SECTION 2: 1701 – 1760 - FRENCH DETROIT

INTRODUCTION:
This unit helps third grade students understand the life and culture of the early French settlers that lived in Michigan in the first half of the 18th century. This unit includes a comprehensive background essay on the French and New France, as well as three lesson plans. The lesson plans include viewing and analyzing primary sources such as maps, objects and narratives. The unit includes a list of additional resources, and copies of worksheets and primary sources needed for the lessons.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:
• Why did the French settle in Detroit?
• What was daily life like for the French settlers in early Detroit?
• What was the relationship like between the French and the Native Americans who lived in the area?
• How did the French defend the settlement from hostile Native Americans and other European groups, like the British?

MICHIGAN GLCEs – THIRD GRADE

Social Studies:
• H3 – History of Michigan Through Statehood
  o 3-H3.0.2 – Explain how historians use primary and secondary sources to answer questions about the past.
  o 3-H3.0.6 – Use a variety of primary and secondary sources to construct a historical narrative about daily life in the early settlements of Michigan (pre-statehood).
  o 3-H3.0.7 – Use case studies or stories to describe how the ideas or actions of individuals affected the history of Michigan.
• G1 – The World in Spatial Terms
  o 3-G1.0.1 – Use cardinal directions to describe the relative location of significant places in the immediate environment.
• E1 – Market Economy
  o 3.E1.0.1 – Explain how scarcity, opportunity costs, and choices affect what is produced and consumed in Michigan.
  o 3.E1.0.3 – Analyze how Michigan’s natural resources influenced its economic development.

English Language Arts
• Informational Text
  o R.IT.03.01 – Identify and describe the basic elements, features, and purpose of a variety of informational genre including textbooks, encyclopedias, and magazines.
• Comprehension
  o R.CM.03.01 - Connect personal knowledge, experiences, and understanding of the world to themes and perspectives in text through oral and written responses.
LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

Students will:

• Understand the geographical factors which influence land use and the importance of the Detroit River in the development of Detroit.
• Learn the important role Detroit played in the fur trade.
• Gather and analyze information through small group discussion.
• Illustrate jobs at each step of the fur trade route through group skits.
• Demonstrate and apply the principle of supply and demand.
• Explain key events in Detroit's early history.
• Identify cause and effect relationships that shaped Detroit's history.
• Analyze the motives of the different groups that had an interest in the Detroit area.

BACKGROUND ESSAY:

After Columbus discovered the “New World”, people from many nations sailed across the Atlantic Ocean. In general, these travelers were looking for one (or more) of three things:

• Rich goods and wealth: Stories from the first sailing expeditions told about great wealth in the New World – gold, silver, furs, spices, wild animals and unique plants. Adventurers also sailed to the New World to find an easier sailing route to Asia, which would open up new trade routes.
• New territory: Many European Kings wanted new land, or colonies, to make their kingdoms larger. They offered generous rewards to men who would sail the seas, build forts, and claim new land for the king.
• A new life: Some travelers had fallen on hard times where they lived, and were looking for a new home with lots of land, few laws and restrictions, and great opportunities.

Starting in the early 1600s, many European nations sent ships, explorers and settlers across the Atlantic on huge sailing vessels. Many settled on the Atlantic coast of North America. For example, the French settled along the east coast of Canada, the British settled in Massachusetts and Virginia, the Dutch settled in New York and the Spanish settled in Florida. Some groups, especially the French, sent smaller boats inland to explore the Great Lakes region.

Under the powerful King Louis XIV, France became a center of European fashion. Fur coats and hats were a sign that a person was rich and important. There were not enough fur-bearing animals in Europe to supply all who wanted them, and as a result, furs were very expensive. French voyagers traveled to the New World to find a bigger source of fur and to make their fortune selling them in France. The trading and transportation of furs, especially beaver, became the most important economic force in Michigan between 1700 and 1815.

The fur business became a trading business because the Native American cultures did not want European money; they preferred to trade for goods. The fur trading process followed the seasons, moving goods when the rivers weren’t frozen. Native Americans and French trappers spent the fall and winter hunting, trapping, and skinning the animals. In
the spring, merchants from coast cities on the Atlantic Ocean sent men and trading supplies westward through the Great Lakes waterways. Tools, blankets, silver, muskets, and glass beads were distributed to traders and taken to smaller trading posts.

In the spring, the traders met the trappers to bargain for animal pelts, sometimes at the trading posts and sometimes at Native villages. The traders transported the pelts to large trading centers on the Atlantic Coast, where huge merchant sailing ships waited to carry the furs to Europe. In return, the merchants and sailors in Europe shipped back supplies to continue the trading process the next spring.

By the 1690s, the French traders had brought so many furs to France that the prices dropped. Also, the French had started quarreling with the Native American tribes in northern Michigan. King Louis XIV decided to stop the fur trade in Michigan. He closed all the forts, including those in Mackinac and St. Joseph, and called the traders back to France.

Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac was a Frenchman stationed at Mackinac in the 1690s. After he returned to France, he persuaded King Louis XIV that a French military post and colony at the southern part of the Great Lakes would be the best way to secure, control and protect French interests in the area. The King agreed to Cadillac’s idea.

Cadillac picked the location for his venture and called it Detroit, which is a French word for “the straits.” A strait is a waterway that connects two lakes. Cadillac arrived at Detroit on July 24, 1701, equipped with men and supplies to build a fort and settlement for the French King.

Detroit was a strategic place for the fur trade in Michigan. The Detroit River connects the Great Lakes of Erie and Huron. Lake Erie connects to Lake Ontario, and Lake Ontario connects with the Saint Lawrence River. The Saint Lawrence River connects to the Atlantic Ocean. This 2,000 mile waterway made it possible for the French to reach the heart of the American continent. Detroit was a perfect location for a settlement and a fort because the river was narrow and easy to defend against invaders. Also, the land was perfect for planting and farming.

**What Was Daily Life Like at Le Détroit?**

For almost fifty years, a bustling trading community grew on the Detroit River. For the first time, the land at the river was claimed and “owned.” French seigneurs, or nobleman, owned the lands; they also owned animals, fruit trees and important buildings like the church, the gristmill and the brewery. French settlers, called habitants, found jobs working on the seigneur’s property.

As the number of traders, military men, women and children in the fort grew, skilled tradesmen arrived to meet their needs. Barrel makers provided storage for grain, beverages and gunpowder. Bakers made bread, cakes and pastries. Carpenters built houses, buildings and boats. Blacksmiths forged metal tools and shoed the horses.

Cadillac invited Native Americans to live near the fort as trading partners. For Native women in the area, life continued according to tradition. They contributed to the tribal community by tanning hides, making clothes, gathering food, raising children and caring for elders. Some Native women married French trappers and learned to speak French.

Madame Cadillac was the first Caucasian woman to live in Detroit. For Caucasian women, daily life in Detroit was very different than in Europe or Canada, where they shopped at city markets for many family needs. Instead, they carried water to the house from the river, cooked over a fireplace and made their own soap, clothes, food and toys. If children learned to read and write, it was the women who taught them. There were no schools during this frontier century. Women coming from Europe and Canada to the Detroit frontier had to work very hard and learn many new life skills.
LESSON 1: THE RIBBON FARMS IN EARLY DETROIT

Materials Used:

- Data Elements:
  - DE 2.1: Ribbon Farms in Early Detroit
  - DE 2.2: Map: French Ribbon Farms, c. 1818
  - DE 2.3: Map: Contemporary Detroit Street Map
- Pencils and paper

Lesson Sequence:

1. Read DE 2.1: Ribbon Farms in Early Detroit to the students, or have them read it in small groups or by themselves. Lead a discussion around the following questions:
   a. What were the major concerns of the French settlers?
   b. What role did the Detroit River play in their lives?
2. Show the students DE 2.2: Map: French Ribbon Farms, c. 1818. Show how the land was divided into ribbon farms. Divide the students into groups and have them discuss farming and family life in the 1750s. Using DE 2.1 and DE 2.2 as references, ask each group to draw a ribbon farm on a piece of newsprint, as if they were creating a detailed map. They must draw the boundaries of the farm, and decide where to place their home, barn, fields, and so on. Ask them to consider:
   a. What was the farmer’s main route of transportation? (The river)
   b. Where would they build their house? Near the river or toward the back of the property? (near the river)
   c. What vegetables did they grow, and where did they place their fields? (Peas, squash, wheat – behind their homes between the house and the forests.)
   d. What animals did they have, and where did they live? (Oxen, milk cows, horses which they kept in barns on the property, near the house)
   e. Where did they do their hunting, and what did the land look like? (At the back of their property, where it is wooded. Also, fishing on the river front.)
   When finished, have each group present their maps to the class.
3. Conclude the lesson by giving each group a copy of DE 2.3: Map: Contemporary Detroit Street Map. Explain that a number of today's streets have French-sounding names (Livernois, Dequindre, St. Aubin, Chene, etc.) Have each group highlight all the streets that have French sounding names. Then, have them compare today’s map with DE 2.2: Map: French Ribbon Farms, c. 1818. Ask them if they see any similarities between the two maps. Explain that many of Detroit’s French street names come from the original habitants that settled in Detroit. The streets marked the boundaries between their ribbon farms. Even though the farms are long gone, the streets that bear these settlers names are still a part of Detroit today.

