



Primary Source Lesson Plan: Exploration of the Colorado River

This lesson is designed as an extension to section 3 in chapter 11 of the TCI textbook, *Social Studies Alive!* The primary sources included demonstrate the value of different and first-hand accounts when approaching history. The primary sources will give a rich and exciting “face” to the topic of the exploration of the Colorado River.

Name of Primary Source

- Journals written during the exploration of the Colorado River by James White, John Wesley Powell, and Leo Brown and Franklin Nims

How primary source ties into text

- **Qualifies:** The primary sources included (journals) give the exploration of the Colorado River a face and a “story” that the textbook sets up.
- **Elaborates:** The primary sources included provide a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the experiences and hardships had by the early explorers of the Colorado River.
- **Raises questions:** Through these primary sources, the students are able to better answer such questions as:
 - What did early explorers experience?
 - How did the Native Americans and the early explorers relate to one another?

Colorado Standards

- 1995 History 3: Understand that societies are diverse and have changed over time
- 2010 Social Studies Standard 1: History develops moral understandings, defines identity, and creates an appreciation of how things change while building skills in judgment and decision making. History enhances the ability to read varied sources and develop the skills to analyze, interpret, and communicate.
- Reading and Writing 1: Read and understand a variety of materials
- Reading and Writing 3: Write and speak using conventional grammar, usage, sentence structure, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling

Big Idea

- Read and respond to [primary sources] as a way to deepen comprehension and explore similarities and differences among stories, authors, and perspectives, (Literacy Planning Guide: Grade 4: Unit 5: Lesson 20.).
- Understand the differences in experiences of the three explorers and the difficulties that they encountered because of the rough and dry terrain and the nature of the Colorado River.

Critical thinking

- After reading section 3 in chapter 11 about the early explorers of the Colorado River. How did the primary sources (journals) deepen your understanding of the exploration of the Colorado River?
- Was John Wesley Powell the first American to see the Grand Canyon from the bottom?
- How did the expeditions of James White, John Wesley Powell, and Leo Brown and Franklin Nims differ?
- How did the experiences of the explorers change with time?
- What did you learn about the Colorado River from the explorers’ accounts that you did not know before?

Mini-Lesson

Teaching

Begin by reading section 3 in chapter 11. Create a timeline of the exploration of the Colorado River. Discuss what it must have been like in the Colorado River Basin if every group of explorers left the area thinking that the Colorado River could not provide enough water for a settlement. The Spanish explorers didn't even bother to name the river.

Active Engagement

Read the excerpt by John Wesley Powell. Fill out the **Response Journal**. This will be used later, after the other excerpts are read as well.

Read the passages by Nims and White. *If time is a concern, consider having half of the class complete the following activities for only one of the explorers.

Chain of Events: Have the students choose an explorer and his excerpt to illustrate, making sure that the main events are present and understood.

Plot Map: Students should complete this organizer as a way to build comprehension and a deeper understanding as a precursor to beginning their newspaper article.

Front Page Headline: The students can use this organizer to write an article as if they had interviewed one of the explorers. Consider hanging the articles up with your timeline.

“The Valley of the Colorado” by John Wesley Powell

The Colorado River is formed by the junction of the Grand and Green.

The Grand River has its source in the Rocky Mountains, five or six miles west of Long's Peak, in latitude $40^{\circ} 17'$ and longitude $105^{\circ} 43'$ approximately. A group of little alpine lakes, that receive their water directly from perpetual snow banks, discharge into a common reservoir, known as Grand Lake, a beautiful sheet of water.

The Green River heads near Frémont's Peak, in the Wind River Mountains, in latitude $43^{\circ} 15'$ and longitude $109^{\circ} 45'$ approximately. This river, like the last, has its sources in alpine lakes, fed by everlasting snows.

