Lesson Plan 2:

**Title:** Mail, Migration, and Myth in the American West

**Grade Level:** 8th grade

**Related Subject Areas:** History of the American West, Communication History, 19th Century American History

**Objectives:**
- Students will gain skills in critical thinking by identifying what historians use to understand the past through the sources available to them.
- Students will practice analytical skills by working with primary and secondary sources, including documents, maps and objects.
- Students will compare and contrast systems of communication and transportation between past and present history.

**Social Studies Standards (District of Columbia):**
- Students identify similarities between present and past.
- Students interpret historical maps.
- Students assess the credibility and reliability of Internet sources.
- Students explain the central issues and problems from the past, placing people on the matrix of time and place.
- Students use geographical knowledge and skills to analyze historical and contemporary issues.

**Time Required:** 40 minutes (each activity requires 10 minutes each).

**Lesson Plan:**
Teacher will introduce the lesson and classroom activities by re-emphasizing the differences between primary and secondary sources, showing examples of each using the NPM website and classroom supplemental materials, pointing out the information that guides the determination of primary vs. secondary sources: dates, author, photographer, painter, etc. The purpose of this lesson is to move the students beyond simply identifying the different source types, but to use them to draw conclusions about events in the past. The teacher can introduce the first educational activity to help students in a deeper understanding of the differences between primary and second-
ary sources, and comparing the past to the present by studying about the 19th century American West and postal history.

Vocabulary List:
1. Similarities (n.): The state of being similar, likeness.
2. Dissimilarities (n.): Unlikeness; a point of difference.
3. Compare (v.): To examine two or more objects, ideas, people, etc. in order to note similarities and differences.
4. Contrast (v.): To compare in order to show unlikeness or differences.
5. Analyze (v.): To carefully examine details in order to identify causes, key factors, common features, and possible conclusions.

Essential Questions:
1. How do primary and secondary sources help students understand the past in different ways?
2. What types of transportation and communication systems were used in the 19th century American West to keep in contact with people in the East? What are the similarities and dissimilarities of the systems between the past and the present?

Educational Activities:
1. Worksheet Activity: What does a source say?
   a. Teacher will assign student groups to work together using the Internet and Brainstorming Sources Worksheet to record their answers. Using the NPM website, “Moving the Mail West” online photographs and supplemental classroom materials (books, magazines, objects) on the American West, the teacher will ask the students to observe, evaluate, and analyze six sources total.
   b. Pose these questions to the students while conducting their research:
      1) What is the source?
      2) What do the images on the source tell you?
      3) What does the text/words on the source tell you?
      4) What is the date it was created?
      5) Who is the author/creator of the object?
      6) What does the object tell you about the American West?
   c. Students will use analytical skills and practice drawing their own conclusions based on the sources provided. Paired students must choose diverse examples, and hand in the Brainstorming Sources Worksheet to the teacher at the end of the activity.
2. Map Activity: What interpretation can a historical source inspire?
   a. Teacher will ask students to pair up and search for one primary map from the 1800s using the
      Internet. Refer the students to the list of “Recommended Websites” as a possible resource.
      Students will print out the map as a reference to help them create a song, poem, or story to
      demonstrate what they observe from the map and know about the time period.
   b. Teacher will pose questions to assist students in the creating their project, as follows:
      1) What states and routes are shown on the map?
      2) What year was the map published?
      3) How would a person travel from the East to the West during the 1800s?
      4) How long would it take?
      5) What kind of environment or conditions would a traveler encounter?
      6) Was travelling across the country a form of communication?
      7) Is it still a form of communication today?
   c. Students will display their maps and make a presentation to the entire class at the end of the
      activity.

3. Comparing Communication Drawing Activity
   a. Based on the game of Pictionary, students are given game cards with items involving
      communication and transportation. The class can be divided in half, so the two teams
      can compete against one another, or even smaller student groups. Use the
      [Comparing Communication Drawing Activity Game Cards] for this activity.
   b. Each team is given a designated amount of time to draw on flip chart paper a comparison of
      19th century and 21st century examples of communication and transportation. The teams take
      turns sending one player from their team to select a card and draw for the opposing team. The
      opposing team tries to guess what they believe the two examples are in one minute.
   c. After the minute is up, the teacher gives a point for each time a group correctly identifies the
      examples. The teacher awards an additional point if the team also describes the similarities or
      dissimilarities of the systems between the past and present. An example card would read: Tele-
      graph and Telephone (Extra point for listing similarities) or Stagecoach and Car (Extra point
      for listing dissimilarities) The player who draws the card informs the team that they need to
      provide what is similar or different about the two examples in order to receive both points for
      the team. The team with the most points wins (highest score out of 24 points total).

**Assessment/Evaluation:** Review essential questions after completing the lesson plan and edu-
    cational activities to reinforce the lesson. Recommend this follow-up activity for evaluation of the
    students understanding of the lesson plan.
**Web Activity:**

Teacher will assign a web-based activity (one of two Arago featured collections) to the students. Individual student or groups choose one of the Arago collections; “Mail, Myth, and Reality” or “Mail and Migration” to practice observing, evaluating, and identify different sources. Students can record their answers via the Brainstorming Sources Worksheet. Students will use one of these two Arago featured collections to reinforce their understanding of primary and secondary sources and the connections between the American West and “Moving the Mail West” during the 19th century.

To help assess the student’s grasp of the difference between primary and secondary sources, the teacher will ask students to use the “My Collection” feature in Arago and e-mail a set of 4 objects (2 primary sources and 2 secondary sources on 19th century American history). Students will also turn in the Brainstorming Sources Worksheet at the end of the activity.

**Materials:**

- Computer for Internet Access
- Flip Chart paper, Blackboard, Whiteboard, and/or Smartboard (or alternatively, workstations)
- Brainstorming Sources Worksheet (Downloadable PDF)
- Comparing Communication Drawing Activity Game Cards (Downloadable PDF)
- Paper and writing instruments (pens, pencils, and/or markers)

**Recommended Websites:**

- [www.arago.si.edu](http://www.arago.si.edu)
- [www.postalmuseum.si.edu](http://www.postalmuseum.si.edu)
- [http://memory.loc.gov](http://memory.loc.gov)
- [www.archives.gov](http://www.archives.gov)