

What were my goals/learner outcomes for the lesson?

- **Define the following terms: ghost town, boom town, vigilante committee, Joseph Smith, Mormon trail**
- **Identify the motivators, challenges and organization of each group**
- **Compare and contrast the journey of the Mormons and the 49ers**

Going into this lesson, I wished to frame the Gold Rush and the travel of the Mormons as two stories that had similarities as well as differences. Naturally this meant that one of my goals was for the students to understand this content. However, my main goal was for the students to be able to compare these two stories so that they understand what they tell us about westward expansion such as the unique motivators and challenges people faced. This put the overarching theme of the chapter (survival) in a lens that is much simpler and understandable for the students as the goals and struggles are at the heart of what we are comparing. Furthermore, I believe this would allow students to conceptualize certain aspects of “movement” such as why does someone move, what challenges travelers face and what leads to sustained settlement. All of these are instrumental in understanding future movements and I believe planting these seeds now will only help students be successful as they continue their study of US history. Some lower-order goals included the students identifying key terms such as boom and ghost towns and characteristics of each group such as style of movement, goal and the nature of their settlements. These goals allowed students to make sense of this lesson but also see overarching themes and elements in history.

What was my formative assessment strategy?

My formative assessment was an exit ticket that consisted of just one question “Compare the experiences between the 49ers and the Mormons. What did their experiences have in common and what set their experiences in the west apart?”. While it's just one question, I believe it was a good way to tie the lesson and my goals together as throughout the entire lesson (both fifth and sixth), there was an effort made to point out the unique characteristics of each group of travelers and they were separated throughout the lesson to make it easier for the students (such as treating the 49ers and Mormon review as two distinct parts of the lesson and treating them as such throughout the Jeopardy review game). Furthermore, by having them compare these two groups, it helped demonstrate both our lower and higher order goals as knowledge of the content, characteristics of each group and vocabulary terms would be the foundation for being able to compare the 49ers and Mormons. It is not the most engaging formative assessment, but I believe that the actual review activity services that goal and the exit ticket helps wrap up that more engaging activity.

Do the student work samples suggest my goals/learner outcomes were met? To what degree and by what percentage of the students?

I would say that the vast majority of students met my goals for this lesson (around 90%) to the extent that many students went beyond what was asked of them. Starting with some of the lower order goals, I believe that my goal of having students understand and apply terms from this lesson was achieved. As I look at the responses I received, the students used terms like Joseph Smith and boom towns in their responses to describe the settlement and organizational patterns of each group despite not being required to do so and this was the case with 19 of the 22 responses (the lack of requiring them to include terms focused on in class was an oversight on my part). This gives me confidence that the visual and auditory methods used to explain certain terms in the review lecture were effective as was focusing on them during the review activity as I do not personally believe that the students would have used these terms had they not been confident in their knowledge of them. Additionally, I would say that students understanding the content and characteristics of each group was also achieved as there were no students that made “incorrect” comparisons (as they misidentified characteristics or chose aspects that were not entirely correct) and the majority of them made connections similar to the ones I was hinting at throughout the lecture. This includes elaborating on these connections such as what does the differing motivations mean in terms of people moving to the west (an example would be a student saying that people saw the west as a place to start over) and what does the relatively exclusive origins of the Mormons mean for their diversity. In terms of the higher order task of comparing the two topics of our lesson, all the students did compare them to some extent. However, some of the comparisons made did not strike at the heart of what the lesson was about, the story of people traveling for different reasons. For example, while one student made the comparisons between the distinct pull factors of each story, there was another that made a surface level comparison like one group traveled to California and another went to Utah. While it is certainly a comparison, it is not quite satisfactory, especially as I consider how I intended to frame the lesson and the emphasis I attempted to place on certain elements of each group. However, these were only a select few and within those select few, most had much deeper comparisons along with surface level ones so this may be more of a case of students attempting to fit as much content as possible at the expense of all of what was written being quality. Additionally, students made comparisons that I did not even point out specifically during the lesson such as Utah being home to permanent settlements while California saw the cycle of boom towns then ghost towns. These comparisons that were not directly made were present in more than half of the assessments and it gives me further confidence that how the lesson was conducted was good as well as this particular formative assessment being an adequate

way of tying everything together. To this extent I would say that 90% of the students met the learning outcomes that I had created including the lower order goals as well as higher level goal of comparing the 49ers and the Mormon's travels. I am further comfortable as students such as S (for confidentiality) who consistently performs well in class as well as A whose performance is not as strong, both grasped the content as well as made substantive comparisons. I would say that the average degree of their understanding was that they understood the content, and were able to find points of comparison with only a handful moving beyond that to make connections with implied content and speak on ideas such as diversity (or the lack thereof) and identity.

What student misconceptions are evident in the student work samples? What might you do in a future lesson to address those misconceptions?

