

# What Does a Cowboy Do?

## Summary

This activity is designed to familiarize students with the cowboy culture of the Old West and its presence in our modern times.

## Main Core Tie

Social Studies - Kindergarten

[Standard 1 Objective 1](#)

## Materials

Cowboy clothes or a "cowboy" volunteer.

- *How I Spent My Summer Vacation*
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- [Cowboy Questions and Icon Cards](#) (pdf)
- [Detailed Cowboy Cards](#) (pdf)
- *Cowboys*
- [My Home's in Montana and Home on the Range](#) (pdf)
- [Visual cues for My Home's in Montana](#) (pdf)

## Additional Resources

### Books

- *B Is for Big Sky Country: A Montana Alphabet*  
, by Sneed B. Collard III, 2003
- *Black Cowboy, Wild Horses: A True Story*  
, by Julius Lester; ISBN 0-8037-1787-3
- *C Is for Cowboy: A Wyoming Alphabet*  
, by Eugene Gagliano 2003 *Cowboys*, by Lucille Recht Penner; ISBN 0-448-40947-X
- *Cowboys and Cowgirls: YippeYay!*  
by Gail Gibbons, 2003
- *Cowboy Up*  
, by Larry Dane Brimner; ISBN 0-329-26522-9
- *Fact or Fiction: Cowboys*  
, by Stewart Ross; ISBN 1-56294-636-6
- *Grumpy Bunny Goes West*  
, by Justine Korman; ISBN 0-8167-4298-7
- *How I Spent My Summer Vacation*  
, by Mark Teague; ISBN 0-517-59998-8
- *I Want to Be a Cowboy*  
, by Dan Liebman; 1999
- *Jack Creek Cowboy*  
, by Neil Johnson; ISBN 0-8037-1228-6
- *Just Like My Dad*  
, by Tricia Gardella; ISBN 0-06-443463-X
- *Matthew the Cowboy*  
, by Ruth Hooker; ISBN 0-8075-4999-1

- *Why Cowboys Need a Brand*  
 , by Laurie Lazzaro Knowlton; 1996
- *Why Cowboy Sleep With Their Boots On*  
 , by Laurie Lazzaro Knowlton; 1995

### Background for Teachers

Students should have an understanding of what culture means and what it represents. Culture is a way of living. It can be your beliefs, a form of art or dance and/or certain traditions or customs of a group of people. Each culture has certain traditions and cultural activities that we may learn and participate in as we live in that culture.

This activity focuses on the cowboy culture of the Old West and its presence in our modern times. In any community in the state of Utah you will find the influence of cowboys. The following activities are designed to familiarize the students with this culture that is unique to the American West where they live. A cowboy is defined simply as a person who works on a ranch and rides on a horse while he herds cattle. However, on the modern day ranch, the job has evolved into more duties such as branding, fencing, hay production, and machine and animal maintenance.

The American cowboy was actually created as a result of the Civil War. Beef was sold to the soldiers and they grew to like it. It also became more popular with the city folk in towns further east. During the war the plains cattle went unattended and grew into a free roaming herd five million strong. An animal that was worth a few dollars in Texas was worth up to fifty in the north. Thus, herding the cattle to rail stations created the cattle drive and also the need for the cowboy.

To be a cowboy or cowgirl a person needs a few basic items to accomplish the job. In order to be a cowboy you need to have the following items:

**Horse:** back in the day of the long cattle drives most cowboys did not own their horse. Horses were an expensive item and cowboys rarely rode the same horse all day. A cowboy often changed his mount up to six times a day. Then and now quarter horses are preferred because they are small and sure-footed and can move at great speed over a short distance. They are a good cutting horse when it comes to separating unbranded calves from their mothers.

**Saddle:** the saddle is made from wood, metal and leather. It weighs around 40 lbs. It keeps the rider's weight rested on the horse's shoulders and not on its back. Back in the day a good saddle could cost up to a year's wages but lasted all the cowboys working life.

**Boots:** boots can be made of plain leather or intricately tooled leather. Boots have high sides that protect from brush, thorns and rattle snakes. Also, they have high heels that keep the spurs off the ground and help the cowboy to keep his feet in the stirrups. At the top of the boot are "mule ears". Cowboys use them to pull their boots on.

