Go West!
(And Make Some Good Decisions)
Grade 2
Anna Cunningham
Andersen United Community School

2014 Thrivent Financial Personal Finance Educator Award
Elementary, 2\textsuperscript{nd} place
Innovation

This lesson is based on a lesson that we already do during our “Then and Now” social studies unit. As far as I know, it is an original lesson. I was inspired by a book, Miss Bridie Chose a Shovel by Leslie Connor in which an immigrant decides to take a shovel with her on the ship to America. She chose the shovel because it was most useful to her in creating her new life in America. She finds happiness and success in America because of her choice. I made a connection between this book and the second grade history unit I teach. It reminded me of a lesson that I already teach called “What Would go in Your Wagon?” about choices that had to be made by European settlers 150+ years ago as they migrated west in covered wagons. We normally do this activity in conjunction with the book Going West—one in the “My First Little House Books” series by Laura Ingalls Wilder. I saw an opportunity to refine the lesson to directly incorporate 2nd grade economics standards using ideas that I learned during the course Using Children’s Literature to Teach Economics at the University of Minnesota. More specifically, I am using the PACED decision-making grid to help students use criteria to make decisions that accomplish a goal.

Introduction

This learning activity will take place in Andersen United Community School in Minneapolis, MN. According to the 2012-2013 Continuous School Improvement Plan:

Andersen is located in the Phillips neighborhood and serves 1,150 K-8 students...
Andersen United Community School’s student populations consist of: 6% Native American, 20% African American, 2% Asian American, 69% Hispanic American and 3% Caucasian. 69% of students are English Language Learners. 15% of students receive special education services. 98% of students at Andersen qualify for free/reduced lunch support.

15% of students at Andersen are homeless or highly mobile.

This lesson is designed for second graders at Andersen United. At Andersen, science and social studies is co-taught by the ESL (English as a Second Language) teacher and the classroom
teacher in the ESL room. All students- both native and nonnative English speakers- receive this instruction. Average class size is between 18 and 20 students. Instruction is planned primarily by the ESL teacher, and co-planning with the classroom teacher happens once per week.

Lesson Context and Description:

The lesson is situated in a unit that addresses MN Social Studies Benchmark 2.4.2.4.1: Compare and contrast daily life for Minnesota, Dakota, or Anishinaabe peoples in different times, including before European contact and today.

The unit compares/contrasts the lives of the Anishinaabe and European settlers in the 1800s with present day life in MN. Leading up to this lesson, students have compared the housing/shelter of the settlers with the Anishinaabe and present day housing. Transportation is the current topic of comparison. This lesson assumes that students are already familiar with covered wagons as a mode of transportation for settlers long ago. (At this point in the unit, my students had made a model covered wagon out of milk cartons and paper.) It also assumes that students have a basic understanding of the economic concepts of scarcity and wants.

In this lesson, students learn about how settlers, with a goal of survival, had to make choices about what to bring on their journey given the scarcity of space in their covered wagons. The decisions are not necessarily easy, and several of the proposed items are debatable. This is not by accident. Many decisions that need to be made in life do not have black and white answers. Students will start to weigh the trade-offs of the different decisions made with the guidance of the teacher during group discussion. For this to happen, children must be able to listen to one another, respectfully disagree with one another and explain their thinking to be understood. This life skill is addressed in MN ELA Standard 2.8.1.1: Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 2 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

The MN K-12 economics standard addressed in this lesson is 2.2.1.1: Given a goal and several alternative choices to reach that goal, select the best choice and explain why.
Materials Needed

- One Post-it note for each student
- Pencils
- 1 Example PACED decision making grid for teacher think-aloud
- 3 PACED decision making grids for students- enough to give one of the three to a pair.
  Example: Divide students into 3 groups. Divide each group into pairs- each pair gets one grid. So if you have 20 students, you would divide them into 3 groups (2 groups of 7 and one of 6) and divide each group into 3 pairs or groups of 3. This would require 3 copies of each grid for the class, but make more to have extras on hand for pairs who finish early.
- Doc cam
- white board and markers
- image of a covered wagon on a screen or on the white board.
- One exit slip per student

