

Jump Back in Time

A Living History Resource

Written and illustrated by
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Chapter 1

Bringing History to Life

Imagine tapping out Morse coded messages, flicking beads on an abacus, and practicing hunting skills, while the aroma of tortillas fills the air. Kids don't want to hear about history—they want to live it!

A living history event makes history fun. Hands-on activities, games, and food make an ideal end-of-year school celebration or can fire up kids for a social studies unit to come. With opportunities for costumes and take home “goodies,” a living history event is also a unique educational, nonfrightening Halloween alternative for school, scouting, and charity fund-raisers. Whatever the setting, when kids experience the culture and daily activities of people in history, they gain understanding they can't find in textbooks.

HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

This resource contains instructions for presenting four living history events, each consisting of a full day of activities. These events, which can be coordinated with school social studies curriculum standards, scouting awards, or just for the fun of it, are:

1. Ancient Cultures Day—a glimpse at selected ancient cultures
2. Native American Culture Day—a sampling of Native American groups based on geographical regions
3. Colonial America Day—a sneak peek at life in the 13 colonies
4. Pioneer Day—a taste of American westward expansion

Everything to plan a living history event is here—instructions, recipes, checklists, and tips to vary each activity. An appendix provides scheduling charts to get organized and sample notes to help you communicate with parents and volunteers. Also included are reproducible handouts so kids can create souvenir booklets that will keep them learning after the day is over. Many of these handout pages can themselves be expanded into additional activities.

A typical living history event is presented as a full day of activities. Groups of children rotate through 10–15 stations with one adult supervisor per station. Stations are organized by theme. Pioneer Day themes, for example, include the journey west, Chinese culture in the west, Spanish culture in the west, Native American culture in the west, railroads and telegraphs, and pioneer life. Choose one or more stations from each theme but include all themes for a well-rounded event.

STRUCTURING YOUR LIVING HISTORY EVENT

Here are some things to keep in mind when planning your living history event:

1. Children rotate through stations in groups of 8–12. You will need the same number of groups as the number of mid-day stations you have chosen, so that all stations are being used throughout the day. Designate which children will be in each group ahead of time to avoid squabbles and delay. All children in a group will have the same kid-friendly group name. Color-coded group nametags (red for “Pyramid Builders”; blue for “Hammurabi’s Heroes,” for example) aid in quick identification. An even number of children per group works best for station activities requiring pairs.
2. Keep children in their original groups and maintain their rotation order throughout the day. For example, to reduce confusion and maintain traffic flow, the same “Buffalo Hunters” will follow the same “Tumbleweeds” through all rotations until everyone reassembles at the end of the day.
3. To assist with organization and instruction, start the day with an activity at station 1 that all children participate in together. Then begin the rotation, starting one group of children at station 2, one group at station 3, and so forth. At the next rotation, all children at station 2 will move to station 3; all children at station 3 will move to station 4; all children at the last station will move to station 2.
4. Use the Sample Rotation Schedule (Appendix 1) as a guide to plan your day. Allow 30 minutes for each beginning and end-of-day activity, 15–20 minutes for each mid-day station, and 3–5 minutes for each rotation.
5. Schedule like-themed activities one after the other so kids finish one theme before moving to the next. For example, during Native American Culture Day, kids should participate in all Plains activities before rotating to the Southwestern stations.
6. Designate one person in charge of timing. Use a bell, drum, bullhorn, or other noisemaker to signal station rotations. Rely heavily on a stopwatch or kitchen timer. Keep groups moving but have recess or specifically scheduled bathroom breaks throughout the day.
7. Provide each child with a bag to collect crafts and handouts. One suggested start-of-day activity is to make a gathering bag. A simple gathering bag can be made from a sheet of heavy paper (18" × 24" or larger) folded in half, stapled at the sides, and decorated with crayons or markers. Make sure each child puts his or her name on the gathering bag. There are suggested activities, such as singing and storytelling, for children to do while preparing their gathering bags. Alternatively, gathering bags can be made ahead of time as a previous school or scouting project, and, of course, plastic or paper grocery bags work in a pinch.
8. Children receive printed handouts at each station to create a souvenir booklet. Booklets are assembled at one of the final stations, generally along with group photos or an end-of-day feast. Provide two sheets of 8½" × 11" paper per child, slip handouts inside, and staple. Children can decorate the cover with colored markers or crayons while participating in discussions about what they learned and how life is different today. Make sure to have a camera and extra film handy at this station and throughout the day.
9. Teachers may want to keep grade-level curriculum standards in mind when choosing which event to present. Schools can present school-wide events over several years to cover multiple curriculum standards. Scouting groups can select events to coincide with badges and award requirements.

