9. Little Houses on the Prairies, the Woods and the Rivers

Overview
As your students learn the history of Minnesota, they imagine they were early settlers and choose which crops they would plant on their farms. This lesson accompanies Chapter 10, “Sodbusters” from the textbook Northern Lights.

Grade Level: 6
Time: One 50 minute class period.

Minnesota State Standards: Geography

Benchmark: 6.3.1.1.1
Create and use various kinds of maps, including overlaying thematic maps of places in Minnesota; incorporate the “TODALSS” map basics, as well as points, lines and colored areas to display spatial information.

Benchmark: 6.3.3.6.1
Locate, identify and describe major physical features in Minnesota; explain how physical features and the location of resources affect settlement patterns and the growth of cities in different parts of Minnesota.

Benchmark 6.3.4.10.1
Describe how land was used during different time periods in Minnesota history; explain how and why land use has changed over time.

Objectives
• Recognize how land was used during different time periods in Minnesota history; explain how and why land use has changes over time.

Materials
• Food for Thought Maps found at http://www.mda.state.mn.us/fft
  ➢ MN Native Vegetation (Map 34), one for each pair of students
  ➢ Landforms of MN (Map 35), one for each pair of students
  ➢ MN Annual Precipitation (Map 36), one for each pair of students
  ➢ Major Cities and Waterways (Map 40)
  ➢ Minnesota Counties (named) (Map 41)
• Food for Thought Color Student Desk Map, one for each student (Order this free resource at http://www.mda.state.mn.us/fft)
• MN Ag in the Classroom Commodity Cards, one set for reference (Order this free resource at http://www.mda.state.mn.us/cc)
• Class set of Northern Lights textbooks (Minnesota Historical Society Press 2013) and/or sets of Little House on the Prairie or Little House in the Big Woods by Laura Ingalls Wilder, or read parts of the novels aloud to the class.
• Cards/slips of paper with a different Minnesota county listed on each card, one card for each pair of students
• Drawing paper
• Crayons, markers, or colored pencils

Key Words
• subsistence farming, diversified farming, Homestead Act, land speculator, market, Grange, cooperative, regulate
Procedure

1. Read with the class either Chapter 10, “Sodbusters” in Northern Lights or sections of the Wilder books that describe 19th century life on the pioneer farms. Discuss what crops they would have grown first and how the natural environment, their life experiences, the climate, etc. affects the choices the farmers made.

2. Use the introductory card of the Minnesota Commodity Card set to divide the Minnesota map (Map 41) into 4-5 sections.

3. Explain that each pair will get a plot of land to homestead in a different county in the state. Hand out a card with a county listed to each pair. Tell them that they must decide as a pair what they will grow first as subsistence farmers. They should refer to the Food for Thought Color Student Desk Map and Major Cities and Water Features map when choosing their crops. On the drawing paper, they should draw what their beginning farm would look like, showing what their farmhouse might have been made of and what crops they might have grown. They should make this drawing into a map and include a legend (TODALSS). As each pair finishes, decide on how accurately their choices reflect the environment and evaluate their maps.

4. If the first farm makes sense, allow them to diversify so that they can begin to make money and use their soil well. They should draw a second farm on the back of the paper, again explaining what they have drawn.

5. Share the different maps with the class, pointing out where the different farmers lived.

Assessments

1. Accuracy and detail of the maps of the farms.

2. Each student writes a sentence using the terms “subsistence farming” and “diversified farming” accurately.