

Overview

In this lesson students will learn the reasons for the cattle drives in post-Civil War Kansas. Students will read a series of historic images then place them in sequential order to tell the story of a cattle drive. This lesson is written for one class period.

Standards

Current standards can be found on kshs.org.

Objectives

Content:

- The student will be able to explain the reasons why the Texas cattle drives came to Kansas.
- The students will be able to name at least three jobs done by a cattle drive cowboy.

Skills:

- The student will be able to analyze and sequence historic photographs to tell the story of the cattle drives.
- The student will be able to make observations and inferences from historic photographs.
- The student will be able to read a historic photograph and take notes about the content.

Essential Questions

- Why was Kansas so critical to the success of post-Civil War cattle drives?

Activities

This activity uses the following *Read Kansas!* cards:

- **Abilene in 1867/Feeding Time**
- **Joseph G. McCoy/Cowboy Hygiene**
- **A Drover/Roping**
- **A Trail Crew/Riding Night Herd**
- **The Roundup/Cattle Pens**
- **The Chisholm Trail/Loading Cattle**

Day 1

1. Introduce the topic of cowboys and the Texas cattle drive era by reading historic photographs. For background information on this topic, we recommend having the students read the cattle drive section of the Kansas history textbook, *The Kansas Journey*. If needed, share vocabulary words in For the Teacher section of this lesson.
2. Divide the class into pair groups. Each pair is only working with one side of the card so you will need to copy, download from the KSHS website (kshs.org), or buy additional cards.
 - a. Provide each pair with one *Read Kansas!* card or copy and two sheets of 8 ½ " x 11" white paper.
 - b. Fold one piece of white paper in fourths to create four quadrants. Unfold and cut out one quadrant so the paper is "L" shaped.
 - c. Fold the second piece of paper into four quadrants. Unfold but do not cut.
3. Each pair will be responsible for reading one historic photograph. There will be a minimum of 12 pairs.
4. Instruct students to cover their photographs with the "L" shaped piece of white paper, leaving the upper right quadrant exposed. The cover sheet may not divide the photograph in exact quarters so students will need to adjust the cover sheet accordingly.
 - a. Students will examine the upper right quadrant and record everything they see in the corresponding quadrant of the second piece of folded paper.
 - b. Turn the cover sheet in clockwise order and continue until the entire photograph is "read," taking notes on each quadrant.
5. Distribute the caption for each photograph to the appropriate pair. Instruct the partners to discuss what they have learned about cowboys and the cattle drive era from their picture and the caption.
 - a. They should use inference skills to answer the essential question, "Why was Kansas so critical to the success of post-Civil War cattle drives?"
 - b. Students should record this information on the back of the folded paper on which they took notes about the photograph. They will share this information with the class.
6. Display each image so the entire class can see it as one student from each pair shares what was learned from the photograph. If you have more than one pair using the same image, ask if there is anything to add or change.
7. After everyone has presented, have the other student in the pair bring his or her photograph to the front of the class. Instruct students that they are going to create a human timeline. As a class, have students sequence the photographs in order of how Texas cattle came to Kansas railheads. We recommend beginning with the **Abilene in 1867** *Read Kansas!* card because it was the railroad that was needed in order to have the cattle drives.

8. After you and the class are satisfied with the order, have each student tell his or her part of the story in order.
9. As a final assessment, have students select one question and write a one-paragraph answer.
 - a. What conclusions can you draw about life as a trail drive cowboy?
 - b. Explain the relationship between cattle drives and the railroad.
10. As an extended activity, students can research a Kansas cattle town using the *Kansas Memory* website (kansasmemory.org). The major towns were Abilene, Ellsworth, Newton, Wichita, Caldwell, and Dodge City. There are a number of great photographs and documents on these towns.

Assessment

- Evaluate the student's ability to work cooperatively to read and interpret a historic photograph.
- Evaluate the student's ability to answer the assessment question.

For the Teacher

If you are using the textbook, *The Kansas Journey*, this lesson works well with the cattle industry section found on pages 140-147.

Vocabulary and definitions:

Cattle town or cowtown: A town to which cattle were driven, loaded onto trains, and shipped to slaughterhouses.

Chisholm Trail: One of the major cattle trails from Texas to the Kansas cowtowns.

Chuck wagon: The wagon on the trail that carried the food (daily servings of rice, beans, and coffee), medicine, and the cowboys' bedrolls.

Drover: A person who drives cattle, another name for a cowboy.

Drover's Cottage: A well-known hotel. The name was used as advertising to attract cattle buyers and sellers. The Drover's Cottage in Abilene was moved to Ellsworth when it became the main railroad for the drives.

