

History  
UNFOLDING

# THE WEST OF OUR IMAGINATION



MindSparks  
CHALLENGING STUDENTS TO THINK HISTORICALLY

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# Introduction

## The West as We Have Imagined It

For much of our history, the American West has been a source of fabulous stories, mythic characters, dreams and ideals. This booklet is intended to help you explore these aspects of its history. In other words, the focus here is not on the reality of the West, it is on how Americans at various times have imagined the West to be.

Obviously, in exploring this dimension, comparisons between ideal and reality must be made. From the start, Americans tended to think of the West as a vast, empty wilderness. As a result, they found it easy to fill up that empty space with their own notions, hopes and ideals. The natural landscape, the original inhabitants, the earliest settlers, and the process of establishing new ways of life—all these aspects were at times seen in mythic ways. By exploring and discussing these myths and ideals about the American West, students will be better able to assess both the reality and the meaning of the West in American life.

The twelve illustrations in this booklet focus on the a number of central themes in the history of American West. The illustrations are presented in four lessons. Each lesson uses three of the illustrations to explore one broad topic in the overall story. Briefly, the four lessons are as follows:

### **The Challenge of the Frontier**

The illustrations for this lesson focus on the process of settlement in general and on the character of the settlers who moved west into each new frontier region.

### **The Original Inhabitants**

Americans have had many ideas about the first inhabitants on this continent. The illustrations in this lesson explore various aspects of stereotypes, both negative and positive, about Native Americans. They should make it clear just how hard it actually is to see and understand all of the different American Indian cultures clearly.

### **Outlaws and Other Characters**

Miners, mountain men, cowboys, and others helped to settle the West. Romantic notions about all of these rugged individuals are still with us. The illustrations in this lesson focus on some of these mythic figures of the American West.

### **Dreams of Development**

Americans have often looked to the West as a place to start over, a place to create new and better ways of life. Therefore, while some of our ideas about the West focus on its pristine and primitive purity, others focus on its potential for development and progress. The illustrations in this lesson explore several different aspects of this theme.

## Using Photos, Cartoons, and Other Visuals to Teach History

Many textbooks are full of colorful visuals. However, all too often these visuals function primarily as window dressing. They make the text more entertaining, or at least more palatable. Only occasionally do the visuals in textbooks do more than offer simple pictorial reinforcement of ideas already presented in the text. In many cases, they pander to the visual orientation of the young while doing little to help young people master the challenges of the visual media that dominate their lives.

By way of contrast, our approach to using visual materials emphasizes their unique strengths as historical documents. The lessons in this booklet focus students on the visual symbols and metaphors in editorial cartoons, the dramatic qualities of certain photographs, the potential of many images to make abstract ideas more specific and concrete, the implicit biases and stereotypes in certain images, their emotional power, and their ability to invoke the spirit of a time and place. In the process, we make every effort to strengthen students' visual literacy skills in general, as well as their ability to think critically and engage in spirited but disciplined discussions.

## How to Use This Booklet

The booklet is divided into four lessons, with three illustrations per lesson. Each lesson consists of the following:

**A BACKGROUND INFORMATION SHEET** This page provides brief summaries explaining the three illustrations on which the lesson is based and their relevance to the lesson's objectives.

**DIGITAL IMAGES** The booklet's PDF allows you to project the images for use in your class discussions.

### **DISCUSSION-ACTIVITY SHEETS**

Each sheet displays one illustration. It includes a sequence of questions to help you plan an all-class discussion while using the projected images. The questions take students step by step through an analysis of the illustration. If you wish, you may reproduce these pages and hand them out. In addition to the discussion questions on the illustration itself, one or two follow-up activities are suggested. Some of these can be made into individual assignments. Others will work best as small-group or all-class activities.

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**OBJECTIVE**

1. Students will become more critical in assessing the accuracy of certain idealized views about the settlement of the West and about the settlers themselves.
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# The Challenge of the Frontier

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*Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.*

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**BACKGROUND INFORMATION****Illustration 1**

This 1872 painting by John Gast is a good place to begin to study the way Americans have thought about and imagined the American West. That's because it dramatically illustrates a central theme about the West running throughout our history—the theme of progress. The mythic female figure at the center of the painting leads the march of progress across the plains, with a schoolbook in one hand and a telegraph wire in the other. Other symbols of progress such as wagon trains and railroads follow her, banishing darkness and bringing the light of a new and better life. This is a visual representation of the key nineteenth century idea of Manifest Destiny. In it, the American West is assumed to be an untamed wilderness bound to be civilized and improved through settlement.