The most common misconception I saw throughout the work was the belief that the 49ers were directly related to or connected to the Mormons in some way. This ranged from believing they were responsible for the persecution of the Mormons, or they were either the group Mormons broke away from or they broke away from the Mormons. This ranged from students who would be considered "high achievers" as well as students who are not as strong learners. I believe this misconception stems from the fact that both groups, while generally unrelated, were included in the same lesson so students may have believed that they had to be related in some way by virtue of being bundled together. To address this error (and others similar to it) in subsequent lessons, I believe making the transition between the two topics more apparent but also prefacing the fact that they are unrelated. In this regard, I believe the transitions could have been smoother as well as the agenda being laid out before starting a lesson, so students were prepared for the changing of topics. Another misconception I saw was that the Mormons went straight from the Northeast all the way to Utah when in reality, the Mormon Trail was from Illinois to Utah. I think a part of this misconception came from the fact that the notes students had were a bit disorganized and placed the events in the wrong order. In terms of teaching, I could have listed the locations the Mormons went to or summarized it after completing the lecture. Another strategy I could have implemented would be using visual guides like a map to help students see the actual path taken by these travelers. In this sense, I believe the lesson was not as visually accessible as it could have been. While I placed great emphasis on drawing and circling words and terms, I failed to recognize that even within that modality of teaching, there are differing ways to approach it. Then there are non-content misconceptions or errors with the assessments such as a sizable portion of students not following the specific instructions that indicated that their response should be in complete sentences. This, like other errors, was visible in many students' works and I believe it is mostly attributed to the rather chaotic handling of passing out the

assessments. In the future, I believe I should be more prepared not just in the sense of ensuring the assessments are ready to be used but also that I am prepared to thoroughly explain what I expect from the students. When I consider these misconceptions, I see more of a failure to manage certain aspects of the lesson rather than the content being too challenging for the students and in subsequent lessons, perfecting the transitions as well as how I present info will be keyways to engage and help my students as they explore similar topics and ideas.

What strengths are evident in the student work samples?

One of the key strengths I have been mentioning is how many of the students had the ability to make implied connections. Some comparisons that were made were not ones I directly discussed in class, but students were still able to make. Like the diversity of the 49ers compared to the Mormons and the more organized nature of the Mormons compared to the 49ers. This is a strength as future work will require them to make these sorts of connections and will be centered on the idea that students will not have everything given to them up front. However, it also shows that the students can hear a lecture and make connections on their own rather than have them actively made for them. This extended into what I would deem to be more sophisticated topics such as race, class and gender (or the lack of diversity in both) such as the 49ers being more diverse across these identities compared to the Mormons. In a similar vein, the majority of students have shown that they are able to extract comparable elements from the content they are viewing. When doing comparisons, finding ideas to compare can be quite challenging for students especially when it seems as if the subjects of your comparisons have nothing in common. Another way to view it is that they made connections between ideas that may seem opposite to one another. An example would be the motivations of both groups which while starkly different from one another point to the notion that people were driven by different desires to travel. I highlight these particular strengths as many students displayed them but also they are higher level ways of viewing and exploring the content. Not just understanding the content you are given but also being able to see and explore the details that may not be obvious. Furthermore, its that higher level critical analysis and inquiry that will be essential for them as they continue their careers as students and begin arguing, critiquing and exploring complicated topics.

Is my formative assessment strategy a clear and accurate picture of what students know and can do? Or did some students fail to put forward their best efforts? What can be done to improve your formative assessment strategy in the future?

I would say for the most part that the work put forth by the students is a fairly accurate picture of what they know from this lesson. I believe what the question was asking was

clear enough to prevent any confusion and the fact that all the responses I received performed that task that was asked suggests that much. The question also does not have the same reliability concern that a multiple-choice assessment (or a small quiz) would have as the students have to find and compare elements of the lesson all on their own. However, I do have concerns about the actual time allotted for them to complete this assessment as we had forgotten to print these questions out beforehand and doing that as well as cutting them took a considerable amount of time. In other words, I have concerns about if students were able to thoroughly consider and perform the task. Supporting this concern is the fact that some answers are a sentence long and have certain rushed elements like spelling mistakes not being erased but rather scribbled over (which at least in my mind suggests they were attempting to complete the assessment fast). Another product of this rushed timing was the fact that some students did not perform the assessment the way it was intended. At the top of the assessment, the students are asked to write in complete sentences, and I received at least five to six assessments that were lists or Venn diagram. As someone who tends to make this mistake as well, I believe I should have read the instructions out loud to the students rather than assuming that they would read it and complete the assignment accordingly, and that would be a way I would improve my work with this assessment style. I am more confident that it was a timing issue rather than a lack of effort issue as there were still very substantive comparisons made across the entire class and students who do typically give it their all in class displayed certain elements of rushed work such as listing. An example of this would be student S who made a list and made several scribbles. Another concern I have is about the effort given by some students. There are surface level observations as well as a few assessments that made few comparisons altogether. I believe this is in some parts a failure on the part of instructions, and I believe that for the students who may have gotten lost mid lesson or were already unfamiliar with the content (as this was a review lecture), a knowledge check between the 49ers half of the lesson and the Mormon half would have been much needed (along with one right before the review jeopardy). This would have hopefully caught a few misconceptions or gaps in knowledge. However, there are some displays of low effort without an attempt such as an assessment with one singular comparison and that comparison being the fact that both groups traveled. This was from a student that is normally quite tired in class for a variety of reasons and that more than likely impaired his ability to perform this task. This student is an instance where I believe additional knowledge checks could have been beneficial as a time to catchup and recollect themselves between parts of a lesson. In terms of the actual assessment, I believed it would have serviced every student in the class if I had listed or identify a few areas of comparison. In that case, the question would have been "Compare the experiences between the 49ers and the Mormons. What did their experiences have in

