

Jesse James *Teacher's Guide*

Jesse James provides insights into American history topics including the Missouri Compromise and pro-slavery factions in the West, the end of the Civil War, Reconstruction-era politics, guerrilla warfare, criminal activities and Westward expansion, the Pinkerton Detective Agency and private policing, American outlaws and the legend of Jesse James vs. the reality of his life, and more. You can use part or all of the film, or delve into the rich resources available on this Web site to learn more, either in a classroom or on your own.

The following activities are grouped into four categories

- History
- Civics
- Geography
- Economics

You can also read a few helpful hints below for completing the activities.

EXCLUSIVE CORPORATE FUNDING FOR *AMERICAN EXPERIENCE* PROVIDED BY LIBERTY MUTUAL.
MAJOR FUNDING PROVIDED BY THE ALFRED P. SLOAN FOUNDATION, THE CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING AND PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS.
AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IS PRODUCED FOR PBS BY WGBH BOSTON.



Jesse James

History

1. James and Dillinger, American outlaws

Visit the Jesse James Shooting Gallery to see how well you can separate the real Jesse James from the mythical one. Now find out about the 1930s criminal who has been called "the most infamous outlaw since Jesse James," [John Dillinger](#) (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/dillinger/>).

Working with a partner and using information on the AMERICAN EXPERIENCE *Dillinger* website and this website, compare and contrast the two men, the crimes they committed, the times in which they lived, and the reasons why some people admired them (however unwisely). Show what you have learned by writing the transcript of the conversation you think the two men would have had if they had ever met. Ask for volunteers to act out their scripts for the class.

2. A time of protest

During one of their train robberies, the James gang wore [Ku Klux Klan](#) (http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/grant/peoplevents/e_klan.html) hoods, and one of the robbers told passengers, "We are Grangers." Why, do you think, did James try to link his gang with the K.K.K. and the Grange movement?

Divide the class into two groups. Assign one group to find out more about the K.K.K. -- its origins, its goals and tactics, and how prominent it was in [Missouri during Reconstruction](#) (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/james-politics/>) -- and assign the other group to do the same with the Grange movement. When they are done, reassemble as a class and have each group brief the other group on its findings. Then discuss these questions as a class:

EXCLUSIVE CORPORATE FUNDING FOR AMERICAN EXPERIENCE PROVIDED BY LIBERTY MUTUAL.
MAJOR FUNDING PROVIDED BY THE ALFRED P. SLOAN FOUNDATION, THE CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING AND PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS.
AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IS PRODUCED FOR PBS BY WGBH BOSTON.



- What (if anything) did the K.K.K. and the Grange have in common? How did they differ?
- What might James have been trying to accomplish by linking his gang to these two groups?
- From what you know about James and his gang, do you think they truly were consistent with the goals and methods of either the K.K.K. or the Grange?

EXCLUSIVE CORPORATE FUNDING FOR *AMERICAN EXPERIENCE* PROVIDED BY LIBERTY MUTUAL.
MAJOR FUNDING PROVIDED BY THE ALFRED P. SLOAN FOUNDATION, THE CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING AND PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS.
AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IS PRODUCED FOR PBS BY WGBH BOSTON.



Jesse James

Geography

1. A nation still divided

A [map](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/reconstruction/states/index.html) (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/reconstruction/states/index.html>) comparing each state's economic health before and after the Civil War shows that while some states were struggling during the Reconstruction years, others were growing rapidly. Divide the states among the members of the class. For each state, students should prepare four bar graphs, one for each of the four economic indicators shown in the map (number of farms, value of farm land, number of factories, and value of manufactured products). Now post these graphs on the wall, dividing them into three categories: Confederate states, Union states, and Border states. Examine them as a class. What do they tell you about how the different parts of the country were doing during Reconstruction?

2. James's deadly trail

Using this site's [timeline](#)

(<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/timeline/james/>), work with a partner to create an illustrated map of the [crimes](#)

(<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/james-robberies/>) committed by Jesse James, his brother [Frank](#)

(<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/biography/james-frank-james/>), and their gang. The map should show basic information on what crimes were committed, where, and when. Illustrate it with photos or drawings of James and his associates. You might want to create your map in the form of a "wanted poster" warning citizens against the James gang.

EXCLUSIVE CORPORATE FUNDING FOR AMERICAN EXPERIENCE PROVIDED BY LIBERTY MUTUAL.
MAJOR FUNDING PROVIDED BY THE ALFRED P. SLOAN FOUNDATION, THE CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING AND PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS.
AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IS PRODUCED FOR PBS BY WGBH BOSTON.



Jesse James

Civics

1. Jesse James, terrorist?

Do you think [Jesse James](#)

(<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/biography/james-jesse-james/>),

[Bill Anderson](#) (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/biography/james-anderson/>), and the other bushwhackers were guilty of "terrorism" for the atrocities they committed during the [Civil War](#)

(<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/lincolns/atwar/index.html>)? Explore this question by holding a mock classroom trial of James on the charge of terrorism. Assign a dozen class members to be the jury and divide the rest of the class into a prosecution team and a defense team. Each team should present its arguments to the jury, which then should vote to convict or acquit James on this charge. (The defense team may select one of its members to act the part of James if it wishes to put him on the stand to testify.)