Session 1 Procedures (about 45 minutes)

1. Review with students what happens when there is a scarcity problem. For example: You have a small bag and a lot of things you want to put in it, but there is a scarcity of space. *(Desired answer: People must make a choice about what goes in the bag.)* Ask students, “How do we choose what goes in the bag?” *(Desired answer: It depends on what the bag is for- the goal of the bag.)*

2. Go over learning target with students: *I can use criteria to make decisions that help reach a goal.* Define **criteria** and **goal.** *(Criteria is are tests that something must pass. A goal is something that people want to happen.)* Let them know that being able to use criteria make good decisions is a very important life skill.

3. Have an image of a covered wagon projected onto the screen. Remind students that this was the mode of transportation that settlers used to move their families west. Explain that they are going to learn about important decisions that the settlers had to make to achieve their goal of making the difficult journey west.
4. Read aloud *Going West* by Laura Ingalls Wilder.

5. Go back to page 12 where the family is packing up their covered wagon. Say, “*Laura’s family had to make important decisions about what to put in their wagon. Today, we are going to practice making similar decisions.*”

6. Remind them that the trip lasted months and that there were no stores to buy things along the way. In addition, when they got to their destinations, they would have to build their own houses.

7. Ask students to turn and tell the person next to them one thing they would put in their covered wagons. When students have an idea about what they would bring, have them write or draw it on a post-it note and put on the covered wagon on the screen.

8. Read some of their ideas from the post-it notes.

9. Pose the essential question: “How do people make decisions to reach their goals? For example, how do you think the settlers decided what to put in the covered wagons when there was a scarcity of space?” Create a list on the board of student responses. *Possible answers might include: They thought about what they needed most, rock-paper-scissors, they worked together to agree, they made a list, etc.*)

10. Tell students that we are going to use three criteria (tests) to decide what to put in the wagon. Explain that the three criteria we will use are:

   a. **Just the right size and weight**- We cannot put things in the wagon that won’t fit. We also cannot bring things that are too heavy because we don’t want our oxen or horses to get too tired pulling the wagon across the prairie.

   b. **Help people survive**- the goal of the trip is to reach our new home alive. Therefore, whatever we put in the wagon must be absolutely necessary for us to survive. (Review items that will satisfy our want of survival: food, water, air, shelter, and clothing. In addition, touch on some of the dangers on the frontier trails such as wild animals, dangerous river crossings, getting stuck in the mud, broken wagon wheels, sickness, etc.)

   c. **Hard to find in nature**- If it’s something that we could find easily on the trail, it’s not something that we would put in our wagon.

   d. Explain that they will be looking for things that meet all three criteria.
11. On doc cam, show students the PACED decision making grid for the scenario. Tell them that this is a helpful tool for making difficult decisions to reach goals and that they will learn how to use this tool today.

12. Explain the grid. “The row across the top tells us about the criteria that we just talked about. The column on the left side shows us the things we have to choose from. We have to decide if these things would be good choices to bring with us in our wagons.”

13. Tell students that the grid can help people reach their goals. Remind students what the settlers’ goal was (to survive the trip west and make a new home).

14. Tell students that they will be working in groups (groups of 2 or 3) to decide what to put in their wagons to meet the goal. They will be using the PACED decision–making grid as a tool to help decide what should go in the wagon. Model with a think-aloud how to fill out the example grid.

15. We have a scarcity of space on our wagon, so we must choose very carefully what we put in it. We want to bring things that pass all three of these criteria. For each item, we will look at how well it passes each criterion. First, we want to bring things that will fit in the wagon and won’t be too heavy for our oxen to pull. Second, we only want to bring things that we need to survive. Third, we want to make sure that what we bring isn’t something that we can find easily in nature because we won’t need to pack things that we can easily find along the way. There is one choice on each grid that is the best. Let’s look at the first choice on the example grid: a piano. Is a piano going to fit well into our covered wagon? (No–draw a sad face) Is it something that the settlers will need to survive? (No–draw a sad face). Would a piano be hard for the settlers to find in nature during their trip across the prairie? (Yes–draw a smiley face)

16. Let’s count the smiles–That’s how many points the piano will receive on our chart. The piano only has one smile (one point), so it is not a good choice for the covered wagon…”

17. Model the second choice on the grid. Let students know that sometimes they will find an object that could go either way depending on how it’s justified. A good example this is the lantern. At first glance, the lantern might not be something needed for
survival, but with some justification (E.g.- You face danger if you can’t see.) it passes the “Helps people survive” criterion and can receive a smiley face.