common and what set their experiences in the west apart? **Consider who were in each group, why they went west, and what life was like for each group**". While it increases the size of the question and prevented students from finding those comparable elements, I believe including this portion would have given the students somewhere to begin their comparisons rather than throwing them right into the question. The assessment itself was a good way to tie the lesson together as it gives students a question to apply their knowledge but does so in a way that pushes the students to explore the content in a new way. However, I believe some of the execution prevents me from having absolute faith that what I see is indeed the best every student has to offer (and this is already on top of typical challenges students have such as being tired or distracted in class) and these flaws were ultimately preventable.

If this were your class, would you assign a grade to the work you received? Would you return it to students with feedback (with or without a grade)? Or would you simply use it to inform your own teaching? Any of these alternatives are reasonable. Talk about how you would or would not link grades and feedback to your formative assessment.

I would not grade this assessment as there are a lot of factors that contribute to the work that I have seen, and they're not all necessarily based around comprehension of the content. A student could be tired, or there was a time crunch in class that affected the work that was produced, or I failed to properly teach the lesson. When I consider these factors, I don't feel personally comfortable putting a grade on work that was affected by a variety of factors, some of which the students had no control of. However, just because I am not grading them does not mean that these assessments are not a strong indicator of where my students are at in terms of content, skills and application and this is my rationale for at least providing feedback. I would provide feedback, not just on if they know the content but on skills such as how they write out their responses, how they compare the topics of the lesson. In other words, there are multiple levels of feedback that can be provided from the content, the skills they show and how they combine them. For example, if a student writes a response but there are some spelling errors, it's important to point them out so the student continues to develop their ability to spell. More importantly, if that student focuses their comparisons on just what the 49ers and the Mormons were trying to achieve then I may suggest that they broaden their view of these two groups (and thus this would be feedback on how they compared the two topics) or they need to be refreshed on what comparing is. To me this is a case where a student could continue developing how their compare topics but also there are clear areas of strengths and weaknesses in content. What I am trying to illustrate by saying all of this is that these are still young

students and while a skill like comparing or spelling may be trivial for adults, continued feedback and support for their development is going to be paramount for the future success of these learners. Ultimately, my intent with this feedback is to prepare students for assessments that will be graded like our summative tests. There is also the matter of using these assessments to measure the success of my teaching. Certainly, for this assessment, I would consider if students were even able to make those connections between two seemingly distinct groups that I had tried to emphasize. If a large number of students are unable to, then I believe that is a clear indicator that I failed to make those similarities and differences obvious or that I should have devoted time in class to demonstrating how to compare topics. Short assessments like this allow me as the teacher time to understand where a particular student is struggling on multiple levels but also then come to conclusions about where the entire class is and that's the value of these assessments to me. I believe I can provide comprehensive feedback but also be able to gauge my success as an educator through looking at my class more broadly. It would provide me time to reflect on what strategies did work (such as in this case, the strong use of vocab terms indicates that the visual methods work) as well as areas where I could further support students (more visuals such as maps to help organize these journeys). This strategy is not set for every instance I have an assessment and there would certainly be some variation as students will certainly catch on quickly if these sorts of assignments are graded or not and that may be a detriment to the info I am trying to extract from them.

Was anything surprising about the work you received? If so, what?

One of the main things that surprised me was the amount of comparisons that were made based off implied content. What I mean by implied content is content that was not outright stated but could be assumed. An example would be a handful of students making comparisons about the actual diversity of each group with the 49ers having people from all over the world while the Mormons were a relatively small and predominately white group of people. Another would be the actual nature of each travel, the students were able to connect the fact that the 49ers saw their travels as temporary while the Mormons very much saw their migration as a permanent endeavor. These examples show to me that the students were much more capable of seeing and making comparisons with implied information. Another aspect of the work that surprised me was the degree to which spelling mistakes were made throughout the assessments. I do not say this to nitpick at the students, but it gives me pause and forces me to consider if integrating spelling or sounding out of certain words and terms into the lesson is something that would be of great benefit for the students. I am only surprised that I am considering this since that is

something in my mind that is very much associated with the younger grades. This is not a criticism of the class, but I think it's a consideration worth making especially when we remember that those years that would have been spent on these skills were consumed by COVID and online learning. It calls into question how I as someone who is working with 8th graders incorporate this work into my lessons and what is the most proactive way to help students but also maintain the balance of their needs being met as well as covering the material I am mandated to cover. Furthermore, there is the question of how much of this can be accurately attributed to the unique circumstances of previous years rather than factors on an individual or family level (such as poverty, challenges with learning and personal responsibilities consuming their time). It's those unique circumstances and their enduring effects that should be a cornerstone of how I construct lessons.