

Creating Utopia?? The Founding of Ruskin

Grade:	4		
Locale:	Ruskin/Apollo Beach/Sun City		
Spark of Interest:	How Ruskin Got Started		
Content Areas:	History/Economics		
Time Frame:	Three 45 minute sessions		
Sunshine State Standards:	SS.A.6.2	SS.D.1.2	LA.4.2.1.5

Abstract:

Students will read and discuss the economic and social factors in the United States that led Dr. McAnely Miller and the Dickmans to establish Ruskin. They will put themselves into the position of early 20th century workers and face the same options placed before those workers. They will also be faced with the same challenges as the founders of Ruskin and be forced to make a decision that would impact the very character that makes Ruskin what it is today.

Materials:

- Background information for teacher and students The Founding of Ruskin Florida by the Ruskin Chamber of Commerce. Can be accessed here or on <http://www.ruskinhistory.org>
- Background information for teacher and students and Socialism in the Sunshine by Lori Robinson and Bill De Young. Can be accessed here or on <http://www.ruskinhistory.org> in “Ruskin Publications” section.
- Copies of Motivation for Moving? Student information sheet for each student group

Key Vocabulary:

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| -Industrialization | -Debt |
| -Utopian | -Credit |
| -Socialism | -Foreclose |
| -Collateral | -Deed |

Lesson Outline:

1. Inform students that they will learn who founded Ruskin and the factors occurring in the United States that was the inspiration for doing so.
2. Organize class into student groups of 2-3.
3. Provide copies of Motivation for Moving? student information sheet to student groups.
4. Read background section on Motivation for Moving? The Small Family Farmer.

5. Discuss with class.
6. Tell student groups to choose one of the options to solve the dilemma the family is in. They must explain why they chose option 1, 2, or 3.
7. Read the next section of Motivation for Moving? A Factory Worker's Dilemma sheet to students.
8. Discuss with class.
9. Have student groups pretend to be a factory worker family in that situation. They must choose option 1 or 2 and explain why they chose it.
10. Read the next section of Motivation for Moving? Different Paths for the Founding Families.
11. Discuss with class.
12. Students decide whether to take the path of Dr. Miller or the Dickmans when founding Ruskin.

Motivation for Moving? Student Information Sheet The Small Family Farmer

The early 1900's was a time of great change for the United States. It was a period of industrialization. Many large steel mills and factories were being built that created unprecedented amounts of materials for items such as cars, buildings, ships, and such. Textile mills and other factories were doing the same. They created clothing and other products in huge quantities in the likes that were never seen anywhere in the world before! This created a large demand for jobs in the cities where these factories were located. Oftentimes cities would spring up around these factories and mills. Large numbers of workers would usually live in very small cramped housing near these factories and mills because they could not afford transportation from any great distance at all. Many families would often share quarters in tenant housing which were inexpensive, small apartment style homes.

Many of the people who came to work in these factories were from small family farms. This was a life that many of these families had lived for generations. It was the only type of life that they knew and could ever envision. The life of the families who ran these farms was often physically difficult though and did not guarantee a living from month to month or year to year. One bad hailstorm or dry summer not only meant no income but could mean starvation for the entire family. The prospect of steady wages sounded good to these families.

Situation #1

The Small Family Farmer

You are a small family farmer in the state of New York. In the spring you had to borrow money from the bank for seed to grow corn and a mule and plow. You gave the bank the deed to your 5 acres for collateral. You also are in debt to the general store for clothes food for your four children. The money will be due in the fall when you harvest your crop. The growing season was going well until a hailstorm destroyed the entire crop in early September.

Since the bank has the deed to the land you will probably foreclose and lose the farm. If there is any money left it will most likely go to the store to pay off the credit. It is doubtful that you will have any money left. What should you do?

Option #1: Remain in the same small town and try to find work for another farmer who wasn't hit as bad by the hailstorm as you were. This is not promising though because most of the other farmers have suffered a setback as well which means their ability to pay any workers is questionable. The town is not large enough to have any other type of work.

Option #2: Move to Ohio where there is good farmland. Get another loan from a bank there to start up a new family farm. If the bank has heard about the difficulties you had in New York they may not want to lend the money to you since you are a high risk.

Option #3: You read an advertisement for laborers in the factories of New York City. You, your spouse, and three of your children could work in the factories. Perhaps someone could be paid to watch your eight month old baby while you work all day.

Which option did your group decide on? Explain why.

Motivation for Moving? Student Information Sheet A Factory Worker's Dilemma

Most of the factory work was unskilled. This means that that you did not have to have an education to perform it. Unfortunately this also meant that the wages for such work was low. The pay for this work was often so low that all adults in a family as well as children had to work. It was not uncommon to see children as young as 7 or 8 years old to work 10 – 12 hours per day in the factories or mills. Since the workers were unskilled and uneducated they usually had no choice but to remain. They did not have the option of locating a better paying job because of their lack of education and work experience. Many factory owners were good, honest people but many took advantage of these low wage workers by demanding they work many hours in unhealthy, dirty, and unsafe buildings. Much of the equipment in a factory can cause injuries and often did to the children that were working there.

It was in reaction to these conditions that many people such as Dr. George McAnelly Miller wanted to create a community that took better care of its people and gave them more opportunities to better their lives. Dr. Miller, a former lawyer and college professor was born in 1857. He was also president of two former socialist workers colleges in Illinois and Missouri. These socialist colleges allowed people without money to attend by working off their education at the college farm or one of the college businesses. In concept people of little means would be able to improve their lives by gaining an education and developing practical work skills. College students could earn a degree and gain work experience without having to pay, they simply invested in sweat equity where they worked off the cost of the college as they went along. You didn't have to have money in order to better your life.