**Illustration 2**

The settlers who settled the frontier throughout the 1700s and 1800s were a hardly group. No doubt it took a great deal of courage and hard work to establish the first farms and communities in each new area as it was opened up. One of the strongest ideas about the frontier is that it fostered a powerful spirit of independence and self-reliance. This illustration captures that aspect of our ideas about the West. Not many settlers were ever quite as independent and on their own as this one seems to be. For example, many had to borrow funds from banks or others to buy their farms—and those lenders often had a good deal of control over the farmer. Also, farmers depended on railroads and many other “middlemen” to get their crops to market. And yet the idea that the West fostered an independent spirit was not just a myth. It was also a reality for tens of thousands of adventurous Americans.

**Illustration 3**

Another, almost opposite idea about the settlers had to do with the strong and close community spirit they fostered. This illustration shows some neighbors helping a newly arrived family build its first log home. A strong community spirit did in fact exist among many of the settlers who moved west. At times, entire communities moved together. The illustration here presents a very positive and idealized view of this spirit of cooperation. Sometimes it existed. But just as often, it did not.



## Lesson 1—The Challenge of the Frontier

# Illustration 1



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

### Discussing the Illustration

1. This painting is about America's westward movement in the 1800s. While its details are realistic, it is not meant to be a real scene. What features show that this scene is not a real one?
2. The painting is titled *American Progress*. In it, a huge female figure is shown floating westward. She is the key symbol of American progress. What is a symbol?
3. On this ghostly female figure is a Star of Empire. She holds a schoolbook in one hand and strings a telegraph wire the other. How do these features add to the idea that this figure is a symbol of "American Progress"?
4. What else in the painting adds to its overall message that westward settlement was also an expansion of American progress? How do the movements and gestures of the many smaller figures add to this idea? How does the use of dark and light add to the idea? Do you agree or disagree with this painting's point of view about America's settlement of the west? Why?

### Follow-up Activities

1. Artist John Gast painted this picture in 1872. By then, Americans had been talking for some time about what they called the nation's "Manifest Destiny." What does your history textbook have to say about this notion of Manifest Destiny? Do you think this painting could have been titled "America's Manifest Destiny"? Why do you think the idea of Manifest Destiny was so popular in the 1800s. What is your opinion of this idea? Answer these questions in a brief essay on this John Gast painting.
2. Pretend that John Gast is alive today. And imagine that someone has asked him to paint a picture titled "America Progress" to get across the way Americans feel about this idea today. What kind of picture would Gast paint? What objects, symbols or figures would he put in it? What style of painting would he use? Try to sketch your own idea of how he might portray American progress today. As a class, share your sketches and discuss your views about the idea of American progress now.



## Lesson 1—The Challenge of the Frontier

### Illustration 2



Courtesy of Dover Publications

#### Discussing the Illustration

1. This 1868 drawing shows a lone farmer plowing a fireguard to keep a prairie fire away from his crops. From the drawing, can you tell what a fireguard is and how it might keep the fire from this farmer's crops?
2. This farmer was a homesteader in 1868. He was helped to get his farm by the Homestead Act of 1862. Can you explain briefly what this act was and how it would have helped this farmer?
3. One historian said of this drawing, "*It shows the American settler as a lonely and heroic individual facing hardships and taking his chances alone.*" What do you think this historian means? Do you agree or disagree with his way of seeing the drawing?
4. Many historians say the idea that western settlers were completely independent individuals is partly true, but also partly a myth. What do you think those historians mean? In what ways were settlers like this farmer truly independent? In what ways were they still very much tied to the rest of the society?

#### Follow-up Activities

1. Ask your librarian to help you find a copy of *Prairie Visions: The Life and Times of Solomon Butcher*, by Pam Conrad (Harper Collins, 1991). This book is a collection of photographs by Solomon Butcher along with written accounts of the lives of pioneers in Nebraska. Read this book and compare the images and descriptions in it to the drawing shown above. Write your own report on this book. In it, describe the idea of life on the prairies you get from the book. Also explain how the above drawing fits or does not fit with the views presented in Conrad's book. Bring the book to class, pass it around, and share your views about it with others.
2. Read the same book by Pam Conrad mentioned in Activity 1. Only in this case, use what you learn to create an imaginary story about the farmer shown in the above drawing. Tell this farmer's story and include an account of the scene shown in the drawing itself. Be as imaginative as you can.

