

Come and Get It: The Chuck Wagon

Grade Level: 4 – 5 **Subject:** Social Studies, Information Literacy

Duration: 1 hour

Description: The purpose of this lesson is to make students aware of the cowboy's way of life, including his daily diet and food preparation methods.

PASS—Oklahoma Priority Academic Student Skills

Social Studies 5.1 Identify major historical individuals, entrepreneurs, and groups, and describe their major contributions. (Grade 4)

Social Studies 5.2 Describe major events of Oklahoma's past, such as settlements by Native Americans, cattle drives, land runs, statehood, and the discovery of oil. (Grade 4)

Social Studies 6.1 Relate some of the major influences on westward expansion to the distribution and movement of people, goods, and services. (Grade 5)

Information Literacy 1.3 Identify and use a range of information sources.

Goals:

- Students will gain an appreciation of the cowboy way of life during long trail drives.
- Students will be introduced to the cowboy's cook and develop an understanding of the chuck wagon and the cowboy's daily diet.

Objectives:

- Students will explain the significance of beef as a food source.
- Students will explain the benefits of inventions and manufacturing techniques to our current diets and compare and contrast past and present food preparation methods.

Assessment: Students will prepare a menu and shopping list for a 3 day camping trip. Students will prepare a supply list for a month long cattle drive for one recipe, complete a word search puzzle which includes cowboy vocabulary words, read and answer questions about a passage from an autobiography of a cowboy who lived on a ranch in Indian Territory in the late 1800s.

Primary Materials:

- Books, articles, photographs of cowboys, cattle and chuck wagons.
- Nutritional information about beef, available at www.beef.org under Consumer Information in the Nutrition section. Publications include "Why Beef is Important in the Diets of Growing Girls and Boys."
- Food safety information, such as "The Dos and Don'ts To Safely Prepare Meat," available at www.beef.org/documents//ACF8E5.doc and "Plating It Safe" in the Food Safety, Safe Food Handling Section.

Optional Resources:

- *Come an' Get it: The Story of the Old Cowboy Cook* by Ramon F. Adams (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976).
- Recipes from the Oklahoma Beef Council found at www.oklabeef.org/Consumerinformation/Recipes/recipeshome.htm
- Review Education and Free Stuff sections of Partnership for Food Safety Education site for additional curriculum at www.fightbac.org/grades_4_8.cfm
- Chuck Wagon Central website at http://lonehand.com/chuckwagon_central.htm

Procedure:

Start by presenting pictures of cowboys, cattle drives and chuck wagons to the students. Ask them to tell you what they remember about the pictures.

Discuss the purpose of the early cattle drives of the late 1800s. Cattle were plentiful in Texas. In the East, people were more accustomed to eating pork than beef. During the Civil War, many soldiers were fed beef. After the war demand for beef grew in the East, so prices for cattle were high. Ranchers determined they could sell their cattle at a higher price if they herded them to Kansas for shipment back east.

Ask students to imagine what a cowboy camp was like in the time of the trail drives. Have them name the different jobs or tasks, such as trail boss, cook, wrangler and cowboy. Explain the responsibilities of each position. (Refer to the vocabulary list.)

Describe the cook's responsibilities to prepare for a cattle drive. Before the cattle drive, the cook had to purchase enough food to last several months and stock it in the wagon. There were few towns and stores along the trail, so missing items could not be replaced easily. The cook also had to consider how long items would stay fresh, his limited storage space and the cost of the ingredients he needed.

The chuck wagon was a wagon designed to provide storage for food and to hold what the cook would need during each day. A chuck box, made up of a number of shelves and drawers that held supplies, was attached to the back of the wagon to keep everything the cook needed within reach. A hinged lid dropped down on the side of the box, making a work table for the cook. Additional storage, called a boot, was added to carry the Dutch ovens and other utensils.

The water barrel was attached to the side of the wagon. A canvas hammock was suspended under the wagon to carry wood. The main part of the wagon also carried cowboy bedrolls, feed for the horses and other supplies that might be needed.

Because cattle meant money to the ranchers, cowboys did not often eat beef on trail drives. Their diets consisted of foods that could be prepared easily and stored without refrigeration for long periods of time. Beans, biscuits, dried fruit, and coffee were staples. Canned tomatoes were cheap and popular. Cowboys often used these as food and drink, because they helped satisfy thirst. Cowboys rarely had fresh milk because range cows gave little milk.

The most important job the cook had to do before the drive was to prepare the sourdough starter for making bread. Starter is a water, sugar and flour mixture which is used to make bread. Each day, the cook scooped out some starter and added more water, flour, salt and baking soda. The dough was put into the Dutch oven to bake. Bread was served often because it was inexpensive and filling.

Food was cooked over an open fire in Dutch ovens. Fires were built from wood, or cow chips, if no wood was available. The cook faced difficult conditions in rainy and windy weather, but understood that meals must be provided no matter what the conditions. A young boy, often called "little Mary," was sometimes hired to assist the cook by fetching water or cleaning pots.

