



The Homestead Act featuring Cowboy Songs collected by John Lomax

OVERVIEW

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How did the Homestead Act of 1862 impact growth and development in the American West, and what is meant by the term “crossroads of culture” in the context of the American West?

OVERVIEW

“A farm free to any man who wanted to put a plow into unbroken sod.”

-Carl Sandberg

In this lesson, students will consider the impact of the Homestead Act on the development of the American West and examine the evidence that settlers and cowboys came from diverse backgrounds.

The development of the First Transcontinental Railroad in the late 1800s opened up millions of acres in the American West for settlement and economic development. To help spur migration west, The Homestead Act was passed in 1862 and signed by Abraham Lincoln. It allowed adventurous settlers to claim 160 acres of land for free, so long as they were at least 21 years of age, promised to build a house, and work the land for five years. By 1900, over 80 million acres were settled.

The image, attractiveness, and lure of the west brought white settlers from the east across the Mississippi, newly freed enslaved people from the South in search of land and opportunity, Chinese railroad workers, Spanish settlers from Mexico, and a mosaic of immigrants from Europe and Asia with hopes and dreams of a better life in the American West. Many of these immigrants were thrilled, energized, and motivated by the image of the west as portrayed in the Wild West Shows that played to huge crowds in Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia. These shows created and perpetuated a myth of the cowboy who was all white, lived rugged solitary lives, and engaged in constant gunfights and battles with Native Americans.

In contrast to the often whitewashed Hollywood image of the “Wild West,” the American West in the 1800s was truly a “crossroads of culture,” where diverse groups intersected, interacted, and inspired. Music in the late 19th Century American West reflected the diversity of the region and contributed to the lives of these settlers by bringing people together for dances, celebrations, and gatherings.



The David Hilton family near Weissert, Custer County, Nebraska. 1887. (Nebraska State Historical Society, Solomon Devore Butcher Collection. Reproduction Number: RG2608. PH:000000-003535)

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson, students will:

1. KNOW (KNOWLEDGE):

- The impact of the Homestead Act on the development of the American West
- The meaning of the term “Crossroads of Culture” in the context of the American West
- The myth and reality of the American Cowboy as portrayed in popular culture
- The Cowboy song as a representation of the American West in the late 1800s

2. MASTERY OBJECTIVE:

- Students will be able to describe how the interaction between different cultures shaped the development of the American West by examining media, analyzing texts, and interpreting primary sources.

ACTIVITIES

MATERIALS NEEDED

- A device with internet access

MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY

1. Ask students:

- What images come to mind when you think of cowboys?
- Where did you first see an image of a cowboy? Was it in real life, or in media (films, video games, etc.)?
- Describe what you think a typical cowboy looks like. Explain to students that in class they will be examining cowboys in terms of the American West and the time period of Western Expansion.

PROCEDURE

1. Display or distribute **Gallery Walk - Buffalo Bill's Wild West Promotional Posters**. Using the **Teacher's Guide: Analyzing Photographs & Prints** from the Library of Congress as a guide, have students pair up to explore the image. Focus on the following questions from the Teacher's Guide: Analyzing Photographs & Prints:

- Describe what you see.
- What did you notice first?
- Why do you think this image was made?
- What's happening in the image?

- What can you learn from examining the image?
 - What do you wonder about?
2. Instruct student pairs to join another pair creating groups of 4. In the larger group, have each pair discuss the image they analyzed, and make connections between the images. After time has allotted, ask groups to share their discussions with the class. Then ask the class:
- What do these images all have in common?
 - Who might Buffalo Bill be? What might he have done for a living?
 - Do you feel this is an accurate portrayal of Cowboys living in the west?
3. Inform students that Buffalo Bill was a soldier and professional bison hunter who turned to show business later in life by creating a traveling “Wild West Show” that popularized the adventurer idea of the “Wild West” across the globe.
4. Play the video Cowboy or Cowflop from PBS Learning Media. Then, ask students:
- What does a cowboy do? How do they make money? (*Raising and herding cattle.*)
 - When and where did the cowboy originate? (*North Africans, who conquered Spain in the 8th century, introduced horseback cattle herding practices. The practices were brought to Latin America by Spanish colonialists.*)
 - How was the cowboy in the American West stereotypically presented? (*As white males.*)
- Who are some of the cultural groups that in reality made up the cowboys? (*Black, Indigenous, and Latin Americans, as well as women.*)
 - Why are these groups underrepresented in popular portrayals of cowboys? (*Hollywood at the time was trying to make money, and therefore catered to white men, as women and marginalized people were seen as a threat.*)
5. Inform students that they will be reading from an autobiography of a cowboy who lived during this period. Distribute **Handout - Excerpt from the life and adventures of Nat Love** After reading the handout and answering the questions individually or in groups, as students to share their responses.
6. Divide students into groups, and distribute **Handout - Cowboy Song Analysis**. After completing the handout, ask students to share their answers with the class.
7. Inform students that cowboys in the American West existed in part due to the Homestead Act, signed into law by Abraham Lincoln in 1862, which encouraged people to migrate West. Display or share with students **Image 1, “Millions of Acres” Advertisement**. Using the **Teacher’s Guide: Analyzing Photographs & Prints** from the Library of Congress as a guide, have students discuss the elements of the poster, its appeal and impact. Focus on the questions below from the Teacher’s Guide: Analyzing Photographs & Prints:
- Describe what you see.
 - What people or objects are shown?
 - What other details can you see?