## Lesson 1—The Challenge of the Frontier

### Illustration 3



Courtesy of Dover Publications

#### **Discussing the Illustration**

1. This drawing shows some settlers who have just arrived at their new home in the West. What are they doing? What other jobs would such a group of settlers have to do quickly once they reached their new home?
2. The drawing shows neighbors helping the newly arrived farm family build its first log cabin home. Why might such a family need help from neighbors to get this job done? What other help from neighbors might these settlers need right away? Why might these neighbors want to help this family get settled quickly?
3. What ideas about American settlers in the West does this drawing seem to present?
4. Some people say this drawing's view of the settlers who went West is almost the opposite of the view presented in the last drawing (on page 6). Do you agree or disagree with this opinion? Why?

#### **Follow-up Activities**

1. Pretend you are one of the figures in this drawing. Write a long letter to a relative or friend back east. In that letter, talk about why you and the others with you decided to head west. Describe your journey, what you have seen, and what new challenges you have had to deal with along the way. Also describe what you expect and what you hope for once you set up your new home. In what ways will life be different for you now that you have arrived at your destination?
2. Ask your librarian to help you find a copy of *A Pioneer Woman's Memoir*, by Judith E. Greenburg and Helen Carey McKeever (Franklin Watts, 1995). As you read this book, think about the drawing shown here and the one just before it (on page 6). How well does each drawing fit with the view of pioneer life presented in the book? Answer this question in a brief report on the book. Bring the book to class, summarize your report on it, and pass the book around for others to see.



**OBJECTIVE**

1. Students will analyze and discuss certain key stereotypes of Native Americans (both positive and negative) that have been common in our history.

# The Original Inhabitants

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*Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.*

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**BACKGROUND INFORMATION****Illustration 1**

Some of our most powerful images of the West are of the Native Americans who were there before anyone else arrived. Unfortunately, many of these images are misleading stereotypes. A stereotype is a simplistic, often insulting, view of some group. This cover for the novel *The Lost Trail* is typical of perhaps the most common and most negative stereotype about Indians—one portraying them as bloodthirsty savages. This book cover of an Indian kidnapping a young woman also presents Indians as dishonorable in their treatment of women, and as cowards who prey on the innocent. Of course, such kidnappings, along with murders and other atrocities, were committed by Indians as well as whites. In the long, sad history of our nation's dealings with Native Americans, there were good and bad people on all sides. Images such as this, however, still distort a very complex truth.

**Illustration 2**

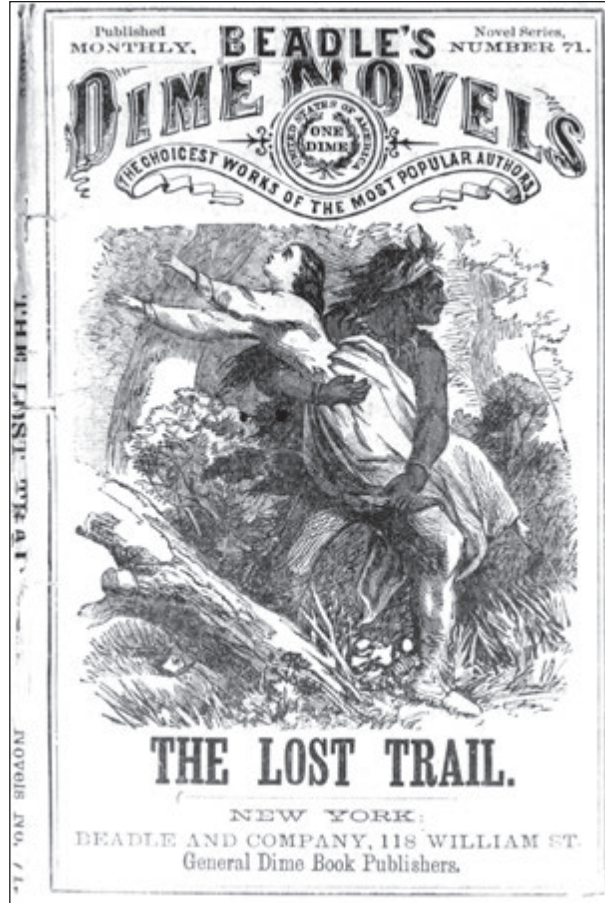
This dramatic drawing shows an Indian of the Great Plains who has seen a herd of buffalo and is signalling this to his village below. The image is certainly not a negative one. It portrays the Native American as a proud member of a unique culture. And it calls our attention to several admirable features of Native American societies: their stress on courage and physical strength, their intelligent use of nature, their ability to cooperate, etc. Yet this image is also somewhat of a stereotype, a view of the Indian as a “noble savage.” It may be a favorable stereotype, but it is still a stereotype. It could lead us to see Native Americans as belonging mainly to a simpler past, not to the present. We might think well of them in that past time. But in doing so, we could also ignore their ability, and their need, to adapt in varying ways to modern life.

