

In this lesson, students will analyze primary sources to understand how individuals and families have been recruited to live and work in North Dakota. They will create their own promotional material for recruitment as a culminating activity.

Historical Skills	Historical Question	Standards
Examining critically	How have the methods used to recruit people to settle in North Dakota changed over time?	SS.4.3.1: Understand the historical development of North Dakota, including early exploration and settlement. SS.4.3.2: Analyze the causes and effects of migration to North Dakota.

Objectives

After completing this primary source analysis and poster creation, students will be able to do the following:

- Analyze various primary source recruitment tools used to get people to move to North Dakota.
- Identify at least four positive aspects of the state that may appeal to individuals.
- Create their own campaign to recruit people to the state informed by at least two pull factors. Pull factors are reasons that people choose to move to a place, such as job opportunities, free land, or personal connections.

Supplies

- Whiteboard or chart paper
- Markers
- Primary source materials from different historical periods of North Dakota recruitment
 - [Holmboe film](#)
 - [ND Department of Commerce video](#)
 - [North Dakota: Its Resources and Its Opportunities](#)
 - [“Two girls with pumpkins and squash” photo](#)
 - [“It’s Howdy Time” bumper sticker](#)
 - [North Dakotan newsletter cover, October 1957](#)
- Projector or printed copies of sources
- Paper, colored pencils, or markers for student-created propaganda posters

Setup

- Provide students access to the primary source materials, and cue up the [Holmboe film](#) and [ND Department of Commerce video](#).
- Have poster supplies set up for each group or ready to be distributed to each group.

Background

North Dakota has a long history of actively recruiting people to settle in the state, beginning in the mid-19th century when it was still a territory. Early efforts were driven by the need for settlers to develop the land and reach minimum territorial population standards to be considered a state. However, the arrival of these new immigrants would further encroach on Native lands, causing additional displacement of Indigenous people. In the 1870s and 1880s, the Northern Pacific Railway played a pivotal role in promoting immigration, offering cheap land to European immigrants, especially from Germany, Scandinavia, and other parts of Northern Europe. These settlers were encouraged through pamphlets, advertisements, and even direct outreach by railroads and land agents who promoted North Dakota’s fertile soil and opportunities for a better life. The territorial government worked with the railroad companies and land agents to attract people to the state.

As North Dakota transitioned from a territory to statehood in 1889, recruitment efforts continued. State officials worked to bring in both foreign and domestic migrants through a variety of promotional

means, such as distributing literature, attending international expositions, and spearheading efforts to encourage immigrants to write testimonials to friends back home. Officials focused on attracting European immigrants but also on encouraging migration from elsewhere in the United States, particularly in light of North Dakota's agricultural boom. The state was eager to bring in settlers to cultivate the land, build communities, and drive economic growth.

Several different campaigns were used to recruit people to North Dakota. The earliest known silent film in the state was recorded for just that purpose. Frithjof Holmboe, a Norwegian immigrant, went to different communities to film their highlights. He would often advertise the days he would be recording so people would come to town, making each community a center of activity. Another company, the William H. Brown Land Company, founded in the late 1800s, played a key role in North Dakota's early immigration efforts by promoting the state as a destination for settlers. The William H. Brown Land Company showcased the state's agricultural potential and opportunities for prosperity. Through advertising campaigns, brochures, and other marketing, the William H. Brown Land Company promoted North Dakota as a place of promise, emphasizing the state's fertile soil, expansive farmlands, and the ideal conditions for farming. By the mid-1950s, a new branding initiative, "Sunny Nodak," was launched by the Greater North Dakota Association to attract both residents and tourists. The campaign played on the idea of North Dakota's sunshine, welcoming atmosphere, and quality of life, focusing on the state's growth potential.

In recent decades, North Dakota has continued its recruitment efforts, highlighting opportunities while aiming to make the state a more diverse and dynamic place. In the 21st century, the state's economic focus has expanded beyond agriculture to include energy, manufacturing, and healthcare, prompting a more diverse approach to recruitment. The North Dakota Department of Commerce, specifically the Office of Legal Immigration, now leads efforts to attract

and retain workers to meet the growing demand in sectors like energy, construction, and healthcare. This department works with businesses and industries across the state to promote North Dakota as a destination for skilled workers, offering immigration pathways, resources, and guidance for those seeking permanent residency or temporary work visas.

Activity

1. Inform the students that North Dakota has been recruiting people to live in the state starting with early settlers in the 1800s to the present.
2. Ask the students the following:
 - What do you think would convince someone to move to a new state, especially one as cold as North Dakota?
 - Do you know why you or your family moved to the state?
3. Talk about the push and pull factors of immigration that might cause people to consider moving to a new place (e.g., land, job opportunities, community, religious freedom, war).
4. Have the students watch the [Holmboe film](#), which is a silent movie created in 1915 to entice people to live in Wilton. As they watch, ask them to look for things that might make people want to move there.
 - Large crowds of people
 - Businesses
 - Cars
 - Children playing
5. Divide students into small groups. You can have each group analyze one source and share or have the group look at all of them.
 - [ND Commerce Department video](#)
 - [North Dakota: Its Resources and Its Opportunities](#)
 - ["Two girls with pumpkins and squash" photo](#)
 - ["It's Howdy Time" bumper sticker](#)
 - [North Dakotan newsletter cover, October 1957](#)

6. In their groups, students will examine the primary sources. Ask them the following questions:
 - Who is the intended audience?
 - What key messages are being communicated?
 - What visuals or words are used to persuade people to move?
 - What might be the benefits of living in North Dakota according to the source?
 - Would you be persuaded by the source?
7. Discuss the different ways people were recruited over time and how the messages have changed.
8. Now that students have explored historical methods of recruitment, tell them they will create their own recruitment posters to convince people to move to North Dakota today. Have students consider the questions from Step 6 as they create their own posters.
9. Provide paper, markers, and colored pencils for students to create their posters. The posters should be colorful and positive, highlight the good things about the state, and have visuals and a slogan.

Reflection questions

1. Students can present their posters, and their classmates can discuss what they think makes the poster effective and whether it would persuade them to move to North Dakota.
2. How do you think recruitment methods have changed over time? Why do you think it's important for a state to have such efforts?