

## **Graphic Novels Project**

**Author:** Scott S Welvaert

**Themes:** Donner Party, survival, history, pioneer/frontier life

**Title:** The Donner Party

**Publisher:** Capstone Press

**Copyright:** 2006

**ISBN:** 0-7368-5479-7

**Target Grade Level:** 4<sup>th</sup>

### **Book Summary:**

“The Donner Party” is a graphic novel format of the story of the Donner Party’s tragic trek to California. The novel keeps the original accounts and personal reflections of the individuals of the Donner party’s struggle through starvation and harsh weather to reach the west. Scott Welvaert mixes important factual information about their trip with the human element of the story making it an exciting and sometimes gruesome tale of the Donner Party. This graphic novel format gives this story an updated look with action packed colorful illustrations.

### **Activity Objectives:**

- The students will complete a KWL chart based on prior knowledge, the graphic novel, The Donner Party, and class discussion.
- The students will read and evaluate the graphic novel, The Donner Party.
- The students will use this graphic novel, The Donner Party, along with other nonfiction resources to create a follow up project.

### **Getting Ready:**

The teacher will provide an overview /background on The Donner Party, and review information on the Westward Movement and the Oregon Trail. The short lesson will be accompanied by video clips on the above mentioned topics. Students will then fill in the K (know) and L (want to learn) portion of their KWL charts.

### **Vocabulary:**

Graphic Novel	banish	emigrants	relief party	
Survival	starvation	summit	route	cannibalism

### **Activities:**

Students will be given a KWL chart to fill out individually as teacher fills out class copy on the overhead. Students will be given a few minutes to fill out the K (know) column of the chart. Then there will be a class discussion of what the students already KNOW about the Donner Party, Oregon Trail and Westward movement. The teacher will add student comments to the chart as the discussion continues. Next as a class, students will fill out the W (what we

want to learn) portion of the KWL chart. In small guided reading groups students will read the graphic novel, "The Donner Party". After reading the students will fill out the L (what I've learned) portion of the KWL chart. As a small group, then as a whole class students will discuss the fate of the Donner party focusing on how some survived, why some died, what went wrong on their journey and what they could have done differently. Upon completion of the graphic novel, KWL chart and class discussion students will be asked to create a final project on the Donner Party. They will choose from the following projects: a diary entry/letter written from one of the people in the Donner Party, create a map/timeline of the Donner Party's route, or create a survival guide for the group.

**Extensions:**

- Students could continue to explore the other materials on the Donner Party, Oregon Trail and Westward Movement. Other materials include; other books, movies, magazines, newspapers, and websites.
- Students could visit museum exhibits based around the history of the frontier, pioneers and the Westward Movement with family members and/or other classmates.
- Students could read other stories about The Donner Party and compare/contrast the information, presentation and format in of the graphic novel to the other nonfiction books.

**INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN**

**Analyze Learners:**

The class consists of 32 fourth grade students, 15 boys and 17 girls. Three students spend majority of the day in an instructional classroom. Two additional students have IEPs. Seven students are in the TPI (both Spanish and Polish speaking) program. The students are seventy-two percent Caucasian, nineteen-percent Hispanic, six percent Polish and three percent from a Middle Eastern background. All students are well behaved and will listen and respond to teachers.

The majority of the students are on or above grade level in reading and writing. Approximately five students are below grade level in reading, writing or both. After class discussion of the Donner Party, past exposure to the Oregon Trail and Westward movement and completion of the K and W portions of the chart students should have an understanding and functioning knowledge of basic concepts, facts and vocabulary related to the Donner Party.

Lecture and discussion were both used in this lesson. The students learn best when discussion and interaction with each other takes place. Many students need both verbal and written direction to successfully complete the tasks at hand. Visual pictures are also used to illustrate key points of the information.

**State Objectives:**

- Students are given a KWL chart, pencil, and the graphic novel "The Donner Party". They are to fill in each section of the chart as they preview and learn more about the topic. (cognitive)
- Given a copy of the graphic novel "The Donner Party" to students in the small group, the students will participate in a small group discussion about the novel, recalling factual information included in the novel. (Interpersonal)

- Upon completion of the introductory lesson on the Donner Party, and the reading of the graphic novel “The Donner Party”, students will create and present a short presentation of their final project on the Donner Party. (Intrapersonal)

### **Select Methods, Media and Materials:**

Methods – mainly small group work, some lecture, and whole class/small group discussion.

Media – computer (PowerPoint presentation, and internet sources), video clips, newspapers, and magazines.

Materials – Five copies of the graphic novel “The Donner Party” (for small group instruction and reading), other nonfiction books on the Donner party, KWL chart worksheet, pencil, and writing paper for each student.

### **Utilize Media and Materials:**

- During the short informational lesson on the facts of the Donner Party, teacher will utilize different types of media including a PowerPoint presentation, video clips, and other nonfiction books.
- During the short lesson, the teacher will ask questions of the students about facts they have heard about the Donner Party, Oregon Trail and the Westward Movement.
- During the small group instruction of the graphic novel, the students will ask each other what facts are important throughout the novel and fill in their KWL chart.

### **Require Learner Participation:**

Each student will be required to engage themselves in the introductory lesson on the Donner Party. They will listen and actively answer questions asked by the teacher. The students will also participate in small group discussion about the graphic novel “The Donner Party” and completing their KWL chart. Students will present their final project of their choosing on the Donner Party to the class to show what they have learned about the topic.

### **Evaluate and Revise:**

- The students will be assessed throughout their learning by the instructor. Large group and small group discussions of the facts and materials will be informally reviewed by the teacher.
- The student’s will be assessed by the work information they include in their KWL chart.
- The student’s will be assessed by the final project the complete, graded using a rubric for each project.
- The teacher’s performance will be assessed by the level of comprehension and understanding of the facts by the students.