

# COWBOYS AND CATTLE DRIVES 1865-1885

Based on Fourth Grade Texas Essential Knowledge &  
Skills



UTSA INSTITUTE OF  
**TEXAN CULTURES**

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## Introduction

Dear Educator,

Thank you for choosing *Cowboys and Cattle Drives, 1865-1885*. In this package, you will find everything you will need to implement a primary source based lesson.

We know that you may need to adapt these lessons to fit the constructs of your classroom and the needs of your students. Please feel free to copy the handouts included or create your own!

We look forward to bringing the museum experience to your classroom. If you should have any questions before the visit, please do not hesitate to contact us.

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# Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills

The following fourth grade TEKS are covered through the implementation of the included lessons. Additional TEKS for fourth grade and other grade levels may also be covered through adaptations to the activities.

## Fourth Grade Social Studies TEKS:

*4.4 History.* The student understands the political, economic, and social changes in Texas during the last half of the 19th century. The student is expected to:(B) explain the growth, development, and impact of the cattle industry, including contributions made by Charles Goodnight, Richard King, and Lizzie Johnson;(C) identify the impact of railroads on life in Texas, including changes to cities and major industries;

*4.9 Geography.* The student understands how people adapt to and modify their environment. The student is expected to:(A) describe ways people have adapted to and modified their environment in Texas, past and present, such as timber clearing, agricultural production, wetlands drainage, energy production, and construction of dams;(B) identify reasons why people have adapted to and modified their environment in Texas, past and present, such as the use of natural resources to meet basic needs, facilitate transportation, and enhance recreational activities; and (C) compare the positive and negative consequences of human modification of the environment in Texas, past and present, both governmental and private, such as economic development and the impact on habitats and wildlife as well as air and water quality.

*4.12 Economics.* The student understands patterns of work and economic activities in Texas. The student is expected to:(A) explain how people in different regions of Texas earn their living, past and present, through a subsistence economy and providing goods and services;(B) explain how geographic factors such as climate, transportation, and natural resources have influenced the location of economic activities in Texas;(C) analyze the effects of exploration, immigration, migration, and limited resources on the economic development and growth of Texas;(D) describe the impact of mass production, specialization, and division of labor on the economic growth of Texas;(E) explain how developments in transportation and communication have influenced economic activities in Texas;

*4.21 Social studies skills.* The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. The student is expected to:(A) differentiate between, locate, and use valid primary and secondary sources such as computer software; interviews; biographies; oral, print, and visual material; documents; and artifacts to acquire information about the United States and Texas;(B) analyze information by sequencing, categorizing, identifying cause-and-effect relationships, comparing, contrasting, finding the main idea, summarizing, making generalizations and predictions, and drawing inferences and conclusions;(C) organize and interpret information in outlines, reports, databases, and visuals, including graphs, charts, timelines, and maps;(D) identify different points of view about an issue, topic, historical event, or current event; and(E) use appropriate mathematical skills to interpret social studies information such as maps and graphs.

*4.22 Social studies skills.* The student communicates in written, oral, and visual forms. The student is expected to: (A) use social studies terminology correctly; (B) incorporate main and supporting ideas in verbal and written communication; (C) express ideas orally based on research and experiences; (D) create written and visual material such as journal entries, reports, graphic organizers, outlines, and bibliographies; and (E) use standard grammar, spelling, sentence structure, and punctuation.

## Fourth Grade English Language Arts TEKS:

*4.2 Reading/Vocabulary Development.* Students understand new vocabulary and use it when reading and writing. Students are expected to: (B) use the context of the sentence (e.g., in-sentence example or definition) to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words or multiple meaning words...(D) identify the meaning of common idioms.

*4.16 Writing/Literary Texts.* Students write literary texts to express their ideas and feelings about real or imagined people, events, and ideas. Students are expected to: (A) write imaginative stories that build the plot to a climax and contain details about the characters and setting;

# Cowboys and Cattle Drives: An Introduction to Cowboy Culture in Texas Jigsaw

**Estimated Time:** 45 minutes

## **Materials:**

- Copies of reproducible *Cowboys and Cattle Drives: An Introduction to Cowboy Culture in Texas* Jigsaw Activity, page
- Copies of reproducible *Cowboys and Cattle Drives* readings, pages

