



When The Lights Came On ***Rural Electrification in Saskatchewan*** **Grade Three Social Studies**



CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Grade Three Social Studies: Unit Two: Heritage: Module One:
Communities Then and Now

<http://www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/docs/elemsoc/g3u21ess.html>

Grade Four Social Studies Curriculum: Unit One: Identities and
Unit Two: Heritage

<http://www.sasked.gov.sk.ca/docs/elemsoc/g4tcess.html>

LESSON PLAN ONE: CLASSROOM INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME

LESSON OVERVIEW

Students will explore what farm life was like before the rural electrification program brought power to Saskatchewan's farms in the 1950s. The effects of rural electrification on the lives of farm families and surrounding communities will be explored.

RESOURCES AND MATERIALS

- Fast Facts information (end of resource package)
- The WDM research paper, *Rural Electrification in Saskatchewan During the 1950s*, by Joan Champ, is available at <http://www.wdm.ca/skteacherguide/>
- Chalk/white board or flip chart, chalk or markers
- Paper and pencils

PROCEDURE

1. Review the Fast Facts information and *Rural Electrification in Saskatchewan During the 1950s* by Joan Champ to prepare to teach the lessons.
2. Begin the lesson by turning off lights in the classroom. Ask students to name all of the things they depend on electricity for in their classroom. Make a list on the board or a flip chart.
3. Next, ask students to name the many ways that they depended on electricity from the time they woke up in the morning to the time they arrived at school. Add these to the list.



The McEachern family enjoying the convenience of electricity in the kitchen, 1955. Saskatchewan Archives Board R-B5373(3)



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4. Discuss the length of the list. Is it long or short? Are the children and their families very dependant on electrical power? Is the availability of electrical power taken for granted?
5. Introduce the topic of rural electrification in Saskatchewan by reading the information in the Fast Facts section of this resource package to the class.
6. Explain that power was limited to a few urban centres until the late 1940s. It may be helpful to discuss the difference between urban and rural at this point. Ask the students if they believe that rural people felt different from urban people. How would it have made their lives different? Explain that rural electrification of Saskatchewan's farms reduced the gap in the quality of life between urban and rural people.

Rural people no longer felt like they were left behind the rest of society. Ask the students to put themselves in the shoes of a young farm boy or girl whose family farm is becoming electrified. Have students write a short story about how the coming of electricity affected their lives and the rest of their family's lives. Were their lives made easier? Did they have more time for recreation? What kinds of new appliances would have been purchased for their homes?

7. Discuss how communities as a whole, both cities and towns, and the outlying rural areas, were affected by electrification. How did the electrification of businesses, community halls, schools and curling rinks affect people?

ADAPTATION AND EXTENSION

1. Visit SaskPower's virtual *Power Museum* online to learn about the development of Saskatchewan's electrical system: <http://www.saskpower.com/pm/index.shtml>.
2. Invite a local community member into the classroom to discuss how electrification impacted their life.
3. Teach in conjunction with a science unit on electricity to reinforce concepts.

LESSON PLAN TWO: AT THE MUSEUM

LESSON OVERVIEW

Students will explore the contents of a discovery box and tour exhibits in the Museum.

RESOURCES AND MATERIALS

- Materials and information sent to you in your Museum tour confirmation package



With the aid of stories and artifacts (human powered and early electric), students will learn how rural people in Saskatchewan managed before they had electricity and how the arrival of electricity changed their lives in the *When the Lights Came On* discovery box.



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PROCEDURE

1. Prepare to teach and to tour the Museum by reviewing the resources listed. Divide your class into groups before the visit. Discuss the required number of groups with the Museum Programmer when you book your visit. Select other staff members or parents to lead the groups. Advise the group leader about what they will have to do.
2. Students will visit a Western Development Museum in Moose Jaw, North Battleford, Saskatoon or Yorkton. The entire class will assemble for a welcome and orientation.
3. The class will be divided into two, three or more groups depending on the class size. Students will interact with artifacts, replicas and photographs located in a discovery box. A leader's script included in the discovery box will spearhead discussion.
4. The class will tour pertinent exhibits in the Museum using a tour handout to guide their exploration. This handout may be a question-and-answer sheet or scavenger hunt. A tour script for the group will be sent with confirmation of your Museum tour booking.

LESSON PLAN THREE: WHEN A MUSEUM VISIT ISN'T POSSIBLE

LESSON OVERVIEW

Students will explore how rural electrification affected different members of a farm family. Students will participate in a simulated contest celebrating the coming of rural electrification.