There were many unwritten rules of behavior around the chuck wagon. For example, cowboys riding near the chuck wagon made certain they were downwind so dirt did not get into the food. Breakfast was eaten quickly because there was work to be done. More time was allowed at lunch to give the cattle time to graze and rest. The evening meal was more leisurely and a social occasion for cowboys who often rode alone during the day.

Each cowboy helped himself to food and coffee, making certain no dirt or ashes got into the pot. Cowboys sat on the ground to eat and were responsible for placing their dishes in the “wreck” pan to be washed. If a cowboy found the water bucket empty, it was his duty to fill it immediately. If a cowboy got up to fill his coffee cup, he was obliged to fill the cups of other cowboys. Discuss with students rules of behavior we follow today when we eat.

Discuss with students the importance of beef in our diets today. Ask students to identify beef food products and their benefits. Discuss the importance of a balanced diet and note the limitations of the cowboy’s diet, such as lack of variety and limited vegetables and fruits.

Talk about how food was prepared on cattle drives with Dutch ovens or over a fire. Discuss the preparation and storage of foods-then and now. Have students describe the benefits of our current methods, such as more variety, longer storage, pre-packaged foods, etc.

Have students prepare daily menus and a shopping list for a 3 day camping trip. Ask them to make their plans based on the same conditions the early cowboys experienced, such as no refrigeration, no electricity, etc. Have students limit their list to items that are nutritious, easy to prepare and transport. Discuss the menus in class.

Have student complete the “Cowboy Word Search” puzzle, the “Chuck Wagon Supply List” worksheet and the “A Day in the Life of the Cowboy Cook” worksheet.

A Typical Cook’s Day on a Cattle Drive

Before sunrise	Get up and start fixing breakfast. Breakfast was often sourdough bread or biscuits and gravy, dried fruit and coffee. Wake the horse wrangler. Wake the cowboys and call them to breakfast. Wash dishes, pack the wagon and move up the trail. The cook would move ahead of the cattle because he could move faster with his team of horses.
11:00 a.m.	Make a new camp and have lunch ready by noon. A typical lunch might include chili or stew with bread, coffee and water. Lunch time gave the cowboys a chance to rest and the cattle time to graze.
1:00 p.m.	Pack the chuck wagon and ride toward the evening's campsite.
5:00 p.m.	Set up the night camp and prepare a dinner of beans, biscuits, and coffee to be ready about 6:30. Dinner might include dessert, such as a fruit cobbler.
9:00 p.m.	Go to bed. Unlike the cowboys, the cook did not have to take a turn watching the cattle at night.

Vocabulary

Cattle drive	The movement of a large group of cattle from one point to another that often took several months. Drives began in Texas and went through Oklahoma to get to Kansas railroad stations, usually covering 10 – 15 miles per day.
Cow chip	Sun-dried manure left on the range by cattle. Cow chips were used as fuel for fires when there was not enough wood. Cow chips were also called surface coal.
Chuck	Food. The cowboy might also call his food eats, chow or grub.
Chuck wagon	The wagon driven by the cook at round-up time and on trail drives. Equipment and food were stored in the wagon.
Cook	Also called Cookie, Dough Puncher, Bean Master, Biscuit Roller or Grub Rustler, the cook was often a cowboy who was older or injured and unable to perform the other tasks of the trail drive. Cowboys often chose who they would work for based on the cook and his reputation.
Cowboy	A young man, usually 15-25.

Dutch oven	A large heavy pot with a flat bottom and 3 legs, usually made of iron. Burning coals were placed under the Dutch oven and on top of the lid. Heat from both sides helped to cook or bake food evenly.
Keg:	A wooden barrel kept on the chuck wagon used to store the sourdough starter.
Sourdough	A kind of bread prepared without using commercial yeast. Many cooks made their own sourdough starter by allowing a mixture of flour and water to sour. This mixture was kept in a keg in the chuck wagon. When the cook prepared bread, he took sourdough from the keg and added more flour or water to make the dough for the bread for that meal. Sourdough biscuits were easy and inexpensive to prepare, so they were served at almost every meal.
Trail Boss	The man in charge of the trail drive. The trail boss rode ahead of the herd and chose the best route for the cattle, scouting for water, grass for grazing and a place to stop at night. He assigned duties to the cowboys. At the end of the drive, he sold the cattle and paid the cowboys.
Wrangler	A cowboy who handles the horses for the cattle drives. Each cowboy may use several horses during a day, riding one while the others rest. The wrangler is the first man the cook wakes up each morning, so he can round up the horses and bring them to camp.

