After the Civil War, thousands of Americans looked west for land and adventure, transforming the Great Plains from open prairie to the nation’s breadbasket. Lured by the Homestead Act, which offered public lands to settlers for a minimal fee, and the promise of new opportunities on the frontier, a diverse throng of Americans pushed west: restless Civil War veterans, workers displaced by economic depression in the east, immigrants, newly freed African Americans, and women. Most settlers, eager to stake a claim, overlooked or disregarded the fact that Native Americans had inhabited these lands for thousands of years. Native peoples, who had been pushed west of the Appalachians, then west of the Mississippi, and finally pushed off desirable western lands and onto reservations, struck back. General William Tecumseh Sherman, one of many seasoned Civil War soldiers who fought Indian Wars in the west, shared the sentiment of many that whites and natives could not coexist peacefully.

Teacher Directions
1. Students, in small teams, discuss the following questions.
   - Why did Americans move west?
   - How did settlement of the west affect Native Americans?
2. Make sure students understand the following points in discussing the questions.
   Americans moved west seeking inexpensive land. The Homestead Act offered cheap land, and an economic depression in the east left many men jobless. Native Americans, who had already been pushed west of the Appalachians and then west of the Mississippi, were pushed off their western lands. They responded by warring against the whites, who had broken numerous treaties.
Teacher Directions

1. Introduce the western movement of the late 1800s. Explain that as soon as the Civil War ended, settlers rushed to the Great Plains in the midsection of the United States to make new lives.

2. Help the students locate the Great Plains and the area of western settlement on a map.

   Explain that for many of the western settlers, the move offered a new start. For example, settlers included Confederate veterans whose homes and way of life were destroyed by war; northern immigrants who wanted their own land; African Americans who wanted greater freedoms outside the segregated south; Civil War soldiers who remained in the military; and adventurers who sought excitement.

3. Working with teammates, students brainstorm for two minutes to list as many words as possible that they think describe the Old West. Allow each team to present its findings, and record a class list on the chalkboard or a transparency.

4. As students consider their list of words, ask if any of the words or symbols are stereotypes of the Old West. Explain that stereotypes are broad generalizations that usually demean groups of people. Explain that especially in the nineteenth century, white Americans stereotyped Native Americans.

5. Distribute one copy of the Student Sheet: Aboriginal Susceptibility and one of Avarice of Indian Agents and two copies of the Student Sheet: Cartoon Analyzer to each team. Define the terms aboriginal, susceptibility and avarice.

6. Working with a team partner, students use the Cartoon Analyzer to analyze the cartoons. Discuss the two cartoons using the following questions as guidelines.

   - How does the cartoonist use symbols, caricatures, and stereotypes to express his view of Native Americans? United States officials?
   - How does the cartoonist use these symbols, caricatures, and stereotypes to persuade the reader to his point of view?
   - What is your reaction to these cartoons?

7. Remind students that the stereotypes in these cartoons reveal fears and dislikes of people who lived over one hundred years ago, and it is natural for us to react strongly to those stereotypes today. Explain that not just cartoonists, but many people use stereotypes when they think about or describe groups of people.

8. Ask students to consider how stereotypes hinder cooperation, equality, and justice. Remind them that negative feelings behind stereotypes can incite violent behavior. Ask them for examples of this behavior in our history, such as battles between the Indians and the cavalry in the Old West.
Activity Two

1. Distribute copies of the Student Sheets: “Home on the Range” to half of the teams and “Don’t Fence Me In” to the remainder of the teams.

2. Working with teammates, students read the lyrics and discuss the following questions written on the chalkboard:
   - What do these songs tell us about the life of the western cowboy?
   - What do these songs tell us about the characteristics of the western cowboy?
   - What elements of the songs appear to be realistic or factual?
   - What elements of the songs appear to be unrealistic or not factual?

3. Students share their generalizations about the life of the cowboy and the American West as depicted in the lyrics of the two songs.

   Note to the Teacher: If available, play recordings of the songs.

Teacher Directions

Students respond to the following writing prompt.

Imagine you are one of the following people: a former Civil War soldier; a newly freed African American; a war widow; a southerner who has lost his plantation; an unemployed factory worker from the north; or an immigrant. Would you risk the difficulties of life on the Great Plains—extreme hot and cold temperatures, little rainfall, few settlements, possible violence from Native Americans, plagues of grasshoppers and locusts—to settle in the west? Why?

Teacher Directions

1. Introduce homesteading in the plains states after the Civil War. Using a map, identify the area of the Great Plains.

2. Explain to students the hardships faced by early homesteaders on the Great Plains. These hardships included matted sod that was difficult to farm; temperatures that rose to over a hundred degrees in summer and plunged to forty degrees below zero in winter; sudden snowstorms and tornadoes; few human inhabitants; plagues of locusts and grasshoppers; and little rainfall. Prairie settlers—including immigrants, women, and African Americans—carved out new lives and surmounted these formidable obstacles. The transcontinental railroad, windmills, the steel plow invented by John Deere, the McCormick reaper, and the new invention of barbed wire all played a role in taming the plains. (For more
information on these inventions and the life of homesteaders, see *Reconstruction and Reform*, Book 7 of *A History of US* by Joy Hakim.