These streams, born in the cold, gloomy solitudes of the upper mountain-region, have a strange, eventful history as they pass down through gorges, tumbling in cascades and cataracts, until they reach the hot, arid plains of the Lower Colorado, where the waters that were so clear above empty as turbid floods into the gulf of California.

The upper two-thirds of the basin rises from four to eight thousand feet above the level of the sea. This high region, on the east, north, and west, is set with ranges of snow-clad mountains, attaining an altitude above the sea varying from eight to fourteen thousand feet. All winter long, on its mountain-crested rim, snow falls, filling the gorges, half burying the forests, and covering the crags and peaks with a mantle woven by the winds from the waves of the sea - a mantle of snow. When the summer-sun comes, this snow melts, and tumbles down the mountainsides in millions of cascades. Ten million cascade brooks unite to form ten thousand torrent creeks; ten thousand torrent creeks unite to form a hundred rivers beset with cataracts; a hundred roaring rivers unite to form the Colorado, which rolls, a mad, turbid stream, into the Gulf of California.

So all the streams cut deeper and still deeper until their banks are towering cliffs of solid rock. These deep, narrow gorges are called cañons.

For more than a thousand miles along its course, the Colorado has cut itself such a cañon; but at some few points, where lateral streams join it, the cañon is broken, narrow, transverse valleys divide it properly into a series of cañons.

All the scenic features of this cañon land are on a giant scale, strange and weird. The streams run at depths almost inaccessible; lashing the rocks which beset their channels; rolling in rapids; and plunging in falls, and making a wild music which but adds to the gloom and solitude.

These cañon gorges, obstructing cliffs and desert wastes, have prevented the traveler from penetrating the country, so that, until the Colorado River Exploring Expedition was organized, it was almost unknown. Yet enough had been seen to foment rumor, and many wonderful stories have been told in the hunter's cabin and prospector's camp. Stories were related of parties entering the gorge in boats, and being carried down with fearful velocity into whirlpools, where all were overwhelmed in the abyss of waters.

There were many stories current of parties wandering on the brink of the cañon, vainly endeavoring to reach the waters below, and perishing with thirst at last in sight of the river which was roaring its mockery into dying ears.

More than once I have been warned by Indians not to enter this canon. They considered it disobedience to the gods and contempt for their authority, and believed that it would surely bring upon me their wrath.

For two years previous to the exploration, I had been making some geological studies among the heads of the cañon leading to the Colorado, and a desire to explore the Grand Cañon itself grew upon me. Early in the spring of 1869, a small party was organized for this purpose. Boats were built in Chicago, and transported by rail to the point where the Union Pacific Railroad crosses the Green River. With these we were to descend the Green into the Colorado, and the Colorado down to the foot of the Grand Cañon.

Source: John Wesley Powell, *The Exploration of the Colorado River*. Garden City, New York: Anchor Books and the American Museum of Natural History 1961. Pages 1-7.

“An Adventure on the Colorado River, 1867.” By James White

After reaching Colorado City, Colo., Baker proposed a prospecting trip to the San Juan. There we got our outfit, and that spring the four of us started on the trip and went over to the Rio Grande.

From the Rio Grande we went over to the head of it, down on the Animas, up the Eureka Gulch. There we prospected one month. We dug a ditch 150 feet long and 15 feet deep. We moved over into the Mancos.

We followed the Mancos [River] down until we struck the San Juan [River]. Then we followed the San Juan down as far as we could and then swam our horses across and started over to the Grand River [now the Colorado River], but before we got to the Grand River we struck a canyon; so we went down that canyon and camped there three days. We could not get out the canyon on the opposite side; so we had to go out the canyon the same way we went down. There we were attacked by Indians and Baker was killed. We did not know there were any Indians about until Baker was shot. Baker, falling to the ground, said, “I am killed.” The Indians were hiding behind the rocks overlooking the canyon. Baker expired shortly after the fatal shot, and, much to our grief, we had to leave his remains, as the Indians were close upon us; and George Stroll and I had to make our escape as soon as possible, going back down in the canyon. We left our horses in the brush and we took our overcoats, lariats, guns, ammunition and 1 quart of flour, and I also had a knife scabbard made out of rawhide, and I also had a knife, and we started afoot down the canyon.