RESOURCES AND MATERIALS

- Images of 1950s electrified appliances available at <http://www.wdm.ca/skteacherguide/electrification/>
- Hardware Contest Worksheet (appendix one)
- Pencils

PROCEDURE

1. Prior to teaching the lesson, print the images of 1950s-era appliances and make a copy of the Hardware Contest Worksheet for each student.
2. Explain that rural electrification bettered the lives of all members of a farm family. The farming operation benefitted immensely from lighted yards and buildings, electric milking machines, incubators, feed grinders, water pumps and more. Chores were easier and more time for leisure was available. Electric radios, and later television, brought the rest of the world into the farm home. However, farm women were particularly affected by the conveniences that electrification made possible like electric washing



Farmyard south of Regina, SK showing the ideal hook-up for rural electrification, 1958. Saskatchewan Archives Board 58-283-05



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machines, stoves, fridges, freezers, running and heated water. Prior to electrification, a farm woman's day was filled with long, arduous chores. For example, wash day, or "Blue Monday" as it became known for the drudgery and bluing associated with the washing process, was a whole day affair.

3. Using the images of electrified items you have copied, have students participate in a simulated contest. Set out the images on a table or pin them up.
4. Ask students to pretend there was a hardware store contest in a local newspaper celebrating the coming of electricity to the rural area. The winner of the contest may pick three electrical items as prizes.

5. Instruct the students to assume the roles of a man, woman and a child living on a farm. They are to choose the top three items each member of the family might have selected as their prize and provide reasons to justify the selections for the three family members.
6. Wrap-up the activity by discussing the positive impact that each of the items would have on the people's lives. The appliances would afford people more time for leisure pursuits because they could finish their work with greater efficiency. The television provided entertainment and brought the world into people's living rooms like never before.

ADAPTATION AND EXTENSION

1. Visit a local museum to see how life and items around homes and farms changed with electrification. To find a museum in your area, visit the Museums Association of Saskatchewan at <http://www.saskmuseums.org>.
2. Draw up a basic blueprint of a farm home for the students in the class. Using the *Western Producer* article from November 12, 1953 entitled "Plan Ahead for the Big Day When You Turn on the Lights," have students draw in the necessary light fixtures, outlets and light switches required to electrify a farm home. The article is available on the *Saskatchewan News Index* website at <http://library.usask.ca/sni/stories/sci1b.html>.



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LESSON PLAN FOUR: CLASSROOM WRAP-UP

LESSON OVERVIEW

Students will listen to a short story entitled *The Montgomerys Discover Rural Electrification*, by Linda Kindrachuk, and complete a worksheet to review what they have learned in the previous lessons.

RESOURCES AND MATERIALS

- *The Montgomerys Discover Rural Electrification* short story (appendix two)
- Rural Electrification Worksheet (appendix three)
- Paper, pencils and crayons

PROCEDURE

1. Read the short story, *The Montgomerys Discover Rural Electrification*, aloud to the class. Having some copies available for students to consult would be helpful.
2. Distribute copies of the Rural Electrification Worksheet for each student to complete. The worksheet will act as a review of what the students have learned about rural electrification in Saskatchewan.

ADAPTATION AND EXTENSION

1. Wind power generated by windmills was a common method of electricity generation on Saskatchewan farms before rural electrification became available. Explore how wind power is being used to generate power for Saskatchewan people today. Discover other ways that power is generated in Saskatchewan. Visit the SaskPower website for more information and to view a power generation animation: <http://www.saskpower.com/powerandenvironment/powerandenvironment.shtml>.



SaskPower Corp. workers raising high-tension power line poles into position near Shaunavon, SK, 1956. Saskatchewan Archives Board R-A13087(1)



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RESOURCES:

- The WDM research paper, *Rural Electrification in Saskatchewan During the 1950s*, by Joan Champ, is available at <http://www.wdm.ca/skteacherguide/>.
- Visit SaskPower's virtual *Power Museum* to learn about the development of Saskatchewan's electrical system. <http://www.saskpower.com/pm/index.shtml>.
- *Western Producer* article from November 12, 1953 entitled "Plan Ahead for the Big Day When You Turn on the Lights," available on the Saskatchewan News Index website. <http://library.usask.ca/sni/stories/sci1b.html>.
- The SaskPower website provides valuable information about how Saskatchewan's power is generated today. <http://www.saskpower.com>.

