

LIFE IN SMOKLERVILLE

“Life in Smoklerville” is an exercise in living history that simulates the hardships of life for the early settlers in Michigan. Your students will work as families to acquire what they need to survive for one year, and during the course of the game they will have the opportunity to trade with the townspeople, work with their hands on several crafts, work at odd jobs to earn more Smoklerville currency, and perhaps, to break the law and spend time in jail. Our objectives are for them to learn about the requirements for survival in a pioneer community to experience the need to make sound decisions about managing money and assets, and to get a feel for the necessity of teamwork and cooperation in trying times.



The game takes place at the Smokler Pioneer Skills Center, our own pioneer town, complete with a schoolhouse, a pioneer log cabin, an animal barn, a craft barn, and on Main Street, a hotel, a tavern, a general store, a museum, and a real jail. Your group will need to provide at least eight adults(staff) to play the role of the various townspeople. They should report to the tavern 20-30 minutes prior to the arrival of the students, for training.

Running time for the game is approximately two and one-half hours. The students should be divided into families before they arrive, and upon entering Smoklerville, should go directly to the Schoolhouse and sit as families, one family to a bench. (Families should be mixed boys and girls. An even number of students is requested when possible in each family, as in 4 or 6 or 8.) The game begins with a town meeting in the schoolhouse given by the mayor of Smoklerville, a Tamarack staff member. Students will learn some of the history of the area, and they will learn what they need to attempt to survive their in Smoklerville. Following the meeting, students will be dismissed to go out into the village to play the game. When the bell in the Town Square rings, all families should return to the schoolhouse to attend a second town meeting, conducted by the mayor, during which they will tally their assets, and discuss the various hardships that they encountered along the way.

We have found that the games, run more smoothly if students do not have prior knowledge of the “particulars” of the games, but please share this information with the adults assigned to play the roles.



The following descriptions of the townspeople are brief, but should give enough information to help the actors assume their roles. A more specific orientation will be given onsite. The rules of the game are flexible, and characters will be encouraged to share stories with the families about their hardships, the reasons for changing prices, etc. Be imaginative and have fun!

INDIAN

The Indian lived on this land long before people came to settle the town of Smoklerville. He still has rights to the water sources, and families must visit him and attempt to convince him to give them access to water. He is friendly and enjoys telling Indian legends and complaining about the loss of his land to the white man. If families are respectful and attentive, the Indian may give up water rights for nothing. He may, however, ask for payment in beaver pelts, trinkets, or other items.

LAND OFFICER

The land office is located just outside the hotel on Main Street. It is the land officer's job to sell a plot of land to the settlers, determine a price, and fill out an official deed. Prices may vary according to the quality of the land (it may be rocky and difficult to farm, or it may be great farming land that contains enough trees for shelter). Available land diminishes toward the end of the year so that families who wait too long to visit the land officer will have a limited selection, and will have to pay higher prices. Deeds will be provided. Before they are able to begin negotiations with the land officer, families must "work their land" and bring finished crafts to the land officer as proof.

TRADESMAN (2)

If possible, it is helpful to have two people assigned to this role. In order to prove to the land officer that they have worked their land, families will have to visit the craft barn (or designated place) to learn a trade (usually, rope or candles or both), symbols that they have worked their land and could set up a household. We will teach these crafts during the orientation before the students arrive.

SAWMILLER

If a family purchases land without trees for their shelter, they will have to visit the sawmiller to buy lumber. Prices for lumber vary in price according to availability, quality, and the mood of the sawmiller. The mill is located in front of the blacksmith shop, and the miller is often found whittling in his spare time. Families must saw one small piece of wood to prove that they have met the requirement of providing shelter for their family.



STOREKEEPER

Families can buy almost anything at the general store. Prices are fixed at the beginning of the year, but the storekeeper can change prices at any time due to storage problems, overstock, availability, quality, etc. Families will not need any of the items that the store carries except salt, but the storekeeper should feel free to try and convince them that they do. The storekeeper may also buy things from the settlers: beaver pelts, litter, lost gloves, etc.

SHERIFF and JAILER

The sheriff is responsible for keeping the law and order by walking around and settling disputes, and carting lawbreakers off to jail. The laws of Smoklerville are the same as anywhere else for the most part, and certain special laws will be explained during the orientation. While the sheriff is roaming around the town, the jailer is busy keeping things calm in the jail and negotiating bail with the families of the criminals. Both the sheriff and the jailer can be mean and nasty at times, but in the end we want the students to be able to say the two are necessary figures in the town.

FUR TRADER

The fur trader is a busy person. When he is not out on the trap line or hunting, he visits towns such as Smoklerville to buy and sell pelts. Since he travels a great deal, it may be possible for him to pay higher prices for the pelts which families wish to sell. He is a wandering salesman, always ready to barter. Families should inquire about the going rate for beaver pelts as compared to the general store.

MAYOR (Tamarack Staff)

In addition to welcoming the new families at the town meeting and explaining how to survive the year in Smoklerville, the mayor is a friendly person who wanders around answering questions and solving problems. Families who run out of money can go to the mayor for a job. The mayor's signature is also required on deeds to property. The mayor will usually require a "registration or filing fee" for providing his/her signature. This may open the door for charges of bribery or official misconduct at the final Town Meeting.