**Spurs:** spurs are worn over the heel of the boots. They are used to goad a horse's flank to urge the horse on. They are used carefully and spur marks are a sign of poor horsemanship.

**Neckerchief or Bandana:** there are many uses for this item. The most common ones are: to protect the neck from sunburn, a face mask for cold or dust, a bandage, a filter, and a handkerchief.

**Cowboy Hat:** most cowboy hats are made from felt. They have wide brims to protect from sun and rain. They can also serve as a fan or pail.

**Chaps:** chaps are leather leggings that are worn over the cowboy's pants for warmth and protection from brush, thorns and cactus spines. In the coldest weather "hair pants" can be worn. "Hair pants" are hide chaps with the animal's hair or wool left on.

**Lasso or Lariat:** cowboys use lassos or the full lariat, which is about 60 feet long, to rope cattle, especially the young calves.

**Branding Iron:** a brand is an owner's mark. It is burned into an animal's hide with a hot iron. Each brand is different and is the registered symbol of each cattle owner.

From the mid-1800's to the present day, the romantic journey of the cowboy has evolved. The cowboy continues to influence our movies, music, dance, dress and even toys.

### Intended Learning Outcomes

2. Develop social skills and ethical responsibility.
5. Understand and use basic concepts and skills.
6. Communicate clearly in oral, artistic, written, and nonverbal form.

### Instructional Procedures

#### Invitation to Learn

Come to class dressed as a cowboy. Read *How I Spent My Summer Vacation*. Have a "cowboy volunteer" come to class and discuss cowboy items and lifestyle.

#### Instructional Procedures

Put the *Cowboy Questions and Icon Cards* in your hat. Check prior knowledge by having students take one out and tell what they know about that question or icon. The student may tell the teacher or a "partner".

Read *Cowboys*.

Tell the students the information from the *Detailed Cowboy Cards*.

Put the *Cowboy Question and Icon Cards* back into your hat. Have the students take one out and tell what they now know about that question or icon. Ask the student to give a more detailed answer to the question or to tell the class anything new they have learned about that icon.

Show the students the visual cues for *My Home's in Montana*. Teach the song using the cue cards. Students can hold the card and hold it up when it is their turn, or the cue cards could be posted up on a board and some removed as the students become more familiar with the song. You could teach the class the song, *Home on the Range* or you could have other teachers or parents sing it while the class sings, *My Home's in Montana*. I have had parents practice *Home on the Range* right on the spot at programs and then they partner sang the song while the class sang, *My Home's in Montana*.

### Extensions

Have a corral of Lincoln Logs and a bag of plastic horses, have the students put a plastic horse into the corral if they have ever ridden a horse. Have a couple of ranch hands make tally marks to see how many students have ridden a horse.

Follow the same procedure as above but change the question to how many students would like to ride a horse.

Teach the students how to draw a simple horse step by step.

Take a field trip to a ranch and have ranch hands talk to the students.

Solve math problems with plastic cows and horses.

### Family Connections

Invite parents to come and listen to your song.

Take the music home and teach it to your family.

Ask parents and grandparents about their experiences with horses and cattle.

Ask parents to teach the students or the class any other cowboy songs that they know.

Have the students teach their families how to draw a horse.

### Assessment Plan

Observe that the whole class is participating in the choosing of cowboy item icons. Make sure that they are answering the questions to you (the teacher) or to their partners.

Have students call out the name of the cowboy items when you hold them up.

Have students work in small groups and give each group a set of the *Cowboy Question and Icon Cards*. Have the student's rank the cards in order of items that are most needed by cowboys to the items that are least needed.

### Bibliography

#### Research Basis

Rimaly, B.K.; (1999) Increasing the Literacy Growth of Kindergarten Students thorough Developmentally Appropriate Emergent Literacy (ERIC-Education Resource Information Center) ED 436761

Using integrated thematic units that incorporate emergent literacy instructional strategies such as read-alouds, story retelling using props, shared reading, acquisition of vocabulary, music, art and writing activities enhances learning.

Suther, L., & Larkin, V. (1996) Early Childhood Arts Games (ERIC Education Resource Information Center) ED403-056

The arts are central to quality early childhood programs. Using games, music, dance and movement help develop physical skills such as coordination, jumping, and ball handling. Cognitive skills such as language development, problem solving and social skills (cooperation, sharing and group negotiation) are enhanced through the arts.

### Authors

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