FAST FACTS

- 1890 – The first electrical power plant in the province installed at Prince Albert.
- 1918 – 63 communities were supplied with electricity.
- 1926 – 114 communities were supplied with electricity.
- 1928 – The first major private company established in the province was Northern Light and Power. Three others soon followed, including Dominion Electric Power. All were later bought out by the Saskatchewan Power Commission in the late 1940s.
- 1929 – The Power Commission Act created the Saskatchewan Power Commission.
- Prior to the electrification of farms in the mid-20th century, life on Saskatchewan farms was filled with back-breaking chores and hard work, leaving little time for leisure and relaxation. Very few farms were served by power generating stations, some operated their own generators or windmills, and the rest went without.
- 1948 – Only 1500 farm homes were wired by the Saskatchewan Power Commission.
- In 1949 the Saskatchewan Government passed the Rural Electrification Act, and the Saskatchewan Power Corporation (later known as SaskPower) began the work of bringing electricity to the province's rural areas. The Saskatchewan Power Commission became the Saskatchewan Power Corporation that same year.
- Under the leadership of Premier Tommy Douglas, the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) government followed through on its 1952 election promise to increase electrical farm service from 4,000 to 40,000 in four years.
- As part of the rural electrification program, non-farm customers in rural areas like schools, churches, community halls and gas stations were also electrified.
- Farm wives particularly benefitted from rural electrification. Perishable foods could be kept fresh in refrigerators, and stored for long periods in a freezer. The arduous tasks associated with washday or "Blue Monday" were minimized by the electric washing machine and iron. Electric stoves replaced wood stoves.
- Many farm men were initially reluctant about rural electrification due to costs associated with bringing electricity to the farm, and a lack of education regarding ways electricity could be used to help with farm work outside the home.
- Rural electrification revolutionized life on Saskatchewan farms, and narrowed the gap between the urban and rural standard of living.



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- Distance was the most important factor in bringing rural electrification to Saskatchewan's farms. During this time, the corporation pioneered the use of the single-wire distribution system using ground return, which helped make rural electrification a reality.
- The Saskatchewan Power Corporation erected between 50,000 to 60,000 transmission line poles per year during the 1950s.
- 58,000 farms had been electrified by 1961, utilizing 90,000 km of single-wire line. Another 14,000 rural customers have been connected since, bringing the total rural system up to 108,000 km of single-wire line.
- "Penny Powers" was a character created by the Saskatchewan Power Corporation to educate farm women how to use the new electrical appliances available to them and the benefits of electricity. At times, there were up to four "Penny Powers" working the summer fair circuit in the 1950s.
- In 1985 SaskPower embarked on the Rural Underground Distribution program to replace rural overhead lines with an underground system.



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APPENDIX ONE:

Hardware Contest Worksheet

Hardware Contest Worksheet

A local hardware store sponsored a contest to celebrate the coming of rural electrification to the farms in the area. People were encouraged to drop by the store to fill in entry forms. First prize in the contest was the winner's choice of any three electrical appliances to be chosen from a list. Answer the following questions to determine what a farm woman, man or child might select and why.

1. If the woman won the contest, which three objects might she choose? Why?

2. If the man won the contest, which three objects might he choose? Why?

3. If the child won the contest, which three objects might he/she choose? Why?



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APPENDIX TWO:

The Montgomerys Discover Rural Electrification

Written by Linda Kindrachuk, Saskatoon Public Schools

Chores on the Farm

The Montgomery family was sitting around the breakfast table enjoying a meal of oatmeal and toast with homemade strawberry jam. It was 6:00 am on a Saturday morning in 1952, and sunlight was pouring in through the cozy kitchen window. The family was discussing the chores that needed to be done that day. Twelve year old Tyler and 10 year old Krista sat intently listening to the chores that needed to be completed before they could go to the local fair in the nearby town of Kindersley. They both wanted to finish their work early so they could leave for the fair in good time.

Tyler was anxious to see how the birdhouse he had built would be judged in the birdhouse building competition. It had taken him most of the winter months to complete the birdhouse in the shop. It was hard to see with only the glow of a coal oil lamp, and he remembered how cold and numb his fingers got while building it. He often had to take a break and come into the house to warm his hands over the wood burning stove in the kitchen.

Krista was just as anxious to see if she would bring home a ribbon for her handwriting notebook in the school handwriting category. Her teacher felt very confident that she would win a ribbon for her neat penmanship. Krista had kept her handwriting notebook looking brand new this year by placing it in a homemade cloth bag her mother had sewn, and had carefully placed it at the bottom of her desk each night so the pages would not get tattered.

The children both knew their mother would surely win first place for her homemade apple pie. Everyone in the district knew that Mrs. Montgomery's apple pie was the absolute best.

