

## About the Show

The Trio discover that life in the Old West is nothing like a cowboy movie. They need all of their tricks and wits to survive a stampede, a band of Cheyenne Indians, and a full-blown charge of Custer's Seventh Cavalry.

## Introduction

Students often have many misconceptions and stereotypes about what life was like in the “Wild West.” This lesson plan explores the myths and realities of cowboy life and includes the use of primary sources.

## Historical Background

The image of the American cowboy—as portrayed in paintings, books, songs, and film—has long been a symbol of America itself. Cowboys were thought to be brave, independent, strong, and defenders of justice. This idealized image did not always match up with reality: cowboys were hired men who worked mostly in groups for long hours and under dusty, dirty conditions.

The first cowboys, *vaqueros*, were of Spanish descent. They developed methods for herding cattle in the early 1800s when Spain ruled Texas. Longhorns, the breed of cattle that lived on the plains of Texas, were not considered valuable until the end of the Civil War. By the late 1860s, a railroad had reached Kansas. Now goods could be shipped back east more easily. The longhorns could be driven north to Kansas for transport. Suddenly, beef—long a luxury—became more affordable, and driving cattle became an important job in the West.

## Curriculum Connections

- American history
- cowboys
- westward expansion

## Subject Areas

- language arts
- social studies



# *The Good, The Bad, and The Goofy*



## Historical Background *continued*

At first, most cowboys in the West were *vaqueros* and African Americans. Many African Americans had worked on ranches and knew how to ride. Because jobs were scarce in post-Civil War Texas, more and more “Anglos” (often ex-Confederate soldiers) eventually joined the ranks. Women also sometimes worked as cowhands.

Several factors led to the decline of the cattle boom, including the invention of barbed wire. This made it cheap to fence in land and the cattle drives could no longer continue. Although the cattle boom lasted a mere 20 years—from 1866 to 1886—the fascination with the life and times of the cowboy continues today. Despite new interpretations and more realistic portraits, the cowboy remains an American icon.

*Want students to get even more excited about history?*



Check out the Old West adventure for kids at

[www.timewarp trio.com/adventures/goofy/](http://www.timewarp trio.com/adventures/goofy/)

**Put It Back, Jack!** and other interactive games to play.

**Plentifax 487**—the ultimate time traveler’s guide—gives facts about the way cowboys lived, worked, and more!

**Cool Books** that kids will love.

# Activity 1



## Cowboy Employment Agency

In this activity, students learn about the real lives of cowboys by reading descriptions of jobs on a cattle drive and researching how cowboys worked and lived. They synthesize this information into a “help wanted” poster, circa 1868.

### Instructions

1. Set the stage with the following script (or improvise your own);

*Okay, cowboy. It's the end of the trail. You go into Dodge City and after a bath, a sasparilla, and a clean shirt, you ask Joe where to catch a cattle drive. He points your way to a ramshackle building with a big sign that reads “Cowboy Employment Agency.”*

*They aren't hiring just now, but you are lucky. Instead of being turned down flat for a job as a cowboy, you get a different job. You are hired to make advertising posters for the agency.*

*You will need to*

- pick a job
- write a brief description of what the job is, including the salary
- create a “Help Wanted” job poster

2. Have students work individually, in pairs, or in groups. Distribute the “Job Cards” handout (cut into individual card). Have students choose what job they will advertise. Then they will need to research the dress and equipment cowboys used.
3. If possible, share some samples of posters from the late 1800s. As students design their posters, remind them that color posters had to be made individually, whereas black-and-white posters could be printed on a printing press. They were no photographs, neon colors, or copy machines!
4. Ask for volunteers to share their finished posters. Ask them to talk about why they chose that particular job and how they decided what language and images to use.
5. Create a “Cowboy Employment Agency” display.

### Take It Further

You may want to ask students to apply for one or more of the jobs. Hold mock interviews (with costumes and props if desired) for more fun.

### Objectives

- to examine stereotypes about cowboys
- to explore job components

### Materials

- art and writing supplies
- “Job Cards” handout

### Curriculum Standards

- **NCSS**  
*Production, Distribution, and Consumption:* Students will describe the influence of incentives, values, traditions, and habits on economic decisions.
- **NCTE/IRA**  
Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information.

## Job Cards

### TRAIL BOSS

The trail boss rides out ahead of the herd to scout. He has to find the best route, the best water, and the best grass. He has to anticipate problems before they happen.

Salary: \$90 per month

### DROVERS

Drovers lead the herd, usually by picking out a mature steer to lead the other cattle. They organize and make the drive, and then sell the cattle at the end of the trail. Drovers purchase 40 to 50 horses for the *remuda* (the herd of extra horses). Each cowboy needs 6 to 8 horses for the drive, since horses tired out, fell ill, or were sometimes lost or stolen. Drovers usually hire 6 to 10 cowboys for a herd of 2500 to 3000 cattle.