## **Instructions:**

1. Divide students into four groups. Tell the students that each group will read about one aspect of life and culture of cowboys in Texas and they need to become the expert on their subject. In a few minutes, it will be their responsibility to teach their classmates.
2. Ask students to read silently or aloud to each other. The group should make notes as they read in their appropriate portion of the Jigsaw Activity Page. Reading assignments will be divided into the following sections:
  - a. Who were the Cowboys?
  - b. Cowboy Clothes
  - c. Cowboy Tools
  - d. Jobs on the Cattle Drive
3. Once students have become the expert on their subject and completed their portion of the graphic organizer, regroup them. You should have six groups of four students and each student should be the expert on one section of the reading. If you have more than 24 students, you will need to adjust the grouping assignments and you may have more than one expert in each group.
4. Students should present the information that they learned to their new group members, and help them complete their Jigsaw Activity Page. If you have more students, ask those students that are duplicates in the group to share the responsibility of teaching their classmates. Remind the students that they are essentially the teacher for their subject, so it is important that they explain their topic as best they can.
5. When this activity is completed, students should have learned about each topic related to the life and culture of cowboys in Texas, completed the Jigsaw activity page, and had the opportunity to teach their fellow classmates.

**Note:** This assignment can also be completed individually.

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

### Cowboys and Cattle Drives: An Introduction to Cowboy Culture in Texas

Directions: Fill in the chart with facts from your reading and the information your classmates teach you, following your teacher's instructions for your jigsaw activity. Then draw a picture in the center to represent how a cowboy may have looked.

<p><b>Who were the Cowboys?</b></p>	<p><b>Cowboy Clothes</b></p>
<p><b>A Texas Cowboy</b></p>	
<p><b>Jobs on a Cattle Drive</b></p>	<p><b>Cowboy Tools</b></p>

# Who were the Cowboys?



*Two African American cowboys standing beside a horse in the early 1900s.*

Our first cowboys were the *indios* and *mestizos* of Mexico who were taught to care for and train the horses and cattle brought to the new world by Hernán Cortés. When explorers, priests, and soldiers came north into what became Spanish Texas, the Indian people of Mexico were brought along to care for the cattle and horses. As the missions of South Texas were built, additional local Indians were used to take care of the mission animals. Cattle and horses had been multiplying in the open country for many decades, and the Indians having become skillful in capturing animals, built their own horse herds and became good riders. They were the first *vaqueros*.

When the first modern cattle drives started in Texas in the late 1800s, many of the new cowboys had been soldiers from the Civil War – from both the North and the South. There were Union soldiers who did not want to go back home and Confederates who were looking for jobs. There were also a number of newly freed slaves. Some sailors were tired of life on the sea. Many came and brought with them songs they used to sing on their boats called sea shanties, which they sang on quiet night watches. Immigrants came from strange and faraway places, looking for jobs, adventure or both.

Many of these cowboys were in their teens and a few were as young as 12 or 13 years old. The average age for a cowboy was 24. Cowboys only worked at cowboying for about seven years. After that, most were ready to settle down for good. Some were able to start their own ranches or take up a related trade, such as saddle making.

Working on cattle drives kept men away this, most cowboys who worked the long trail drives in the 20 years after the Civil War were not married. When a cowboy decided to marry, he usually stopped making the trail drives and found a job that would keep him in one place for a time.

Most cowboys could neither read nor write, either because they had grown up during the disrupted time of the Civil War or because they lived in frontier areas, where there were no schools. However, cowboys learned how to read brands, numbers and prices in catalogs. A trail boss who could read and write, and thus keep records, could get a larger salary than one who could not.

There were even a few cowgirls in Texas. In 1814, Doña María del Carmen Calvillo inherited her father's ranch near present-day Floresville. It is known that Doña Maria rode horses and worked cattle. Johanna July was a black Seminole that lived in Eagle Pass and learned to break horses and mules after her father died. Lizzie Johnson is known as the "cattle queen of Texas." She worked as a schoolteacher and a writer before she decided to try the cattle business. Lizzie is believed to be the first woman to drive her own herd up the Chisholm Trail from Texas to Kansas, where she sold her cattle. Even though her husband also was in the cattle business, she had her own brand and made her own money. She was a very independent woman, indeed! Willie Matthews, another cowgirl, dressed as a man to ride the trails. Dressed as a man, Willie worked for Sam Houston for four months before she told him that she was really a woman. There were also at least 13 other women who rode the cattle trails between 1860 and 1896.

# Cowboy Clothes

The clothes that cowboys wore were the same as those of any other working man or boy of the day. Shirts were usually homespun and hand-sewn by mothers, aunts, or sisters. Cowboys who made the long drives usually were not married yet and had no wives to make their clothes. In fact, many of the first cowboys were wearing their old Civil War uniforms as they worked their way up the trail.