- Why do you think this image was made?
- What do you wonder about?
- Who do you think was the audience for the image?

SUMMARY ACTIVITY

1. Continue to display **Image 2, “Millions of Acres” Advertisement**. Tell students they will be designing their own advertisement enticing Americans to travel and settle west. Each poster should include:
 - An appealing reason to move west (adventure, land, freedom, etc.)
 - A depiction of a historically accurate cowboy.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. The American West was settled by wonderfully diverse groups of people. While this is not a complete list of this frontier melting pot, most historians agree that the ancestral land of Native-Americans was claimed, settled, and developed primarily by four groups. Indigenous people were re-settled by the settlers, and despite these hardships, they contributed significantly to the fabric of the American West. It is important to note that within these groups there resides diversity, uniqueness, and individuality. For each of these groups, prepare a media presentation of your choosing, that represents the **motivations, experiences, and challenges** that these groups endured to settle the American West. Include references and examples of their music and dance as it relates to their unique contributions.
 - Native Americans
 - African Americans
 - European Americans
 - Mexican Americans
 - Asian Americans
2. Explore the story of Nicodemus (<https://www.loc.gov/resource/hhh.ks0077.photos/?sp=6>), the only remaining all Black town west of the Mississippi River that was settled in the 1800s on the western plains by former slaves. Virtually visit Kansas: Nicodemus National Historic Site (<https://www.nps.gov/articles/nicodemus.htm>) and answer the following questions:
 - What motivated these formerly enslaved people to name their settlement Nicodemus?
 - Have you heard of this town?
 - Why was Nicodemus settled? Who settled it?
 - How does this story illuminate the fundamental concept of a “crossroads of cultures”?



3. To learn more about the American Cowboy and the West, explore these TeachRock lessons:

- Westward Expansion and Country Music's Hispanic Influence
- The Myth of the American Cowboy
- The Reclamation of the American Cowboy



STANDARDS

COLLEGE, CAREER, AND CIVIC LIFE (CC) SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARDS

History

D2.His.4.9-12. Analyze complex and interacting factors that influenced the perspectives of people during different historical eras.

D2.His.5.9-12. Analyze how historical contexts shaped and continue to shape people's perspectives.

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORY AND SOCIAL SCIENCE FRAMEWORK STANDARDS

Topic 2. Democratization and expansion [USI.T2]

5. Analyze the causes and long and short term consequences of America's westward expansion from 1800 to 1854 (e.g., the Louisiana Purchase, the War of 1812, growing diplomatic assertiveness after the Monroe Doctrine of 1823; the concept of Manifest Destiny and pan-Indian resistance, the establishment of slave states and free states in the West, the acquisition of Texas and the Southwestern territories as a consequence of the Mexican-American War in 1846–48, the California Gold Rush, and the rapid rise of Chinese immigration in California).

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARDS

11.2. Students analyze the transformation of the American economy and the changing social and political conditions in the United States in response to the Industrial Revolution.

4. Explain how states and the federal government encouraged business expansion through tariffs, banking, land grants, and subsidies. (P, E)

SOCIAL STUDIES – NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE SOCIAL STUDIES (NCSS)

Theme 1: Culture

Theme 3: People, Place, and Environments

Theme 6: Power, Authority, and Governance

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

College and Career Readiness Reading Information Text Standards for Grades 11-12

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.



CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.6 Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.7 Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g., a person’s life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.6 Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness or beauty of the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.7 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing for Grades 9-12

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening for Grades 9-12

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.2 Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source.



CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.3 Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, identifying any fallacious reasoning or exaggerated or distorted evidence.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.2 Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.3 Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, assessing the stance, premises, links among ideas, word choice, points of emphasis, and tone used.





RESOURCES

HANDOUTS

- Gallery Walk - Buffalo Bill's Wild West Promotional Posters
- Teacher's Guide: Analyzing Photographs & Prints from the Library of Congress
- Handout - Excerpt from the life and adventures of Nat Love