**Illustration 3**

This is a photo of a Sioux Indian medicine man named Foolbull. It seems to be an accurate and favorable image of a proud Native American. But in fact it proves that incorrect ideas about Indians can affect even the most realistic image. The photographer posed Foolbull wearing a bear claw necklace, and carrying a bow, arrows and shield. This actually gives a mistaken idea of what a medicine man's true role in his tribe was. The photo is a warning about how hard it can be to understand another culture.

## Lesson 2—The Original Inhabitants

# Illustration 1



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

### Discussing the Illustration

1. This cover is from a novel called *The Lost Trail*. It was published in 1864, just before the last big armed conflicts between settlers and Native Americans all across the western United States. From the book's cover, what do you suppose the story is about? Do you think you would enjoy reading this story? Why or why not?
2. From the way the two figures are drawn, what views about Native Americans and about women on the frontier would you expect to find in this story? Why?
3. Judging from this book cover, why do you think people in the late 1800s enjoyed reading these "Beadle's Dime Novels"?
4. In what ways is the image of Native Americans on this book cover inaccurate? In what ways, if any, is it accurate? Some people would say this image is a negative, or insulting, stereotype of Indians. What is a stereotype? And do you agree that this is a negative stereotype of Native Americans? Why or why not?

### Follow-up Activities

1. **Small-group activity:** Some people would call the cover of *The Lost Trail* an unfair and stereotyped image of Native Americans. As a group, try to decide how you feel about this image. Then use your library to find other books with illustrations or photos of Indians in the late 1800s. Make copies of five of images that you think are stereotypes and five you think are accurate. Arrange the images, and this book cover, in a bulletin board display called "Images of the Indian: Fair and Unfair." Write a statement explaining your grouping of the images.
2. In 1836, Comanche warriors kidnapped nine-year-old Cynthia Ann Parker from her Texas home and raised her as one of their own. She was recaptured by Texas Rangers 25 years later. Her story is told in *Where the Broken Heart Still Beats*, by Carolyn Mayer. Read this book and write a book report on it. In your report, compare the ideas about Native Americans you get from this book to those suggested by this cover from *The Lost Trail*.

## Lesson 2—The Original Inhabitants

# Illustration 2



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

### Discussing the Illustration

1. In this drawing, a Plains Indian has seen a herd of buffalo and is signalling this to his village below. In what ways was the buffalo important to many of the Indian cultures on the Great Plains?
2. The previous illustration (on page 9) showed Native Americans in a rather negative way—as bloodthirsty savages. Some people say that this drawing shows Native Americans in a positive way, as proud hunters of the prairies. What in the drawing do you think leads people to see it this way? That is, what features of the drawing help it to portray Indians as people we should admire?
3. Others say this drawing is as much a stereotype as the one on page 9. They say that it may be a positive stereotype, but it is still a stereotype. One person called it “a perfect example of the ‘Noble Savage’ stereotype instead of the ‘Bloody Savage’ stereotype.” What do you suppose this person meant? Do you agree or disagree with this point of view? Why?

### Follow-up Activities

1. The Indians of the Plains used the buffalo in a wide variety of ways. Read more about these Indians and their many uses of the buffalo. Then prepare a brief talk to the class describing these uses. Here are some kinds of uses to find out more about:

Food	Clothing
Shelter	Weapons
Tools	Fuel
Ornaments	Toys

Try to present specific examples of uses of the Buffalo in each of the above ways. Where possible bring pictures illustrating these uses to pass around during your talk.

2. By the time settlers moved onto the Great Plains, the Indians there had actually already been changed greatly by contact with Europeans. This was especially true with regard to their use of the horse. Write an essay describing how the horse changed life for the Indians of the Great Plains.



## Lesson 2—The Original Inhabitants

### Illustration 3



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

#### **Discussing the Illustration**

1. This is a photo of Foolbull, a Sioux medicine man in the late 1800s. In what parts of the West were the various groups of Sioux Indians located? What were some key characteristics of the Sioux cultures?
2. For many Native Americans, the medicine man played a role similar to that of a shaman or an African witch doctor. What do you know about such figures and their many duties?
3. The man who took this photo had Foolbull wear the feathers and bear claw necklace you see. And he gave him a bow, arrows, and shield to hold. But these items actually give a mistaken idea of what Foolbull's true role in his tribe was. Can you guess how these items give an incorrect view of Foolbull's role?
4. How do you think the man who took this photo felt about Native Americans? Why do you think he portrayed Foolbull in an inaccurate way? Is it possible for a picture of Native Americans to be fair even if it is not completely accurate? Why or why not?

