

Linam Collection: Women's Work

Age/ Level: lower elementary (k-3)

**Introduction:** The inspiration for the title comes from the old saying "A man may work from sun to sun, but a women's work is never done." Thelma Webber's book, Life on the Prairies: Settling the Llano Estacado (1996) contains many wonderful stories about men and women she knew or knew about over the years. In Thelma's own words, "tales of pioneer living, hardships, and joys" are told in order that the "sacrifices, strength, and character" of these individuals would not be forgotten. The exhibit is based on these stories and artifacts from the Linam collection. Excerpts from *life on the Prairies* along with other research sources illustrate the Woman's role in settling the land.

**Background:** In the mid 1800's the Homestead Act was passed. The act encouraged many pioneers to move westward. This meant picking everything up, packing it all up in a wagon, and heading toward an unknown territory. Although this seemed very exciting at first, pioneers quickly learned the true hardship of moving west. For women the move was particularly hard, they become the primary caretaker for the entire family. These women were now mothers, wives, teachers, doctors, and menders.

As these women arrived in the western territory life did not get any easier. Women worked long days tending to their family's needs. Chores for a pioneer women included mending and sewing, churning butter, washing clothing, field work, soap making, cooking, and many others. Life was very hard.

These activities are meant to demonstrate to students how life might have been during the late 1800's in the west and how difficult life was for a pioneer woman.

CCSS

RI.2.6: Identify the main purpose of a text including what the author wants to answer, explain or describe.

RI.3.1: Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers

W.k.8: With guidance and support from an adult, explore a variety of digital tools to produce and publish writing, including in collaboration with peers

W.3.8: Recall information from experience or gather information from print and digital sources and sort evidence into provided categories

SL.1: Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners and adults in small and larger groups.

## Activities:

- Bartering
  - Objective: Students will have the opportunity to learn about trading and the barter systems with other students.
  - Materials:  
Index cards  
Checklist  
More information of how the barter system worked during pioneer days  
<http://www.aitc.sk.ca/saskschools/genst5.html>
  - Procedures:
    1. Students will break into groups of 4. Each student should have 10 cards. These cards represent their goods. Each card will have an item or items and any specifications (\*example 3 chickens but one doesn't lay eggs).
    2. Students will then attempt to trade their goods first with their group. Each student has to be careful to trade correct items as to not trade so much that they do not end up with all chicken and not meet their basic needs. Each student has to decide what they need from their checklist and what they need to get rid of to achieve.
    3. Students after trading with their groups can move to other groups (towns) and see if they can achieve a trade there.
- Churning butter
  - Objective: Students will get the opportunity to make homemade butter
    - Materials:  
Heavy cream  
Jar (plastic is recommended)  
Bread  
\*salt (optional)
    - Procedures:
      1. Split class into groups of 3-4. Each group will receive a jar and a marble.
      2. Fill each jar  $\frac{1}{4}$  of a cup of heavy cream. Salt if desires and place lid.
      3. Have students shake it around in their group. They can roll it or shake it for about 15 minutes until the butter solidifies.
      4. Once the butter has solidified, serve on bread and let students taste their creations.



More information on butter churning: <http://www.oldandinteresting.com/history-butter-churns.aspx>

- Weaving

- Objective: Students will learn about weaving:

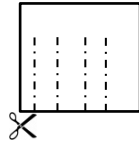
- Materials:

- Long construction paper

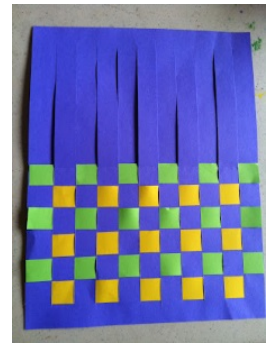
- Scissors

- Procedures:

1. Begin by folding construction paper in half. Using scissors cut 1 in. strips from the fold down leaving an inch uncut



2. Cut 1 in. strips out of construction paper. All different colors work best.
3. Weave the strips of paper into the larger construction paper.



## A Day in the Life of a Pioneer Woman

Have students recreate some of the woman's work:

Gather eggs (plastic eggs around the room)

Feed the animals

Bring water from a stream (have students fill up a pail with books, sand, toys, etc... and carry it across the room multiple times)

Cook (this can be where we churn the butter)

Milk the cow

Clean house

Washing clothes (tie in with bringing the water from the stream)

Pick goods from the garden

Play bartering game

Ironing

Cooking

Sewing and mending (weaving project)

This can be different stations throughout the classroom. Split the classroom into groups and rotate with the different stations. The objective is for students to see how tough a women's job was during the mid to late 1800's. These activities are a fun way to help demonstrate "a women's work is never done."

Discuss with kids

Have students reflect on these chores with their groups. How did they feel after they finished all their day's work? How is a woman's work different today?

## Checklist

Chickens (for eggs and food) \_\_\_\_\_

Cows (milk and food) \_\_\_\_\_

Pig's \_\_\_\_\_

Seeds \_\_\_\_\_

Fabric \_\_\_\_\_

Eggs \_\_\_\_\_

Milk \_\_\_\_\_

Butter \_\_\_\_\_

Cheese \_\_\_\_\_

Clothing \_\_\_\_\_

Meat \_\_\_\_\_

Garlic \_\_\_\_\_

Sugar \_\_\_\_\_

Flour \_\_\_\_\_

Corn \_\_\_\_\_

Potatoes \_\_\_\_\_

Wheat \_\_\_\_\_

Berries \_\_\_\_\_

## **Women's work**

**Women works was very difficult they had to keep their family clean, fed, and healthy.**

**Women's chores were often very challenging and required a lot of work.**

- 1. How did you feel after you got done with your work?**

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- 2. How is a woman's work different from today?**

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## Pioneer Women

Think about our technology today, has this helped make our jobs easier. Imagine not having a refrigerator. Where would you store food? What if we didn't have any electricity to provide light and power our stoves and TV's? How would you see in the dark? How would your parents cook? Now think about not having a store nearby, to go and buy food or clothes. What would you do?

These are the kinds of things that pioneers came across. There was no electricity so the pioneers had to think and come up with different ways to survive.

Fruits and vegetables were often grown in a garden or planted as a crop. The fruits and vegetable would be left to dry as a way to preserve. If possible women would put the ripe fruit and vegetables in a can, and store it. Canned fruit lasted for months. Salt was also important in curing, a technique used to preserve, meat.



What about light? Women would make candles out of beeswax and animal fat.

For clothing women would be in charge of making clothing for the whole family because buying it was very expensive and a store would be too far away. Women would spin wool from a sheep and make thread, then weave the thread, and finally sew it together to make a shirt or a pair of pants. Socks and coats were generally knitted.

During pioneer times women had to wash clothing by hand because a washing machine did not exist. Washing clothes was an all-day activity. The day would begin by having the children bring



water from a nearby stream in buckets. These buckets were very heavy when full. The women would use their handmade soap and a washboard to wash each item of clothing. When it was clean it was hung up on a line to dry. After clothes were dry they were taken inside and ironed. The iron was heated up by placing it on top of a wood burning stove. Women often owned two or three so they can keep switching them as the iron cooled.

Women were in charge of cooking the meals and cleaning the house. A traditional meal included some kind of bread and meat. Women had to sweep the floor constantly due to the fact that they did not have floors.



Women were constantly working in their homes. They would help their husbands take care of the crops and the animals. The women would be in charge of feeding the animals, milking the cows, and gathering eggs.

It was a tough job but women were very tough and learned how to fix any problems that came. So although we have great technology today do you think that we would be able to do the things that these pioneer women did? What if we lost electricity? Could we keep warm and have light?