18. For ambiguous items, it is very important for students to respectfully disagree and explain their thinking. (*Who remembers what to say when you disagree with your partner? I respectfully disagree because _____*)

19. Move onto the last choice- the firewood. Firewood could fit in the wagon, it is needed to build fires to cook food- therefore needed for survival- but it is a natural resource readily found during the journey. The firewood gets 2 points. (Unless you have a student argue that previous settlers already used all of the firewood, or that trees are scarce on the prairie.)

20. Work with students to figure out which of the three items on the list would be the best choice (*the lantern because it earned 3 points*). On any given grid, only one of the choices meets all three criteria.

21. Pair up students and give them one grid per pair. There are 3 different grids, so not everybody will be working on the same one. For example, if there are 24 students, 4 pairs will be working on any given grid.

22. Circulate as students work, assisting as needed.

23. After about 10 minutes, check in with students and collect papers. Review the learning target: *I can use criteria to make decisions that help reach a goal.* Ask them what went well and what was difficult in using the grid to make a decision. Review the definition of **goal** and **criteria**.

**Session 2** (about 45 minutes)

1. Read the essential question: *How do people make decisions to reach their goals?*

2. Read the learning targets:
   a. *I can use criteria to make decisions that help reach a goal.*
   b. *I can share my thinking with others by telling them what we decided to put into the wagon and why.*

3. Pass papers out to students. Divide the class into 3 groups. All students who completed Grid #1 will be in group 1, Grid #2 students will be in group 2, and so on.
4. Explain that they are going to talk to each other to find out if they made similar decisions on their grids. If there is a disagreement, they need to listen to each other until they agree on a choice. Then they are to nominate one person to represent the group and share their grid and their thinking with the class.

5. Circulate the room as students share their decisions with their groups. Assist as needed.

6. Bring the class together on the carpet. Have representatives from each of the three groups share their grids, their decisions, and their thinking with the class. Ask each representative if there were any disagreements in the group and how they worked them out to come to a decision. Inform students that these are probably the kinds of discussions that the settlers had when they were deciding what to put in their wagons!

7. **Closure:** Review the essential question. *How do people make decisions to reach their goals?* Ask students to turn and talk to come up with an answer that uses the word “criteria.” (E.g.- *They use criteria to help them decide which is the best choice.*)

8. Go back over the learning target: *I can share my thinking with others by telling them what we decided to put into the wagon and why.* Ask students how they think they did- what went well and what didn’t go so well in meeting the learning target.

9. Tell students that before they leave, they will have to show how well they can use criteria to make a decision that meets the goal of surviving a long trip in a covered wagon.

10. Send students back to desks. Pass out the exit slip and read the items aloud to the class as students complete individually. Tell them to circle the best choice for the wagon.

11. Collect their papers for assessment.

**Reflection**

The exit slip is the evaluation tool used to assess how well students *can use criteria to make decisions that help reach a goal.* Because I didn’t actually do this exact lesson with students, I’m curious to see how well they do.
Before my maternity leave, I did get a chance to show my students how to complete the PACED decision making grid. We did the “Danny Chooses a Pet” activity together to familiarize them with how to complete this kind of grid. Then, we used the grid again in another activity related to a story that we read. They did very well using the criteria to make decisions, although using a grid to make decisions seemed unnatural to them, and they would not yet be able to independently apply this tool to other situations. I am excited to incorporate this economics concept into our history unit to give students more opportunities to practice making sound decisions.