#### **Follow-up Activity**

1. **Small-group activity:** The above photo shows how hard it can be for people to understand Native Americans, even when they are sympathetic to them. Over the years, Native Americans have been portrayed in hundreds of movies. Many of these portrayals are unfair and insulting. Others try to show Indians in a positive way, as people we should admire. But how many movies show the Indians accurately? Your group's task is to rent and watch the following three movies:

The Searchers (1956)  
Dances with Wolves (1990)  
Black Robe (1991)

As a group, discuss the movies and answer these questions: Which movie portrays Native Americans in the most favorable way? Which movie portrays Native Americans in the least favorable way? Which movie portrays Native Americans most accurately? Prepare three brief reviews explaining your group's answers to these questions.

**OBJECTIVES**

1. Students will discuss the role of miners, cowboys, hunters and others who helped settle the American West.
2. Students will assess the accuracy of certain images of these typical westerners.

# Outlaws and Other Characters

*Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.*

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION****Illustration 1**

Farmers were not always the first to move into any frontier area. Often, a wide variety of hunters and trappers were the first to arrive. And even more than the first farm families, these “mountain men” are usually seen as the true independent spirits of the American frontier. This drawing of a hunter skirting an Indian village captures that idea. Yet even these loners had to rely on all sorts of people. They traded with the Indians, and depended on them for help in gathering furs and for all kinds of knowledge about their surroundings. In many cases, they also worked for large trading companies and depended on a vast worldwide market for the goods they wanted to sell.

**Illustration 2**

Another group that opened certain areas to settlement were the miners. The discovery of gold in California in 1848 lured thousands of men there with dreams of striking it rich. The California find was only the first of many to set off a gold or silver rush in the 1800s. The first arrivals in any mining area often resembled the men in this picture. They worked alone or in small groups, panning for gold in river beds or digging for it on the surface. Meanwhile, life in the mining towns they founded was exciting, disorderly, even dangerous. A lot of gold and money changed hands. But few men got rich. Each region would then change rapidly, once it became necessary to dig mines underneath the surface. This took expensive equipment and a lot of workers. Big mining companies replaced the lone miner. The days of mining camps such as the one in this drawing passed quickly.

**Illustration 3**

The great Texas cattle drives also lasted only for a short while. From 1866 through the 1880s, cowboys drove huge herds of Texas longhorn cattle to key towns along railroad lines in Kansas and elsewhere. From there, the cattle were shipped to Chicago to be processed. The closing of open range land, the building of more rail lines, and a number of other factors soon brought the era of the cattle drives to an end. Even while they lasted, the cowboy’s life was rarely as exciting as this drawing suggests. But the cowboy and the outlaw did become a permanent part of the West of our imagination.

## Illustration 1



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

### Discussing the Illustration

1. Before farmers arrived, other kinds of settlers had usually gone west first—for example, trappers, traders and hunters, such as the man shown here. What animals might this man be hunting? What would he most likely be planning to do with them?
2. In the drawing, the hunter is sneaking around an Indian village? Why might he be doing this? Why is he leading his horse down the middle of a stream?
3. One writer called western mountain men and hunters “free, independent, and total loners.” Why do you think he described them that way?
4. But another writer says, “Actually these lone hunters and mountain men usually depended greatly on Indians, other traders and trappers, and consumers and producers of goods back East.” What do you think he means? How independent do you think these hunters, trappers, and mountain men were?
5. Which of these two views fits best with this drawing? Explain your answer.

### Follow-up Activities

1. Ask your teacher or librarian to help you find a copy of *Bridger: The Story of a Mountain Man*, by David Kherdian (Greenwillow, 1987), or *Hugh Glass, Mountain Man*, by Robert McClung (Morrow, 1990). Read one of these books and write a brief report on it. In the report, summarize the book’s plot, describe its main character, and explain what the book was able to teach you about hunters, mountain men, and other early explorers of the West. Also, explain how the book’s portrayal of its main character fits or does not fit with the portrayal of the hunter in the illustration shown above.
2. Read a biography of one of the following explorers of the American West: Meriwether Lewis and/or William Clark, John Wesley Powell, or John Charles Fremont. Based on your reading, create a colorful and detailed map showing the area the explorer or explorers traveled in. Show important geographical or cultural features. And use words on the map to tell as much of this story of exploration as you can.



## Illustration 2



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

### Discussing the Illustration

1. Among the first settlers in the west were miners like the men you see here. The caption for this drawing reads “California Gold Diggers—A Scene From Actual Life at the Mines.” From this, can you guess in approximately what years this drawing might have been made? Explain your answer.
2. During the California Gold Rush, thousands of men left the East and headed to California hoping to strike it rich. In what ways did they get to California in the 1840s and 1850s, and how long did it take?
3. This scene shows some miners digging up dirt and sifting it in wooden boxes called cradles. How successful were most miners who used these methods to find gold in California and other mining areas in the West?
4. This drawing gives a realistic idea only of the first few years of gold mining in California and the other western mining regions. How did mining in each region change after those first few years?

### Follow-up Activities

1. **Small-group activity:** Ask your teacher or librarian to help you find a copy of *The American West in the Nineteenth Century: 255 Illustrations from ‘Harper’s Weekly’ and Other Contemporary Sources*, by John Grafton (Dover Publications, Inc., 1992). Look at the illustrations of mining on pages 11–48. Your group’s task is to learn how mining changed in each gold mining region during its first two decades. Based on what you learn, choose ten drawings from Grafton’s book that best illustrate how the techniques of mining changed as each region developed. Use photocopies of the drawings and create your own captions for a bulletin board display called “Western Gold: Dreams and Realities.”
2. **Small-group activity:** Use the research of the group working on Activity 1. Based on this research, create a brief skit involving the four miners shown in the above drawing. Try to use your skit to show what life was really like for those who set out to strike it rich mining gold in the West.

## Illustration 3



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

### *Discussing the Illustration*

1. One of the most well-known figures in the history of the American West is the cowboy. Cowboys became well known during the great cattle drives from 1866 into the 1880s. Where did these cattle drives take place, and what was their main purpose?
2. This drawing shows cowboys in a shootout of some sort. It portrays the life of the cowboy as an exciting and dangerous one. But actually the cowboy's daily life was usually very boring. What were the main tasks of the cowboys during the great cattle drives?
3. This fight shown here seems to have something to do with cattle and sheep. What conflicts over cattle and sheep led to fights during the cattle drives? What other problems do you think sometimes led to violence on the cattle drives of the late 1800s?
4. What would you have liked or not liked about being a cowboy like the ones shown here? Why do you think cowboys have been such popular heroes in books, movies, and TV shows over the years?

### *Follow-up Activities*

1. In the cattle drives of the 1860s, '70s, and '80s, cowboys drove huge herds of Texas longhorn cattle to certain key towns along railroad lines in Kansas and elsewhere. From there, most of the cattle were shipped to Chicago to be processed. Read more about life in one of these cattle towns—such as Sedalia, Missouri, or Abilene, Ellsworth, and Dodge City in Kansas. Prepare a brief talk in which you answer the following questions: 1) How was the town founded? 2) How long was it important in the cattle drives? 3) What was life like in it during those years? 4) What happened to it after the cattle drives ended?
2. Read more about the great cattle drives of the late 1800s. Based on what you learn, create a short story about the life of a cowboy. Include the scene in the above drawing as a part of your story. Make your story exciting and imaginative. But also try to make it as realistic as possible in its description of cowboys and their way of life.



**OBJECTIVES**

1. Students will better understand efforts to develop the American West and make more efficient use of its resources.
2. Students will discuss the pros and cons of various plans to modernize life in the West.

# Dreams of Development

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*Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.*

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**BACKGROUND INFORMATION****Illustration 1**

The first illustration in this booklet (on page 5) was about the idea of western settlement as progress. The illustrations in this lesson add to this idea of progress—the idea that settlement and development of the West would make life better and better there. This photo certainly illustrates that spirit. It shows the joining of the Union Pacific rail line with the Central Pacific line to form the first transcontinental railroad. The Union Pacific was built westward from Omaha, Nebraska, while the Central Pacific moved eastward from Sacramento, California. The lines were joined in this ceremony at Promontory, Utah, on May 10, 1869. A trip across the continent was suddenly reduced in time from months to a mere eight days. This enormous construction project required the help of huge corporations, the federal government, planners and engineers, and thousands of Irish, Chinese and other laborers. It added greatly to the sense progress and confidence Americans felt about the West.

**Illustration 2**

Millions of farmers helped settle the American West. Many arrived with little money and only a few simple tools. But most farmers planned to produce crops for sale. And they usually wanted to be as up-to-date as they could. Many were always ready to try out any new technique. In the 1800s, all kinds of new machines began to change farming and make it more modern. This illustration of a huge, mechanized wheat farm in the Dakota territory presents a positive view of this change. However, not all farmers could afford the new machinery, railroad transportation costs, or other features of agricultural modernization in the West.

**Illustration 3**

Americans have always found it easy to have big plans for the West. Perhaps that's because of the huge scale of its mountains, canyons, open spaces, rivers and other natural features. For example, in the 1930s the Hoover Dam was one of several planned in order to tame the wild Colorado River. The Colorado River projects did provide flood control, irrigation water, and electricity for several states. They also caused environmental strain and other kinds of problems. Nevertheless, big dreams of development such as this are likely to continue to be a central part of the idea, and the reality, of the American West.