2. James' "assassination"

The 2007 film *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford*, starring Brad Pitt as Jesse James, recounts James' [death](#)

(<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/james-death/>) at the hands of Robert Ford. Ford, whom some people bitterly criticized for shooting James, had been promised a pardon by Governor Thomas Crittenden of Missouri.

Ask for a volunteer to play the part of Governor Crittenden and have him hold a press conference on the killing and his role in it. The rest of the class should play the part of reporters. Questions should range from sympathetic to critical and should address such issues as whether killing James was necessary, how the people of Missouri (as well as people in other states interested in moving to or investing in Missouri) might react to James's death, and whether justice was served in this case.

EXCLUSIVE CORPORATE FUNDING FOR AMERICAN EXPERIENCE PROVIDED BY LIBERTY MUTUAL.
MAJOR FUNDING PROVIDED BY THE ALFRED P. SLOAN FOUNDATION, THE CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING AND PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS.
AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IS PRODUCED FOR PBS BY WGBH BOSTON.



Jesse James

Economics

1. Latter-day Robin Hood?

Newspaper editor [John Newman Edwards](#)

(<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/biography/james-edwards/>) portrayed Jesse James as a modern-day Robin Hood who stole from the rich and gave to the poor. Find out more about Robin Hood by watching a film or reading a book based on his story. Read [newspaper accounts](#)

(<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/primary-resources/james/>) including Jesse James' justifications for his actions. Now, using what you know about the Robin Hood story and about Jesse James, imagine that you have just read one of Edwards's editorials in the *Kansas City Times* and write a letter to the editor of around 300 words in which you give your own view of Edwards's comparison.

2. A price on his head

In 1881, a \$10,000 reward was announced for the [capture](#)

(<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/biography/james-agency/>) of Jesse and Frank James. Find out how much that amount would be in today's dollars by using an online inflation calculator such as the one on the [NASA Web site](#)

(<http://cost.jsc.nasa.gov/inflation/nasa/inflateNASA.html>). Then, using information from the [FBI](#), (<http://www.fbi.gov/>) the State Department's [Rewards for Justice](#) (<http://www.rewardsforjustice.net/>) program, and other sources, find out which alleged criminals or terrorists have the highest U.S. government bounties on their heads today. Make a list of these persons, along with the crimes they are suspected of committing. Which crimes draw the highest reward amounts?

EXCLUSIVE CORPORATE FUNDING FOR AMERICAN EXPERIENCE PROVIDED BY LIBERTY MUTUAL.
MAJOR FUNDING PROVIDED BY THE ALFRED P. SLOAN FOUNDATION, THE CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING AND PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS.
AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IS PRODUCED FOR PBS BY WGBH BOSTON.



Jesse James

Helpful Hints

History

Alternatively, you could divide the class into groups and assign each group a different area of comparison. One group might focus on the possible reasons why both men chose a life of crime, a second group might compare life during

[Reconstruction](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/reconstruction/) (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/reconstruction/>) with life during the [Great Depression](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/dustbowl/) (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/dustbowl/>), and so on.

Students researching the K.K.K. might start with the [historian interviews](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/reconstruction/kkk/sf_klan.html) (http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/reconstruction/kkk/sf_klan.html) at the Web site of the AMERICAN EXPERIENCE film [Reconstruction: The Second Civil War](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/reconstruction/). (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/reconstruction/>)

Geography

Before starting this activity, you may want to prepare a sample bar graph as a class to remind students how they should be constructed. More details on crimes committed by James can be found on the Web.

Civics

Both the defense and prosecution teams should explore the issue of what defines terrorism -- in terms of the acts committed, the persons against whom the acts were committed, and the stated goals of the attackers. For example, can killing a uniformed soldier be termed "terrorism"? Does it matter if the soldier was unarmed? Does it matter if the killer was (or was not) motivated by some political belief?

Students may want to review pages 376-378 of T.J. Stiles' biography of James, *Jesse James: Last Rebel of the Civil War* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), for reactions to James' killing, including

EXCLUSIVE CORPORATE FUNDING FOR AMERICAN EXPERIENCE PROVIDED BY LIBERTY MUTUAL.
MAJOR FUNDING PROVIDED BY THE ALFRED P. SLOAN FOUNDATION, THE CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING AND PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS.
AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IS PRODUCED FOR PBS BY WGBH BOSTON.



Crittenden's defense of his actions. Students might also want to consider how they would react if a present-day governor encouraged the killing of a dangerous criminal without trial.

Economics

Films about Robin Hood include the 1991 "Robin Hood - Prince of Thieves," starring Kevin Costner and the 1938 "The Adventures of Robin Hood," starring Errol Flynn. Books about Robin Hood include the 1904 "[Robin Hood](#)," by J. Walker McSpadden (<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/832>).

Before doing this activity, you might ask students to explain why \$10,000 in 1881 is not the same as \$10,000 today. You may ask them to try out this [online inflation calculator](#) (<http://www.westegg.com/inflation/>).

EXCLUSIVE CORPORATE FUNDING FOR AMERICAN EXPERIENCE PROVIDED BY LIBERTY MUTUAL.
MAJOR FUNDING PROVIDED BY THE ALFRED P. SLOAN FOUNDATION, THE CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING AND PUBLIC TELEVISION VIEWERS.
AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IS PRODUCED FOR PBS BY WGBH BOSTON.