Everything the cowboy wore or carried had many uses, even his bandana or “nose rag.” It was not just for decoration – just to make him look like a cowboy. It was his neckerchief, his towel, his washcloth, a bandage, a short rope, a hobble, a basket, his earmuffs, or his flag. If he wore it loosely, it kept the sun from burning his neck. When it was very dusty, he pulled it over his nose. In very hot weather a cowboy might wad up his “nose rag,” wet it and stick it inside his hat to cool his head. Bandanas could be used as hot pads for holding branding irons or they might even become a blindfold for a nervous horse. They also made a good protection for “gizzard lips,” lips cracked and raw from the sun and the wind.

Vests were worn mainly for the pockets. Pants pockets were unusable to a cowboy sitting on a horse and a cowboy needed somewhere to put his smaller items such as his tobacco, pocketknife, or brand book. Vests were better than jackets for a cowboy, because jacket sleeves got in the way of cowboy jobs such as roping. A vest could keep a man warm when it was buttoned, and it was not too hot when it was open.

Hats could be used in many ways. *Vaqueros*, cowboys from Mexico, wore *sombreros*. Later these hats changed to look more like the cowboy hats that are worn today. Hats were important for cowboys because they gave shade in the hot sun and kept rain off a cowboy’s head. Hats could be used as drinking cups, washbasins, or buckets. They were often used as fans for starting cook fires and sometimes to beat out a grass fire. Signals could be given by a wave of the hat. A good cowboy hat was crumpled, spotted, dusty, sweat-soaked, and comfortable.



*Grace Houston, a female rancher, stands next to a horse on Adolph Houston Ranch, Live Oak County around 1924.*

*Vaqueros*, wore *chaparreras*, leather protectors that fastened over regular pants. Later called chaps by cowboys in Texas, these were necessary in the thorny brush country of South Texas, where both a cowboy’s pants and legs could be ripped to pieces on a fast ride through a mesquite thicket. Chaps also helped protect a rider from injury should he be thrown from, or bitten by, his horse.

The first cowboys wore ordinary working boots or shoes, the same as other working men. However, since a cowboy spent all day in the saddle and did almost all of his work while on horseback, he discovered he needed a different type of shoe. By the 1870s, cowboys were wearing high, pull-on boots with slightly higher heels. The high-top boots protected the lower legs from brush and did not leave a gap that pebbles and twigs kicked up by the horse could get into. Higher heels kept the rider’s feet more securely in the stirrups. Most fancy cowboy boots were not made until the turn of the century, 20 years after the great trail-driving days.

Spurs were used to give quick signals to the horse. They were attached over the boot by a leather strap. Cowboys really like to show off in their spurs. Even though spurs jingled on their owner, some cowboys added “jingle-bobs” which made even more noise when they walked.

# Cowboy Tools



*Albert Besch holds a rope while on horseback in Bernard Prairie, Colorado County, Texas between 1910 and 1916.*

Cowboys did not own their horses, but they did buy their own saddles. Since a cowboy stayed in the saddle all day and sometimes much of the night, he was usually very picky about his saddle. A cowboy would usually pay the equivalent of a month's salary (about \$30) for a good saddle, but he expected it to last for years, perhaps for all of his time working as a cowboy.

Texas saddles started like Spanish war saddles, but the Spanish saddle had not been comfortable. Texas saddles had to be comfortable enough for a man to sit in all day and sturdy enough to stand up to the hard use they would be put to on long trail drives.

Each saddle had a horn that was used for attaching their rope and helping a cowboy mount his horse. The horn of the saddle was sometimes called the "dally welte" or "dally" from the Spanish phrase *dar la vuelta*, which means to wrap around.

The wooden frame of a saddle is called a tree. This had to be put together with screws, but since screws worked loose under stress, the tree was covered with wet rawhide that was laced tightly. The rawhide shrank as it dried and held the wooden tree firmly together.

The most used all-around tool of a cowboy was his pocketknife, which he carried in his vest pocket when he was on the trail. Like everything else, the cowboy's knife had many uses. He might

need it to cut rawhide or leather, or to make repairs on a chuck wagon. He might also use it for eating, for trimming fingernails and toenails, or digging mesquite thorns or prickly pear spines out of his skin. He would definitely use it to butcher wild game caught on the trail.

The cowboy's rope came to be called a lariat from the Spanish *la riata* of the *vaquero*, cowboys from Mexico. The first lariats were braided rawhide and were very strong. Ropes were used to catch and hold cattle for branding, to make a corral for horses while on the trail, to "snake in" firewood for cooking and for many other things. Cowboys worked to develop their skill in roping to a fine art.

