Lesson Plan for High School Psychology Class

By Don Weller

Previous lessons:

Previous to this lesson students will have completed a study of human emotions, behaviors, personality, and values. They will also have read the thesis “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” by Frederick Jackson Turner and then participated in a teacher led discussion of the article and the settling of America. Several key words would have been defined such as imperial, manifest destiny, frontier, and technology.

Objectives:

Students will read letters written by people who lived in frontier America to try and develop a profile of human traits exhibited by these people such as emotion, behavior, personality, and values for the people represented in the letters.

Students will then work in groups using their profiles to hypothesize what these people might have done next. Each student will then write a one page letter taking on the character of one of the letter writers.

Materials:

Documents from the Library of Congress:

- Trails to Utah and the Pacific: Diaries and Letters 1846-1869
  Spooner, Elijah Allen Letters and Diaries 1849-1850
  March 11, 1849 March 2, 1850 August 25, 1850

- Prairie Settlement: Nebraska Photographs and Family Letters 1862-1912
  Letters from Uriah W Oblinger to Mattie V Thomas
  August 26, 1866 November 4, 1866
  Letters from Mattie V Thomas to Uriah W Oblinger
November 4, 1866 May 3, 1868

Letters from Giles S Thomas to Thomas Family

February 15, 1875 January 3, 1876 March 15, 1878

Procedures:

Divide students into three groups. Group one receives letters copied from the Library of Congress documents written by Elijah J Spooner. Group two receives letters copied from the Library of Congress documents written by Uriah W Oblinger and Mattie V Thomas. Group Three receives letters copied from the Library of Congress documents written by Giles S Thomas. Allow students fifteen minutes to read the letters. Give each group a copy of the discussion questions listed below. Allow groups fifteen minutes for discussion. Bring students back together and make a list on the board of the traits observed by each group. Lead a discussion about these traits asking students which of the traits would be the most important for survival on the frontier allow twenty five minutes.

Discussion Questions:

• What are some of the obvious human traits that you notice from the letters?

• Do you think the traits you observed are enough for these people to survive on the frontier?

• What additional information would you need to help you better understand these people?

Assignment:

Assign students the task of taking on the personality of one of the people from the letters presented in class. Have them write a one page letter that their person might have written next using the same language found in the original letter. Assignment due next class period.