Salary: \$25 to \$30 per month

### FLANK RIDERS

The cows are surrounded by flank riders, who ride three-quarters of the way at the side of the herd to keep the cattle in a big group.

Salary: \$25 to \$30 per month

### POINT RIDERS

On each side at the front of the herd is a point rider who “points” the herd in the right direction. Point riders need experience in herding and riding because the most rambunctious cattle head for the front of the herd.

Salary: \$25 to \$30 per month

## **DRAG RIDERS**

Drag riders bring up the rear. Their job is to keep the herd moving and closed up, and to round up stray cattle. Drag riders prod along slow, sick, or lazy cattle. Sometimes a cow might drop out to give birth. Since newborn calves can't keep up with the herd, it is the unpleasant duty of the drag riders to eliminate the calves and drive the cow back into the main herd.

Salary: \$25 to \$30 per month

## **SWING RIDERS OR SWINGMEN**

A swing rider is positioned on either side of the herd, about one-third of the way from the front. Swingmen have to endure the incredible heat—not to mention the odor—that the herd gives off.

Salary: \$25 to \$30 per month

## **HORSE WRANGLER**

The wrangler tends the horses. Each cowboy rides 2 to 3 mounts a day so the horses don't get too tired. The horse wrangler drives the *remuda* (the herd of extra horses). Each cowboy needs 6 to 8 horses for the drive, since horses tired out, fell ill, or were sometimes lost or stolen.

Salary: \$25 to 30 per month

## **COOK**

The trail drive is organized around the food or chuck wagon. The chuck wagon must travel faster than the herd to get ahead and make camp because cowboys want their meal ready when they arrive. The cook is the second most experienced man on the crew. He needs to be able to fill in for drovers.

Salary: \$5 more than drovers per month

# Activity 2



## Go West!

After students research facts about cowboys, especially through firsthand accounts, they write a letter using different points of view.

### Instructions

1. Have students research cowboys and their way of life. Ask students to find firsthand accounts, letters, and photographs of people in the 19th century West: Native Americans, African Americans, ranchers, cowboys, and cowgirls.
2. Have students imagine that they are one of the people they have read about. Using the information they have found, have students write a diary entry. You may want to have students write about a particular issue, such as fair wages or a woman applying for a job usually done by a man. Have students include as much detail as possible, such as the clothes they wear, the food they eat, how they spend the day, their relationships with others, and so on.
3. Ask volunteers to read their diary entries aloud. Enhance the atmosphere with props, costumes, and music.
4. To expand the assignment, have students create a scrapbook with artifacts related to their character, such as maps, sketches or drawings, recipes, and songs.

### Take It Further

To help students compare and contrast the myths and realities of the cowboy, have them watch a cowboy movie at home (you may want to provide a list beforehand) or in class. As they watch, have students take notes about the film's historical accuracy. Have students present their reviews.

### Objectives

- to enhance students' knowledge and understanding of the West
- to use primary source materials
- to write in a diary format
- to write from various points of view

### Materials

- art and writing supplies

### Curriculum Standards

- **NCSS**  
*Culture:* Students will demonstrate how information and experiences may be interpreted by people from diverse cultural perspectives and frames of reference.
- **NCTE/IRA**  
Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions and posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience. Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and store knowledge.

## Recommended Books

### For Teachers

***The Oxford History of the American West*** edited by Claude A. Milner II, Carol O'Connor, and Martha A. Sandweiss. (Oxford University Press, 1996) Composed of scholarly essays, this is a useful reference for research on a broad range of issues and topics.

***The Story of the West***

edited by Robert Utley. (DK, 2003) From prehistoric hunters to present-day Silicon Valley, this is a social, political, cultural, and economic history told by historians in conjunction with the Smithsonian.

***The West: An Illustrated History***

by Ken Burns and Geoffrey West. (Back Bay Books, 2003) A companion volume to the PBS television series, this tells the story of the West, from the arrival of the first Europeans through the 20th century.

***Winning the Wild West: The Epic Saga of the American Frontier, 1800–1899*** by Page Stegner.

(Free Press, 2002) Essays on various topics about the West, profusely illustrated with paintings, photographs, and artifacts.

***The Writer's Guide to Everyday Life in the Wild West*** by Candy Moulton.

(Writer's Digest Books, 1999) Writer's Guide to Everyday Life series. This book explores the details of daily life. See also *Everyday Life in the 1800s: A Guide for Writers, Students and Historians* by Marc McCutcheon.

### For Students

#### Fiction

***All the Stars in the Sky: The Santa Fe Trail Diary of Florrie Mack Ryder***

by Megan McDonald. (Scholastic, 2003) Dear America series. When her widowed mother remarries, Florrie and her family travel on the Santa Fe Trail to make a new home in the West.

***Between Earth and Sky: Legends of Native American Sacred Places***

by Joseph Bruchac. (Harcourt, 1996) Native American legends and spectacular paintings tell of the majesty of the land we share.

