Episode 3: Building Futures

Lesson Title: Pioneers: Whose Stories are Remembered?

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Episode Description:

Building Futures: Entrepreneurship & Identity traces the entrepreneurial spirit of Coloradans who forged economic pathways despite discrimination, limited capital, and systemic barriers. These stories reveal how enterprise, labor, and innovation built communities and created lasting cultural legacies.

Throughout the episode, children's voices—including students from immigrant families, Indigenous, Black, Latino, and neurodivergent youth—reflect on work and identity, connecting historical entrepreneurship to modern opportunities. Utilizing archival materials and visual sequences, Episode 3 emphasizes that Colorado's economic development has always been driven by diverse individuals who carved opportunity from challenge.

Lesson Inquiry Questions:

1. How did early entrepreneurship in Colorado reflect the diverse backgrounds of the Indigenous Peoples and others who came to Colorado?
2. What cultural factors and systemic barriers influenced the development of the entrepreneurial spirit in Colorado communities?

Lesson Description:

What is a pioneer? This 8th grade history and civics lesson challenges the traditional, often narrow narrative of westward expansion by examining the lives of three extraordinary Coloradans: legendary Black cowboy and author Nat Love, Cheyenne businesswoman and cultural mediator Amache Prowers, and Denver's first licensed Black female physician, Dr. Justina Ford.

Through a collaborative, inquiry-based research project, students construct their own definitions of a pioneer, read specialized biographical texts, and work in small groups to design and present thematic slide portfolios. Class-wide discussions push students to analyze how systemic barriers, discrimination, and limited capital shaped early entrepreneurship, while crucially evaluating how expanding the definition of "pioneer" to include diverse racial, gender, and cultural backgrounds transforms our collective understanding of American history.

Grade Level/Time Needed:

8th Grade/ 60 minutes

Lesson Inquiry Questions:

1. What is a pioneer?
2. Who counts as a "pioneer," and how might that answer change depending on whose story we're looking at?
3. How does including diverse perspectives change our understanding of Colorado and American history?

Supporting Questions:

1. What does it mean to be a pioneer?
2. What qualities or actions make someone a pioneer?
3. Does a pioneer have to be the first person to do something? Why or why not?
4. What challenges did Nat Love, Amache Prowers, and Dr. Justina Ford face?

Lesson Objectives:

Students will be able to:

1. Evaluate how the definition of "pioneer" has traditionally been shaped and argue whose stories should be included when studying westward expansion in American history.

2. Examine the lives of Nat Love, Amache Prowers, and Dr. Justina Ford to identify how they overcame challenges, broke barriers, and contributed to Colorado and American history.

Background Knowledge / Contextual Paragraph for Teachers:

1. This lesson draws on both meanings of the word pioneer, so it is okay if students use either meaning (some of the individuals studied fit both definitions).
    a. a person who is among the first to explore or settle a country or area, especially one of the first Europeans to colonize the western United States.
    b. a person who is among the first to research and develop a new area of knowledge or activity.
2. The traditional narrative of the "pioneer" heavily relies on the image of white, European-American settlers traveling in covered wagons to claim "empty" land under the Homestead Act of 1862. To guide students in critically questioning this term, teachers should understand that the word "pioneer" has been used to justify Manifest Destiny, painting westward expansion as a clean, heroic venture while erasing the violent displacement of Indigenous populations.
3. A Shift to Human Capital: Expanding the definition of "pioneer" to include innovators, builders, and community anchors allows students to evaluate how human capital (resilience, specialized skills, and bilingualism) drove Colorado's economic foundation despite systemic discrimination.
4. To facilitate rich student inquiry, teachers should have a firm grasp of the following individuals and the specific socio-political landscapes that these individuals navigated:
    a. Amache Prowers (c. 1846–1905) — *Cheyenne Mediator, Rancher, & Entrepreneur*
        i. The Context of Cultural Shifting: Born *Walking Woman* to Southern Cheyenne Peace Chief Ochinee (Lone Bear), Amache lived through a period of extreme violent transition. Her father

was brutally killed by U.S. forces in the Sand Creek Massacre (1864).

ii. The Border "Moved" Over Her: When she married Anglo-cattleman John Wesley Prowers, she occupied a highly complex social position. She did not migrate; the geopolitical and cultural borders shifted directly over her homeland, in part, because of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.

iii. Entrepreneurial Impact: Fluent in Cheyenne, English, and Spanish, Amache was a critical diplomatic and business mediator along the Santa Fe Trail. When she and her family received land reparations after the massacre, she strategically used her 640 acres to aggressively expand their cattle ranching operations, demonstrating remarkable business acumen while preserving Cheyenne traditions in her home.

b. Nat Love (1854–1921) — *Black Cowboy, Author, & Railroad Icon*

i. The Black West: Teachers should know that roughly one in four cowboys on the Western frontier was Black. Following the Civil War, the open range offered freedmen a level of social mobility and wage equity rarely found in the Reconstruction-era South.

ii. Human Capital & Self-Promotion: Born into slavery in Tennessee, Love taught himself to read and write despite laws forbidding Black literacy. His legendary skills in horse-breaking, roping, and shooting earned him the famous moniker "Deadwood Dick."

iii. Industrial Transition: As the open range closed due to barbed wire and expanding railroads in the late 1880s, Love successfully pivoted his career. He moved to Denver and became a Pullman Porter. While this work carried its own racial hierarchies, it was one of the most stable, organized paths to the Black middle class at the time. Crucially, Love took control of his own narrative by publishing his autobiography in

1907, ensuring his achievements would not be erased by history.

c. Dr. Justina Ford (1871–1952) — *Medical Pioneer & Community Anchor*
    i. The Color Line in Medicine: In 1902, Dr. Ford became the first licensed Black female physician in Colorado. Despite holding her medical license, she faced severe systemic exclusion: she was denied entry into the Colorado Medical Society and barred from practicing or holding privileges in any Denver hospital.
    ii. The "Five Points" Economy: Blocked by institutional racism, Dr. Ford bypassed the medical establishment entirely by setting up an independent clinic inside her home in Denver's historic Five Points neighborhood.
    iii. A Legacy of Care: She became a beloved, vital resource for Denver's diverse, underserved communities—treating Black, Latino, and immigrant patients who were turned away by white-only hospitals. Over her 50-year career, she delivered more than 7,000 babies, practicing medicine in multiple languages to meet her patients' needs.