10. Don't forget local resources when planning your event. Relatives, museum docents, historians, craftsmen, and artists love to share their knowledge or culture with kids. People will be more willing to volunteer an hour or two than a whole day though, so try to schedule their participation at the beginning or end of the day when they can give their presentation once to the whole group.
11. Pool resources with other leaders. Teachers, for example, can cooperate with same-grade teachers in their school or community for a single living history event. Similarly, fourth grade teachers presenting an end-of-the year Pioneer Day might consider including graduating third graders and their teachers and parent volunteers.
12. Reproducible scheduling aids and notices are provided to help you plan your event. Use Appendix 1, the Sample Rotation Schedule, as a guide to help schedule your rotations. Use Appendix 2, the Master Volunteer Schedule, to help coordinate volunteers. Appendixes 3, 4, and 5 can be used to communicate with parents, volunteers, and people who may be donating supplies for your event.

HOW TO RESIZE AN EVENT

What if you can't set aside a whole day for living history? What if you are low on volunteers? What if you want to present living history to a smaller group of children? Or a larger one?

Jump Back in Time living history events are ideally suited for a large number of children—three classrooms, or a Cub Scout pack, for example. But because of their flexibility, they can just as easily be presented in other formats. For example, if time and volunteers are limited, teachers can present a living history “week” by scheduling one or more activities per day. Similarly, scout leaders can present a living history “month” by scheduling a few activities per meeting over several weeks. To schedule a Pioneer Week, you might present a Westward Ho! mini event on Monday, a Home on the Range mini event on Tuesday, and so on.

If you are presenting an event for fewer children, you can either make your groups smaller—5–6 children each—or you can have two or three larger groups of 10–15 children each. Although it is easier to maintain control within smaller groups, a fewer number of large groups means that not all stations need to be presented at the same time. Four larger groups, for example, could rotate in the morning through one combined station followed by four rotations and then through four rotations followed by one combined station in the afternoon, thus reducing the number of adult leaders needed. You should, however, allow an additional 5 minutes per station for larger groups, which tend to waste more time in disorganization.

If you are planning a larger event—a schoolwide affair or fund-raiser, for example—you will want to structure it so that each child's participation is approximately one to two hours. Therefore you will choose 4–6 rotation stations. Children can participate in the beginning activities while they are waiting to start the rotation. Consistent and firm rotation timing is even more important at larger events to maintain organization and traffic flow. Additionally, for these larger events, remember to specify a firm time when the last group of children begins the rotation process so that you can ultimately end the event.

TIPS FOR EXTRA FUN

Each activity in this manual can be completed within a 15–20 minute period. It is generally better to keep kids moving than for them to have time left over with nothing to do. Therefore, this resource

includes “Tips for Extra Fun” for each station with ideas for additional activities or enhancements that can be done at that station. Here are some tips to make the whole event more fun.

- Be sure to renumber your stations, if needed. For example, if you plan a Colonial America Day using only 10 of the possible 16 stations, renumber yours 1–10.
- Whenever possible, precut paper patterns and string and pre-punch holes to help the day move more smoothly.
- Provide small prizes, candies, ribbons, or classroom points for game winners.
- Signs with the station name and number at each station help direct traffic. Large computer-printed banners are great, but simple handwritten signs are just as effective. Whenever possible, personalize stations with adult leader, town, and school names. For example, stations named “Mission del Smith,” “Mrs. Gregory’s Better Butter Shop,” and “Brookville Railroad” make the day more fun.
- When scheduling rotations, try alternating indoor and outdoor activities, crafts and games, standing and sitting.
- Consider having water or punch (and cups) at some stations and have access to soap and water, hand sanitizer, or wipes when cooking and eating.
- A shaded rule at the top and bottom of pages in this book indicates patterns, maps, handouts, or stories intended to be photocopied and used for your event. In addition, you may wish to make single copies of station instructions and text meant to be read aloud. Note that maps are to be used as reference and are not intended to be precise in detail.
- Encourage kids and leaders to dress in costume. Many diverse peoples lived throughout history, so ethnic costumes of all kinds work for these events. Ideas for simple costumes, props, and accessories are included at the beginning of each unit. A red bandana or a Grecian sheet “toga” may be all that’s needed to get kids in the mood. At least consider providing a few costumes or props for end-of-day group photographs.
- Let local media and businesses know what you’re doing. A bit of publicity and community awareness often yields volunteers and donated supplies. It might even help you snag a local historian or celebrity to spin tales for your start or end of day.

NOW JUMP BACK IN TIME!

Based on the guidelines in this manual, Pioneer Day was presented to groups of 100 fourth graders three separate years at a California public school, despite strict fingerprinting requirements that limited the number of volunteers available. You can do it, too.

Whether you want a single day of fun or a week of mini events. Whether you want to present living history to 20 kids or 1,000. Whatever part of the world and place in history you want to share with children—you can do it. Simply don your toga, slip into your moccasins, grab your quill pen, and start planning. Can’t you almost smell those tortillas sizzling on the griddle? Don’t just imagine history. Grab those kids, jump back in time, and live it!