Observation Skills

During this lesson your students will complete one or more tasks in which they will enhance their observation skills and ability to follow directions. They will also learn about Custer’s Historical Stagecoach lines which provided daily accommodations for travelers from rail-heads at Sidney, Nebraska and Cheyenne, Wyoming. These are perfect activities for an afterschool group, club, elementary class or for home use.

Process:

- Introduce the activities by reading the information about Custer’s Historic Stage Coach on the following website. Images of the Past
  1. The article introduces many challenges faced by the drivers/passengers of the stagecoach. Discuss some of these challenges and how they have been resolved in modern travel.
  
  Below are a few challenges to get the conversation started.
  1. Unpredictable weather: tornadic rain/wind, whiteout blizzards, extreme heat/cold
  2. Unpassable roads after rainstorms or snow melt
  3. River crossings
  4. Robberies
  5. Wood benches
  6. Exposure to the elements
  7. Food
  8. Tired horses
  9. Boredom

Below are a few examples of accommodations/comforts we take for granted that have helped to resolve the challenges listed above.
  1. Live radar available on smart phones, Emergency Broadcast Alerts, NOAA, all-wheel drive, climate controlled compartments, etc.
  2. Crowned roads with gravel, blacktop or cement, establishment of city, county and state department of roads, all-wheel drive, highway system, etc.
  3. Bridges, dams and ferries
  4. 911 (law enforcement)
  5. Comfortable seating, lumbar support, heated seats, etc.
  6. Climate controlled compartments
7. Restaurants, convenience stores, coolers, etc.
8. Engines, gas stations, mechanics, etc.
9. DVD player, radio, games, personal devices

The drivers of the stagecoaches had to use prior knowledge and superb observation skills to safely navigate the extreme challenges at hand. For example, the close observation (and prior knowledge) of wind direction and cloud buildup/movement would help a driver dictate whether it was safe to proceed or to turn around and take cover. Also, observing a heavy rainfall, the swiftness of the current and the rise of a river would help a driver decide whether it was safe to cross.

Below are two activities designed to help your students develop their observation skills, learn to follow directions/cues and have fun at the same time.

1. **What’s Missing?** - During this teacher guided activity, your students will use their detective (observation) skills to figure out what has been removed from a room.
   - Provide the students 1–3 minutes (amount of time depends on age) to look around the classroom (any room you select) and mentally try to remember everything in the room.
   - Have the students leave the room.
   - Remove one item from the room or add an item to the room.
   - Have the students return.
   - Provide the students 1–3 minutes (amount of time depends on age) to look around the classroom and see if they can identify the item. No one is allowed to talk/visit or identify the item during this time.
   - Identify the item.
   - The activity above can be modified in many ways to meet the needs of your students.
     - Add/remove more than one item.
     - The student can used a notebook to draw items in the room.
     - The students can use a notebook to take notes.
     - Allow them to take photos with an IPad, phone or camera (could place on screen).
     - Take the students to a room they have never been in before.
     - Hints/clues could be given or left.
     - Move something from one place to another.
2. **Whiteout (Verbal Map)** – During this activity your students will learn the cardinal directions, observe a system of movements, understand the importance of writing and following detailed descriptions/directions and they will work with a group of students to complete a specific task.

**NOTE:** Students will be blindfolded so safety precautions should be considered to keep the students safe.

- The goal of the activity is to move through the course in the least amount of time without hitting the milk cartons.
- Using large posters, mark the walls of a large multipurpose room/gym with the four directions. The activity could be completed on a football field.
- Divide the students into groups of three to four. One student from each group will be blindfolded (mimicking whiteout conditions) and placed in the middle of the room.
- The remaining students from each group should place empty milk cartoons on pre-marked (by educator) locations on the floor to construct an obstacle course.
- The students should then work together to develop a list of commands to successfully navigate their blindfolded partner through the obstacle course. The commands must be written down and not changed during the activity.
- The following commands in the following categories are allowed.
  - **Directions:**
    - Left or Right
    - North, South, East or West
    - Degrees (0 – 360)
  - **Movement**
    - Paces
    - Steps
- These are ideas to consider and modifications that could be made.
  - Have the students complete a task, like delivering the mail or passengers.
  - The students will soon realize that the length of a pace/step can vary depending on the student.
  - Start with a simple obstacle course (2-3 cartons).
  - Remove all objects that might cause someone to fall.
  - Do not complete the activity in an area with steps, low hanging obstructions or drop-offs.
  - Increase the complexity as the students accommodate to the commands; add additional commands and categories.
  - At first this activity might seem impossible, but soon the students will familiarize themselves with the commands.

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