



POWELL CENTER FOR
ECONOMIC LITERACY

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Pioneer Choices

How the Pioneers Used Their Productive Resources

Time Required

15 Minutes

Grade Level and Subject

Elementary and Middle School; U.S. History

Economic Concepts

Choice - *A selection among alternatives. Scarcity requires individuals, businesses and nations to make choices.*

Productive Resources - *the natural, human, capital, and entrepreneurial resources that are used to produce goods and services.*

Overview

Early pioneers traveled into unsettled territories where they knew they would be required to rely on their own ability to survive. Careful use of their productive resources helped them to settle the land. For a more in-depth look at the Pioneer Farmers, please see our website lesson, Pioneer Farmers.

Objectives

- Students will be able to explain the role of productive resources in the pioneers' decision to move west.

Materials and Handouts

- [Handout #1](#), Productive Resources. This can be posted on a bulletin board to be filled out by the class as a whole, or it can be given to each student to list the desired resources. Keeping the terms in front of the students will help them develop their economic vocabulary.
- Lincoln logs (if possible)
- Sawhorse or narrow table; small pillows or paper bags

Teaching Activity

The pioneer farmers had to have sufficient *productive resources* to survive in the new land. Explain the three kinds of productive resources: *human resources* (labor and people), *natural resources* (the "gifts" of nature such as land, timber, etc.), and *capital resources*, also called *capital goods* (equipment, tools, wagons, etc.). To help students differentiate between the various types of resources, ask them to imagine they are a pioneer building a house. Ask the following questions:

- What human resources do we use today to build a house? (carpenters, plumbers, etc.) Did the pioneers have access to all these helpers? Who had to perform these tasks? (the family unit)
- What natural resources are used in building a house? (land to put it on, timber, field stones, etc.)
- What capital resources do you need? (axes to chop down trees, hammers, nails, etc.). How would the pioneers have access to capital resources? (either they brought the tools with them, or they made them)
- If you have access to a Lincoln Log set, show the students the notched ends of the logs. Why was that important for the farmers? (Pioneers could substitute a human resource [cutting the logs] for a scarce capital resource [nails] that would have taken up valuable wagon space.)
- Will all of the workers (or family members) perform the same job? (No, each worker performs the job he or she does best. This is *division of labor or specialization*.)
- In what areas might you have *scarcity* (the condition of not being able to have all the goods and services you need)? (Answers will vary. Some will center on the small number of workers available, the availability of good trees, or the tools that had to be left behind)

Divide students into groups of four to five. Tell them to imagine they are among the first families moving to the wilderness west of the Appalachian Mountains. Their new home will be a plot of land covered with trees. In order to build a new life and a new farm, they must make important decisions about what to bring before they leave. Remind them that everything will be transported by packhorse. A good visual for this activity is a sawhorse or small narrow table which represents the packhorse. Use paper bags or pillowcases to represent saddlebags. Have students list some of the items they would like to take and see how much they can load onto the "packhorse." (A math connection would be to find out how much a packhorse can actually carry and calculate how many horses it would take to carry the family possessions.)

Instruct groups to brainstorm, then list the items their families will bring and the reasons for their choices. Each group should share their list and explain the reasoning behind their choices.

Productive Resources

Human Resources	Natural Resources	Capital Resources

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