Their father Peter interrupted their thoughts. "As soon as we eat breakfast, Krista, please help your mother with the dishes. Meanwhile, Tyler, you can bring a pail of water to the house from the well and then go out and do the milking. The water pump is fixed now so it's much easier to pump. Krista, you can carry the milk pails from the barn to the summer kitchen so your mother can separate it. We'll be taking a can of cream into town on the way to the fair. Oh, and Krista, be sure to feed the chickens an extra amount so they will be fine until tomorrow morning. We may be late coming home from the fair and may only have time for the milking. Tyler, you be sure to slop the hogs an extra amount too."

"Krista and I will need to pick strawberries. Mrs. McDonald in town said she would buy all the strawberries we could sell her. It's extra spending money for the fair," added Mrs. Montgomery.

The Montgomery family quickly rushed through their chores so they could leave for the fair. Mrs. Montgomery and Krista packed the picnic basket. Chicken salad sandwiches, oatmeal raisin cookies baked yesterday, and strawberries filled the basket. Mrs. Montgomery filled a glass quart jar with iced tea.



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A Day at the Kindersley Fair

The Montgomerys set out on the thirty minute drive to Kindersley. On the way there, Mrs. Montgomery spoke to Mr. Montgomery: “Peter, I understand Penny Powers, the lady from the Saskatchewan Power Corporation, will be at the fair. She will be giving a presentation on how electrification will benefit rural farm families. I think we should plan on attending her presentation at two o’clock in the exhibit hall.”

“Linda, we don’t have a need for electricity at the farm. It has absolutely no value for us. Folks in town may benefit from it but we are getting by just fine with our kerosene lamps. Other than having electric lights for the house, there is no other need for it. The Saskatchewan Power Corporation charges about \$500.00 to bring it to the yard and we need an additional \$400.00 to wire the house. I need to buy a new hay mower and could use the money for that instead,” Peter answered.

“Dad, if we got power, we could be just like our cousins in town. Then we wouldn’t have to be embarrassed about using the lamps when they come to visit,” Krista interrupted.

“Krista, your cousins enjoy the farm even without electricity,” dad replied.

“All I would like us to do is go to Penny Powers’ presentation and listen to what she has to say, Peter. Could we please just do that?” Mrs. Montgomery said to her husband.

“Alright dear, we’ll go, but don’t expect me to sign up for electrical farm power.”

The Montgomerys dropped off the strawberries and eggs at the McDonald’s and headed for the fair grounds. It was so exciting to see all the midway rides in the distance. Mr. Montgomery selected a shady spot near a row of trees so the family could enjoy their picnic lunch later on at noon. Mrs. Montgomery gave her children each \$2.50 for the day.

“I can hardly wait to ride the ferris wheel!” Tyler exclaimed. “But first I want to go check on my birdhouse entry.”

“I’ll go with you to the exhibit hall to see how my handwriting entry did,” Krista replied.

“Let’s all go together,” Mr. Montgomery said. “Then we can check out your mom’s apple pie entry as well.”

The Montgomery family headed off to the exhibit hall to see how their entries had fared in the competitions. Krista was the first to find her handwriting entry. Sure enough, there was a shiny red ribbon attached to it. Tyler located his birdhouse a couple of rows over. It too had a first prize ribbon attached to it. He had tied for first with a neighbour boy. The children’s hard work had paid off. Mother’s renowned apple pie, with the perfectly woven lattice work crust on top, was once again awarded first prize in the pie contest for the third year in a row.

Fairs were always so exciting and this one did not disappoint. After a quick stroll through the fairgrounds, the Montgomerys headed back to the car for their picnic lunch.



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Penny Powers Presents the Benefits of Electricity

At 1:30 pm, Tyler and Krista headed over to the rides. Mr. & Mrs. Montgomery walked to the exhibit hall to listen to the Penny Powers presentation. At the hall, benches were set up and many of them were already full 30 minutes before the program was to start. Mr. and Mrs. Montgomery were amazed to see how many of their neighbours were there. Some of them were very excited about the prospect of getting electricity, and others, like Mr. Montgomery, were skeptical. A hush went over the audience as a lady took the stage.

“I’m Lillian McConnell, better known as Penny Powers, and I have been hired by the Saskatchewan Power Corporation to travel through Saskatchewan to address rural folks on the merits of signing up for power for your farms. The CCF Government of Saskatchewan, under the leadership of Tommy Douglas, is implementing their election promise to electrify rural farms. To date I have visited many fairs like this one and have met hundreds of people in town halls.”

“Let me begin by saying that electricity will make a huge impact on your lives. It will make everyone’s life easier on the farms and you will wonder how you ever could have done without it. I know the common thought is that electricity will only light up your home, but it can do so much more. Much time will be saved by the entire family, and the time you save can be redirected to other work, or even leisure time. Time saved can also mean you can be more creative in your work.”