Extension Activities

1. Hold a class discussion. Almost everything found on a French Ribbon Farm was made and/or produced by the members of the family. How many things in your home are made and/or produced by members of the family? Where are most of the things in your house made and/or produced?
2. Review the role of men, women, and children during the years of the French settlements and compare them with life today in Detroit. Discuss why the Detroit River was so important to the French farmers. Ask the students if they think the Detroit River is important to the city today.
LESSON 2: THE FRENCH FUR TRADE

Materials Used:

- Data Elements:
  - DE 2.4: Photo: Beaver Pelt
  - DE 2.5: Chart: Fur Trade
  - DE 2.6: Letters: Fur Trade 1833
  - DE 2.7: Letters: John Askin
  - DE 2.8: Illustration: Royal Exchange
  - DE 2.9: The Hat Maker
  - DE 2.10: Variations on the Beaver Hat
  - DE2.11: Painting: King Louis XIV and Cadillac
- Worksheet:
  - WS 2.1: Fur Trade Job Descriptions
- Pencils and paper

Learning Sequence:

1. Divide the class into seven groups representing the different steps along the fur trade route and provide them the Job Description sheets and relevant Data Elements as follows:
   a. Native American trappers:
      i. DE 2.4: Photo: Beaver Pelt
      ii. DE 2.5: Chart: Fur Trade
   b. Voyagers:
      i. DE 2.6: Letters: Fur Trade 1833
   c. Detroit – Fort Trading Posts:
      i. DE 2.7: Letters: John Askin
   d. Todd and McGill Fur Trading Company, Montreal, Canada:
      i. DE 2.7: John Askin Papers
   e. Royal Exchange – London, England:
      i. DE 2.8: Illustration: Royal Exchange
   f. Hat Maker (Millinery):
      i. DE 2.9: The Hat Maker
      ii. DE 2.10: Variations on the Beaver Hat
   g. Consumer:
      i. DE 2.9: The Hat Maker
      ii. DE 2.10: Variations on the Beaver Hat

2. Introduce the lesson by showing DE 2.11: Painting: King Louis XIV and Cadillac and commenting on the beaver hats people are wearing in the painting. Tell the class that they will learn the process of the fur trade from the beaver to the beaver hat. Ask the students what they think/know about this process. Allow responses.

3. Ask the students to follow the directions on their Job Description sheets and discuss the process. Then they should prepare a short skit showing what their job is. They can use the data element document(s) in the skit if they want. Allow 15-20 minutes in groups while monitoring their progress.

4. Ask each group to share their skits.
5. Use the following scenarios to lead a discussion of how the process of supply and demand might be interrupted or changed by different factors. Ask groups how their jobs might be affected. Lead students in writing and developing stories to summarize:
   a. There is a bad trapping season and the number of beavers trapped is less than expected.
   b. Native Americans capture the boat carrying furs to Montreal.
   c. Native Americans need different trade goods.
   d. A better beaver trap is designed.
   e. A storm at sea sinks the ship with furs that is bound for London.
   f. A disease (such as cholera) sweeps through the Native American villages.
   g. War breaks out in Europe and/or war breaks out in America.
   h. The government imposes taxes on furs or requires hunting licenses.

6. Conclude the lesson by asking students how Detroit was important to the fur trading process. The major reason for founding Detroit was its strategic position for transportation of supplies and furs and as a gathering place for many different people from the Great Lakes area and beyond. Give students an opportunity to look at a large map and trace the route from Detroit to all of the Great Lakes and to France. Emphasize to students that there were few roads and that the area now known as Michigan was heavily forested. Rivers were the best mode of transportation at that time.

LESSON 3: HABITANTS AND VOYAGERS

Materials Used:

- Data Elements:
  - DE 2.6: Letters: Fur Trade 1833
  - DE 2.12: Story: A Spy in Old Detroit
- Worksheet:
  - WS 2.2: Voyageurs vs. Habitants
- Pencils and paper
- Chalkboard, white board or smart board

Lesson Sequence:

1. Explain that living in Detroit in the 1700s was very different than today. If they completed Lesson 1 on the Ribbon Farms, they know a little bit about what life was like for the habitant, or French farmer and settler.
2. Today they will get a chance to see what life was like for the French voyageur, or fur trapper. They typically left the safety of the Fort for the autumn and winter months to hunt for beaver and other animal pelts in the Michigan wilderness.
3. Divide the class into small groups. Give each group copies of DE 2.6: Letters: Fur Trade 1833, DE 2.12: Story: A Spy in Old Detroit and the worksheet. As they read, have the students fill in their worksheets by listing the characteristics of the voyageur’s life in one column, and Paul’s (or the habitant’s) life in the other column.
4. While the students are reading and discussing, draw a Venn diagram on the board. Label one circle “Voyageurs” and the other circle “Habitants.”
5. When the students are finished, lead a class discussion that compares and contrasts the lives of voyageurs and habitants. Use the Venn diagram to list the characteristics that are different (in the large circles) and similar (in the overlapping area) between the two groups.
6. To conclude the lesson, have the students write a brief paragraph telling who they would rather be, a voyageur or a habitant, and why.
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Books:


Links:


