

# Home on the Range: The Life of a Cowboy

**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 various activities and tasks of cowboys.

## **PASS—Oklahoma Priority Academic Student Skills**

<b>Social Studies 1.1</b>	Demonstrate the ability to utilize research materials, such as encyclopedias, almanacs, atlases, newspapers, photographs, visual images, and computer-based technologies. (Grade 4)
<b>Social Studies 5.1</b>	Identify major historical individuals, entrepreneurs, and groups, and describe their major contributions. (Grade 4)
<b>Social Studies 1.1</b>	Locate, gather, analyze, and apply information from primary and secondary sources using examples of different perspectives and points of view. (Grade 5)
<b>Language Arts/Writing 2.2</b>	Write creative stories and poems using figurative language (alliteration, personification, simile, and metaphor) and varied word choice. (Grade 4)
<b>Language Arts/Writing 2.3</b>	Write personal, persuasive, formal business letters including the date, greeting, body, closing and signature. (Grade 4, Grade 5-2.4)
<b>Information Literacy 1.3</b>	Identify and use a range of information sources.

### **Goals:**

- Students will gain an appreciation of the early cowboy's way of life.
- Students will be introduced to the annual cycle of the work of a cowboy.

### **Objectives:**

- Students will examine photographs and other primary source materials related to cowboy life.
- Students will discuss the skills cowboys learn to perform the tasks of their jobs.

**Assessment:** Students will write a letter applying for a job as a cowboy. Students will research a topic related to the lesson, such as rodeos or cattle trails, and prepare a brief report.

### **Primary Materials:**

- Photographs of cowboys, their equipment and cattle.
- Classroom display of books with photographs and information about cowboy life for use with this lesson.

### **Additional Resources:**

- Information about the Chisholm Trail at the Chisholm Trail Heritage Center website at [www.onthechisholmtrail.com/](http://www.onthechisholmtrail.com/) and the Oklahoma Historical Society's Chisholm Trail Historical Museum website at [www.waurika.net/museum.html](http://www.waurika.net/museum.html)
- Information about ranch rodeos in Oklahoma at the Oklahoma Historical Society website [www.ok-history.mus.ok.us/enc/ranchrodeo.htm](http://www.ok-history.mus.ok.us/enc/ranchrodeo.htm)
- Information about the Chisholm Trail at the Oklahoma Historical Society website [www.ok-history.mus.ok.us/enc/chsmtrl.htm](http://www.ok-history.mus.ok.us/enc/chsmtrl.htm)
- Oklahoma Ag in the Classroom "Quick Ag Facts About Beef" [www.clover.okstate.edu/fourh/aitc/lessons/extras/facts/beef.html](http://www.clover.okstate.edu/fourh/aitc/lessons/extras/facts/beef.html)
- "History of the Ranch Cattle Industry in Oklahoma" by Edward Everett Dale, *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1920* (USGPO, 1925).

**Procedure:**

Provide students with primary source materials such as newspaper articles, photographs, and books related to cowboy life. Have students discuss the various tasks cowboys perform, such as branding cattle and taking cattle to market.

Have students work in small groups to create lists of the skills cowboys need in order to do their jobs, such as the ability to rope a calf while riding a horse. Ask students to present their lists to the class. Ask students to consider how the lives of cowboys in the late 1800s differ from the lives of cowboys today. Explain that early cowboys performed certain tasks at different times of the year.

Roundups were held in the spring and in the fall. During a roundup, cowboys from different ranches worked together to gather cattle in a central location. The purpose of the roundup was to give each owner the opportunity to inventory his herd and have cattle separated to send to market.

New calves were branded during the roundups. Calves were branded with the same brand as their mother. Several cowboys worked together to brand each cow. Usually one roped the calf, two held it on its side on the ground, and another placed the brand on the hide of the cow using a branding iron heated in a fire. Even today, it takes several cowboys to brand a calf.

During the roundups cowboys from several neighboring ranches worked together. They often spent their time in the evenings together telling stories and having contests. Cowboys competed to see who could rope a calf the quickest or who could ride a wild horse the longest. These evening events soon became very popular in local communities and were the beginnings of today's rodeos. Today, more than 100 rodeos are held in Oklahoma each year.

Cattle separated for sale in the spring were moved in herds from Texas through Oklahoma to Kansas. Cattle were moved during the spring and summer because there was plenty of grass and the weather was warm. During the late 1800s, the closest railways were in Kansas. Once the herds reached Kansas, they would be sold and transported by rail to Eastern cities. Because the cattle moved 10 – 15 miles per day over the open plain, it might take 2 – 3 months to reach their destination. The routes they chose were determined by the type of terrain and the location of water. Some of the difficulties cowboys faced included deep rivers, lack of adequate water and stampedes. The route of one of the most popular trails in Oklahoma, the Chisholm Trail, was marked with 400 concrete markers in 1997.

Cowboys on cattle drives spent much of their day alone. They rode from sunrise to sunset, except for a break for lunch when the cattle were given time to graze and rest. The evening meal at the chuck wagon was the social event of the day. Cowboys gathered around the fire to visit and tell stories.

At night each cowboy took a 2 hour shift to watch the cattle. During that time, the cowboy watched to see that no cattle strayed. Cowboys often sang to the cattle to help calm them. If something frightened the cattle, such as a loud noise, there was a danger they would stampede.

Cowboys faced many dangers on cattle drives, including being trampled in a stampede, struck by lightning or bitten by a rattlesnake. Being dragged by his horse, after falling off the horse with his foot still in the stirrups, was a common cause of death for many cowboys.

During the winter months, ranchers needed fewer hands and laid off many cowboys. Those who were laid off often took odd jobs, while those who stayed at the ranches tended the animals, until the roundups began again in the spring.

Have students discuss what aspects of cowboy life interest them. Ask them what aspects they would find difficult or unpleasant. Have students write a letter to apply for a position as a cowboy using the "Position Available: Cowboy" worksheet. Have students write a brief report about a related topic that interests them, such as rodeos or cattle trails in Oklahoma. Encourage them to use encyclopedias, and other resources, including the Internet, to research their topics. Have students write poetry, using the "Cowboy Poetry" worksheets.

## Vocabulary:

Cattle drive	The movement of a large group of cattle from Texas through Oklahoma to Kansas that often took several months during the late 1800s.
Chuck wagon	A wagon, driven by the cook at round-up time and on trail drives. Food, supplies and equipment were stored in the wagon.
Cowboy	A young man, usually 15-25, hired to work with cattle. About one-third of the early cowboys were Mexican or African-American. Many were Native Americans, former soldiers or slaves.
Primary Source	An actual record that has survived the past, such as a diary, letter, photograph, or film of an interview.
Rodeo	A public competition or exhibition in which a cowboy's skills are displayed.
Roundup	The gathering of cattle, usually in the spring or fall. During roundup, cattle may be inspected, branded or separated for sale.
Secondary Source	A record that was created after an event occurred, such as a textbook.
Stampede	A sudden movement or rush of cattle often caused by fright. When cattle stampeded, cowboys had to work to stop them. During the stampede there was a danger cowboys or cattle could be hurt or killed.

## Further Suggestions:

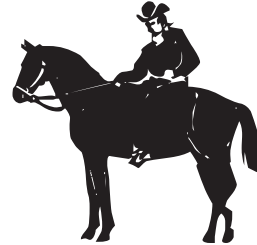
- Invite a member of the Oklahoma Historical Society to visit the classroom to talk about cowboy life in Oklahoma. Contact Mike Adkins, Director of Education, at [madkins@ok-history.mus.ok.us](mailto:madkins@ok-history.mus.ok.us) or 405-522-5248. A traveling trunk of cowboy items is also available.
- Take a field trip to the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City. See their website for more information [www.cowboyhalloffame.org/m\\_tour\\_el.html](http://www.cowboyhalloffame.org/m_tour_el.html). The Museum also has a traveling trunk of cowboy items. Contact Sue McCoy at 405-478-2250, Ext. 264 or [smccoy@nationalcowboymuseum.org](mailto:smccoy@nationalcowboymuseum.org).
- The Diamond R Ranch website, sponsored by the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, includes numerous cowboy activities for students such as games, songs, tours, exhibits, etc. Check it out at [www.nationalcowboymuseum.org/diamondr/index.html](http://www.nationalcowboymuseum.org/diamondr/index.html)
- Take a field trip to a local museum or historical society, such as the Chisholm Trail Historical Museum in Waurika, the Chisholm Trail Heritage Center in Duncan, or the Chisholm Trail Museum in Kingfisher. If a visit is not possible, ask a staff member to visit the classroom to present information and encourage students to visit the museum or historical society. For more information about museums and historical sites, see the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreations Department's "What To Do" section of its website at [www.travelok.com/](http://www.travelok.com/).
- Invite a rancher or cowboy to visit the class to talk about their experiences.
- Invite a cowboy or cowgirl who competes in rodeos to talk about their experiences. There are several associations in Oklahoma that may be able to recommend speakers, such as the Northeast Youth Rodeo Association of Oklahoma [www.nyraok.com/](http://www.nyraok.com/) or the Oklahoma Kansas Youth Rodeo Association [www.cowboyway.com/OKYRARodeo.htm](http://www.cowboyway.com/OKYRARodeo.htm).
- See lesson plans and other information from Oklahoma Ag in the Classroom at [www.clover.okstate.edu/fourh/aitc/](http://www.clover.okstate.edu/fourh/aitc/). Topics include Animals in Agriculture, Agriculture and the Environment, Food and Nutrition, and Agriculture in History.

# Position Available:

# COWBOY

Send letter of interest to:

**Joe Brown**  
c/o **Lazy 8 Ranch**



Write a letter expressing your interest in the position of cowboy.

Describe your skills and experience.

Include the date, greeting, body, closing, and signature.

## LOCAL ROUTE DRIVERS

Registered a high  
excellent high profile  
international  
organization

Excellent pay make  
up to \$26 a day  
Full time Must know  
OAC make a 22 well  
No CDL needed  
We need people of the  
highest integrity

Bring CVR & copy  
at 2215 SW 4th  
M 59-1  
ask for manager

## WELLS FARGO

Positions Available  
**DRIVER/GUARD**

Requirements

At least 2 years exp  
A driver's license with qualifications  
Must be able to handle cash  
Must be able to work the night shift  
Must be able to work the weekend shift

We Train

\$250.00 Sign On Bonus  
\$250.00 Bonus

**CASH TELLER**

Requirements

A driver's license with qualifications  
Must be able to handle cash  
Must be able to work the night shift  
Must be able to work the weekend shift

WELLS FARGO BANK

18741 17th Ave NW  
Alaska 99574

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# COWBOY ACROSTIC POETRY

Create an acrostic poem using words and phrases that describe cowboys. Choose a word related to the cowboy way of life.

An acrostic poem is formed by writing a word vertically down the page. Use one letter per line and make each a capital letter. As you write your poem, each line must begin with the letter that is on that line. You may use one word or a whole phrase per line. Acrostic poems do not have to rhyme.

If you have a hard time finding the right word or phrase for a particular letter, use a thesaurus or dictionary to find a synonym with the beginning letter.

Example:

**C**owboys  
**O**n the open range  
**W**earing  
**B**rown boots  
**O**ften wave their hats and shout  
**Y**ahoo!



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