We traveled all day until about 5 o'clock, when we struck the head of the Grand Canyon of the Colorado River. There we picked up some logs and built a raft. We had 200 feet of rope when we first built the raft, which was about 6 feet wide and 8 feet long, just big enough to hold us up. The logs were securely tied together with the ropes. We got on our raft at night, working it with a pole. We traveled all night, and the next day, at 10 o'clock, we passed the mouth of the San Juan River. We had smooth floating for three days. The third day, about 5 o'clock, we went over a rapid and George washed off, but I caught hold of him and got him on the raft again.

From the time we started the walls of the canyon were from two to three thousand feet high, as far as I could estimate at the time, and some days we could not see the sun for an hour, possibly two hours. Each day we would mix a little of the flour in a cup and drink it. The third day the flour got wet, so we scraped it off of the sack and ate it. That was the last of the flour and all we had to eat.

On the fourth day we rebuilt our raft, finding cedar logs along the bank from 12 to 14 feet long and about 8 or 10 inches through. We made it larger than the first one. The second raft was about 8 feet wide and 12 feet long. We started

down the river again, and that was about 8 o'clock in the morning (as to our time, we were going by the sun) we got into a whirlpool and George was washed off. I hollered to him to swim ashore, but he went down and I never saw him again.

After George was drowned I removed my trousers, tying them to the raft, so I would be able to swim in case I was washed off. I then tied a long rope to my waist, which was fastened to the raft, and I kept the rope around my waist until the twelfth day.

About noon I passed the mouth of the Little Colorado River, where the water came in to the canyon as red as it could be, and just below that I struck a large whirlpool, and I was in the whirlpool about two hours or more before I got out.

I floated on all that day, going over several rapids, and when night came I tied my raft to the rocks and climbed upon the rocks of the walls of the canyon to rest. I had nothing to eat on the fourth day.

On the fifth day I started down the river again, going over four or five rapids, when night came I rested on the walls again and still nothing to eat.

On the sixth day I started down the river again, and I came to a little island in the middle of the river. There was a bush of mesquite beans on this island, and I got a handful of these beans and ate them. When night came I rested on the walls again.

The seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth days were uneventful, but still going continuously over rapids, and still nothing to eat. So I cut my knife scabbard into small pieces and swallowed them. During the entire trip I saw no fish or game of any kind.

On the eleventh day I went over a big rapid. I saw it before I came to it, and laid down on my stomach and hung to the raft and let the raft go over the rapid, and after getting about 200 yards below the rapid I stopped and looked at a stream of water about as large as my body that was running through the solid rocks of the canyon about 75 feet above my head, and the clinging moss to the rocks made a beautiful sight. The beauty of it can not be described.

On the twelfth day my raft got on some rocks and I could not get it off; so I waded on to a small island in the middle of the river. On this island there was an immense tree that had been lodged there. The sun was so hot I could not work, so I dug the earth out from under this tree and laid under it until the sun disappeared behind the cliffs. This was about noon. After resting I got up and found five sticks about as big as my leg and took them down to the edge of the island below my raft. I then untied the rope from my raft and took the loose

rope I had around my waist and tied these sticks together. I slept on this island all night.

On the thirteenth day I started out again on my newly made raft (leaving the old raft on the rocks), thinking it was daylight; but it was moonlight, and I continued down the river until daylight. While floating in the moonlight I saw a pole sticking up between two large rocks, which I afterwards learned the Government had placed there some years before as the end of its journey.