***The Case of the Deadly Ha-Ha Game***

by John R. Erickson. (Viking, 2001) Hank the Cowdog and his sidekick Drover try to defeat Rip and Snort, the evil coyote brothers, with the deadly Ha-Ha game.

***Cowboys*** by Glen Rounds.

(Holiday House, 1991) Drawings and text show a typical day for a cowboy from sunup to sundown.

***Cowboys on the Western Trail: The Cattle Drive Adventures of Josh McNabb and Davy Bartlett***

by Eric Oatman. (National Geographic, 2004) A series of letters and journal entries tell the story of two young men on an 800-mile cattle drive in 1877. Archival photographs and drawings add authenticity to the fictionalized story.

***Get Along, Little Dogies: The Chisholm Trail Diary of Hallie Lou Wells***

by Lisa Waller Rogers. (Texas Tech University Press, 2001) Hallie helps drive the cattle to Dodge City—an unusual adventure for a girl in 1878.

***The Good, the Bad, and the Goofy***

by Jon Scieszka. Illustrated by Lane Smith. (Puffin, 2002) The Trio has landed in the Old West, which turns out to be a lot less glamorous than it looks on TV!

***The Journal of Joshua Loper: A Black Cowboy***

by Walter Dean Myers. (Scholastic, 1999) My Name Is America series. In 1871, 15-year-old Josh realizes his dream of working on a cattle drive from Texas to Kansas.

***Return of the Buffaloes***

by Paul Goble. (Orchard, 1996) In this retelling of a Lakota myth, a mysterious woman breaks a famine by summoning a herd of buffalo from a cave in the Black Hills.

#### Nonfiction

***Bill Pickett, Rodeo-Ridin' Cowboy***

by Andrea Davis Pinkney. (Gulliver, 1999) A biography of the child of freed slaves who grew up to be a famous black rodeo performer.

***Black Cowboy, Wild Horses: A True Story***

by Julius Lester. (Dial, 1998) Follow Bob Lemmons, a former slave, and his horse Warrior as they “run” wild mustangs.

***Born to Be a Cowgirl: A Spirited Ride through the Old West*** by Candace Savage. (Tricycle Press, 2002) From Fannie Sperry to modern-day rodeo riders, this action-packed book tells the story of America's cowgirls.

***Boss of the Plains: The Hat That Won the West*** by Laurie Carlson. (DK, 1998) While others struck gold or blazed trails through unknown territory, John Batterson Stetson created the most popular hat west of the Mississippi.

***A Braid of Lives: Native American Childhood*** by Neil Philips. (Clarion, 2000) Excerpts from memoirs and biographies, plus archival photographs, cover one hundred years as Native Americans describe their childhoods. A companion volume to *In a Sacred Manner I Live*.

***The Cheyennes*** by Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve. (Holiday House, 1996) The First Americans series. Describes the traditional social structure, daily life, spiritual beliefs, and tragic interactions with white soldiers, as well as today's Cheyenne people.

***In the Days of the Vaqueros: America's First True Cowboys*** by Russell Freedman. (Clarion, 2001) Explores the haciendas and ranchos where the art of herding cattle originated.

***The Life and Death of Crazy Horse*** by Russell Freedman. (Holiday House, 1996) Authentic sketches provide the basis for this biography of the greatest of the Teton Sioux warriors.

***The Opening of the West*** by Rebecca Stefoff. (Benchmark, 2003) Short introductions to primary documents chronicle the frontier experience, from explorer Zebulon Pike to Mary Olivette Taylor, the first woman known to have helped in a Texas cattle drive.

***The West: An Illustrated History for Children*** by Dayton Duncan. (Little, Brown, 1996) An informative guide, based on the PBS documentary series *The West*. Also in the series: *The Gold Rush* by Liza Ketchum and *People of the West* by Dayton Duncan.

## Web Sites

**DIAMOND R RANCH**  
[www.nationalcowboymuseum.org/diamondr/](http://www.nationalcowboymuseum.org/diamondr/)  
This children's site from the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum includes tours through the museum's galleries, songs, games, and more.

**NEW PERSPECTIVES ON THE WEST**  
[www.pbs.org/weta/thewest](http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest)  
Based on the Ken Burns documentary, *The West*, this site contains sections about the people, places, and events that formed the American West, as well as lesson plans.

## RON TARVER: AFRICAN-AMERICAN COWBOYS

[www.nationalgeographic.com/photography/tarver/](http://www.nationalgeographic.com/photography/tarver/)  
Visit this photo gallery of African American cowboys by National Geographic's former senior editor of photography, Ron Tarver.

## TIME WARP TRIO

[www.timewarp trio.com](http://www.timewarp trio.com)  
This site for kids includes interactive games, fascinating facts, and booklists that help make the past come alive.

### Please note:

Although these sites were verified at the time of publication, Web site addresses and content are frequently subject to change.