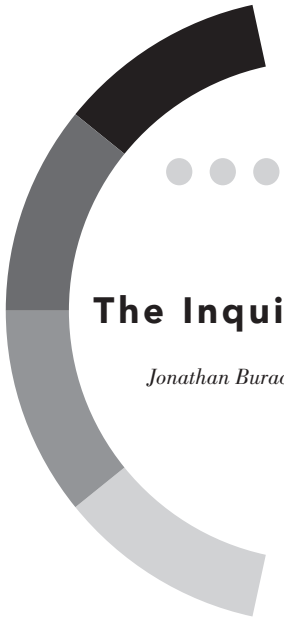


A Rising Industrial Giant



The Inquiry Arc in U.S. History

Jonathan Burack

Free Land

MindSparks®

CULVER CITY, CALIFORNIA

HS10141E v1.0

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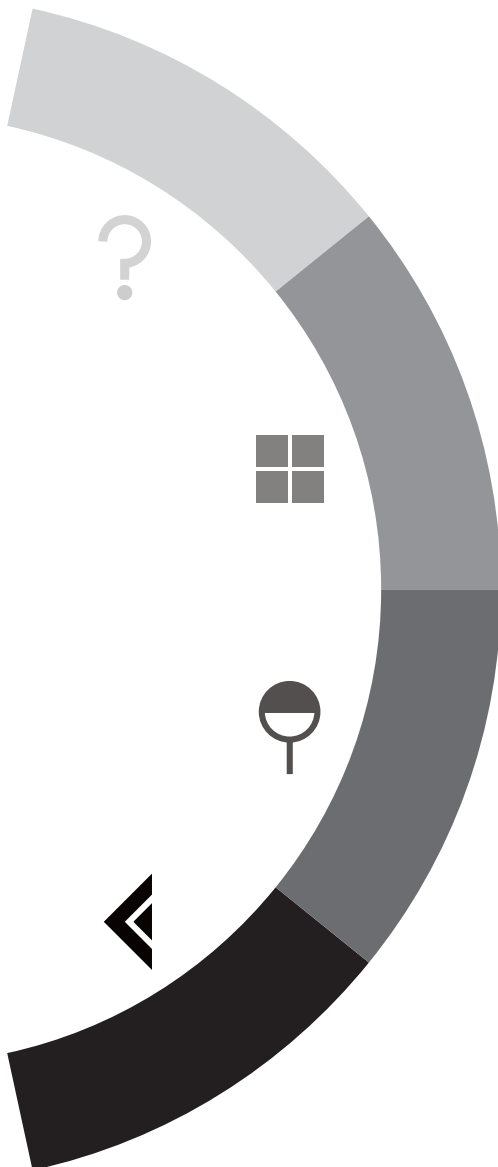
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C3 Framework

This book is based primarily on the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies Standards. This C3 Framework is an effective tool offering guidance and support for rigorous student learning. The assignments encourage students to be active participants in learning and to explore the parts of history that they find most compelling. Central to the C3 Framework and our use of it is its Inquiry Arc—a set of four interrelated dimensions of informed inquiry in social studies. The lessons in this book are based on all four dimensions of the C3 Inquiry Arc. While the C3 Framework analyzes each of the four dimensions separately, they are not entirely separable in practice—they each interact in dynamic ways. As a result, the lessons combine some or all of the dimensions in various ways.



Four Dimensions of the Inquiry Arc

1 Developing compelling and supporting questions and planning inquiries

Questions shape social studies inquiries, giving them broader meaning and motivating students to master content and engage actively in the learning process.

2 Applying disciplinary concepts and tools

These are the concepts and central ideas needed to address the compelling and supporting questions students pose. The C3 Framework stresses four subject fields: history, civics, economics, and geography. Each lesson addresses all of these disciplines.

3 Evaluating sources and using evidence

The purpose of using primary and secondary sources as evidence is to support claims and counterclaims. By assessing the validity and usefulness of sources, including those that conflict with one another, students are able to construct evidence-based explanations and arguments.

4 Communicating conclusions and taking informed action

While this may take the form of individual essays and other writing assignments, these lessons stress other kinds of individual and collaborative forms of communication, including debates, policy analyses, video productions, diary entries, and interviews. Meaningful forms of individual or collaborative civic action are also incorporated into each lesson.

How to Use This Book

This book offers you the chance to implement the entire C3 Inquiry Arc in brief, carefully structured lessons on important topics in U.S. history. Each lesson is driven by a central compelling question, and disciplinary supporting questions are provided. Each lesson asks students to apply understandings from all of the C3 disciplines—history, civics, economics, and geography—and includes individual and group tasks in an integrated way.

Each lesson includes an introductory essay, detailed teaching instructions, a set of primary sources, and the handouts needed to implement the lesson’s assignments. Rubrics for student evaluation and sources for further study are also provided. The teaching instructions suggest a time frame for completion of each lesson, but the assessments can easily be adapted to fit into any lesson plan.

Each lesson is aligned with several C3 Framework standards and Common Core State Standards. The College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Literacy emphasize the reading of information texts, making these lessons ideal for integration into English Language Arts instruction.



C3 Disciplines



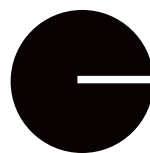
History



Civics



Economics



Geography



Free Land

Was the Homestead Act Necessary?

Overview

Introduction

The Homestead Act of 1862 opened huge sections of prairies and other lands west of the Mississippi River to millions of small farmers. The law allowed any 21-year-old adult or head of a family to claim up to 160 acres of federal land for free, except for a small filing fee. To become an owner and receive title to the land, the settler had to live on it for five years and improve it by building a home and farming on it. Some homesteaders succeeded. Others did not. Land speculators, at times, took advantage of the law in several ways. In time, heavy overgrazing and farming of the dry soils of the prairie led to erosion and other environmental problems. Nevertheless, the Homestead Act was always popular and always helpful to many seeking land and a new way of life in the West. Was the act successful? Was it necessary or a good idea? These are the compelling questions for this lesson. In this lesson, students will work with short passages from ten primary sources. These primary sources form the core content for a set of tasks that will help students answer the lesson's compelling question.

Objectives

Students will work individually and in small groups to respond in a meaningful way to a compelling question about the Homestead Act. They will apply discipline-specific background knowledge, use scaffolding, and engage in instructional activities to interpret primary sources before presenting their ideas to the class.

