built houses which were sunk below the level of the ground. The Pueblo people invented villages and houses that resembled our condominiums, architecturally, and systems of irrigation were developed. Arts and crafts, pumpkin growing, and weaving and pottery were all practiced. Indian art on walls and caves tells of the historical events in New Mexico. The Pueblo were a peaceful group of people. The Navajo acquainted themselves with the Pueblo. The two cultures shared different styles of living.

Life in New Mexico now is influenced by three cultures. They are Indian, Spanish, and English-speaking Americans. The architecture reflects Indian Pueblo and Spanish styles. The area is still known for woodcarving, talented weavers, and for fine Spanish food.

Utah

Utah is west of the Great Divide and halfway between Canada and Mexico. It is the 11th largest state in the United States. Arizona borders it on the south, Nevada on the west, Idaho and Wyoming on the north, and Wyoming and Colorado are on the east. At the southwest corner is the only spot in the United States where the four states meet.

In 1776, Spanish missionaries opened the route for the Old Spanish Trail. This was between Santa Fe and Utah Lake. The Ute Indians lived in this region. The word "Ute", which means people of the mountains, became the name of the state. There were several large tribes that made up the Ute Nation. Then came the Paiutes, and Shoshone Indians.

John C. Fremont, in 1843-44, made an expedition to Oregon and went to Great Salt Lake Valley. He was the first to make maps and report on this region. In 1844, Brigham Young became leader of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This was a religious group known as the Mormons. For years, the Mormons were driven from state to state. People didn't approve of the Mormons' beliefs and ways of life. Brigham Young headed for Utah in 1846 with a small group of Mormons. They built cabins, planted crops, and found a new home. Brigham Young tried to set up a government, but between the Ute Indians and President Fillmore, it failed.

In 1848, a group of hungry crickets started eating the crops and starvation occurred. A flock of seagulls appeared and ate the crickets. Some years later, the Mormons put up a Sea Gull Monument on Temple Square in Salt Lake City. These birds are protected by law because they were so helpful.

On January 4, 1896, Utah became the 45th state. It is the eleventh largest state in the United States. The capital is Salt Lake City, and the nickname for the state is the beehive state. It is known for its industry. The state tree is the Blue Spruce and the flower is the Sego Lily.

Utah is quite a unique state. The Wasatch Mountains form a spine down the middle of the state. West of the mountains is a green band of land fertile from irrigation, and west of this band is a section of desert. This large area in Western Utah is called the Great Basin, and in the south end of the basin is Utah Lake, the largest fresh water lake in the state.

East of the Wasatch Mountains is the Colorado Plateau. This is a desert area that changes from yellow to red as it nears the Colorado River. Mountains and plateaus make up most of the state. Utah is one of the largest silver producing states in the nation. Petroleum, lead, and zinc are taken from the Utah mines. The Mormons learned about coal and how it burned from the Indians. This helped Utah become a prosperous coal industry state.

Colorado

The beautiful state of Colorado sits on top of the world. It is known as the highest state in the union. One thousand five hundred peaks in this state tower ten thousand feet or more above sea level. These snow-capped Rocky Mountains are the most striking feature of Colorado. This divides the state into two sections. On the east side of the mountains, rivers flow east into the Mississippi Valley. On the west, they flow west into the Pacific Ocean. Because they separate the rivers in this way, the Rocky Mountains' peaks are called the Continental Divide.

Colorado lies about halfway between Canada on the north and Mexico on the south. The state is shaped like a rectangle and covers 103,948 square miles.

It is believed that Coronado was the first white man to exist in the Colorado area. He came in 1541. He was a famous Spaniard seeking the seven cities of Cibola and their treasures of gold. In 1706, another Spanish explorer, Juan de Uribarri, took possession of the region. He did this in the name of Spain, and called it Santo Domingo. Over the next hundred years, France and Spain fought each other for possession of this area. In 1803, the United States bought this territory from France. This was called the Louisiana Purchase, and cost 15 million dollars. After all the explorers, hunters and trappers came to the region of Colorado.

The first settlement in Colorado was in 1853. Six years later the first school was opened in Auraria. It was a one room log cabin with a mud roof. In 1858 gold was discovered in the streams far into the mountains. In a few years the gold disappeared. Families settled on the river valley and began planting crops and establishing farms.

In 1867, the capital became Denver. Bridges were put up, roads were built, and the Denver and Rio Grande railroad was developed. On August 1, 1876, Colorado was admitted to the Union as the 38th state.

The mild climate and sunshine help the farmers in Colorado grow wheat, corn, hay and alfalfa. Colorado also leads the nation in the growing of sugar beets.