Cowboy Food Slang

Airtights	Canned goods, such as peaches or tomatoes
Beans	Prairie strawberries, whistle berries
Biscuits	Hot rocks
Coffee	Brown gargle, java, Arbuckle (a popular brand of coffee at the time of the early cattle drives)
Corned Beef	Salt hoss
Eggs	Hen fruit
Gravy	Texas butter
Molasses	Lick, larrup (used in place of sugar)
Onions:	Skunk eggs

Further Suggestions:

- Read aloud *Justin and the Best Biscuits in the World* by Mildred Pitts Walter. In the book, ten year old Justin spends time at his grandfather's house, learning about ranch work, the history of the early black cowboys, and how to make great biscuits.
- Gather recipes and make a supply list for a month long cattle drive. Take one recipe and determine how much to purchase of each ingredient for the entire month.
- Make sourdough starter. Prepare biscuits and beans for students to sample.
- Invite a member of the Oklahoma Historical Society to visit the classroom to talk about cowboy life in Oklahoma. Contact Mike Adkins, Director of Education, at madkins@ok-history.mus.ok.us or 405-522-5248.
- Take a field trip to the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City. Their many tours include a "Cowboy Lifestyle" program where students can see an actual chuck wagon and camp equipment. For more information, see www.cowboyhalloffame.org/m_tour_el.html
- Encourage students to visit www.fooddetectives.com/ sponsored by the Partnership for Food Safety Education to learn more by playing a game. The game is also available in Spanish.
- See lesson plans and other information from Oklahoma Ag in the Classroom at www.clover.okstate.edu/fourh/aitc/. Topics include Animals in Agriculture, Agriculture and the Environment, Food and Nutrition, and Agriculture in History.

Cowboy life Word Search Puzzle

Circle the hidden words listed below.

B S K D X E L T T A C H T B S
Q I M F L X H L U N C H R R U
S Q S T W R A N G L E R N E P
G R T C C S E S S A L O M A P
L A O H U Y C O W B O Y G K L
C O R O V I U S B O S F R F Y
K E B R A R T G T A I X A A P
N F U S D W E W I R R P Z S I
O F R E Y K I M E K E R E T H
I O G V I D U T C H O V E N C
N C A L E E F F O C R C R L W
O R C H U C K W A G O N H I O
G N M R P H G U O D R U O S C
B J C X U Z A D X M R E T A W
T R A I L B O S S I S N A E B

BEANS	BISCUIT	BREAKFAST	CATTLE	CHUCK WAGON
COFFEE	COOK	COW CHIP	COWBOY	DUTCH OVEN
FIRE	GRAVY	GRAZE	GRUB	HORSE
KEG	LUNCH	MOLASSES	ONION	SOURDOUGH
SUPPLY	TRAIL BOSS	WATER	WRANGLER	

CHUCK WAGON SUPPLY LIST

Before each cattle drive began, the chuck wagon cook purchased the ingredients he needed to prepare food for the entire journey.

Cowboys often ate beans because they were inexpensive, and easy to prepare on the range.

Pretend that you are the cook for a month long cattle drive with 9 cowboys. You plan to serve beans once each day. (Don't forget that you will want to eat too.)

How much of each ingredient will you need to purchase for the journey?

COWBOY BEANS RECIPE

Serves 10

2 pounds dry pinto beans

1 can tomatoes

2 green chilies

2 large onions

1 teaspoon salt

Wash the beans and soak overnight. After soaking, drain the beans, place in Dutch oven and cover with water. Add remaining ingredients and simmer on coals until tender.

Ingredient

Amount

What other ingredients could you add to this recipe to make it different each day?



A DAY IN THE LIFE OF THE COWBOY COOK

Read the following paragraph written by Hubert Collins. In his autobiography *Storm and Stampede on the Chisholm*, he tells about moving as a young boy to the Red Fork Ranch on the banks of the Cimarron River in Indian Territory in 1883. Cowboys driving cattle along the Chisholm Trail would often camp near the ranch.

All the cow-boys drove during the day, and took turns on night-herd duty. One and all could ride, rope, brand, scout, and wait on the cook.

To wait on the cook meant that as soon as they made camp at noon or night, some of the men must rustle up water and wood for his use. As soon as camp was made, one might see a cloud of dust arise somewhere within a half mile. When this dust cleared enough, a cow-boy would be disclosed riding his pony and dragging a log or bundle of wood at the end of his rope, the other end of which was fastened to his saddle horn. He generally came as fast as the pony, hampered by the drag, could travel. If the camp was not near water, another cow-boy would ride into the nearest stream or pond on his pony, dip up a bucketful of water, and race at full speed back to the cook with it. According to custom, the cook must be supplied with grub, wood, and water; then it was “up to him.”

To serve the outfit properly, the cook must have breakfast ready before the sun rose each morning, and rouse the sleepers to eat it. As the herds got under way, he would clean up, pack the wagon, drive until eleven o'clock or so, and then make camp for the noon meal. Here he had to cook and serve, repack and drive on to the camp site for that night. When that was reached, he must again unpack and prepare the meal to be served at sundown. After the clean-up for the evening, he had nothing to do until morning. Three times a day was the same fare served with little variation, and yet, there is no record of any man failing to respond to the call, “Come an' git it! Come an' git it! Chuck-a-way!”

If it was your turn to “wait on the cook,” what two items did the cook want you to find?

_____ and _____

Outline the tasks of the cook on the trail drive:

Define the word “hampered.” Use a thesaurus and provide 2 synonyms.

Write this sentence another way: “Three times a day was the same fare served with little variation, and yet, there is no record of any man failing to respond to the call, ‘Come an' git it! Come an' git it! Chuck-a-way!’”