C3 Standards Addressed by This Lesson

- ◆ **D1.4.6-8.** Explain how the relationship between supporting questions and compelling questions is mutually reinforcing.
- ◆ **D1.5.6-8.** Determine the kinds of sources that will be helpful in answering compelling and supporting questions, taking into consideration multiple points of view represented in the sources.
- ◆ **D2.His.5.6-8.** Explain how and why perspectives of people have changed over time.
- ◆ **D2.His.11.6-8.** Use other historical sources to infer a plausible maker, date, place of origin, and intended audience for historical sources where this information is not easily identified.
- ◆ **D2.His.12.6-8.** Use questions generated about multiple historical sources to identify further areas of inquiry and additional sources.
- ◆ **D2.His.16.6-8.** Organize applicable evidence into a coherent argument about the past.
- ◆ **D2.Civ.8.6-8.** Analyze ideas and principles contained in the founding documents of the United States, and explain how they influence the social and political system.
- ◆ **D2.Eco.7.6-8.** Analyze the role of innovation and entrepreneurship in a market economy.
- ◆ **D2.Geo.5.6-8.** Analyze the combinations of cultural and environmental characteristics that make places both similar to and different from other places.
- ◆ **D2.Geo.6.6-8.** Explain how the physical and human characteristics of places and regions are connected to human identities and cultures.
- ◆ **D3.1.6-8.** Gather relevant information from multiple sources while using the origin, authority, structure, context, and corroborative value of the sources to guide the selection.
- ◆ **D3.2.6-8.** Evaluate the credibility of a source by determining its relevance and intended use.

- ◆ **D3.3.6-8.** Identify evidence that draws information from multiple sources to support claims, noting evidentiary limitations.
- ◆ **D3.4.6-8.** Develop claims and counterclaims while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both.
- ◆ **D4.1.6-8.** Construct arguments using claims and evidence from multiple sources, while acknowledging the strengths and limitations of the arguments.
- ◆ **D4.3.6-8.** Present adaptations of arguments and explanations on topics of interest to others to reach audiences and venues outside the classroom using print and oral technologies (e.g., posters, essays, letters, debates, speeches, reports, and maps) and digital technologies (e.g., Internet, social media, and digital documentary).
- ◆ **D4.6.6-8.** Draw on multiple disciplinary lenses to analyze how a specific problem can manifest itself at local, regional, and global levels over time, identifying its characteristics and causes, and the challenges and opportunities faced by those trying to address the problem.

Common Core Anchor Standards Addressed by This Lesson

- ◆ **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1.** Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
- ◆ **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.2.** Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
- ◆ **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.6.** Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.
- ◆ **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.9.** Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.
- ◆ **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.7.** Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
- ◆ **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1.** Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Teaching Instructions

Compelling Question

Was the Homestead Act necessary?

Preparation

Provide all students with a copy of the Introductory Essay. Assign this reading as homework. In addition, assign all relevant parts of your course textbook or other basic reading material. Remind students to keep the compelling question for the lesson in mind as they read.

Asking Questions about the Homestead Act

This part of the lesson stresses Dimensions 1 and 2 of the C3 Framework

Day One

1. Briefly discuss the Introductory Essay in class, and address any initial questions students may have.
2. Distribute the How to Analyze a Primary Source handout. Review each suggestion with the class, and remind students to refer back to the handout as they read the primary sources in this lesson.
3. Divide the class into four small groups. Each group will focus its work on one of the four basic disciplines identified in Dimension 2 of the C3 Framework—history, civics, economics, or geography. As they work, the groups should keep in mind the lesson’s overall compelling question. However, for Day One and Day Two, each group will work mainly with a second compelling question—one related specifically to its assigned discipline.
4. Provide each group with one copy of its discipline-specific Assignment Sheet. Give each student a copy of all the primary sources for this lesson. Each group may share a primary source packet, if necessary.
5. Have students complete the Day One section of their Assignment Sheets. The objective for Day One is for groups to read three primary sources and then formulate one supporting question about each of those sources. The supporting questions should be recorded in the spaces provided on the Assignment Sheet.

Applying Disciplinary Concepts and Evaluating Sources and Evidence

This part of the lesson stresses Dimensions 2 and 3 of the C3 Framework

Day Two

6. Students will return to their previously assigned groups and formulate a claim addressing their group’s compelling question. After reading the remaining seven primary sources, they will select one that supports their claim.

7. Using the evidence gathered from primary sources, each group will then prepare a brief (five- to ten-minute) presentation about the Homestead Act from their group's disciplinary perspective. The presentation can be in the form of an oral report, a debate among group members, or a PowerPoint or similar type of presentation. Allow time for students to prepare by discussing and debating topics among themselves.

Day Three

8. Each group will deliver its presentation (prepared by the students as their final task on Day Two). Following each presentation, allow time for class discussion and for a final effort to answer the central compelling question for the lesson.

Communicating Results and Taking Action

This part of the lesson stresses Dimension 4 of the C3 Framework



Students will complete a final project that expresses an understanding of the topic and responds clearly to the lesson's central compelling question. The project may be completed in groups, but students should be evaluated individually.

Distribute the Communicating Results and Taking Action handout, and decide whether you will assign the projects or allow students to form groups and choose tasks on their own. Set a reasonable deadline. Students should review the Homestead Act Rubric so they can understand how their performance will be evaluated. The projects are summarized below.

Communicating Results

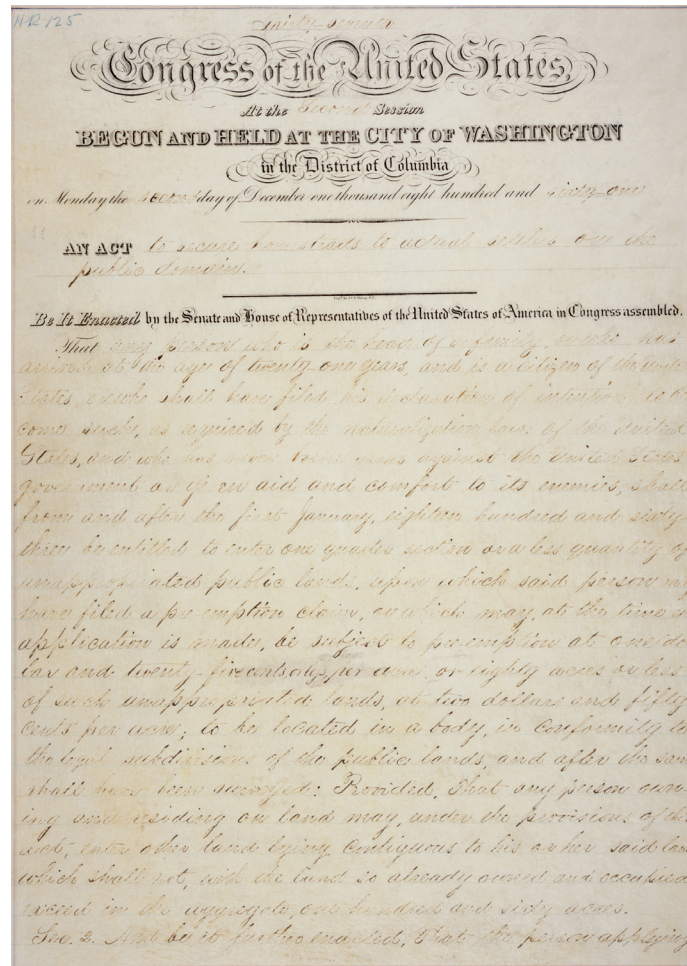
- ◆ Have students reread Primary Sources 1.3 and 1.4. Each student will pretend to be a friend of H. B. Thomas (Primary Source 1.4). As a friend, suggest to Thomas that he read Primary Source 1.3, the comments of Mrs. Will H. Berger. Using information from these two sources and any others for this lesson, the students will write letters to Thomas making suggestions for how he might have made the homesteading experience better for himself than it seems to have been.
- ◆ Separate students into small groups. Ask half of the groups to read one or more of Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie* series of children's books on homesteading in the West. Ask the other half of the groups to read *Free Land*, a novel by Rose Wilder Lane, who was the sister of Laura Ingalls Wilder. Each group should then prepare a brief presentation in which they discuss the views about homesteading expressed by each author. Each group should also choose two primary sources for this lesson that help support the views their author expresses.
- ◆ Primary Source 1.6 is a letter by Elinore Pruitt Stewart. Ask a group of students to read Stewart's book, *Letters of a Woman Homesteader*, published by Houghton Mifflin in 1914. The book is available online from Project Gutenberg. Have the group discuss the book and choose three other letters from it to present to the rest of the class. The group will use these letters to guide a discussion of what they add to the entire class's understanding of homesteading.

Taking Action

- ◆ In 1935, Congress passed Public Law 74-46. It recognized that “the wastage of soil and moisture resources on farm, grazing, and forest lands . . . is a menace to the national welfare.” It created the Soil Conservation Service, which in 1994 changed its name to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Have students learn more about the work of this agency. (The NRCS website has an essay called “More than 80 Years Helping People Help the Land: A Brief History of NRCS.”) Provide the following instructions: Based on what you learn, create a series of posters on important issues regarding soil conservation and related natural resource conservation problems. Prepare a class presentation on the poster series for the rest of the school.
- ◆ Based on the work in the previous assignment, students should use PowerPoint or some other presentation software to create a presentation about the class’s poster series. Invite local organizations and media outlets to a public meeting at the school. Explain the class project and show the presentation and the posters. Leave time for discussion and follow-up suggestions.

Introductory Essay

The Homestead Act



The first page of the Homestead Act.

In the spring of 1862, President Abraham Lincoln had a lot on his mind. He was struggling to force eleven Southern slaveholding states back into the Union. The Civil War that had emerged from this struggle was not going well for the North. Yet on May 20, 1862, Lincoln took time to attend to another matter. It was on that day he signed the Homestead Act into law.

The Homestead Act opened up the western public lands to settlement. In particular, it made huge sections of open prairies on the Great Plains west of the Mississippi River available to millions of small farmers. The law allowed any 21-year-old adult or head

of a family to claim up to 160 acres of federal land for free, except for a small filing fee. Freed slaves, women, and immigrants planning to become citizens were encouraged to apply. To become owner and receive title to the land, the settler had to live on it for five years and improve it by building a home and farming on it.

Until 1862, the government had used sales of public lands as a key way to raise revenue. For much of the time, the public land was sold at \$1.25 per acre. Yet even at that low price, it was hard for many poor farmers to afford the 640-, 320-, 160-, or 80-acre lots they had to purchase. Those who favored free homesteads had been pressuring Congress to act for years. It is no accident that they finally won their battle in the midst of the Civil War. Southern slaveholders had long opposed free public lands. They feared that settlement of the Western territories by free farmers would lead to the creation of many new free states. Now, with the Southern states out of the Union, Republicans easily passed a law their voters strongly backed.

In the decades following the Civil War, thousands of settlers took advantage of the Homestead Act to start farms in the West. In time, with plenty of hard work, many succeeded. They helped form new towns with schools and churches and a stable way of life. However, many others did not succeed. In fact, only about 40 percent of those who filed claims finally “proved up”—that is, earned title to their land at the end of the five-year period.

For one thing, farming on the Great Plains was extremely challenging. These prairie lands were wide open and very dry. Drought and blizzards both made life difficult. Plagues of locusts in the 1870s wiped out the crops of many settlers. The tough, tangled sod was hard to plow. A 160-acre farm on such soil was often too small. Even eastern farmers with skills and experience were often not able to cope with these new conditions. And the lure of free land attracted many unprepared for what they were to face. The land may have been “free” to these farmers, but many other costs of operation were not. Tools, seeds, farm animals, wagons, and many other items still had to be paid for.

By the 1940s, more than 1.6 million homestead claims had been filed. Homesteaded farms made up about ten percent of all government-held land. Obviously this meant that many other settlers paid for their lands in other ways. One major way was to buy land that had been granted to the railroads. Many land grants went to the railroads to help them build lines crossing the continent to the Pacific Ocean. Since this land lay along the railroads’ routes, it rose in value as the roads were built. Many settlers preferred to buy such lands rather than get a free homestead. A major cost of farming is the cost of transporting crops to market. Being near a railroad often made it worthwhile for a farmer to pay the higher land prices the roads might charge for their lands.

While the Homestead Act helped hundreds of thousands of poor farmers, it also lent itself to abuses. Land speculators took advantage of the law in a number of ways. Land speculators are those who buy land and then wait for its price to rise before selling at a profit. As settlers and railroads moved in, the price of western lands did tend to rise. Speculators were not supposed to be able to get free homesteads. However, they found many ways to fool or bribe the scattered and overworked officials in the land offices.

In time, the heavy overgrazing and farming of dry prairie soils led to erosion and other environmental problems. Nevertheless, the Homestead Act was always popular and always helpful to many seeking land and a new way of life in the West. So then was the act successful? Was it necessary or a good idea? The primary sources for this lesson will help you debate these questions and make up your own mind.

HOMESTEAD.	
Land Office at <i>Granville, Neb</i>	
<i>January 20th 1868.</i>	
CERTIFICATE, } No. <i>1</i>	APPLICATION, } No. <i>1</i>
It is hereby certified, That pursuant to the provisions of the act of Congress, approved May 20, 1862, entitled "An act to secure homesteads to actual settlers on the public domain,"	
<i>Daniel Freeman</i> has	
made payment in full for <i>1/2 of NW 1/4 of Sec 16, 1/4 of NW 1/4 of Sec 17, and SW 1/4 of Sec 18</i> of	
Section <i>Twelfth (26)</i>	in Township <i>fourth</i>
of Range <i>five (5) E</i>	containing <i>160</i> acres.
Now, therefore, be it known, That on presentation of this Certificate to the	
COMMISSIONER OF THE GENERAL LAND OFFICE, the said <i>Daniel Freeman</i>	
shall be entitled to a Patent for the Tract of Land above described.	
<i>Henry M. Atkinson</i> Register.	

Image Sources: Act of May 20, 1862 (Homestead Act), Public Law 37-64, 05/20/1862; Record Group 11; General Records of the United States Government; National Archives.

Homestead certificate of Daniel Freeman. 1868, courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration.



History Group

GROUP MEMBERS:

The Homestead Act

Your group's task is to explore the history of the Homestead Act. A compelling question is provided, and you will work from there to develop and answer supporting questions based on primary sources. Follow the steps to complete the task.

Day One

1. Review the concept of compelling and supporting questions with your instructor. Briefly, compelling questions focus on meaningful and enduring problems. They ask us to deal with major issues and important ideas. Supporting questions are those that help us answer a compelling question.
2. As a group, briefly discuss the following compelling question:

After the Civil War, America changed rapidly from a nation of farmers, small towns, and simple technology to a nation of huge corporations, big cities, and complex technology. Did that make it harder or easier for the Homestead Act to work as it was supposed to work? Why, or why not?

3. Read and discuss Primary Sources 1.1, 1.5, and 1.9.
4. Read and discuss the following background information. Use the information to help complete the handout.

Those who settled the frontier throughout the 1700s and 1800s were a hardy group. No doubt it took courage and hard work to establish the first farms and communities in each new area. One of the strongest ideas about the frontier is that it fostered a powerful spirit of independence. Of course, few settlers were ever completely on their own. For example, many had to borrow funds from banks to buy their farms. Those lenders often had a good deal of control over the farmer. Also, farmers depended on middlemen to get their crops to market. Yet the idea that the West fostered an independent spirit was not just a myth. It was also a reality for tens of thousands in the years before the Civil War.

Then in the late 1800s, a new urban and industrial America emerged. Powerful new corporations came to dominate many industries. Transcontinental railroads tied the country together into one huge national market. These railroad companies received millions of acres of public land to sell.

These lands were often the ones the farmers most wanted. They needed to be near the rail lines in order to ship their crops to market. Farmers often felt at the mercy of the railroads and other industrial corporations. The more productive these farmers became, the greater seemed their problems—such as steadily falling prices for crops and livestock, rising debts, steep costs for storing and shipping produce, and more.

5. Each group member should develop some supporting questions about the primary sources your group has been asked to discuss. Use the background information above to help you think about these questions. Develop supporting questions that will help answer your group's compelling question. As a group, choose one supporting question for each primary source and record those questions here.

Primary Source 1.1

Primary Source 1.5

Primary Source 1.9

Day Two

6. As a group, make a claim about your compelling question. The claim should be one you can back up with evidence from your assigned sources. This claim is your evidence-based answer to your group's own compelling question. Here is that question again:

After the Civil War, America changed rapidly from a nation of farmers, small towns, and simple technology to a nation of huge corporations, big cities, and complex technology. Did that make it harder or easier for the Homestead Act to work as it was supposed to work? Why, or why not?

State your group's claim here:

7. From the remaining seven primary sources for this lesson, choose one additional source that your group believes can support or clarify its claim. The source may also be one that challenges this claim in a way that seems important. In the space below, list the source your group chose and briefly state why you chose it.

Source:

Reason for choosing this source:

8. Prepare a brief (five- to ten-minute) presentation. Summarize the sources you used. Discuss the supporting questions you developed. Explain your answer to your group's discipline-based compelling question. Use the space below for notes or to create an outline of your group's presentation.



GROUP MEMBERS:

The Homestead Act

Your group's task is to explore the civics issues raised by the Homestead Act. A compelling question is provided, and you will work from there to develop and answer supporting questions based on primary sources. Follow these steps to complete the task.

Day One

1. Review the concept of compelling and supporting questions with your instructor. Briefly, compelling questions focus on meaningful and enduring problems. They ask us to deal with major issues and important ideas. Supporting questions are those that help us answer a compelling question.
2. As a group, briefly discuss the following compelling question:

Suppose the Civil War had never happened. In that case, could the Homestead Act ever have been passed by Congress?

3. Read and discuss Primary Sources 1.1, 1.3, and 1.7.
4. Read and discuss the following background information. Use the information to help complete the handout.

In the elections of 1860, the Democratic Party was hopelessly split over the issue of slavery. This enabled the Republican Party to win and elect Abraham Lincoln as the next president. Lincoln opposed slavery. He and his party pledged to stop its spread to the Western territories. As a result, by early 1861 eleven Southern states left the Union. That meant there were eleven fewer states with senators and representatives in Congress.

Southern members of Congress opposed any plan to give free land to settlers. Southern slave owners did not want to make it easy for free laborers to flood the territories. Not all of those free farmers opposed slavery on moral grounds. But they all feared the competition of slave labor. Any new states they formed would be likely to ban slavery, further weakening the South in Congress. For Republicans, a new homestead law was itself a key part of their antislavery program. With the South gone, therefore, the Homestead Act passed easily in May 1862. The vote was 107 to 16 in the House and 33 to 7 in the Senate. Moreover, because of its timing, the law also allowed freed African Americans to become homesteaders.

Thousands did. Civil War Union soldiers got special treatment in taking up homesteads, as well.

5. Each group member should develop some supporting questions about the primary sources your group has been asked to discuss. Use the background information above to help you think about these questions. Develop supporting questions that will help answer your group's compelling question. As a group, choose one supporting question for each primary source and record those questions here.

Primary Source 1.1

Primary Source 1.3

Primary Source 1.7

Day Two

6. As a group, make a claim about your compelling question. The claim should be one you can back up with evidence from your assigned sources. This claim is your evidence-based answer to your group's own compelling question. Here is that question again:

Suppose the Civil War had never happened. In that case, could the Homestead Act ever have been passed by Congress?

State your group's claim here:

7. From the remaining seven primary sources for this lesson, choose one additional source that your group believes can support or clarify its claim. The source may also be one that challenges this claim in a way that seems important. In the space below, list the source your group chose and briefly state why you chose it.

Source:

Reason for choosing this source:

8. Prepare a brief (five- to ten-minute) presentation. Summarize the sources you used. Discuss the supporting questions you developed. Explain your answer to your group's discipline-based compelling question. Use the space below for notes or to create an outline of your group's presentation.



GROUP MEMBERS:

The Homestead Act

Your group's task is to explore the economics of the Homestead Act. A compelling question is provided, and you will work from there to develop and answer supporting questions based on primary sources. Follow these steps to complete the task.

Day One

1. Review the concept of compelling and supporting questions with your instructor. Briefly, compelling questions focus on meaningful and enduring problems. They ask us to deal with major issues and important ideas. Supporting questions are those that help us answer a compelling question.
2. As a group, briefly discuss the following compelling question:

Many people used the phrase *free land* to describe the Homestead Act.
Do you think that description is an accurate way to sum up the act's true nature?

3. Read and discuss Primary Sources 1.4, 1.5, and 1.6.
4. Read and discuss the following background information. Use the information to help complete the handout.

The Homestead Act of 1862 was only the first of several such acts. Homesteading ended in 1976 (except for Alaska, where it ended in 1986). Only about ten percent of the public lands were ever given out as free homesteads. On the dry lands of the Great Plains, a grant of 160 acres was often not enough for a profitable farm. Many settlers preferred to buy land from railroads or from speculators who had obtained larger tracts either from the railroads or in other ways. Cattle ranchers, timber companies, and others used various tactics to obtain homestead lands. Bribery was a common problem. Understaffed land offices could not easily check to make sure homesteaders were improving their lands as required.

Only 40 percent of homesteaders were able to complete the five-year process and obtain title. A good deal of homestead property, therefore, wound up in other hands. Poor homesteaders or those without the needed skills often failed. The land might have been free, but tools, livestock, seed, wagons, materials to build barns, and other items were

not. Travel costs and the cost of shipping crops to market had to be covered. Many farmers preferred to buy more expensive land near a railroad depot or in a fertile valley. It was easier to do that than to make a living on the remote prairie lands of the Great Plains. Homesteading was not the answer to every dream.

5. Each group member should develop some supporting questions about the primary sources your group has been asked to discuss. Use the background information above to help you think about these questions. Develop supporting questions that will help answer your group's compelling question. As a group, choose one supporting question for each primary source and record those questions here.

Primary Source 1.4

Primary Source 1.5

Primary Source 1.6

Day Two

6. As a group, make a claim about your compelling question. The claim should be one you can back up with evidence from your assigned sources. This claim is your evidence-based answer to your group's own compelling question. Here is that question again:

Many people used the phrase *free land* to describe the Homestead Act.
Do you think that description is an accurate way to sum up the act's true nature?

State your group's claim here:

7. From the remaining seven primary sources for this lesson, choose one additional source that your group believes can support or clarify its claim. The source may also be one that challenges this claim in a way that seems important. In the space below, list the source your group chose and briefly state why you chose it.

Source:

Reason for choosing this source:

8. Prepare a brief (five- to ten-minute) presentation. Summarize the sources you used. Discuss the supporting questions you developed. Explain your answer to your group's discipline-based compelling question. Use the space below for notes or to create an outline of your group's presentation.



Geography Group

GROUP MEMBERS:

The Homestead Act

Your group's task is to explore the geography of the Homestead Act. A compelling question is provided, and you will work from there to develop and answer supporting questions based on primary sources. Follow these steps to complete the task.

Day One

1. Review the concept of compelling and supporting questions with your instructor. Briefly, compelling questions focus on meaningful and enduring problems. They ask us to deal with major issues and important ideas. Supporting questions are those that help us answer a compelling question.
2. As a group, briefly discuss the following compelling question:

How did the geography of the Great Plains affect the results of the Homestead Act for homesteaders and the nation as a whole?

3. Read and discuss Primary Sources 1.2, 1.8, and 1.10.
4. Read and discuss the following background information. Use the information to help complete the handout.

In 1837, John Deere designed a steel plow that homesteaders on the prairies found useful. Known as the “sodbuster,” this plow could cut through soil without clogging. It was also called the “grasshopper plow,” because of its looks. The plow made it possible for the homesteaders on the Great Plains to turn over the tough prairie ground. Once stripped off, sod was useful building material. However, this region goes through dramatic cycles of dry weather. Its soils are hard to farm even in good conditions. In droughts, the exposed soil easily blows away. Plowing up the prairie caused long-term problems.

During World War I, demand for food rose rapidly. American farmers expanded production to meet that demand, and the soils were further eroded. Along with the intensive farming, an excess of cattle and sheep grazing had altered and damaged the landscape. Contemporaneous with the Great Depression, a period of intense drought set in. In 1930, a series of droughts began, leading to the so-called Dust Bowl of the 1930s. Intense dust storms covered a third of the plains. Dust clouds

miles high caused ruin and drove many farmers to pack up and head west to California.

The federal government halted homesteading for a time. Programs were set up to teach soil conservation methods and to plant trees to break up winds and slow erosion. Finally, some efforts began to correct the mistakes of the earlier era of homesteading.

5. Each group member should develop some supporting questions about the primary sources your group has been asked to discuss. Use the background information above to help you think about these questions. Develop supporting questions that will help answer your group's compelling question. As a group, choose one supporting question for each primary source and record those questions here.

Primary Source 1.2

Primary Source 1.8

Primary Source 1.10

Day Two

6. As a group, make a claim about your compelling question. The claim should be one you can back up with evidence from your assigned sources. This claim is your evidence-based answer to your group's own compelling question. Here is that question again:

How did the geography of the Great Plains affect the results of the Homestead Act for homesteaders and the nation as a whole?

State your group’s claim here:

7. From the remaining seven primary sources for this lesson, choose one additional source that your group believes can support or clarify its claim. The source may also be one that challenges this claim in a way that seems important. In the space below, list the source your group chose and briefly state why you chose it.

Source:

Reason for choosing this source:

8. Prepare a brief (five- to ten-minute) presentation. Summarize the sources you used. Discuss the supporting questions you developed. Explain your answer to your group’s discipline-based compelling question. Use the space below for notes or to create an outline of your group’s presentation.

How to Analyze a Primary Source

For this lesson, you will be studying several primary source documents. This handout offers suggestions for how best to read and analyze historical primary sources. Studying such sources is challenging. They were created in a different time and place. Their language and use of certain key terms often differ from ours. They assume things we might not accept. They arise out of historical circumstances and settings that differ greatly from our own times. To use such sources as evidence, you need to apply some special historical thinking skills and habits. Here are some guidelines to help you do this.

◆ *Question the source*

Since no primary source was written with you and your interests in mind, you need to be clear about what you are looking for when you examine a source. You need to stay in charge of the investigation. Act like a detective, and ask questions. Above all, keep your own most important compelling questions in mind as you read and think about a source.

◆ *Consider the source's origins*

This is often simply called “sourcing.” It means asking who created the source, when and where the source was created, and why. If you know the source’s purpose, you will be more likely to see how it is shaped by its creator’s point of view. Among other things, sourcing can help you decide how reliable or typical a source might be.

◆ *Contextualize the source*

“Context” here means the broader historical setting for the source. Sources are always a part of a larger historical context. You need to consider how this context helps clarify the meaning of the source. You also need to decide which context is most important. Sources might be understood best in connection with a local context or a recent event. Alternatively, they might be understood better within a national or international context, or as part of a long-term trend in society at large. Your guiding questions should help you decide which context is most important.

◆ *Corroborate the source*

This means you must think about your source in relation to other sources. Does the source agree with or support those other sources, or does it seem to be at odds with the other sources? Might there be additional sources, which have not been provided to you, that could support or conflict with your source?

◆ *Above all, read the source carefully*

Look at language closely. Pay attention to images, emotional language, metaphors, and other literary devices. Think about what is implied, not merely what is stated or claimed in so many words. Think about what is left out as well as what is included. Make inferences based on your close reading. This will help you get more out of your source than even the source’s creator might have seen in it.

PRIMARY SOURCE ►

I.I

In Favor of the Homestead Act

The House of Representatives voted in favor of the Homestead Act on February 28, 1862. On that day just before the vote, John F. Potter spoke in favor of the proposed law. Potter was a Republican House member from Wisconsin. This passage is from his speech that day. The Senate voted in favor of the bill a week later. On May 20, President Lincoln signed it into law.

Original Document

By the adoption of this system, the object which has ever been regarded as of the utmost importance in the final disposal of our public lands—their early and rapid settlement by an industrious population—will be much sooner realized than under the old system, which allows a large portion of the public domain to fall into the hands of the speculator, a system which limits and retards settlement, because the purchaser does not desire these lands for his own occupation, but retains them until such time as the laborer is compelled by his necessities to yield to the demand made upon him, and to pay to the capitalists a price entirely beyond the means of the greater number of those who would gladly occupy and improve them. By the adoption of this policy, we shall hereafter avoid the great evils which have invariably followed the enormous grants of public lands to corporations and companies, thus building up large land monopolies, which have ever been the bane and curse of our new States, and proved most detrimental to the interests of that class of our fellow-citizens who are the best entitled to the protection of the Government, by placing them in the power of those who have no sympathy in common with them and no interest except their own aggrandizement.