Coal is the chief mineral product of Colorado today. The large coal mines supply fuel for many industries, including the giant steel mills. This mountain state also has a supply of building materials, such as granite, marble and sandstone. Limestone and lava are mined here and sent all over.

Colorado has forests of pine, fir, and spruce which cover millions of acres. In order to preserve the trees, the government set aside thirteen million acres as national forests. They cover one-fifth of the state.

Denver lies just north of the center of the state. It is the largest city in Colorado and is named the Queen city of the Plains because of the business and tourist center located there. The State Museum Building contains relics of the Pueblo Indians and the Cliff Dwellers of long ago. It also shows the development of transportation in the west.

Some cities of Colorado hold lots of historical artifacts. Pueblo, a city of factories and steel mills, is 40 miles

south of Colorado Springs. It is the second largest city in the state, and its history goes back to the Spanish days. In 1806, Lieutenant Zebulon Pike erected the first building built by Americans in Colorado. Pueblo has been filled with trappers, hunters, and people seeking gold. It is a city filled with many races and nationalities. In Trinidad, a city in the extreme southern part of Colorado, lies the Kit Carson Museum which contains pioneer relics.

Mesa Verde

Mesa Verde is a park in the southwestern corner of Colorado. Since it is covered by plateau evergreens, juniper and pinion, the Spanish named it Mesa Verde, meaning Green Table. This park protects one of the most impressive groups of prehistoric Indian structures north of Mexico. The ancient buildings are set in a wilderness of forested canyons and mesas, too. There are villages such as Cliff Palace, Spruce Tree House, and Square Tower House. According to archeologists, the primitive civilization started at the beginning of the first century A.D. and continued to the 13th century.

During the Basketmakers period A.D. to 450, the Indians raised squash and corn on the mesas and lived in caves. During the next 300 years, the Indians discovered how to make pottery, along with baskets. They also developed a new kind of dwelling, shallow pits dug in the mesas' tops and roofed with poles covered with mud. During the Developmental Pueblo Period, which was from 750-1100, the Indians used different methods of constructing walls of stone, mud, and poles. Then they began joining their houses to form villages. Up to this time there had been peace, and the Indians progressed in the following areas: arts and crafts, population, and farming.

Prehistoric Indians farmed the Mesa Verde for over a thousand years. Their structures consisted of single dwellings. Villages of attached houses had watch towers, storerooms, and underground ceremonial chambers. The Spanish called their neat and compact settlements pueblos. These Native Americans thus were known as the Pueblo Indians. Some of their buildings were discovered by Anglo-American settlers in the late 19th century. The cliff dwellings and mesa top buildings that remain are very attractive.

Spruce Tree House is the best preserved of Mesa Verde's sites. This is a village containing 114 dwelling rooms and 8 kivas, which were ceremonial chambers. Many of the ceilings are made of timbered beams, cut poles and adobe.

Cliff Palace is the biggest and best known of the ruins. The rooms accommodated 400 people and there is a four story tower. This was abandoned in the 13th century.

Balcony House is another ruin, which is known for its defensive design. You have to climb a ladder up the canyon wall to a ledge to the court in the midst of the ancient dwellings. This all leads to the rear of the cave. The wall was built with careful stonework to safeguard the outer edge of the court. Pueblo Indians built it thousands of years ago because they didn't like the idea of their children tumbling into the canyon. There is a crawl tunnel which is the only way out of the Balcony House. This was the only entrance for the Pueblos, a way to keep out invaders.

There are hundreds more Cliff dwellings. Mesa Verdes Indians took to the caves late in their period of habitation, when raids of other Indians occurred. Earlier they lived in open sites atop the mesa and close to the farm lands and hunting areas. History suggests that bad farming, enemy pressure and a long drought in the 13th century led to the break up of their culture.

There is a ruin called the Sun Temple which is on top of the mesa. This appears to have been built for religious purposes. There is a great mystery surrounding this ruin.

There are some interesting facts about the Basketmakers who lived in Mesa Verde from A.D. 1-400. These agricultural Indians wove beautiful baskets, but built no houses, made no pots, and had no bows and arrows. The major weapon was an atlatl. It was a very primitive throwing stick that increased the power of their throwing arms. It was inaccurate and short ranged, and so was not good for hunting or defense. They gradually learned to make roofed houses, and to make pots to cook with.

