

Millions to None

An Inquiry Lesson of the Passenger Pigeon's Flight to Extinction



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Overview

The once most numerous species of bird the world has ever known, whose migrations during the springtime would blacken the midday sky. The Passenger Pigeon was rapidly driven into extinction during the late nineteenth century. How could this have happened and what were the main factors in the Passenger Pigeon's demise and eventual extinction?



Destruction of agriculture made them an easy target for kill, practically and justifiably.

The Passenger Pigeon's natural characteristics met head on in conflict with America's population and expansion growth, leading to loss of habitat.



Rationale

This inquiry lesson will engage the students to learn the historical attitudes of humans towards the wildlife and environment of the late nineteenth century. The lesson will help students understand how environmental policies evolved to what they are today. Also, this lesson should spark debate on what can be done to improve current environmental policies and ensure a balance between environmental interests and economic necessities.



"Then the authors of all this devastation began to move among the dead, the dying, and mangled, picking up the pigeons and piling them in heaps. When each man had as many as he could possibly dispose of, the hogs were let loose to feed on the remainder."

- John James Audubon



"We meet here to commemorate the death of a species. This monument symbolize4s our sorrow. We grieve because no living man will see again the onrushing phalanx of victorious birds, sweeping a path for spring across the March skies, chasing the defeated winter from all the wood and prairies of Wisconsin."

- Aldo Leopold



Standards

- B.12.2 - Analyze primary and secondary sources related to a historical question to evaluate their relevance, make comparisons, integrate new information with prior knowledge, and come to reasoned conclusion.
- B.12.4 - Assess the validity of different interpretations of significant historical events.
- B.12.9 - Select significant changes caused by technology, industrialization, urbanization, and population growth, and analyze the effects of these changes in the United States and the world.
- CCSS-RH 2 - Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; providing an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among key details and ideas.
- CCSS-RH 3 - Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matter uncertain.