Adapted Version

It has always been most important to have our public lands settled by an industrious population. This Homestead Act will do that much sooner than the old system would. That old system allowed too much land to fall into the hands of the speculator. That limited and retarded settlement. That's because the capitalist speculator does not purchase these lands to occupy them himself. He holds them only until he can force laborers to pay him a price far beyond what they can afford. Some will have to pay this price anyway. Many others will not. They would gladly occupy and improve these lands. But they cannot pay the price. With the Homestead Act, we will avoid this great evil. It is an evil that always results from the enormous grants of public lands to corporations and companies. These grants build up large land monopolies, which are always a curse to our new states. Such huge grants harm those citizens who most need the Government's protection. The grants put those citizens under the power of those who have no sympathy in common with them and no interest except their own gain.

Original Document Source: "A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation, U.S. Congressional Documents and Debates, 1774–1875," Congressional Globe, House of Representatives, 37th Congress, 2nd Session, 1035. Available online from the Library of Congress at <https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llcg&fileName=059/llcg059.db&recNum=76>.

PRIMARY SOURCE ▶

I.2

Sod House on the Prairie

Many homesteaders settled on the flat, open lands of the Great Plains, a vast region from the Mississippi River to the eastern edge of the Rocky Mountains. Much of this land is treeless dry prairie and grassland. Lacking wood or stone, homesteaders often had to build their homes with blocks of sod. This sod was made up of thickly rooted prairie grass. It was hard to plow up and cut, but plentiful. This photograph shows a family standing in front of a sod house with a windmill on the roof of an adjoining building. The photo was taken in 1884 or 1885 in Coburg, Nebraska Territory.



Original Document Source: "Coburg, Nebraska Terr. & vic., 1884-85." Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Reproduction Number LC-DIG-ppmsca-08375. Available online from the Library of Congress at <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2005693379/>.

Mrs. Will H. Berger was born in 1874 and grew up in Dakota County, Nebraska. She was interviewed in 1938. This passage is from that interview, conducted as part of the Federal Writers' Project under the U.S. Work Projects Administration.

Original Document

My folks came to the United States from Sweden in 1866; landed in New York, then came to Omaha. When they got to Omaha they had \$5.00 in American money, no job, and couldn't speak a word of English.

Mother got a job washing for about a month. Then they both got work on the new Union Pacific railroad from Omaha to Laramie City. Father worked on the road and mother cooked and washed for twenty-two men, for nine months; when they got back to Omaha they had \$900.00 saved up.

Then they bought a horse and buggy and started to hunt for a home. . . . They settled on a homestead on Wigle Creek and lived there and saw all the hardships. The first year they were on their homestead they built themselves a one-room frame house, tar paper on the outside; built a sod barn; had one horse and bought themselves a cow.

The next spring father and mother were away working and Mrs. J. W. Davis stayed to look after the baby. While they were gone a prairie fire came, but they had plowed up around the house and barn and weren't damaged. The next day a snow storm came up; they had a cellar under the house and took the horse and cow down cellar and kept them from freezing. The next year they had the grasshoppers, but stayed on the homestead until mother died, in 1900.

When mother died my folks had 720 acres of land paid for; they had homesteaded 160 and bought the rest. Their homestead cost them \$90.00 but they bought 80 acres belonging to an uncle and paid \$250.00 for that. Bought another quarter section and paid about \$800.00 for that; the last quarter they paid \$1,600 for. It was all in one piece, on the reservation; had 2½ miles on the Winnebago reservation line. Father went back to the old country in 1901 and died there in 1921.

My folks raised lots of cattle and I used to ride a horse and take care of the cattle in the pasture. We had about 200 head, and sometimes about 100 calves.

Original Document Source: U.S. Work Projects Administration, interview with Mrs. Will H. Berger, Federal Writers' Project: Folklore Project, Life Histories, 1936–1939. Available online from the Library of Congress at <https://www.loc.gov/resource/wpalh1.17081005/?sp=3&st=text>.

H. B. Thomas was a homesteader in Nebraska. He was born in 1856 in Illinois and moved first to Kansas and then to Nebraska in 1882. This passage is from an interview with him in 1938, conducted as part of the Federal Writers' Project under the U.S. Work Projects Administration.

Original Document

I homesteaded in southwestern Nebraska about 53 years ago. We went to land office in North Platte, Nebraska and got the papers filed. There was 5 of us looking for claims and sent to North Platte to see what land was free. We located on the prairies. . . .

Our homestead was in Lincoln county. . . . We drove yolk cattle down to our claims and put up a sod home.

We broke prairie, made our homes and settled. We found that we plowed on some land that wasn't ours. A good many old Union soldiers that settled on these homesteads. We had to live on our claims 5 years to get the land. One of the soldiers claimed that he had a harder time homesteading than he did when he served in the army.

We built our houses out of sod. We built churches out of sod as well as school-houses. I gave one corner of my land to the authorities for a schoolhouse. . . .

There was one winter in 1886 that we had 3 blizzards, one came the 16th of November and the drifts of snow layed on the ground until April. We left this territory and moved to Madison County. I had lost all of my crops on my homestead and a depression and drought which ruined me. . . .

In the fall of 1899 I moved again to Norfolk and lived there. One of the early songs we used to sing in those days was "Darling I am growing old; silver thread among the gold."

PRIMARY SOURCE ▶

1.5


"Millions of Acres"

Homesteaders were not the only ones to get free public lands. The government also gave millions of acres to the railroads. This was a way to help the railroads build their lines. The lands were usually located along or near the railroads' lines. The railroads made money by selling this land to settlers. Even though the Homestead Act offered land for free, many settlers still preferred to pay for other lands, in particular lands owned by the railroads. This poster is an 1872 advertisement for land for sale by the Burlington & Missouri River Railroad Company.

PRODUCTS WILL PAY FOR LAND AND IMPROVEMENTS!

MILLIONS OF ACRES

View on the Big Blue, between Camden and Crete, representing Valley and Rolling Prairie Land in Nebraska.



IOWA AND NEBRASKA LANDS

FOR SALE ON 10 YEARS CREDIT

BY THE **Burlington & Missouri River R.R. Co.**

AT 6 PER CT. INTEREST AND LOW PRICES.

Only One-Seventh of Principal Due Annually, beginning Four Years after purchase.
20 PER CENT. DEDUCTED FROM 10 YEARS PRICE, FOR CASH.

LAND EXPLORING TICKETS SOLD
and Cost allowed in First Interest paid, on Land bought in 30 days from date of ticket.
Thus our Land Buyers ~~get~~ **GET A FREE PASS** in the State where the Land bought is located.
These **TERMS** are **BETTER** at \$5, than to pre-empt United States Land at \$2.50 per Acre.
EXTRAORDINARY INDUCEMENTS on FREIGHT and PASSAGE are AFFORDED TO PURCHASERS and THEIR FAMILIES.

