

The Wild West *Teacher's Guide*

[Custer's Last Stand](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/custer) (www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/custer), [Billy the Kid](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/billy) (www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/billy), [Buffalo Bill](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/cody) (www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/cody), [Kit Carson](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/carson) (www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/carson), and other AMERICAN EXPERIENCE programs on the American West offer insights into social studies topics including European colonies in North America, Westward expansion, the American frontier, relations between Native peoples and settlers, the continent's natural resources, law and lawlessness on the frontier, myths or legends of the West, nostalgia for the West, and more. Use part or all of the programs, or delve into the rich resources available on this website to learn more.

EXCLUSIVE CORPORATE FUNDING FOR AMERICAN EXPERIENCE PROVIDED BY LIBERTY MUTUAL INSURANCE.
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.



**Liberty
Mutual.**
INSURANCE



ALFRED P. SLOAN
FOUNDATION



Corporation for
Public Broadcasting



The Wild West
Teacher's Guide

Comprehension Section

Use this activity with your students before or after they watch any of the programs in our [Wild West collection](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/collections/wild-west) (www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/collections/wild-west), or explore AMERICAN EXPERIENCE's online offerings on the American West.

Before or after using this activity, reference our timeline on Westward expansion, [American Frontiers](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/timeline/wild-west) (www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/timeline/wild-west), where you will find most of the following terms. Match the correct terms from the list with the descriptions below.

<p>Battle of Washita Gold (Gold Rush of 1848) Sitting Bull Kansas-Nebraska Act Lewis and Clark Louisiana Purchase Great Westward Migration Exodusters Migration Massacre at Wounded Knee Civil War Spain (Adams-Onis Treaty) Yellowstone National Park Cherokee Tribe Oklahoma Land Rush Frederick Jackson Turner Navajo Long Walk Appalachian Mountains Homestead Act Closing of the Frontier Mexico (Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo)</p>	<p>War of 1812 Geronimo Battle of Little Bighorn Declaration of Independence Mississippi River Transcontinental Railroad Comstock Lode Erie Canal Louisiana Territory Proclamation of 1763 The Oregon Trail Battle of Little Bighorn Libbie Custer Great Britain Republic of Texas Treaty of Fort Laramie French and Indian War Trail of Tears Northwest Ordinance</p>
---	--

1. In the Proclamation of 1763, the British government forbade American colonists to settle west of this mountain range.
2. This 1787 law set the rules by which new states would be formed from the territory between the Ohio River and the Great Lakes.
3. This deal between the United States and France in 1803 doubled the size of the United States.
4. This river marked the western boundary of the United States until 1803.
5. In 1804, these two men began a two-year exploration of the United States' new western territories.
6. In 1812, the United States went to war with this major European power in part because of the latter's support for [Indian tribes](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/weshallremain/the_films/episode_1_about) (www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/weshallremain/the_films/episode_1_about) on the American frontier.
7. In 1819, the United States purchased Florida from this country.
8. Completed in 1825, this waterway across New York State helped connect the East Coast and the Midwest.
9. This area, independent since 1836, was annexed by the United States in 1845.
10. In 1838, these native people were forced to leave their homes and move west of the Mississippi on a march referred to as the "[Trail of Tears](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/weshallremain/the_films/episode_3_about)" (www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/weshallremain/the_films/episode_3_about).
11. In 1843, large numbers of [migrants](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/donner) (www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/donner) started using this overland route to travel westward from Missouri to Oregon.
12. In 1848, this country was forced to give up a large part of its territory after being defeated in war by the United States.

