

From Wagon Wheels to the Digital Highway: The Cougar Cast Network Sample Needs Statement

Mr. Bradbury and his class of fourth-grade students had spent two weeks studying the Westward Migration, part of their social studies curriculum during fourth grade. They had tracked the journeys of European immigrants to Ellis Island and had followed them as they traveled west toward Utah. They had followed the migration of the Chinese along the tracks of the railroads and had studied the lives of Mormon pioneers. Now it was time to use their background knowledge to complete a project with real meaning.\

Mr. Bradbury provided the framework and a grading rubric for the final project for the Westward Migration Unit: Each student was to research his or her own history and prepare a report that explained how each of them ended up living in St. George, Utah. They had two weeks.

Jimmy started his search in the school library. He knew that his family had moved from Mexico to California and then to Utah. He found a book about California that had a whole chapter on Mexican immigrants. Talking to his parents and Tia Rosa, Jimmy discovered that his family had lived in a desert area in Mexico that experience severe drought. He was told that because there was no water, their family couldn't farm.

They moved to California to work on the farms there, but when Jimmy's uncle said that he had found a house and a construction job in Utah, Jimmy's mom and dad decided to come, too. After interviewing his parents and aunt and uncle and after reading the chapter on immigration in the California book, Jimmy began working on his project presentation.

From his teacher, Jimmy got a piece of art paper on which he drew three vertical lines. In the first section, using careful cursive, he wrote about his family's decision to leave Mexico and their journey to California and then Utah. In the second section, Jimmy drew a picture of their house in Mexico and a picture of their house in Santa Clara. In the last section, Jimmy drew a small map of western North America and a dotted line tracing the family's journey. Finally, he used crayons from his classroom to lightly color over the three sections, making his report look like a flag of Mexico.

When Mr. Bradbury saw Jimmy's final project, he was thrilled. Jimmy had included his history, where they had started, why they had migrated, the length of the journey, and where they had ended up. He had done everything Mr. Bradbury had asked—and neatly, too. Jimmy should have been very proud of his work and his presentation. He was excited to present to his class—until Wyatt did his presentation the day before Jimmy's.

Wyatt's ancestors also immigrated to Utah; they came from Denmark. They were considered Mormon pioneers. They had come three generations before, homesteading land and building businesses. Wyatt also talked to his parents about immigration, but Wyatt's project looked very different than Jimmy's. Wyatt presented a sixteen-slide Microsoft PowerPoint presentation he prepared on this computer at home.

His presentation contained original photographs that Wyatt had taken the summer before on a genealogical tour of Denmark he did with his family. They had traveled to the birthplace of his great-grandparents and photographed their rock home and their gravestones. He had traced their journey from a Danish seaport to Ellis Island, where he had taken pictures during the summer after third grade.

Wyatt's presentation included music from a Danish composer, his original photos, sound bites from his grandfather, and excerpts from his great grandmother's journal. His project had the same required elements that Jimmy's had, but they were presented in a different format.

Why do you think Jimmy no longer felt excited to present his project, no longer felt satisfied with his 8.5 x 11 piece of art paper? This is only one example of educational inequity. Examples like this exist in every classroom, in every school. This project-learning grant can level the playing field using technology. Your support of this project can ensure that every Jimmy, as well as every Wyatt, has the tools to produce his or her project, and feel pride in it.

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