Address **GEO. S. HARRIS, LAND COMMISSIONER,**
or **T. H. LEAVITT, Ass't Land Comm'r, Burlington, Iowa.**

Or apply to

FREE ROOMS for buyers to board themselves are provided at Burlington and Lincoln.

CIRCULARS are supplied GRATIS for distribution in ORGANIZING COLONIES and to induce individuals to emigrate WEST.

A SECTIONAL MAP, showing exact location of our IOWA LANDS is sold for 30 Cents, and of NEBRASKA LANDS for 30 Cents.

COMMERCIAL ADVERTISER PRINTING HOUSE, BUFFALO, N. Y.

Original Document Source: "Millions of Acres," poster published by Burlington & Missouri River Railroad Co., New York, 1872.
Available online from the Library of Congress at <https://www.loc.gov/resource/rbpe.13401300/>.

Women as well as men were able to sign up for homesteads, and many did just that. One female homesteader was Elinore Pruitt Stewart (born Elinore Pruitt on June 3, 1876). Stewart was a homesteader in Wyoming. A collection of her letters was published in 1913. This passage is from a January 23, 1913, letter to Mrs. Coney, who had employed Stewart as a housekeeper in Denver.

Original Document

When I read of the hard times among the Denver poor, I feel like urging them every one to get out and file on land. I am very enthusiastic about women homesteading. It really requires less strength and labor to raise plenty to satisfy a large family than it does to go out to wash, with the added satisfaction of knowing that their job will not be lost to them if they care to keep it. Even if improving the place does go slowly, it is that much done to stay done. Whatever is raised is the homesteader's own, and there is no house-rent to pay. This year Jerrine cut and dropped enough potatoes to raise a ton of fine potatoes. She wanted to try, so we let her, and you will remember that she is but six years old. We had a man to break the ground and cover the potatoes for her and the man irrigated them once. That was all that was done until digging time, when they were ploughed out and Jerrine picked them up. Any woman strong enough to go out by the day could have done every bit of the work and put in two or three times that much, and it would have been so much more pleasant than to work so hard in the city and then be on starvation rations in the winter.

To me, homesteading is the solution of all poverty's problems, but I realize that temperament has much to do with success in any undertaking, and persons afraid of coyotes and work and loneliness had better let ranching alone. At the same time, any woman who can stand her own company, can see the beauty of the sunset, loves growing things, and is willing to put in as much time at careful labor as she does over the washtub, will certainly succeed; will have independence, plenty to eat all the time, and a home of her own in the end.

PRIMARY SOURCE ▶

I.7

Exodusters

Soon after the Civil War, thousands of freed African American slaves also benefited from the Homestead Act. Some twenty thousand of them left for Kansas alone in the 1870s. Those who took part in this exodus came to be referred to as Exodusters. Many Kansas Exodusters settled in and around the town of Nicodemus. This photo shows one such family.



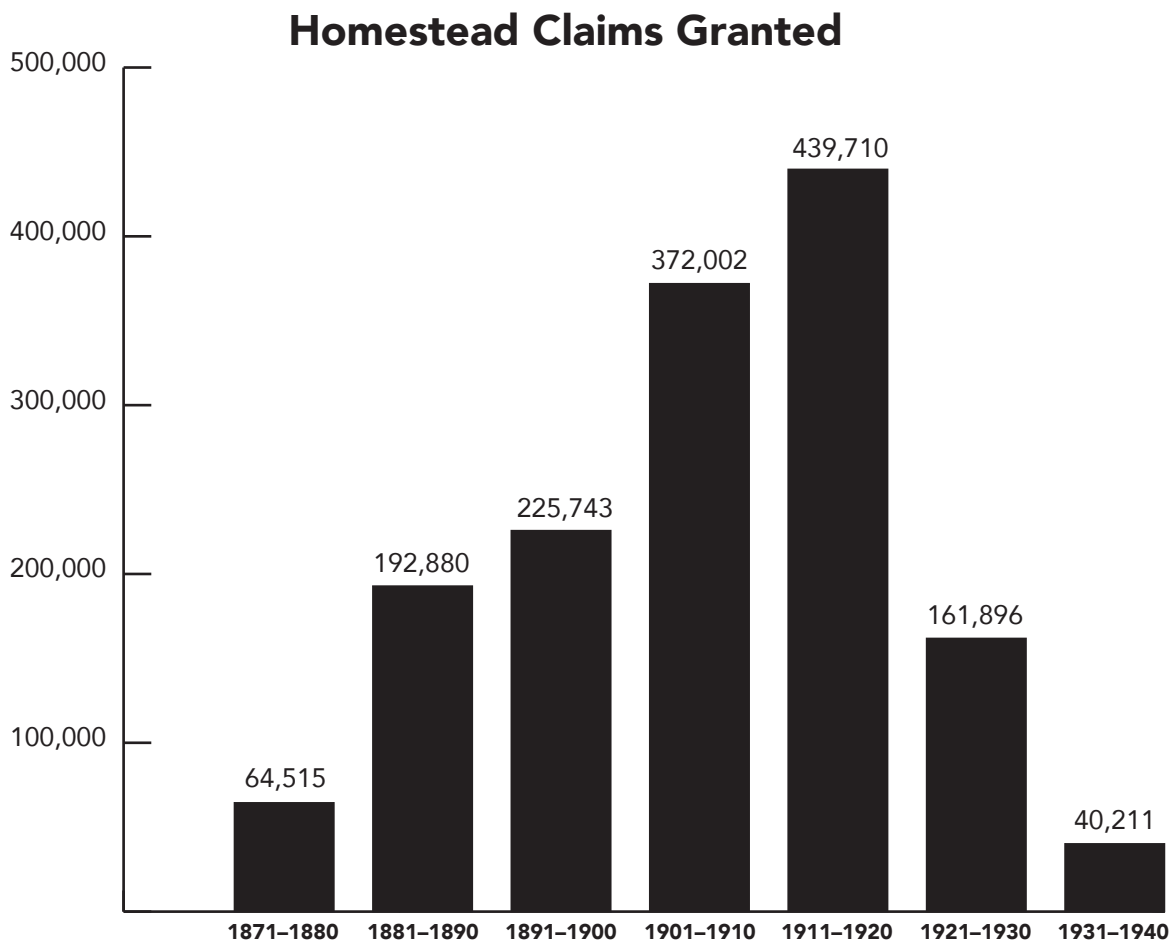
Original Document Source: "Early Area Homestead, Nicodemus Historic District, Nicodemus, Graham County, KS." Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Reproduction Number HABS KANS, 33-NICO, 1—6. Available online from the Library of Congress at <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/ks0077.photos.069503p/>.

PRIMARY SOURCE ▶

I.8

Homestead Claims by Decades

This chart shows homestead claims by decade between 1871 and 1940. It is based on figures provided by Mark C. Schug and William C. Wood.