3. Distribute the Student Sheets: *Homesteading on the Plains* to each small learning team. Working with teammates, students examine and discuss the photographs to determine what each of the pictures tells about the life of the prairie homesteader. Then teams compose captions for the photographs.

4. Visit each team as students analyze and discuss the photographs and compose the captions. Check that the captions are accurate and that all students are equally involved in the activity. Students should take turns recording their team’s captions.

5. Display the photographs, perhaps by taping a copy of each to the chalkboard. Cluster all the teams’ captions around each of the photographs. If time permits, teams can read a few of the captions to the class. Allow an opportunity for students to view the photographs and read the captions.

6. To extend this activity, students design an advertisement that encourages homesteading on the Great Plains. Include information about the land and the benefits of owning a farm as well as the requirements for land ownership.

**Teacher Directions**

Use the following activities with your students.

**Language Arts** — The *Little House on the Prairie* series by Laura Ingalls Wilder has been read and treasured by millions of children. The books are based on the author’s childhood as a homesteader on the plains. Read one or two chapters to the class from one of the following books: *Little House on the Prairie; Little Town on the Prairie; or The Long Winter*.

**Language Arts/Library** — Students read *Caddie Woodlawn* by Carol Ryrie Brink. A Partner Discussion Guide is available from the Johns Hopkins University Talent Development Middle School Program.

**Language Arts/Library** — Students read excerpts from *The Prairie Traveler*, a reprint of the 1859 best-selling guide written by army captain Randolph B. Marcy for settlers traveling across the American frontier. This guide became the essential handbook for westward-bound pioneers, outlining exactly how to prepare for the trip and what to expect. Students will enjoy such fascinating frontier lore as why mules can cross rivers only if they don’t get their ears wet, how to interpret smoke signals, and treatments for rattlesnake bite.

**Science/Library** — Students study the ecology of the prairie and how the grasslands are different from other ecosystems. The science of life on the prairie includes such topics as prairie plants and why they grow there;
interesting prairie animals and their life cycles; the composition of the soil; and weather on the prairie.

Physical Education — Barn dances were popular social events for prairie communities. Students learn to square dance and explore dances of ethnic groups that settled in particular western regions.

Technology/Library — The Teaching With Historic Places program has a lesson about Adeline Hornbek, a single mother of four who homesteaded in Colorado in the 1870s. Students visit the site @ www.cr.nps.gov/nr/twhp/wwwlps/lessons/67hornbek/67hornbek.htm

Music — Students sing or listen to the songs of the Old West. Students determine which are traditional work songs. Students listen to “The Plow that Broke the Plains” by Aaron Copeland.

Geography and Art — Students research, draw, and illustrate a map of the most famous cattle trails or of the Great Plains.

Language Arts/Library — Students read an example of Mark Twain’s literature about the West, such as Roughing It and “The Celebrated Frog of Calaveras County.”

Technology/Library — Students use the internet to investigate topics of interest about homesteading or pioneer life on the Great Plains. For example, students can explore the Library of Congress site about western migration and homesteading of African Americans @ http://lcweb.loc.gov/exhibits/african/afam009.html or the National Archives site about Glidden’s patent for barbed wire @ http://www.nara.gov/education/teaching/glidden/wire.html

Art/Library — Students view works of artists such as Frederick Remington, Winslow Homer, and Thomas Moran.
Aboriginal Susceptibility

MAN-WITH-FRAYED-EAR—What for you cry?
MAN-AFRAID-OF-RED-HEADED-HORSE—Injun think what dam shame he’s Injun!

Library of Congress
The Reason of the Indian Outbreak
General Miles declares that the Indians are starved into rebellion.

Library of Congress
## Cartoon Analyzer

### Visuals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Which of the objects or characters in the cartoon are symbols?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you think each symbol means?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Which words or phrases in the cartoon appear to be the most significant?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why do you think so?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Describe the action taking place in the cartoon.

Explain the message of the cartoon.
Home On the Range

Oh, give me a home,
Where the buffalo roam,
Where the deer
and the antelope play,
Where seldom is heard
A discouraging word,
and the skies
are not cloudy all day.

Home, home on the range,
Where the deer and the antelope play,
Where seldom is heard
A discouraging word,
And the skies are not cloudy all day.
Don’t Fence Me In

Oh, give me land, lots of land under starry skies above
Don’t Fence Me In.

Let me ride thru the wide open country that I love,
Don’t Fence Me In.

Let me be by myself in the evening breeze, listen to the murmur of the cottonwood trees. Send me off forever but I ask you please Don’t Fence Me In.

Just turn me loose, Let me straddle my old saddle underneath the western skies.

On my cayuse let me wander over yonder til I see the mountains rise. I want to ride the ridge where the west commences, Gaze at the moon till I lose my senses. Can’t look at hobbles and I can’t stand fences, Don’t Fence Me In.
Homesteading on the Plains

Library of Congress
Homesteading on the Plains
Homesteading on the Plains

National Archives
Homesteading on the Plains

A. A. Forbes Collection
Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma
Homesteading on the Plains

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