## Lesson 4—Dreams of Development

# Illustration 1



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

### ***Discussing the Illustration***

1. This photo shows a very important moment in the history of the American West. It took place at Promontory, Utah, on May 10, 1869. What two railroad lines linked up there on that date, and from what city had each line been built?
2. Why do you think this event was so important in the entire history of the American West?
3. In very different ways, each of the following played a big part in the story of this first transcontinental railroad: 1) several private businessmen, 2) Irish immigrants, 3) Chinese immigrants, 4) the buffalo, 5) Native Americans, 6) the federal government. Discuss the way each of these six groups affected the building of this railroad.
4. The first drawing in this booklet (on page 5) is called “American Progress.” In 1869, many Americans saw this photo as one of the greatest signs of progress in the West to that point. Why do you think they felt that way? Do you agree or with them? Why or why not?

### ***Follow-up Activities***

1. Pretend you are one of the following:
  - California businessman Leland Stanford
  - An Irish immigrant working for the Union Pacific
  - A Chinese immigrant working for the Central Pacific
  - A Sioux warrior
  - A homesteader moving to western Nebraska
  - A St. Louis operator of freight-carrying wagon trainsNow pretend you have just seen the above photo and a story describing it. Write a brief letter to a friend expressing your feelings about this event and the effect you think it will have on your future.
2. The first transcontinental railroad made it possible to travel from coast to coast in eight days, instead of months by wagon train or sea. Read more about train travel in the late 1800s. Use history books to find maps of U.S. railroad lines in 1870. Plan a route you might have taken that year from an eastern city to San Francisco. Now write eight long diary entries describing your trip across the country in detail.

## Illustration 2



Courtesy of Dover Publications

### ***Discussing the Illustration***

1. This drawing is another example of what many at the time saw as progress in the West. In what ways is this farm different from the farms of the settlers in the drawings on pages 6 and 7 in lesson 1?
2. This is a large wheat farm in the Dakota territory in 1878. In the center of the drawing is a huge threshing machine. What part of farm work does a threshing machine do?
3. The use of modern farm machinery in the West became more common in the late 1800s. In part, that was because of the flat lands of the plains. In part, it was because of the arrival of railroad. How might these two factors have made it easier for farmers to begin using modern farm machinery?
4. What were some benefits to western farmers from machinery and the railroads? What were some problems these two things caused farmers? Do you think this drawing mainly presents a favorable or an unfavorable view of these changes? Why?

### ***Follow-up Activities***

1. Use your library to learn more about changes in farming tools and techniques in the 1800s. Find out more about the following:

Jethro Wood's plow (1819)  
John Deere's steel plow (1837)  
Mechanical seeders (1840s)  
The McCormick reaper (1840s)  
Mechanical threshers  
Combines  
Tractors

As part of your research, make photocopies of drawings of these tools and the ways in which the farmers of the western plains used them. Create a bulletin board display called "The Industrial Revolution on the Plains."

2. Barbed wire was one simple but very important invention in the history of the West. Read more about this invention and write a brief essay about its effect on farming and ranching in the West.



## Illustration 3



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### ***Discussing the Illustration***

1. This is another project that many Americans saw as a sign of progress and development in the West. Can you name this dam and the river it helps to control?
2. The dam was built in the 1930s. For decades before then, many in the West had long hoped to use dams someday to control the Colorado River. What do you know about that river? Why did so many people in the West want a system of dams to be built on it?
3. What are some of the ways in which dams like this have helped to strengthen the West's economy?
4. Hoover Dam blocks the Colorado River between Arizona and Nevada. But many people in Southern California were also especially happy to see the dam built. Why was that so?
5. Along with helping the West's economy, dams like this have also added to certain environmental problems. What are some of the problems such dams can cause? Do the problems they cause outweigh in importance the benefits they bring? Why or why not?

### ***Follow-up Activities***

1. The construction of the Hoover Dam involved more than 4,000 workers. From this one photo, make a list of all the special problems you think would have made it hard to build this dam. Read more about the building of the Hoover Dam. Then pretend you are a worker on the dam. Write an imaginary account of one day on the job. Try to include some comments on each of the problems on your list.
2. Look back over the three illustrations in this lesson. In different ways, each illustration shows how modern industrial society has affected life in the West since the mid-1800s. Make two lists. On one list, describe all the benefits people in the West have received from these changes. On the other, list all the problems these changes have caused. Use your lists to help you take part in a class discussion about progress and development in the West. The goal of this discussion should be to come up with ideas about how the West can best plan its future into the next century.