13. The discovery of this natural resource in [California](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/goldrush) (www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/goldrush) in 1848 led to a stampede of migrants, sometimes called the "forty-niners."
14. This 1862 law encouraged the settlement of the West by granting land to people who would farm it.
15. George Custer's actions at this 1868 battle led him to be hailed as the greatest Indian fighter on the plains and a hero of the American frontier.
16. This 1868 treaty established the Great Sioux Reservation and gave ownership of the [Black Hills](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/timeline/custer-timeline) (www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/timeline/custer-timeline) to the Lakota, along with hunting rights in Wyoming, South Dakota and Montana.
17. Completed in 1869, this [transportation](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/tcrr) (www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/tcrr) link made it possible for goods and people to travel from one end of the country to the other much more quickly.
18. In 1876, this Sioux leader destroyed a U.S. cavalry unit led by [General George Custer](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/custer) (www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/custer) at the Little Bighorn.
19. In 1879, these African Americans migrated from the South to establish farms in Kansas.
20. In 1886, this Apache warrior, one of the most feared and respected Indian fighters, finally surrendered to U.S. forces.
21. This 1890 killing of Sioux Indians by U.S. Cavalry troops is often seen as the end of the Indian Wars.
22. Her three best-selling books, published between 1885 and 1893, helped shape the image of George Custer for more than half a century.
23. In 1893, this historian declared that the western frontier, which he said had played a key role in shaping American history, was now closed.

The Wild West

Teacher's Guide

Classroom Activities

Activity 1: Voices from History

Invite members of the class to imagine that they have been given a chance to conduct an interview with George Custer, Libbie Custer, Sitting Bull, [Geronimo](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/weshallremain/the_films/episode_4_about) (www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/weshallremain/the_films/episode_4_about), Kit Carson, Annie Oakley, or another figure who was central to the history of the Wild West.

Working in small groups, have students decide on a figure to interview and come up with at least five questions they would like to ask this person. Then have class members exchange their lists and set out to answer the questions their classmates have generated, using material presented in the films, additional research conducted online or at the library, and their own inferences as the basis for their answers. Have students present the interviews to the class in a talk-show format, or publish an interview-style magazine with a collection of these conversations.

Activity 2: The Cost of Progress

In *Custer's Last Stand*, historian Richard Slotkin argues that George Custer "incarnates one of the fundamental problems in American history: What do we really make of the progress that we made? What did it cost for the United States to become the country that it's become? What price was paid, and who paid the price?"

Using evidence presented in the [Custer](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/custer) (www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/custer) film (or in any of the other films in the Wild West collection), discuss Slotkin's questions as a class, paying particular attention to "who paid the price" as America expanded westward. Students may also reflect on the cost of progress by staging a class debate on this topic or by writing persuasive essays in which they take a stand on this issue and support their arguments with historical evidence.

Activity 3: Voices from the Old West

To research eyewitness accounts by some of the different kinds of people who lived in the West, divide the class into teams of six students each and have teams assign each member one of the following: rancher (or cowboy), farmer, Native American, prospector for gold (or some other mineral), woman, soldier (or scout). Students should find primary-source accounts by several such persons, select a brief (200 words or fewer) excerpt that they found particularly interesting, and copy that excerpt onto a sheet of paper, without identifying which team they represent.

When all of the teams are done, have them organize their sheets by category (all of the accounts by ranchers in one pile, for example) and hand them to the teacher. The teacher will then select the most compelling excerpt in each of the six categories. Which team had the most winners?

Activity 4: Surviving the West: A Game of Skill and Chance

Working together as a class, design a board game called "Surviving the West," in which players advance their pieces along a sequence of squares (by rolling a die) in order to see who can be the first to reach the square in the center of the board.



Scattered across the board should be several "Just Your Luck" squares; a player who lands on one of them selects a card from a pile that contains descriptions of fortunate events (for example, "Congratulations: you've just struck gold! Advance five squares!") and unfortunate ones (for example, "Sorry, grasshoppers have eaten your crop. Go back five squares.").

Also scattered across the board should be several "Test Your Knowledge" squares. A player who lands on one of them selects a card from a pile that contains multiple-choice quiz questions on the West (for example, "From what country did Texas declare its independence in 1836: France, Mexico, Spain, or the United States?"). The player may not advance until he or she has answered the question correctly.

When the design of the game is complete, produce several copies and have the members of the class play it in small groups. Do they think a real westerner of the 1800s would have enjoyed it -- and do they think they could have beaten him or her?

Activity 5: Yesterday's West, Today's America

Have each student take the [Westernizer](#)

(www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/west-quiz) personality quiz to see what kind of person he or she would have been in the American West. Students should also explore the links provided there to learn about some historical figures who shared those traits.

