



NEW MEXICO HISTORIC SITES

Group Learning Activity: Creating a Safe Space (Grades K-4)

SWBATD comprehension of the purpose of the historic La Placita (Lincoln) torreón by explaining how it served as a defensive structure.

Materials Needed: 5-6 small boxes with both ends cut out (approximately the size of Kleenex boxes or slightly larger) sidewalk chalk (if using the outdoor activity instructions)

Discussion:

If possible, take students outside for discussion. Otherwise, looking out the window, consider the following:

- Look all around and identify what is man-made in the surrounding environment.
- After determining how much of our world is man-made, ask students to imagine that they woke up one morning and there were no houses, no stores, no office buildings, streets, telephone wires or cars. What would be the first things a new settler would need to locate to survive? (Water, food and shelter).
- Once water and food have been located, what would be available for shelter? (Remind students that many of the trees and plants that we see in desert communities were planted as part of the landscaping and would not be there otherwise.)
- Discuss how long humans can live without water, food, shelter, clothing.
 - water – 3 days with shelter (some have made it 8-10 days without water, but in the desert, this would be unusual).
 - food – 3 weeks (if there is water and shelter)
 - shelter – depends on the climate, but if conditions are harsh (such as snow), it could be as little as 3 hours.

Group Learning Activity:

Explain to students that they are the people of La Placita del Rio Bonito. They have just arrived in the Bonito Valley and need to build a torreón so that they will have a safe place for everyone to go at night.

This activity can be performed indoors or outdoors. Teachers should give minimal guidance to encourage students to problem-solve. In both activities, the students should cluster together to determine how big their circle should be. Remind students to work together and not let just one student take over the project.

1. Indoors: Ask students to move desks into a circle to simulate a cylindrical torreón-shaped structure

Outdoors: Ask students to draw a circle around themselves that will represent their protective torreon

2. Hand the small boxes to students at different point around the circle and tell them that these represent the small holes built in the torreon.
3. Ask 1-2 students to step outside the circle and walk around it as students take turns looking through their boxes.
4. Remind students that the torreon was a solid structure, so the only view that the occupants would have had from inside was the small visual that could be seen through the windows.
5. Ask students if looking through the windows was an effective way to spot the enemy during a gunfight? (No, because there was such a limited view that could be seen. Also, a person looking through the holes would be exposing their eyes and face to bullets, arrows and debris.

Follow Up Discussion:

- Now that we've seen the limited view that someone would have using the small windows, is it possible that the holes in the walls might have been intended for another purpose? (ventilation)
- Explain that although the people inside the torreon had limited visual perspective, the men on top of the torreon had a 360 degree view.
- Ask what the disadvantages might have been to being on top of the torreon? (exposure to heat, cold, weather and the upper half of their body might have been exposed when they arose over the roof rim to fire their weapons.
- Discuss that when the citizens of La Placita took cover in the torreon, they may have had little warning or time to gather supplies and had no idea how long that they would be inside. What are some of the problems that might have been experienced by those on the inside? (lack of food, water, firewood, restroom, food and water for livestock, and living in close quarters with other families and animals)