When daylight came I heard someone talking, and I hollered "hello," and they hollered "hello" back. I discovered then that they were Indians. Some of them came out to the raft and pulled me ashore. There were a lot on the bank, and I asked them if they were friendly, and they said that they were, and I then asked them to give me something to eat, when they gave me a piece of mesquite bread. While I was talking to some of the Indians the others stole my half-ax and one of my revolvers, which were roped to the raft. They also tore my coat trying to take it from me.

After eating the bread I got on my raft and floated until about 3 o'clock in the afternoon, when I came upon another band of Indians, and I went ashore and in to their camp. They did not have anything for me to eat, so I traded my other revolver and vest for a dog. They skinned the dog and gave me the two hind quarters and I ate one for supper, roasting it on the coals. The Indians being afraid of me, drove me out of their camp, and I rested on the bank of the river that night, and the next morning, the fourteenth day after I got on my raft, I started to eat the other quarter, but I dropped it in the water. I floated that day until 3 o'clock and landed at Callville, and a man came out and pulled me ashore.

Jim Ferry or Perry (not sure as to the first letter of this name) was a mail agent at that place. He was also a correspondent for some newspaper in San Francisco. He took me in and fed me. When I landed all the clothing I had on my body was a coat and a shirt, and my flesh was all lacerated on my legs from my terrible experience and of getting on and off the raft and climbing on the rocks. My beard and hair were long and faded from the sun. I was so pale that even the Indians were afraid of me. I was nothing but skin and bones and so weak that I could hardly walk. Jim Ferry or Perry cared for me for three days, and the soldiers around there gave me clothing enough to cover my body.

I was at Callville about four weeks, and a boat was there getting a load of salt, and I got on that boat and went to Fort Mojave. There I met Gen. Palmer and told him my story.

Source: 65th congress, 1st Session. *Senate Document No. 42: The Grande Canyon*, An article giving the credit of first traveling the Grande Canyon of the Colorado to James White, a Colorado Gold Prospector, who it is claimed made

the voyage two years previous to the expedition under the direction of Maj. J.W. Powell in 1869. Washington D.C.; Government Printing Office, 1917.

“An Accident on the River” by Leo G. Brown and Franklin A. Nims

From the Diary of Leo G. Brown

“Jan. 1. Stopped to take a negative, [sic] photographer F. A. Nims in climbing a wall missed his footing and fell twenty two feet. He lay unconscious several hours. On picking him up found his ankle broken and blood oozing from his ears and nose. Set the ankle. Wood very scarce and hard to build a fire [.]”

[“] Jan. 2. Nims still unconscious. Made a stretcher for him. Loaded the boats and ran very swift water. Came to a [sic] rapid with sudden fall of twelve feet and made portage.[”]

[“Jan.] 3. Fixed Nims as comfortably as possible [sic]. Stanton, Mack and Hislop went in side canon to look for trail to Lee’s Ferry to take Nims back.[”]

[“Jan.] 4. Fixed Nims as comfortably as Possible {sic} and all, with the exception of Hogue and Kane, started with him up the side of the canon, which was supposed to be Rock House canon. Had great difficulty in carrying him. Impeded by high rocks and overhanging shelves. Had to work over waterfalls and through cracks in the crags, and wade through muddy pools holding him up. Several times had to lift him up rocks with ropes while we held one another from slipping. A fall would have hurled him hundreds of feet below. In less than half a mile climbed nine hundred feet. Carried him in all two and half miles and 1,700 feet up; took eight hours. Nims unconscious all the time. Had to lie down to rest. So tired shoved ourselves along by putting our hands on our knees. Reached top 4p.m. where were to meet Stanton with Johnson’s team.[”]

From the Diary of Franklin A. Nims

January 12. I regained consciousness today and found myself lying on the floor of the cook house at Lee’s Ferry. Johnson and family were eating dinner. I asked what happened, why I was there and what day it was. Mr. Johnson said that I had fallen off a cliff, broken my leg; that Mr. Stanton walked thirty five miles to get here. We took the team and drove back to the top of Marble Canon, where the party had brought you on a stretcher from the river. You had bled at the mouth and ears for three days, and have been unconscious ever since.