Marking cattle using a branding iron helped cowboys to identify which cattle belonged to them. The practice of branding cattle goes back about 4,000 years. Tomb paintings in Egypt show cattle being branded.

The Spanish were branding their cattle when they came to North America. The cattle brought into Mexico by Hernán Cortés were branded with a cross. The *vaqueros* continued the tradition, and Texan cowboys got the practice of branding from them. The cowboys developed their own symbols and branding language. Eventually many ranches were named after their brands.

The first cowboys did not carry guns, but most photographers of the day kept several guns as props. Cowboys willingly strapped these on when they had their pictures taken at the end of the trail. Later, some cowboys did own guns, but the guns rode with the bedrolls in the chuck wagon. A gun strapped to a man on horseback could get in the way. Guns were seldom used by cowboys except in self-defense, usually against rustlers trying to steal cattle. Even so, guns were almost never needed. The tale of the cowboy riding with his trusty gun by his side is just a tall tale. Guns were not a standard part of the cowboy's equipment.



# Jobs on a Cattle Drive



*Cowboys eating behind a chuck wagon near West Texas in 1926.*

Cattle herds on the trail usually had from 2,300 to 2,500 head of cattle, although some herds were smaller and some much larger. A good cattle drive usually had one cowboy for every 200 to 300 head of cattle. Ranchers did not usually organize their own trail drives, but hired a contractor to set it up and hire the cowboys.

A trail boss handled men, horses, and cows. He worked his men hard and tried to make sure the cattle arrived at the end of the trail in better shape than when they started.

During the day, the herd would spread out until it might be spread two or three miles long, like a parade. The riders at the front were called “lead” or “point” riders. Some distance behind the “point” riders would be the “swing” riders on each side of the herd. Further back and closer to the end would be the “flank” riders. At the very end, behind the herd, came the “drag” riders who had to keep tired calves and sore-footed cows from stopping. Riding “drag” was considered the worst

position, and although the other riders rotated positions, the “drags” often fell permanently to the youngest boy.

The job of the “wrangler” was to herd the horses – for a crew of ten that might mean as many as 70 horses. The owner of the herd provided each cowboy with a “string” of six or seven horses. A “cow pony” would only be ridden for four or five hours at a time, and a cowboy might have to spend as many as 15 hours a day in the saddle. Within his string, a cowboy would select certain horses that seemed suited for special jobs. He usually had one certain horse he favored for night duty and another, a good swimmer, for fording rivers.

The wrangler drove the horses in a group, usually to one side of the main herd. The job of the wrangler and the “night hawk” usually went to some of the youngest and most inexperienced boys in the outfit.

After the first mounts of the day had been selected, roped, and saddled, the night hawk, who had been on duty all night watching the horses, went to camp for a late breakfast and to help the cook clean up and break camp. The night hawk might try to sleep in the back of the chuck wagon, but when needed, he would have to get out and help gather firewood.

The cook was generally a little older than the other cowboys and had probably been a cowboy before he became a cook. He acted as a kind of rough den mother to the others, fixing at least two hot meals during the day, treating cuts and other injuries, mending clothes and settling arguments. The cook was the first person up in the morning and usually the last person to bed at night.

# Cowboy Idioms and Slang

**Estimated Time:** 30 minutes

**Materials:**

- Copies of reproducible *Cowboy Idioms and Slang* Activity Page, page 11

**Instructions:**

1. Explain to students that an idiom is a common expression or saying that is understood figuratively, but does not make any sense literally.
2. Review common idioms such as:
  - a. It's raining cats and dogs.
  - b. Actions speak louder than words.
  - c. It's a piece of cake!
  - d. You are the apple of my eye.
  - e. That's the last straw!
3. Then, tell students that people from different cultures have their own sayings and slang words. Ask students to brainstorm some idioms, sayings or slang words that they use with their family and friends.
4. Next, pass out copies of the reproducible *Cowboy Idioms and Slang* Activity Page. On this page students will complete the following activities:
  - a. Read and explain the meaning of cowboy idioms, then draw a picture in the space provided to represent what this idiom would look like if it were understood literally.
  - b. Next, read the list of cowboy slang words and try to match them with the correct word or definition.

### Cowboy Idioms and Slang

Directions: Read each idiom and explain what it means. Then use the space provided to draw a picture of what that idiom would look like if understood literally.