Canyon de Chelly National Monument

In Northeastern Arizona, three broad irregular canyons come together to form a leaf shaped scar. They are Canyon de Chelly, Canyon del Muerto, and Monument Canyon. All three cut deeply into the plateau with vertical walls of red sandstone. Their wide level floors are dry and sandy, and most of the year rain turns them into muddy torrents. Together the three canyons make up Canyon de Chelly National Monument. This symbolizes an ancient and traditional home of the Navajo Indians. They have lived in the canyon since about 1700. Their houses, or hogans, and peach orchards can be seen scattered on the canyon floor. This land has come to be known as the sacred land of the Navajos.

This is the largest and most scenic national archeological monument. There are several hundred ruins, but the principal ones are White House and Sliding, in twenty five mile Canyon de Chelly. The earliest construction of the White House Ruin began about 1066. The ruin originally contained about 175 rooms and 4 kivas. The kivas were used for ceremonial chambers. The Basketmakers are said to have lived there during the Pueblo period 1276-1299; then they parted.

The White Man's world has really interfered with the Navajo way of life. This began with the Spaniards that roamed the southwest. After one raid in 1804, Spanish troops followed the Navajos into this canyon stronghold. They killed women and children by firing against the roof in a high cave, so that their bullets ricocheted into them. In Canyon del Muerto lead spots can still be seen on the ceiling of that cave. It is known as the Canyon of Death.

In 1864, the famous frontiersman, Kit Carson, took some Navajos and put them on a reserve in New Mexico. Carson and his men caught about 8,000 Indians in Canyon de Chelly and herded them off to Bosque Redondo. So many Indians died in that concentration camp that the government relented and let them return; and the Navajo have lived there ever since. They have a huge reservation which still exists.

The three canyons sheltered the Anasazi, and the Ancient Ones, centuries before the first Navajo came.

Mummy Cave, in Canyon del Muerto, has a well preserved dwelling with a three story watch tower made of smooth cut masonry. This cave was thought by archeologists to be inhabited from about the time that Christ was born to 1300. This village may have been inhabited longer than any other in the United States. Antelope House and Standing Cow are both ancient cliff dwellings that are named for Navajo paintings which are still on the canyon walls. One of the pre-Columbian sites is White House Ruin in Canyon de Chelly. This name of this dwelling comes from its white plaster, which is made from adobe; the building remains preserved today.

Monument Valley

Monument Valley is a beautiful place. It stretches across northern Arizona's plateau country and into southern Utah. It is known by some as the land of the Navajo Indians. Masses of time-chiseled rocks resembling temples

form a stone city. Great red sandstone columns and carved forms reach upward to heights of over one thousand feet. The unusual outlines of some of the formations have been given names such as Emperor on the Throne, Train Rock, the Camel, and Elephant Herd. It is said to be the finest architecture in the world.

The great sandstone figures resemble human forms, animals, birds, and other familiar objects. At night the rising of the moon lights up the valley beautifully. This gives the monuments a fairyland effect. Sometimes in the morning the cloud formations appear as a fog covering the valley floor, making the tops of the monuments look as though they are suspended in mid-air.

From a central point in Monument Valley, the Ute Mountains in Colorado, the Henrys in Utah, the Carrizos in New Mexico, and the Lukachukais in Arizona can all be seen. The four mountain ranges are all within a radius of 250 miles.

The elevation of Monument Valley is 4,500 feet above sea level. The valley has the San Juan River in Utah on the north of it. The south gateway is the Owl Rock and Ogathla Peak, which is in Arizona. The eastern side is Comb Ridge near the Colorado state line. On the west is No Man's Mesa and Copper Canyon in Utah.

At one time, Monument Valley was a level area. Volcanic eruptions caused the earth to crack. Erosion by wind and water took place, and the sandstone sections formed hundreds of monuments. Many were topped with limestone. Prehistoric people found the area suitable to build pueblos and cliff dwellings. Great ruins are still there under the ledges of cliffs in some areas. They were built of mud and stone.

Monument Valley comprises a small section of the 25,000 square miles of the Navajo nation. This is the largest Indian reservation in the United States. There are Navajo families presently living there. The Navajo in Monument Valley do not live in villages, as do the Hopi, whose small reservation is contained in this area. The Navajo are a pastoral people who move from place to place. As their flocks graze onward, they just build new homes. They have two different types of homes: summer and winter. Their winter homes are a low dome shaped mud and brush house built over logs. It resembles an igloo. The space inside is roomy and comfortable. The fire for heating and cooking is built in the center of the room, with a smoke hole in the top of the hogan. The summer shelter looks like an open air camp. The roof is thatched and supported by poles and is open on all sides. It serves as a shelter from the summer sun. The winter hogans are usually built on a mesa or behind a hill, near a spring. This is used year after year until it is abandoned or burned, due to a death in the family. The summer hogans are moved from field to field. The entrance is always facing the east, because the Navajo is a sun worshipper.

