

San Marcos Explorers Lesson Plan

NOVEMBER 2023

DATE: November 2023

LOCATION: Crockett Elementary School

TIME: 8:00 AM

PARTNERSHIPS (if any): Crockett Elementary School Library

PROMOTION PLAN:

**TOPIC:** Famous Texas Cowpokes

**GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF WORKSHOP & GOALS:**

Challenging the traditional image students may have of what Texas cowboys (and historical figures as a whole) looked like, by telling the untold stories of the diverse faces of the state's cattle industry.

**MATERIALS & COSTS:**

Construction Paper  
Pencils  
Colored Pencils  
Crayons  
Markers

Outdoor space or indoor gym with enough space for students to run safely in

**LESSON PLAN (with timing):**

**Discussion:** meeting students where they are. Formulate questions that will get them to talk about what they already know about the topic, or what they currently associate it with.

Ex: Where have you seen \_\_\_\_? Who has heard of \_\_\_\_?

**2-3 Minutes (Slides 2-3):**

Start by asking students to picture in their minds what a cowboy looks like. What does he wear? Is he a tall person or a short person? Are you picturing a cowboy or a cowgirl? Where have we seen cowboys before, and what do they look like? In movies, books, TV?

Have students raise their hands to give some of their thoughts and ideas.

Display some pictures of cowpokes in popular media and ask if students recognize them, and what all of these images may have in common. Point out that the popular image of a cowboy is a white man, riding alone in the “Wild West,” and transition into the background of cowpokes in Texas.

**Background:** Lay the foundational knowledge that is essential for students to know to understand the topic at hand.

Ex: explaining basics of the water cycle

**4-5 Minutes (Slides 4-7):**

Begin with a the brief history of how cowboys came to be, starting with the introduction of cows to the Americas (“Which came first? The cowboy or the cow? The cow! In 1493, Chirstopher Columbus brought Spanish cattle to islands in the Caribbean...”)

Explain that the first cowboys were Mexican vaqueros, who used herding skills that came from their Native-American, African, and Spanish roots. Talk about how cowboy culture as we know it would not exist without these vaqueros, even down to the language we use to talk about cowboys and ranching. (“Corral, buckaroo/vaquero, lazo/lasso, rodear/rodeo, mustang/mesteno are all words that exist in the cowboy lexicon because they were originally Spanish words!”)

Transition into how the job of cowhand expanded to African-Americans as white ranchers brought slaves with them to Texas during the 1800s. During the Civil War, while white farmhands and sons of plantation owners became soldiers in the Confederate Army, slaves were left with the task of maintaining ranches, and learned herding and riding skills from Mexican vaqueros. After Emancipation, 1 in 4 cowboys for hire were black freedmen.

All the while, women were also involved in the ranching and cattle industry, not just as wives but as trail riders, animal caretakers, homesteaders, doctors, and more. Many women even owned cattle themselves.

**Local Context:** Bring the broader topic close to home by teaching about how it relates to their region/community.

Ex: explaining what the Edwards Aquifer is

5 minutes (Slides 8-12)

Using each slide's focus on one individual, give examples of the real life cowboys and cowgirls who were familiar in the Texas scene during the height of the Wild West/early cattle ranching era. Emphasize how each person played an important role in the development of what people think about the image of the American cowboy and the image of the West as a whole.

**Food for Thought:** Have another short discussion about how the students' new knowledge compares to what they knew before, or previously thought.

Ex: How do you feel about \_\_\_\_ now that you know how it works? What are you going to do different now?

3-4 minutes (Slide 13)

Return to the discussion from the beginning of the lesson, and ask again students to describe a cowpoke. How has this image changed from what they imagined before? Did this origin of the cowboy aesthetic surprise them? If it did, why? Will it change how they think about cowboys in the future? What do they think this might say about history in general? Is it more diverse than it appears?

**Call to Action:** A challenge or tangible action that students can do to apply their new knowledge.

Ex: visit a museum, pick up litter, talk to their family, etc

Challenge students to bring up their new knowledge the next time they encounter cowboy culture out in their lives, whether they are watching a movie or visiting a ranch. Encourage them to share what they learned with their family, or visit a museum about agriculture and museums. Challenge them to be critical and think of what information may be missing the next time they learn about any part of history, and establish that history is made up of the untold and unknown as it is the told and known.

**Activity:** A hands-on or out-of-seat activity that helps students apply their new knowledge or engage with the material.

Ex: Craft, competition/quiz, presentation, dance, science experiment/lab, etc.

10-15 minutes

Cattle and Cowpokes or Stampede is a play on the game Jailbreak. Before allowing students to rise from their seats, establish ground rules for the activity, which includes tagging and running. Remind students to be gentle and avoid pushing or being rough enough to injure each other. With the help of another adult, demonstrate what an acceptable gentle "tag" looks like and what an unkind "tag" looks like.

After ushering students into a safe, enclosed outdoor area or a gym, divide students into two equal groups. Designate one group as "cows" and the other group as "cowpokes." Designate the boundaries of the area you are playing in (example: don't climb the bleachers, don't cross this line, etc), and designate your "corral", which will be a smaller area that students who are "cows" will return to when they are tagged.

To begin the game, have students line up in their separate groups. On your “Go!”, “Cowpokes” are challenged to tag the “cows” to get them to return to the “corral.” Students can only tag one person at a time. To add another level of challenge, an adult will call out “Stampede!” every so often, which will allow “cows” to break free from the corral and run back out into the game.

Pause the game every so often to switch students from one role to the other, in order to allow every participant to get a chance as both “cow” and “cowpoke.”

**Optional Activity:**

If no outdoor space is available to safely execute Stampede, another activity that can be used to accompany this lesson plan is Create Your Own Brand. To accomplish this, distribute construction paper, markers, pencils, colored pencils/crayons amongst student tables/desks. Using the projector (or even books about cowboys that you may have access to in a library), display examples of ranch brands and give a small background explanation on how they were often derived from the initials of a name or place. Challenge students to design their own ranch brand with the limitation that it must be composed of the letters of their initials. If there is time, allow students to share their creations for the class, and invite them to explain what their ranch name would be (Bar A, Rocking J, etc).