# **Image Close-ups**





## The Challenge of the Frontier

# Illustration 1



Courtesy of the Library of Congress



## The Challenge of the Frontier

# Illustration 2



Courtesy of Dover Publications

## The Challenge of the Frontier

# Illustration 3

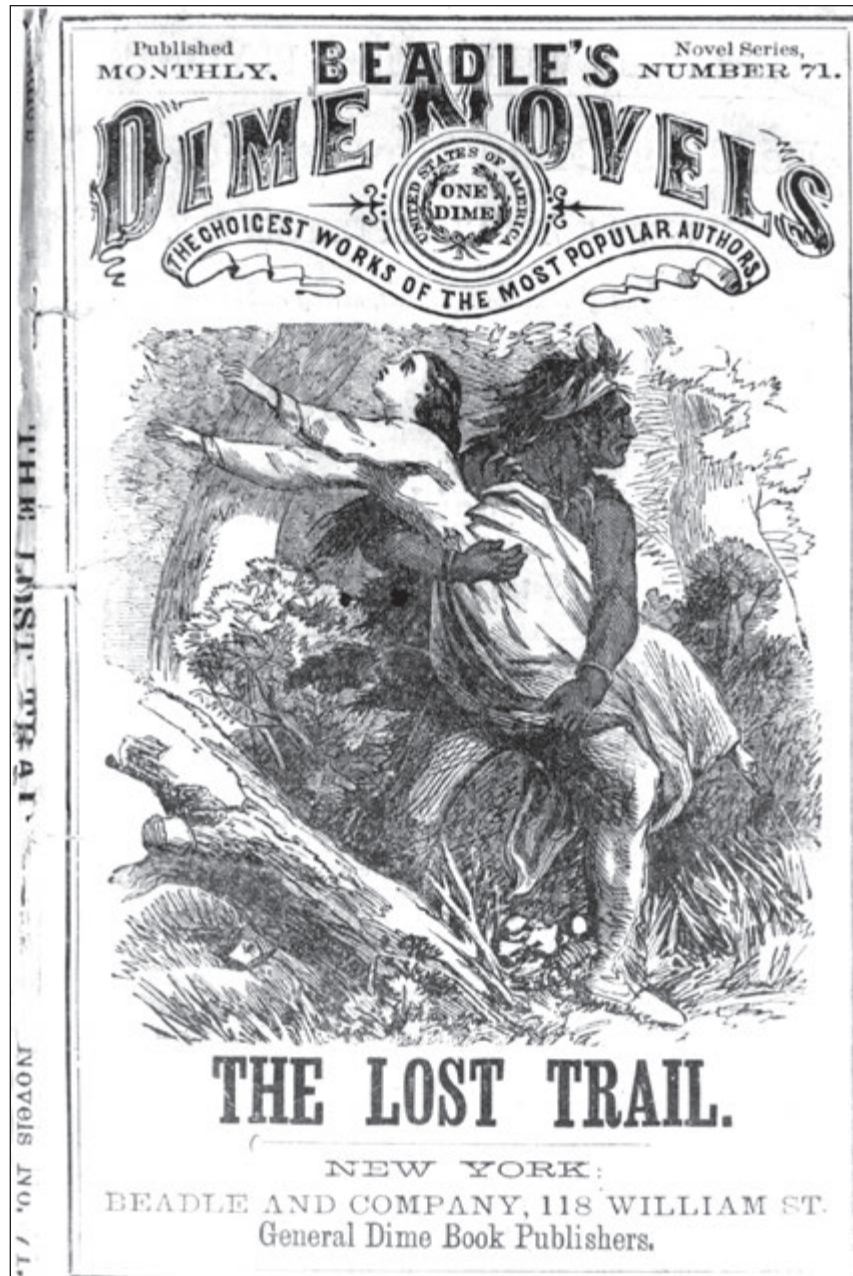


Courtesy of Dover Publications



## The Original Inhabitants

# Illustration 1



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

## The Original Inhabitants

# Illustration 2



Courtesy of the Library of Congress



## The Original Inhabitants

# Illustration 3



Courtesy of the Library of Congress



Outlaws and Other Characters  
**Illustration 1**



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

## Outlaws and Other Characters

# Illustration 2



Courtesy of the Library of Congress



## Outlaws and Other Characters

# Illustration 3



Courtesy of the Library of Congress



## Dreams of Development

# Illustration 1



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

## Dreams of Development

# Illustration 2



Courtesy of Dover Publications



## Dreams of Development

# Illustration 3



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