Kansas Pacific Railroad: The Kansas Pacific began in 1855 as the Leavenworth, Pawnee and Western Railroad, and was later reorganized in 1863 as the Union Pacific Eastern Division. The name "Kansas Pacific" was not adopted until 1869.

Lariat: A long noosed rope used to catch animals.

Longhorn: A tough breed of Spanish cattle with very long horns.

Railhead: A town or point along a railroad where a train can have cargo loaded or unloaded.

Answer Key for Sequence Activity:

This is the recommended sequence but those photographs with a * can be in any order.

Abilene in 1867
Joseph G. McCoy
A Drover
A Trail Crew
The Round up
The Chisholm Trail*
Feeding Time*
Roping*
Cowboy Hygiene*
Riding Night Herd*
Cattle Pens
Loading Cattle

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- Kansas Historical Society collections



Abilene in 1867

This is the earliest photograph of the new town of Abilene. The Union Pacific Railroad (later the Kansas Pacific) was under construction west of Kansas City to Denver. In 1867 it reached Abilene. The town was approximately 700 miles from the beginning of the trail in Texas. By September 1867, when the first herds arrived, the Drover's Cottage was ready for business (the large building near the center of the photograph).



Joseph G. McCoy

In 1867 Joseph G. McCoy (seated) was a cattle dealer from Illinois who decided that Abilene would make a good railhead. When he arrived the town consisted only of a few log cabins. He built stockyards that could hold 3,000 head of cattle, started a bank, and built the Drover's Cottage. Then he sent agents to Texas to inform cattle ranchers of Abilene's ability to ship cattle by rail to market. McCoy's brother James stands next to him in this photograph.



A Drover

The term drover is another name for a cowboy. One 19th century definition of a cowboy was "anyone with guts and a horse." A cowboy needed to be strong to survive the harsh conditions of trail life. Cattle stampedes, flooded rivers, and lightening storms were typical hazards. Cowboy gear and clothing was designed to serve a specific and practical function to enable him to do his job.



A Trail Crew

It took about a dozen cowboys to trail 2,500 head of cattle. Cowboys brought their own saddles, but the rancher provided the horses for the trail drive. For their labors, cowboys earned \$1 a day plus their food. They were fed from a chuck wagon.



The Round Up

After the Civil War there was a large demand for fresh meat among residents in the war-ravaged states. Texas cattlemen saw an opportunity for making money if only they could get their cattle from the open ranges to the people back east. Cattle that brought \$4 in Texas sold for \$40 in Chicago. Once the railroads reached Kansas ranchers were eager to have their cattle driven north. In the spring the ranchers would hire cowboys to round up the herds and brand the cattle in preparation for the long trail drive.



Feeding Time

On the trail it was the cowboy's primary job to make sure the cattle had adequate water and grass for grazing. Since cattle can move no more than 10 miles per day without losing weight, an average cattle drive from Texas to Abilene lasted more than two months.



The Chisholm Trail

The first cattle drive up the Chisholm Trail arrived in Abilene in 1867 with 2,400 steers. Abilene continued to serve as the end of the trail until 1871. By then the railroad had reached other towns farther west and south, including Ellsworth, Newton, and Wichita. These towns served as the major railheads until Dodge City took the honor as the “queen of the cattle towns” in 1875. Branches of the Chisholm Trail led to all these towns. It is estimated that as many as five million longhorns were driven from Texas to cattle towns in Kansas.



Roping

On the trail the cowboy was rarely out of reach of his lariat. He had to be ready at a moment's notice to bring back a runaway steer or pull a cow out of the mud.



Cowboy Hygiene

These cowboys are relaxing and getting a long-awaited bath in a calm stream. An average workday was 18 hours with little leisure time.



Riding Night Herd

A cowboy's day was not 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Although the herd was only driven during the day, cowboys were still needed at night. They would ride around the perimeter of the grazing or resting herds to keep the cattle safe and calm.



Cattle Pens

Once cattle made it to Kansas there were two options. They could be shipped directly to markets back east or they could be left to graze on native prairie grass over the summer. Grazing had the advantage of cattle doubling their weight, which would bring the owner more money. Cowboys, however, would still be needed to work and guard the herd through the summer.



Loading Cattle

This illustration is of a Kansas Pacific Railroad stock car at Abilene in 1871. Special railroad cars were used to transport cattle. A few of the cowboys continued to work for the stockmen as they rode the train to Chicago, caring for the cattle along the way. The going rate for cattle in the East was \$40 a head.