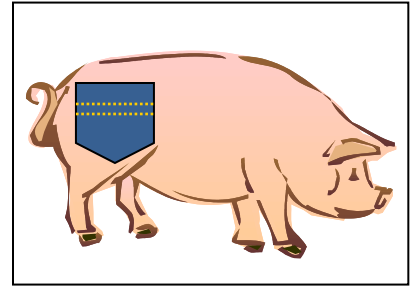
Idioms are phrases that have hidden meanings. The expressions do not mean exactly what the words say.

Example:

The lazy cowboy was as **handy as hip pockets on a hog**.

What is the meaning of this idiom? It means that the person or thing is useless.

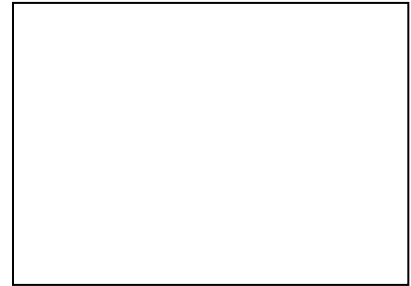
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1. The new cowboy swore he could keep up with the herd, but when the other cowboys realized that he had never ridden a horse, they decided that the new guy was **all hat and no cattle**.

What is the meaning of this idiom? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



2. Even though the cowboys worked late into the night, they had to **bite the bullet** and wake up early.

What is the meaning of this idiom? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



3. Just as the young cowboy was about to make a big mistake, the cook told him, "**Don't squat with your spurs on.**"

What is the meaning of this idiom? \_\_\_\_\_

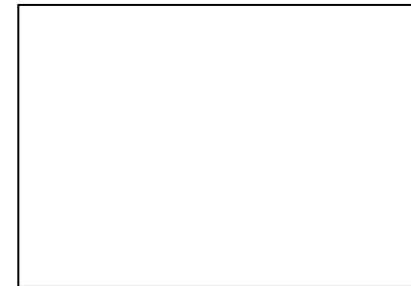
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4. There was a dance in town, so the cowboys put on their **best bib and tucker**.

What is the meaning of this idiom? \_\_\_\_\_

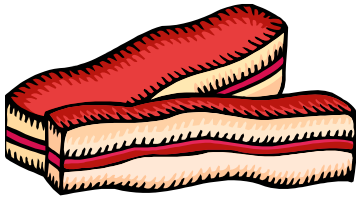
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Directions: Match each cowboy slang word listed in the word bank with the correct word and picture.

Slang is a type of language that is very informal and usually used by a particular group of people.

BACON



Chuck Wagon

Chicken

Slang Term

FARMER



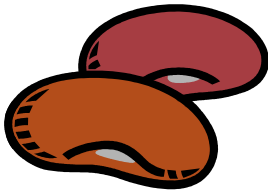
Slang Term

GRAVY



Slang Term

RED BEANS



Slang Term

CAMP COOK



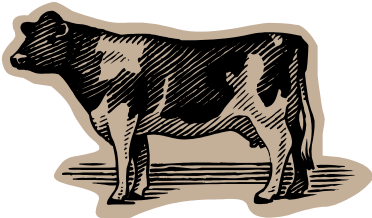
Slang Term

ONIONS



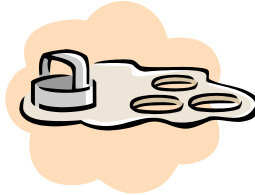
Slang Term

COW MANURE



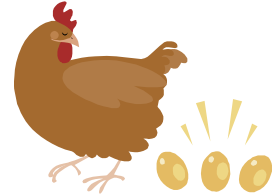
Slang Term

BISCUITS



Slang Term

EGGS



Slang Term

## Cowboy Slang Word Bank

Chuck Wagon Chicken

Hot Rocks

Belly Cheater

Texas Butter

Sodbuster

Hen Fruit

Prairie Coal

Skunk Eggs

Texas Strawberries

# A Day on the Trail

**Estimated Time:** 45 minutes

**Materials:**

- Previously completed *Cowboys and Cattle Drives: An Introduction to Cowboy Culture in Texas* Jigsaw Activity, page 5
- Notebook paper or blank paper

**Instructions:**

1. Using all of the information that they have learned from the previous activities, ask students to think about what a day in the life of a cowboy might have been like.
2. Instruct students to write a two-page story about a cowboy on a cattle drive. In their story, they should include facts and details that they learned in the other activities. Students may be creative and make up names for characters and ranches, but they should be sure to use factual information about what life was really like.
3. When they have completed their writing, ask students to illustrate one aspect of their story. They may choose to draw a character or a scene.

## References:

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### Photos

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