Situation #2

A Factory Worker's Dilemma

As you have learned many of the workers in these factories and mills were small farmers who moved to the bigger cities for employment. Many others though were people without much money who already lived in the cities. They needed employment also and many of them were unskilled with little or no education. Their families faced the same living and working conditions as the transplanted farming families. Pretend you are the parent of one of these families. You have three children. Which option would you choose?

Option #1: Continue to work in the factory. Your job may be demanding and pay very little but at least you can share a home with your relatives and feed and clothe your children. Besides, even if attending the college is free you don't have enough money to travel there.

Option #2: Take a risk. If you can borrow or save enough money to travel to the college then you can earn a college degree for yourself, your spouse, and your children. It may take several years of hard work from everyone but at least everyone will have better opportunities at higher paying jobs. Perhaps your children won't have to live like this the rest of their lives.

Which opportunity did your group choose? Explain

Motivation for Moving?
Student Information Sheet
Different Paths for the Founding Families

Unfortunately neither one of these colleges lasted very long because of troubles with the residents of the towns they were established in. Dr. Miller therefore decided to take his concept of a socialist community centered on the school to a more remote area. In 1906 he relocated his entire family to Shell Point. If this sounds familiar to you it could be because this is the same area that Shell Point Road in Ruskin was named after. During this time the area was very rugged. Only a few hardy people lived in Southern Hillsborough County. Living among the mosquitoes, saw palmettos, and hot weather was not for the faint of heart!

Dr. Miller and his family were joined by his brother in laws the Dickmans and their families. The Dickmans and Millers have descendants living in Ruskin today. They are still a centerpiece of community and business involvement.

Dr. Miller and the Dickmans pooled together their resources for 12,000 acres of land right here in Southern Hillsborough County. The Dickmans traded 550 acres of excellent farmland in Missouri and they all agreed to pay \$3.75 dollars per acre for 12,000 acres of land here. Not a bad deal considering that some of that same land now can easily sell for \$50,000 per acre! This was the beginning of Ruskin and Apollo Beach.

The land they purchased was very rugged. The climate was hot and humid. Not many people lived there and they did not have a house to move into. They did not have a guarantee of a job or any income. But there were many pine trees available and excellent farmland. Turpentine came from the pine trees and sold for a great price. The wood from the trees could then be cut and sold or used for buildings. The land could be farmed and produce as many as three crops per year. Ruskin Inlet and the surrounding waters of Hillsborough Bay produced fish and shellfish. It could be a great opportunity...if you were willing to work hard and take a risk. Would the risk be worth it to you?

Situation #3

Different Paths for the Founding Families

The Dickmans and the Millers took very different routes when they established Ruskin. Dr. Miller was very active establishing the college and Utopian concept. The Dickmans farmed the land and developed business interests. Descendants of the Miller family remain active in the higher education field. Descendants of the Dickmans continue to operate the family's financial interests. If you were in their place which path would you have chosen?

Option #1: Work like Dr. Miller to establish a college centered community where people without much means could own a house, run a business or farm, and get an education despite the lack of success in past attempts. Create a community where all adult members could vote. Understand that a certain amount of your income is taken from you and used for public parks, buildings, and organizations.

Option #2: Work like the Dickman families at developing for profit businesses. Understand that they will be taking large financial risks and doing most of the work therefore they deserve the majority of the profits. The businesses they establish will pay other people, some of those jobs will pay well while other jobs are low wage.

Which option did your group choose? Explain why.

The Founding of Ruskin, Florida Background Information

By The Ruskin Chamber of Commerce

After having experienced failures as president of two different Ruskin-plan colleges in the Midwest, Dr. George McAnelly Miller had an idea that the primitive woods and coast of southwest Florida would be an ideal site for a new cooperative venture. He was looking for an isolated spot away from outside interference, a climate favorable to agriculture, and enough land to develop an economically independent community. Dr. Miller and three of his brothers-in-law agreed to trade property in Missouri for 12,000 acres in Florida. Thus, his dream became reality.

Dr. Miller moved with his wife Adaline and children to the site of Ruskin in 1906. A few years later, three of his wife's brothers, A.P., N.E. and L.L. Dickman joined them here. Some of the other early settlers came from other failed Ruskins in Tennessee and Georgia.

From his previous experience, Dr. Miller already knew how to get things started and what to avoid in a cooperative community. The founders purchased land, subdivided it, and created a marketing and development company. The Ruskin Homemakers sold the plots. Part of the proceeds from sales went to the Commongood Society for general community improvements and expenses of Ruskin College. The idea for this form of cooperative society and use of its own script cam from the other Ruskins. The covenant contained provisions against profanity, smoking and drinking. Landowners were required to be white.

The community attempted to adhere to principles of shared public property and responsibility. For instance, the park and the college grounds were communally held public spaces, some chores were shared among the group for the common good, and women as well as men could own property and vote.

Ruskin College was a central feature of the community. The college buildings were erected from locally available timber. Student's days were divided into thirds, with work, study and relaxation claiming equal portions of their days. The curriculum was varied and liberal.

In its early days, Ruskin was an isolated community. Tampa and St. Petersburg could only be reached by boat ride which took several hours each way.

Plenty of timber and turpentine were available for construction, although hauling it required a pair of oxen. Artesian wells supplied good water, and good soil and a temperate climate were ideal for growing fruits and vegetables. The surrounding waters supplied fish, shellfish and fowl. For the rest of its needs, the town organized a cooperative general store.

The college continued until World War I, when many young people either went into the armed services or took jobs in the cities and juts never returned. In 1919 Dr. Miller died during a trip to promote a book he had written. Also near this time a fire destroyed most of the college buildings.

Although these combined tragedies ended the college and the heyday of the cooperative enterprise, Ruskin survived. In fact, the Ruskin Commongood society operated until the 1960's.