I said “that I must have a doctor at once.” He said that the nearest doctor was at Kanab ninety miles away, and he could not send for him before Spring, and this is January Twelfth. Mrs. Johnson asked if I would like something to eat. I said that I did not feel hungry but I would try. She put some mutton stew, peas, mashed potatoes and bread and butter on the plate, and Mr. Johnson braced

me up. I took a mouthful, but could not chew it as the right side of my face was partially paralysed [sic].

January 31. Arrived in Denver and taken to the St. James annex. Called Doctor Pheiffer [Pfeiffer], the Union Pacific R.R. chief surgeon. He removed the bandages and found the foot alright. The next day the pain in the foot came on and I sent for the doctor, upon another examination discovered a broken bone that had not been set; he put the two ends together [sic] and ground or roughen[e]d them. The next day he returned, set the bone and put my leg in a plaster cast which I wore until March seventeenth. After taking the cast off, the doctor found that it was a true bone growth instead of a ligam[ent]ous growth, which he feared would happen, owing to five weeks interval between the breaking and setting.

At the end of seven weeks, or February 20th, I was able to eat solid food.

Source: Dwight L. Smith, ed. *The Photographer and the River 1889-1890, The Colorado Canon Diary of Franklin A Nims with the Brown - Stanton Rail Road Expedition*. Santa Fe: Stagecoach Press, 1967. Pages 58-67

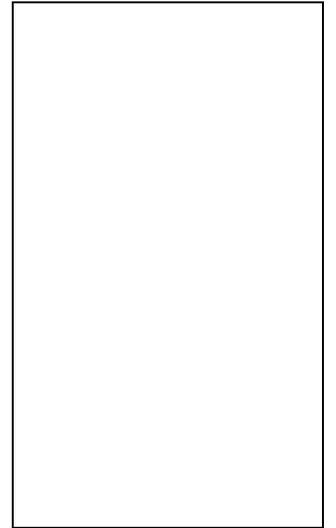
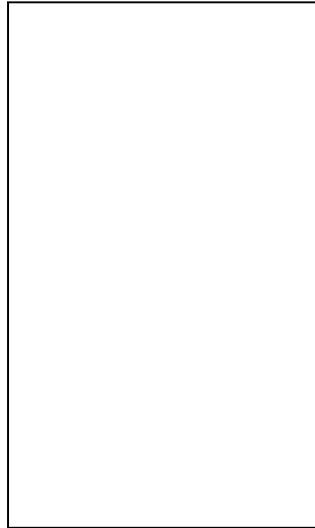
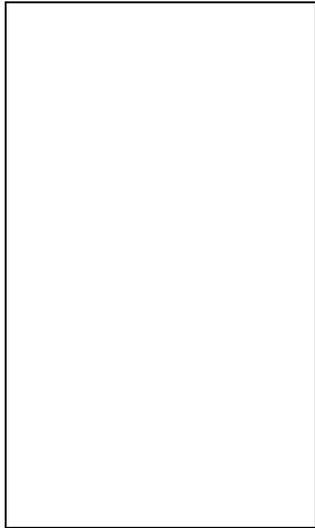
Response Journal

Use this chart to record your responses to the readings. Make sure to list any questions that you had that were not answered during the reading. This response time will deepen your understanding of the content and is an important part of reading.

Thoughts or Noticings	Feelings	Questions

Chain of Events

Illustrate the events in the order that they occurred.



Describe each event below.

Front Page Headline

Your assignment is to write an article as though you have interviewed one of the Colorado River explorers. This organizer will help you plan your article.

Lead: This should be a **catchy** line drawing your reader's attention.

When:

Where:

What: Tell your reader what happened:

Conclusion:

Plot Map

Who (Name of Explorer)

Events of the exploration:

Why (Purpose of Exploration)

Setting (Where and When)

