Blazing Trails: Discovering Routes through Arizona to California

Students learn of the routes early explorers blazed in their travels through the Arizona territory. Along the way, students also learn about the Gila River and practice calculating distance as well.

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Grade Level: 4-5
Duration: 2 class periods

National Geography Standards
Element 5: Environment and Society
14. How human actions modify the physical environment.

Arizona Geography Strand 4
CONCEPT 4 Human Systems
GRADE 4
PO 3 Describe how the building of transportation routes resulted in human settlement and economic development in Arizona.

CONCEPT 5 Environment and Society
GRADE 5
PO 1 Describe the ways European colonists and Native Americans viewed, adapted, and used the environment.

Arizona Math Standard
STRAND 1: Number Sense and Operations
CONCEPT 1: Number Sense
GRADE 4
PO 7 Compare two whole numbers.

CONCEPT 2 Numerical Operations
GRADE 4
PO 4 Solve word problems using grade level appropriate operations and numbers.

GRADE 5
PO 2 Solve word problems using grade level appropriate operations and numbers.

CONCEPT 3 Estimation
GRADE 4
PO 3 – Estimate length and weight using both U.S. customary and metric units.
PO 4 – Estimate and measure for distance.

Overview
In this lesson students explore the different routes taken through the territory of Arizona. They investigate the importance of the Gila River and its tributaries. They learn of the early explorers who traveled through Arizona and the purpose for their travel. They also calculate the approximate distance of the routes and use this data to draw conclusions about distance and time.

Purpose
This activity is designed to help students gain an understanding of the early explorers and the routes they took through Arizona to reach California. The students will also use a map scale to determine the distance of the routes and then compare their findings.

Materials
- Blazing Trails map without trails marked (at least 1 per pair of students)
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- Blazing Trails map with trails marked (color transparency would be nice for teacher to use in pointing out the trails)
- Southwest U.S. Topography and Rivers map or a map of Arizona with the interstate highways
- A set of Fact/Task cards (1 set per pair of students)
- Colored pencils
- Question Sheet (1 per student)
- Question Sheet answer key
- Arizona Landforms and Rivers Map

**Objectives**
The student will be able to:

1. Find the Gila River and its tributaries on the Blazing Trails map.

2. Trace the routes taken by the early explorers.

3. Use the map scale to measure the approximate distance of those routes.

4. Find and compare the difference between the distances of the routes.

5. Calculate the time it took to travel the routes.

6. Analyze two maps to compare the past and the present routes through Arizona.

**Procedures**

1. Working with a partner, the students will read the six fact cards and complete each of the tasks. Each student will need to have a completed map in order to answer the questions. Or, read the facts together as class and then have groups of students complete each task. An additional technique to help students would be to copy the teacher’s answer key in black and white and then have the students trace the routes with colored markers, but be sure to have them color the appropriate trail.

2. After the students have completed the tasks review the routes on the overhead to insure that the students have their routes correct.

3. The students will answer the questions provided on the question sheet.

**Assessment**
The Question Sheet and the Blazing Trails map will be used as the assessment.

Assessing the geography on the map:
- Labeling the different routes that were taken (10 points)
- Identifying the routes taken by the explorers and the modern day interstate roads (5 points)

Assessing the geography on the Question Sheet:
- Questions 4 (5 points) and 5 (5 points) on the Question Sheet.

Assessing the math on the Question Sheet:
- Question 1 (10 points)
- Questions 2 (5 points) and 3 (5 points)

Mastery will be considered 80% or higher on the geography portion and on the math portion.

**Extensions**
If time is a problem, have the class divided into 6 groups, each doing one fact card. Then the groups could share their findings with the class, so each team would have all of the answers.

**Sources**

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