



## A Lesson on The Gulls of Salt Lake by Jessica Jagodzinski

**Grade Level:** Grade 8

**Subject Area:** English Language Arts

**Lesson Length:** 1 hour 45 minutes

**Lesson Keywords:** The Gulls of Salt Lake, Reading, Writing

**Lesson Description:** Students will use reading and writing techniques to read the passage, identify new vocabulary, engage in discussion of key concepts with peers and answer critical thinking writing prompts. Students will be able to identify obstacles faced by pioneers and solutions used to overcome challenging settling life.

### Common Core Standards Covered with This Lesson

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.8.1: Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

---

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.8.10: By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of grades 6-8 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

---

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.1b: Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, using accurate, credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text.

---

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.1c: Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.

---

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.8.2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

---

---

---

## Lesson Content: Book/Story/Reading Passage

**Instructions:** Please read the following reading passage as many times as needed (aloud and silent) before starting to go through other lesson pages. Understanding the content of this passage is very important since the lesson activities will be all about this content. Feel free to print the passage if needed.

### The Gulls of Salt Lake

by

**Content:** At last. They were safe. A brave little company of pioneers from the Atlantic coast crossed the Mississippi River. They finally succeeded in climbing to the top of the great Rockies and down again into a valley in the very midst of the mountains. It was a valley of brown, bare, desert soil, in a climate where almost no rain falls. But the snow on the mountain-tops sent down little streams of pure water; the winds were gentle. Like a blue jewel at the foot of the western hills was a marvelous lake of salt water, an inland sea. Some wanted to keep going, but most said, this is where we should live the journey is accomplished. So the pioneers settled there and built themselves huts and cabins so they could survive the first winter.

They were used to challenges. It had taken them many months to make the terrible trip. Many had died of illness on the way; then many died of hardship during the winter. The supplies they had brought in their wagons were so nearly gone that, by spring, they were living partly on roots, dug from the ground. All their lives now depended on the crops they could raise in the valley. They made the barren land fertile bringing mud from the river to the dry land, and creating irrigation channels. They planted corn and grain and vegetables, and everyone collaborated. Then it was an anxious time as they watched for the plants to grow, with hopes, and prayers, and careful eyes.

In good time the brown earth was covered with a carpet of tender, green, growing things. No farmer's garden could have looked better than the great garden of the desert valley. And from day to day the little plants grew and flourished till they were all well above the ground they had succeeded. James, who was the head of the group, said, We finally will have all the food we need. We have achieved our goal.

Then a terrible thing happened. One day, the men who were watering the crops saw a great number of crickets swarming over the ground at the edge of the gardens nearest the mountains. They were hopping from the barren places into the young, green crops, and as they settled down they ate the tiny shoots and leaves to the ground. More came, and more, and ever more, and as they came they spread out till they covered a big corner of the grain field. Yet still more and more, till it was like an army of black, hopping, crawling crickets, streaming down the side of the mountain. James said, Watch out, they're going to eat our food. We will be ruined.

Everyone tried to kill the crickets by beating them down, but the numbers were so great that it was like beating at the sea. Suddenly, from far off in the air toward the great salt lake, there was the sound of flapping wings. It grew louder. It looked like a white cloud rising from the lake, a flock of sea gulls flying toward them. Hundreds of gulls rose and circled and came on. The gulls! The gulls! James cried. They will rescue us. It is a miracle. The gulls flew overhead, with a shrill chorus of whimpering cries, and then, in a marvelous white cloud of outspread wings and hovering breasts, they settled down over the field. Look, look, James said. See! They are eating the crickets! They are saving our crop. We are restored.

It was true. The gulls ate the crickets, and when at last they finished, they had stripped the fields of that pest. The pioneers had moved to the right place after all. It had taken a lot of work, great determination, and courage. They had met and overcome obstacles, solved problems, and would survive. Without the gulls, what might have happened is not certain, but the future was secure, the pioneers were confident.

---

## Task 1: Vocabulary

**Instructions:** Please complete the following vocabulary activity by choosing the correct meaning of each word selected from the passage and use of each word correctly in a sentence.

**Q: 1 WordPhrase:** fertile **WordPhraseTier:** 2

**Question:** In the passage, the pioneers "made the barren land fertile bringing mud from the river to the dry land." What does the word "fertile" mean in this sentence?

- A: useless
- B: productive
- C: shriveled
- D: messy

**Question:** Which one of the sentences below uses the word "fertile" correctly?

- A: The family bought the fertile bookshelf at the store.
- B: Reading my homework with the fertile helped me understand more.
- C: The fertile camera made the picture blurry.
- D: Tulips and daisies bloomed in the fertile forest.

**Q: 2 WordPhrase:** shrill **WordPhraseTier:** 2

**Question:** The author wrote "The gulls flew overhead, with a shrill chorus of whimpering cries..." What does the word "shrill" mean in this sentence?

- A: Soft
- B: Annoying
- C: Beautiful
- D: High-Pitched

**Question:** Which one of the sentences below uses the word "shrill" correctly?

- A: The shrill sound from the smoke detector warned us of a fire.
- B: She feel asleep to the calm sound of shrill rain tapping her window.
- C: Her shrill voice quietly calmed me down.
- D: The beach is shrill in the summer.

**Q: 3 WordPhrase:** irrigation channels **WordPhraseTier:** 3

**Question:** The author in our story says "They made the barren land fertile bringing mud from the river to the dry land, and creating irrigation channels." What does the term "irrigation channels" mean in this sentence?

- A: an annoying mess
- B: places to live
- C: a type of train station
- D: a place for water to flow

**Question:** Which one of the sentence below uses the term "irrigation channels" correctly?

- A: I play the music on the irrigation channels loudly.
- B: The irrigation channels are known for their colorful feathers.
- C: I found irrigation channels when I cleaned out my notebook.
- D: The irrigation channels guided water to my dry garden.

**Q: 4 WordPhrase:** great Rockies **WordPhraseTier:** 3

**Question:** The author in our story describes the pioneers "climbing to the top of the great Rockies and down again into a valley." What does the term "great Rockies" mean in this sentence?

- A: giant wall
- B: tall trees
- C: large mountains
- D: skyscraper building

**Question:** Which one of the sentences below uses the word "great Rockies" correctly?

- A: It took me all day to walk the path through the great Rockies.
- B: She listened to the great Rockies when studying.
- C: I grew a great Rockies in my garden last spring.
- D: She great Rockies when walking home late.

---

## Task 2: Forum Discussion

**Instructions:** This discussion forum will have questions for students to respond. Read the posted questions, and respond to each. Students are responsible for posting one initial and two peer responses for each topic.

### 1 - The Pioneers' New Home

In the story, the pioneers made changes to the valley so they could live there. Describe the new setting using details from the passage.

### 2 - Discuss the metaphor "like beating at the sea".

The author uses the metaphor like beating at the sea when describing pioneers trying to kill the crickets. What does the metaphor mean? How does this reflect the feelings of the pioneers??

### 3 - "They were used to challenges. It had taken them many months to make the terrible trip."

The pioneers faced many challenges and problems when making their journey and settling in the valley. Why was collaboration and working together important for them being successful??

---

=====

Task 3: Writing Activity

**Instructions:** For your writing assignment, in 2-3 paragraphs (minimum 250 words) evaluate the importance of perseverance by the pioneers when overcoming obstacles and why aid (from each other and the gulls) was necessary for their survival.

?

=====