Original Document Source: Mark C. Schug and William C. Wood, *Economic Episodes in American History* (Morristown, NJ: Wohl, 2011), 97. Available online from the National Park Service at <https://www.nps.gov/home/learn/historyculture/upload/Final%20Patents.pdf>.

This passage is from an 1885 essay, "The Spoliation of the Public Lands," by George W. Julian, in which he criticizes past U.S. land distribution policies. Julian praised many aspects of the Homestead Act, but he felt that it also failed to do enough for ordinary settlers. In this passage, he specifically refers to the lands given out to the railroads.

Original Document

Simultaneously with the passage of the Homestead Law, and as if intending to thwart its provisions, Congress inaugurated our system of extravagant and unguarded land-grants in aid of railways, covering over two hundred million acres. It is true there were strong excuses for this legislation. The need of great highways to the Pacific was then considered imperative, and unattainable without very liberal grants of the public lands. The value of the lands granted was not understood as it is to-day. Moreover, the nation was then engaged in a struggle for its life, or in the settlement of the great problems that followed, and was thus exposed to the dangers of hasty legislation. These are extenuating facts; but the mischiefs of this legislation are none the less to be deplored. They are not, however, so much the result of the grants themselves as the failure of Congress to declare them forfeited after inexcusable non-compliance with their conditions. This failure is equivalent to re-granting the lands. More than one hundred million acres are to-day locked up by these unearned grants, and Congress, in refusing to declare them forfeited and to open the lands to settlement, has been far more recreant to the homestead policy than in making the grants in the beginning.

Adapted Version

When it passed the Homestead Act, Congress did something else that worked against that law. Congress began its system of excessive and unregulated land grants to help the railways. These grants came to over two hundred million acres of public lands. Yes, there were good reasons for doing this. We needed the great railways to the Pacific. This goal seemed unattainable without huge grants of public lands. The value of the lands granted was not understood as it is today. Moreover, we were caught up in a great civil war to save the nation itself. This made it too easy to fall into the dangers of hasty legislation. That is a valid excuse. But the harmful results of this legislation are still deplorable. It is not simply the grants themselves. It is the failure of Congress to take the lands back when the railroads failed to comply with their conditions. This failure had the same result as giving the lands away all over again. More than one hundred million acres are today locked up by these unearned grants. Congress has refused to take them back and open them to settlement. This has harmed the homestead policy even more than making the grants in the beginning.

Original Document Source: George W. Julian, "The Spoliation of the Public Lands," *The North American Review* 141 (August 1885): 175-185. Available online from JSTOR at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25118517>.

PRIMARY SOURCE ▶

I.IO

The Fragile Lands of the Plains

The rapid settlement of the Great Plains helped thousands of ordinary Americans get farms of their own. Unfortunately, these farmers often had to settle on the driest and least productive of the dry prairie lands of the region. Removing the tough prairie grass exposed thin soils not easily held in place. In the drought years of the Great Depression, especially, much of the exposed soil was blown away in the huge dust storms of those years. This photo from March 1936 shows the large drifts of sandy soil one such dust storm piled up against this farmer's barn near Liberal, Kansas.



Original Document Source: Arthur Rothstein, photograph for the Farm Security Administration, March 1936. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Reproduction Number LC-USF34-002505-E. Available online from the Library of Congress at <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa1998018503/PP/>.

Communicating Results and Taking Action

Communicating Results

- ◆ Reread Primary Sources 1.3 and 1.4. Pretend to be a friend of H. B. Thomas (Primary Source 1.4). As a friend, suggest to Thomas that he read Primary Source 1.3, the comments of Mrs. Will H. Berger. Use information from these two sources and any others for this lesson to write letters to Thomas making suggestions for how he might have made the homesteading experience better for himself than it seems to have been.
- ◆ In your group, read the primary source your instructor assigns—either a book from Laura Ingalls Wilder’s *Little House on the Prairie* series, describing the homesteading life in the West, or *Free Land*, a novel by Rose Wilder Lane, who was the sister of Laura Ingalls Wilder. Your group will then prepare a brief presentation in which you discuss the views about homesteading expressed by the author. Your group should also choose two primary sources for this lesson that help support the views the author expresses.
- ◆ Primary Source 1.6 is a letter by Elinore Pruitt Stewart from a group of her letters published as *Letters of a Woman Homesteader* in 1914. The book is available online from Project Gutenberg. Read Stewart’s letters and discuss the book with your group. Choose three other letters from the collection to present to the rest of the class, using these letters to guide a discussion about what they add to the entire class’s understanding of homesteading.

Taking Action

- ◆ In 1935, Congress passed Public Law 74-46. It recognized that “the wastage of soil and moisture resources on farm, grazing, and forest lands . . . is a menace to the national welfare.” It created the Soil Conservation Service, which in 1994 changed its name to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Learn more about the work of this agency by reading the essay “More than 80 Years Helping People Help the Land: A Brief History of NRCS” (available at the NRCS website) and other material you can find online. Based on what you learn, create a series of posters on issues of importance regarding soil conservation and related natural resource conservation problems. Prepare a class presentation on the poster series for the rest of the school.
- ◆ Based on the work in the previous assignment, use PowerPoint or some other presentation software to create a presentation about the class’s poster series. Invite local organizations and media outlets to a public meeting at the school. Explain the class project, and show the presentation and the posters. Leave time for discussion and follow-up suggestions.

The Homestead Act Rubric

Criteria	Unacceptable	Developing	Proficient	Excellent
Focus	Tries to respond to task instructions but lacks clear focus on a central idea or thesis	Addresses the task instructions adequately but focus on a central idea or thesis is uneven	Responds to the task instructions appropriately and convincingly; has a consistent focus on a central idea or thesis	Responds to all task instructions convincingly; has a clear and strong focus on a well-developed central idea or thesis
Research	Refers to some sources but fails to connect these in a relevant way to the task instructions	Refers to relevant sources well but does not always connect these clearly to the task instructions	Refers to relevant sources accurately and usually connects these to the task instructions and a central idea	Refers to relevant sources accurately and in great detail and connects these clearly to the task instructions and a central idea
Development and Use of Evidence	Uses some details and evidence from sources but does not make clear the relevance to the task purpose or instructions	Uses details and evidence from sources generally but not always in support of a clear focus relevant to the task purpose or instructions	Uses details and evidence from sources in a way that effectively supports a focus relevant to the task purpose or instructions	Uses details and evidence from sources along with clear explanations demonstrating deep understanding of the task purpose or instructions
Content	Refers to disciplinary content without clearly understanding it or while using it in an irrelevant or inaccurate manner	Refers to disciplinary content with some understanding but not always with a clear idea of its relation to the overall task	Accurately uses disciplinary content and demonstrates a clear idea of its relation to the overall task	Uses disciplinary content effectively and explains thoroughly and in-depth its relation to the overall task
Conventions	Demonstrates only limited control of standard English conventions, with many errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, and other conventions	Demonstrates some command of standard English conventions with limited errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, and other conventions	Demonstrates adequate command of standard English conventions with few errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, and other conventions	Demonstrates a well-developed command of standard English conventions with few errors and a use of language appropriate to the audience and the purpose of the task

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