5. Guiding the Civic & Historical Inquiry. Teachers should use this background to push students past basic "hero worship" and focus on structural analysis:
    a. Analyze the Tensions: Help students see how these three figures did not just succeed *within* the system; they succeeded by actively working around, challenging, and redefining hostile legal and social structures.
    b. Connect to Current Relevance: Use the discussion to bridge past and present. For instance, the discussion on Dr. Justina Ford naturally connects to modern conversations surrounding healthcare equity and medical deserts in diverse urban communities today.

Building Background Knowledge for the Student:

Students can pull in prior knowledge of Westward Expansion from history class.

Lesson Sources:

1. Nat Love Article
2. Amache Prowers Article
3. Dr. Justina Ford Article

Lesson Materials Needed:

1. Internet access or printouts of the three articles.
2. Digital space or butcher paper to define pioneer.
3. Access for students to create and project slide presentations.

Lesson Instructions:

1. Begin with a bell ringer/hook question: What does the word pioneer mean? Who do you think should be considered a pioneer?
    a. Students write down their definition and five individuals that fit that definition.
2. Compile a definition of what a pioneer is from student answers.
3. Write student examples of pioneers that fit the class-created definition.
4. Break the class into three small groups (or six for larger class sizes; just assign two groups to each pioneer).
5. Direct students to read the article that matches their assigned individual.
    a. Nat Love Article
    b. Amache Prowers Article
    c. Dr. Justina Ford Article
6. Students will create a slide presentation for the class on why the person is a pioneer.
    a. Slide presentation components:
        i. 3-5 Slides
        ii. Title Slide
        iii. Biography Slide
        iv. Connection to Colorado Slide
        v. Pioneer Slide - why is this person considered a pioneer?
7. Students present their slides to the class.

8. Host a discussion (can be partner, small group or large group) and discuss the following questions:
    a. What do these three pioneers have in common?
    b. Does our definition of a pioneer need to change?
    c. Does a pioneer have to be the first person to do something? Why or why not?
    d. Why do you think many history lessons have traditionally focused on white pioneers? Whose stories are we missing?
    e. How does the word "pioneer" change when we include people from different racial and cultural backgrounds?
    f. Who gets to be called a pioneer?
9. Discussion questions connected to the film *Becoming Colorado: Episode 3: Building Futures: Entrepreneurship and Identity*
    a. In the film students respond to a quote from Nat Love that states "Among the cowboys a man was judged by his ability and courage." Why do you think this quote was included? Why was this important to Nat Love?
    b. What connections can you make between Frances Wisebert Jacobs, Dr. Charles Spivak, and Dr. Justina Ford?
    c. In the film students respond to a Cheyenne quote, "A people without a history is like the wind on the prairie." What does this quote mean to you?

Strategy Instruction Differentiation:

1. Vocabulary support:
    a. Migration
    b. Perseverance
    c. Opportunity
    d. Discrimination
    e. Barrier
    f. Legacy
2. Articles can be presented at different reading levels.

Assessment:

Exit ticket that addresses the two questions:

1. What is a pioneer?
2. How did learning about Nat Love, Amache Prowers, and Dr. Justina Ford change your perspective on pioneers?

2022 Social Studies Standards:

- 8.1.1.EO.a – Use and interpret documents and other relevant primary and secondary sources pertaining to United States history from multiple diverse perspectives.
- 8.1.1.EO.d – Construct a written historical argument supported by relevant evidence and logical reasoning demonstrating the use or understanding of primary and secondary sources.
- 8.1.2.EO.a – Determine and explain the historical context of key people and events from the origins of the American Revolution through Reconstruction including the examination of different perspectives.
- 8.1.2.EO.d – Evaluate the impact of gender, age, ethnicity, and class during this time period and the impact of these demographic groups on the events of the time period.
- 8.4.1.EO.c – Describe examples of citizens and groups who have influenced change in United States government and politics.
- 8.5.1.EO.c – Analyze the changes in the development of human capital over time through education, apprenticeship, entrepreneurship, and work experience.

Extension Activities:

1. Have students compare
    a. Nat Love and a more traditional western pioneer
    b. Amache Prowers and settlers moving west
    c. Dr. Justina Ford and early medical pioneers
2. Have students examine the rationale for using Amache Prowers' name for the Amache Japanese Incarceration Camp.

3. Have students research the Colorado pioneer license plates and how they no longer require proof of 100 years residency (*Denver Post* Article).
4. If students have connections to / interest in the University of Denver, they could host a discussion about the unofficial mascot choice (the University of Denver's unofficial mascot is Boone the Pioneer - does the visual representation of a pioneer match what was learned in today's lesson?)

Additional Resources:

- The Complete Digital Autobiography of Nat Love (Documenting the American South)
- The Original Digitized 1876 Colorado Constitution (Colorado State Archives)
- History Colorado's Casimiro Barela Biography Sheet
- National Trust for Historic Preservation: The Archeology of Amache Prowers
- Colorado Women's Hall of Fame: Dr. Justina Ford Profile
- Colorado Department of Education (CDE) Civic Resources
- iCivics educator resources and discussion routines