



Alaska Agriculture in the Classroom *presents*

Hopeful Harvest: Alaska's Agricultural History Told by Voices of the Past

Alaska Content Standards: History C1-3; English/LA A1, 2 or 3

Fairbanks 1918: Cold Reality

Introduction

In 1918, Milton D. Snodgrass was an employee of the federal government, working at the Agricultural Experiment Station near Fairbanks, which had opened in 1906. In his first winter at the station, Snodgrass writes a letter to his predecessor, J.W. Neal, to explain the happenings of the previous season. The letter is both personal and professional, and gives glimpses of life at the station and in Fairbanks at the end of World War I. It is part of the archives at the University of Alaska Fairbanks Elmer R.asmuson Library.



Assignments

Read 1918 letter Snodgrass to Neal (see Word file)

1. Vocabulary and comprehension

a. Define unfamiliar words, including thresher, cylinder, cellar, radiator, gilt, kernels.

b. Discuss expressions, e.g., “like pulling teeth,” “if worse comes to worst,” “gobble on to” and “out of commission.”

c. What challenges did Snodgrass have to face in his first year at the station?

Write or discuss the problems with which he had to deal.

2. Writing exercise

Even today, people who live outside of Alaska often have misconceptions about life here, and sometimes our lives are significantly different for those people to find our lives interesting. Snodgrass writes a long letter full of anecdotes and detail. At one point, Snodgrass says he is worried about whether mosquitoes will have enough moisture to hatch in the spring.

In 1918, letters were the only inexpensive means of distance communications. Telegraphs were expensive and the telephone was not widely used. In the letter Snodgrass laments that because one of the mail-carrying boats has wrecked, letters take as much as a month to travel from Sitka to Fairbanks.

Write a letter to someone you know outside of Alaska, or as if you knew someone outside of Alaska, about your life over the past several months, sharing unusual, interesting or humorous incidents that might be unique to Alaska or your life.

For more information

Review pictures and information in publications from University of Alaska Fairbanks' School of Natural Resources & Agricultural Sciences' Agricultural & Forestry Experiment Station: “Agroborealis,” Spring 1998, Vol 30, No. 1 and “Throw All Experiments to the Wind,” 1996. Available online at <http://www.uaf.edu/salrm/afes/>

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