“Women can sing their ‘wash day blues’ away and save time and energy by using electric washing machines and electric irons. Washing machines will do the work your hands and back did, and irons can be used continuously without having to stop to heat them. The time saved can be used to help your husbands around the farm with other chores.” At this comment, many chuckles arose in the audience. Penny Powers continued, “Ladies, you can put away your beating spoons and can use an electric beater for your baking. Electric refrigerators will make food storage much easier and safer. You will not have to cook every meal. Leftovers can be put in the refrigerator for another meal and your time can be used elsewhere. If you decide to get an electric stove, reheating leftovers can be done quickly without having to fire up your wood stove. Electric stoves make baking and cooking a breeze with constant heat. An electric kettle means you can enjoy having hot water for your tea or cocoa, again without firing up the stove. A freezer will allow you to freeze meat, vegetables and fruit. This saves tremendous time compared to canning and preserving in jars. Other appliances you would enjoy having, and would save time using, include an electric sewing machine, toaster, electric coffee percolator, floor polisher, vacuum cleaner, heating pad for preheating your beds or aches and pains, an electric clock, electric cream separator, and eventually you might want to consider an electric dryer. One experience of using a clothes dryer and not hanging clothes outside when it is freezing outside will change your attitude to washday forever.”



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During Penny's presentation, many ladies smiled and nodded their approval. Mrs. Montgomery could not even imagine laundry not taking an entire day! The thought of never having to bring frozen laundry into the house from the line in the winter was incomprehensible!

The men remained unmoved, and some even whispered to each other that electricity was really only a benefit to women and not to men at all.

Penny continued, "Men, you may believe electricity is only a benefit to your wives, but just focus in and you will soon agree with me that electricity will make a major impact on your lives. Just consider the amount of time and energy you would save using an electric saw, sander or drill. A simple tool like a trouble light, which is a light bulb on a cord, will prove indispensable when repairing machinery, or working outside after dark. You will be able to work in your machine shop repairing and building after dusk and even after dark when your farm buildings are lit up. An electric radio gives better quality reception than a battery operated one. You could listen to the weather forecast and farm news outside in your shop! Battery chargers will mean connecting your battery to power and letting it charge. You won't have to bring your battery in the house everyday in the winter to keep from freezing. You will simply plug in your vehicle block heater and your battery will not freeze and your engine temperature will be warm enough to start even in minus temperatures. For you dairy farmers, portable milkers can lighten your chores. Imagine how much easier trips between the house and barn would be in the night with a powerful yard light to guide your way."

Penny finally touched on the improvement rural electrification would have on family life. Families could enjoy listening to the radio together, and read comfortably after dark without having to be near a coal oil lamp. Penny finished off by talking about television. She expected that it would be coming to Saskatchewan in the next few years. You would be able to watch the news and weather rather than just listen to it on the radio.

Penny had saved the most convincing argument for rural electrification until the end. "Your government has promised to electrify farms. The government together with the Saskatchewan Power Corporation is providing grants to electrify rural farms. I have the information and forms here with me at the front. Please pick these up before you leave even if you are still questioning the need for electricity. The information in the package may convince you or answer any other questions you might have."

Having completed her presentation, Penny Powers thanked the audience for attending her presentation on rural electrification. "I will remain here in the hall for the next hour and will be available to answer any other questions you might have," she said. Peter and Linda Montgomery looked at each other. In a surprise move, Peter walked to the front and picked up a package.

"No promises, but I think we just might have to have a family discussion about this rural electrification business. The money we will spend might be well worth the expense," he said.

Linda's face broke into a huge smile. "I can hardly wait to tell Krista and Tyler," she said.



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APPENDIX THREE

Rural Electrification Worksheet

1.0 Complete the sentences using the vocabulary below.

Prior to the 1950s, electrical power was only available in cities and towns. Very few farms were electrified. However, some farms did generate electricity using _____ and _____ to help with chores like grinding feed and pumping water.

Farm _____ often believed that electricity would benefit only farm _____, and that it was unnecessary and expensive.

The _____ carried out the work of bringing electricity to Saskatchewan's farms.

_____ taught rural people about the advantages of electricity and new types of electrical appliances they could use like _____, _____ and _____.

After rural electrification, instead of canning all of their garden vegetables and fruits, farm women could _____ them in new appliances called freezers.

Chopping _____ for the stove was one less chore that farm women had to do once they were able to purchase an electric stove.

Vocabulary:

irons

wood

Penny Powers

women

stoves

windmill

men

freeze

washing machine

Saskatchewan Power Corporation

generator