This mesa country is adapted to sheep raising. The Navajo shear the sheep for rug weaving and for trading purposes. All families raise sheep and grow corn, melons, squash, and beans for their own needs.

There is a world of discovery in this land of monuments. There are buttes, mesas, canyons and free standing rock formations that appear to defy gravity.

This hot and arid environment limits human occupation. There are more than 100 sites and ruins dating back before 1300 A.D. It is not known as to when the first Navajo settled in the valley. Recent literature of the Navajo lands has given this area the title of Monument Valley Navajo Tribal Park. The Navajo National and Recreation Department gives out information for visiting this area.

Sample Lesson PLans

1. Make Navajo Fry Bread

1 cup flour 1 tsp. baking powder 1/2 tsp. salt
1/2 cup water 8-10 tablespoons solid shortening for frying
honey jam

To begin, sift flour, baking powder and salt in a bowl. Stir in the water, mix with your fingers; the children will love this part. Knead lightly by digging in with the heel of your hand. This will make a soft dough.

Dust everything with flour, if the dough is sticky. Roll out the dough 1/4 inch thick on a lightly floured surface. Cut into squares, about 2 inches.

Melt the shortening in a sauce pan. When it is hot and smoking, quickly fry 2-3 squares of dough at a time. They will puff up. Brown one side, then the other. You can drain on paper. This can be served with honey or jam.

Children love to cook and eat their creations. This activity is simple and the rewards are immediate. The children will gain a sense of how the Indians used to eat. The simpler the method, the more interest you will generate in the children.

2. Kachina Dolls

These were masks that were used to summon spirits. The Indians would wear the huge head masks and go to a village and dance for the people. They brought gifts and taught people arts and crafts. The masks would resemble animals, birds, vegetables and many reptiles. The Hopi, Zuni and the Navajo used these masks as a ceremonial costume.

Children love to make colorful and wild masks for any occasion. Use lots of bright paper, scissors, glue, scraps of old material, colorful yarn, and let the children use their imaginations.

I would suggest that you have a Kachina doll already made to use as an example. Try it on, and let the children wear it to get rid of any fears and anxiety about making them.

3. Creating a loom

You will need:

14 inches long—12 inches wide of heavy cardboard
scissors ruler 1 tapestry needle beads (clay, wooden)
35-40 yards of colorful yarn (lots of bright colors)
1 ball of 2 ply jute

Using a ruler, draw a line 1/2 inch down from the top of the cardboard. Now, draw the same amount on the bottom of the cardboard. Now, cut on the 1/2 inch lines from the edge of the cardboard, to the lines that you drew on the top and the bottom. Do not bend the cardboard. There should be 24 tabs at the top and the bottom. String the threads, or the warp, as it is called. Use the ball of jute. Hold the cardboard so that the cuts are at the top and bottom. Take one end of the jute, push it down from the top firmly into the first cut. The loose end should stick out of the back on the left. Wind the jute around the second tab three or four times. (Follow the diagram I have drawn.) As a final step, students weave yarn crosswise over and under yarn already on cardboard. Children love to weave, especially if they have a choice of bright colors. Let them choose their own combinations, and make sure you have one that is done so that they can see the finished product.

(figure available in print form)

Some follow up lessons:

A. Correspond with an Indian reservation in the regions that you discussed. See if you could create a pen pal situation with the schools that they have there. Write to the following place for information: Four Corners U.S.A. Teec Nos Pos Chapter. P.O. Box 949, Teec Nos Pos, Arizona, 86514. The children love to hear how other cultures live, especially in the U.S.A.

B. Children also enjoy music and dance of other cultures. Have a person from The Turtle Island Store in New Haven come into the classroom for a visit. One of the owners does ritual dances and is quite friendly. She has been on the New Haven Green for creating a drum circle dance. This can be performed in a classroom and can be very stimulating for the children and the adults. You may want to have the children make their own drums before having a guest. Mixashawn is another New Haven Jazz Musician who is very willing to perform for small audiences. He is an audience response person, so the children will not be bored.

C. Recreate the ruins and land formations. Using clay or shoe boxes, create dioramas. Children can be shown pictures of the places that you read about. Let them use their imaginations and have an exhibit showing all their hard work. Given hands on work, the children tend to produce creations you would never expect.

D. Have a fashion show of Indian dress. Some children are very good at drawing and designing. Let them reproduce the way it used to be years ago, and let them design the outfits nowadays. The Indians tend to be very colorful and children respond to this.

To put closure on all these activities, have a combination day and invite people from the school to visit. The students can exhibit everything that they made, and be very proud that people were interested to look at it.

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