

2012 – 2013 Homesteaders

As the first U.S. community located north of the Columbia River, Tumwater prides itself on its important position in the development of Washington State. At Tumwater Middle School, we incorporate this regard for our local heritage into our eighth grade social studies curriculum. The **Homesteaders** class is offered as an option to the regular 8th grade social studies curriculum.

Homesteaders is a living history program with a two-fold **purpose**: a) the education of our eighth grade Homesteader students in the early history of their community and state; and b) through the interpretation of the pioneer experience, the building of a sense of self, family, and community connectedness.

The program was created in 1988 as a Washington State Centennial project and, during its twenty-five-year existence, has brought the pioneer story alive for over 1000 homesteaders, 7000 fourth graders, and countless community members. Many of our current homesteaders are the younger brothers and sisters of former students.

Homesteaders are a group of sixty eighth grade students who apply and are selected at the end of their seventh grade year to participate in the program. The Homesteader classes study the same basic 19th Century U.S. History and Washington State curriculum as all other eighth graders, but with special emphasis on the early history of Tumwater, including additional hands-on workshops designed to teach pioneer life skills. Students also take on a commitment to participate in a minimum of two community service events throughout the year. Each homesteader must also supply his or her own pioneer clothing, which will be worn at all public events.

The pioneer experience, of course, begins with the overland journey, and an early major component of the Homesteader program is a simulation of the arduous trek over the Oregon Trail. During the simulated 2,000-mile trip, students study the westward expansion of the United States. Students develop a trail persona and form families. They make family decisions about which supplies are crucial to the success of their journeys, pack their wagons, and head out across the plains. A major element of this unit is the study of primary source materials: diaries and journals (Rev. E.E. Parrish, Samuel Crockett, John Minto, etc.) and trail artifacts.

The wagons finally arrive in the Oregon country, but for the Simmons-Bush party the journey is not over, for they will travel on up the Cowlitz River into Puget Sound country to establish New Market, now Tumwater. Having arrived in New Market, the Homesteaders set about creating a community. They read about the events of those early years, 1845 through 1850, and they polish their personas of the residents of New Market. They become the children of Mike Simmons, James McAllister, and Gabriel Jones, just to name a few. They practice speaking in the idiom of the time, they have lessons in Victorian etiquette, and compose dialogs in which they converse about current events in New Market.

Throughout the year, the hands-on workshops help create the flavor of pioneer life and give the Homesteaders the experience they need to later share these activities with others. Early in the year we present workshops in clothing styles, cider pressing, music and dance, candle dipping, and toys and games. After arrival in New Market the workshops begin in earnest. A week is spent working with wool. Students learn to card, spin with a drop spindle, spin with a spinning wheel, and knit the basic stitches. We talk about shearing, washing, dyeing – all the processes of turning raw wool into a finished product. The boys work with tin and learn the basics of woodworking and blacksmithing. The girls make a quilt and learn to do laundry with a washboard and a wooden tub.

Community events are what showcase our program and allow our Homesteaders to pass on all they have learned. In the course of our year we participate in events such as the Tenino Winterfest, Thurston County Birthday, and Tumwater Historical Association Quilt Show. In addition, we sponsor two major events of our own. One is an old-fashioned cider squeeze called Cider Sunday where customers bring their own apples and we use hand presses to turn their apples into cider. The other event is our New

Market Pioneer Fair, which is the culmination of all our Homesteaders have learned through the year. This fair runs for three days at the end of May; for two days all our district fourth graders visit the fair where they see scenarios of New Market life. In these scenarios, the Homesteaders present scenes of life along the trail and in early New Market. The visitors to the fair also get to try their hand at churning butter, making rope, spinning, blacksmithing – all the activities of a busy pioneer village – and on the third day we open the fair to the public as a fund raiser for the Tumwater Historical Association.

Throughout the year, students will be evaluated by their effort, quality, and enthusiasm demonstrated while completing the essential learnings of the program. The Pioneer Fair in June will provide the opportunity for students to perform the skills and history accumulated through the entire year. The final goal is for the student to perform so well as to convince the audience that they have *traveled through time to early New Market*.

Mr. Cooksey and Mr. Haywood teach the daily classes and conduct the workshops. Anne Kelleher (aka: Izabella Bush), a co-founder of the Homesteader program with Brian Buntain, also helps with the workshops. Throughout the years we have helped and been supported by many, many, wonderful parents and community members who have generously shared their time, talents, and resources with us. We have also formed a very close partnership with the Tumwater Historical Association with whom we team up for many of our outside activities.

The drama of the Oregon Trail and the courageous men and women who traveled it and gave us our heritage continues to fascinate people of all ages. We have found that a real hunger exists to relive that experience. Hands-on history is an exciting, fun, educational, lasting way to reach back and make the connection to our past. The Homesteaders program makes such a connection possible for the students and citizens of Tumwater.

PLEASE NOTE: Points for the community service events will only be included in Homesteaders 4th quarter grade.