Next, have each student select one of those historical figures and imagine that this person has been given an opportunity to write a newspaper column commenting on some aspect of life in America today. What would appear most interesting -- or shocking -- to this visitor from the past, given his or her life experiences? Each student should write a column on behalf of their chosen historical figure and circulate it among the class or read it aloud.

Activity 6: Diverse Indian Peoples

As the film on [Kit Carson](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/carson) (www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/carson) explains, Carson dealt with many different kinds of American Indians, from different tribes, and therefore did not view them as a single group or stereotype.

To see how stereotypes can present a distorted view of a people, ask the class what characteristics first come to mind when they think of [Native Americans](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/weshallremain) (www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/weshallremain) of the West (for example, what they wore, what their diet consisted of, how they governed themselves, and how they treated members of other tribes) and make a list as a class of the "top ten" of these characteristics. Then divide the class into small groups and have each group research an assigned Native American tribe to prepare a list of its top 10 characteristics. As each group presents its top 10 list, post it next to the class's initial top 10 list of characteristics of Native Americans in general.

When you are done, compare the groups' lists to each other, and to the initial top 10 list. What similarities and differences do you see among the Indian tribes? How accurate was the class's initial list?

Activity 7: The Pioneer Spirit

Discuss as a class the reasons why so many people decided to give up their current way of life and move to the West during the 1800s. What were they seeking -- more freedom, more opportunity, a chance to build one's own future?

Do you think these goals are still important for Americans today? To explore this issue, divide the class into teams of two students each, and have each team examine the speeches of two of the presidential candidates for 2008 or 2012 -- one Republican and one Democrat. Team members should look for references in these speeches to ideals such as freedom and



opportunity, and see how the candidates discuss these ideals in terms of specific issues, such as the economy, immigration, or health care.

Have teams report their findings to the class. Use these findings as the basis of a class discussion on whether Americans today are motivated by the same things as the Americans who migrated to the West.

EXCLUSIVE CORPORATE FUNDING FOR AMERICAN EXPERIENCE PROVIDED BY LIBERTY MUTUAL INSURANCE.
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.



**Liberty
Mutual.**
INSURANCE



ALFRED P. SLOAN
FOUNDATION



Corporation for
Public Broadcasting



The Wild West

Teacher's Guide

Suggestions for Classroom Activities

Comprehension

Reference our timeline on Westward expansion, [American Frontiers](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/timeline/wild-west) (www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/timeline/wild-west), before or after using this activity. After students have answered the questions, you may want to construct a timeline as a class using the events they describe.

Activities

Activity 1: Use the biographies of [George Custer](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/introduction/custer-introduction) (www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/introduction/custer-introduction), [Sitting Bull](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/biography/oakley-sitting-bull) (www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/biography/oakley-sitting-bull), [Kit Carson](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/introduction/carson) (www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/introduction/carson), [Annie Oakley](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/biography/oakley-annie) (www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/biography/oakley-annie), and others to help in coming up with answers to the interview "questions."

Activity 2: If your class is unable to watch the film, encourage them to use the [transcript](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/introduction/custer-transcript) (www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/introduction/custer-transcript) to help find evidence for their debate or essay.

Activity 3: Students may want to consult this PBS collection of [primary sources on the West](http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/resources/archives) (www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/resources/archives), as well as these [links](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/further-reading/wild-west-websites) (www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/further-reading/wild-west-websites) to other relevant AMERICAN EXPERIENCE websites.

Activity 4: Have students compose the "Test Your Knowledge" questions individually so the questions are unfamiliar to most students when they play the game.

Activity 5: The columns should not assume that readers know the author's life story. Instead, they should describe the author's experiences and how they affect his or her view of life in America today.

To help students begin thinking about topics for a column, you might ask what [Annie Oakley](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/oakley) (www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/oakley) might think of a woman being a leading candidate for president, or what Buffalo Bill might think of a Hollywood western, or what [Francis Parkman](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/murder/sfeature/sf_parkman.html) (www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/murder/sfeature/sf_parkman.html) might think of the frequent use of western images in advertisements for consumer goods.

Activity 6: The Library of Congress' "American Memory" website has a [list of tribes](http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/award98/ienhtml/tribes.html) (http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/award98/ienhtml/tribes.html), along with links to photos.