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## ABSTRACT

Based on short stories and novels, this lesson plan presents activities designed to help students understand that in the 19th century, the American frontier brought both solutions and problems; and fiction writers as well as documentarians have portrayed the American frontier. The main activity of the lesson involves students writing essays addressing whether characters in the novels and short stories do or do not correspond with information students found from nonfiction sources. It includes objectives, materials, procedures, adaptations, discussion questions, evaluation methods, extension activities, annotations of suggested readings and web links, vocabulary, and related academic standards and benchmarks addressed in the lesson plan. The lesson plan also contains a description of a video clip related to the lesson, comprehension questions related to the video clip, and answers to those comprehension questions. (RS)



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## TITLE OF LESSON PLAN:

American Frontiers

**LENGTH OF LESSON:** One class period

**GRADE LEVEL:** 9-12

**SUBJECT AREA:** Literature

**CREDIT:** Summer Productions, Inc.

**OBJECTIVES:** Students will understand the following:

1. In the 19th century, the American frontier brought both solutions and problems.
2. Fiction writers as well as documentarians have portrayed the American frontier.

### MATERIALS:

For this lesson, you will need:

Short stories and novels mentioned in the lesson plan

### PROCEDURE:

1. Discuss with students that we learn about the past—in this case, the westering of Americans—not only through documentary films and history books but also through fiction about the period in question. This project will give students an opportunity to read short stories and novel excerpts about the American frontier and then comment on what the literature tells them about that period.
2. Give students a choice of reading the following works or others that portray pioneer life:
  - An excerpt from any of the five Leatherstocking tales by James Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851)
  - The short story "The Luck of Roaring Camp" or "The Outcasts of Poker Flat" by Bret Harte (1836-1902)
  - The short story/tall tale "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" by Mark Twain (1835-1910)

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- The short story “Neighbor Rosicky” or “The Sculptor's Funeral” by Willa Cather (1873-1947)
- The short story “Under the Lion's Paw” or “A Day's Pleasure” by Hamlin Garland (1860-1940)
- An excerpt from the novel *Giants in the Earth* by Ole Rølvaag (1876-1931)

3. In the left column of a two-column chart, direct students to list the major characteristics of the real-life American people who went west during the 19th century—negative characteristics as well as positive ones. Based on history books and documentaries, students should characterize the pioneers in

- social terms—their manners and customs;
- economic terms—what wealth they took with them, what wealth they achieved;
- political terms—their dependence on or attitudes toward government; and
- philosophical/religious terms—their morality, their attitudes toward nature and other people, especially people not in their own ethnic group.

4. As students read the works of fiction they've chosen, they should note in the right-hand column specifics that illustrate how the fictional characters conform to or differ from the descriptions in the left-hand column.

5. When they finish their reading and have reviewed their charts—perhaps, adding to the charts—the students will be ready to draft their essays. Stress that their thesis statements should make clear whether the author's portrayals of characters on the frontier do or don't correspond with the information students have from nonfiction sources.

6. You may want to instruct students to consider the following additional questions in their essays:

- What was the author's personal experience of the frontier? Is it important to know whether the author lived on the frontier himself or herself?
- Would you categorize the author's vision of the frontier as realistic or romantic? Why?

## **ADAPTATIONS:**

Juvenile and young adult novels that students can use to carry out this project include the following:

- *My Prairie Christmas* by Harvey Brett
- *The Journey Home* by Isabelle Holland
- *A Promise at the Alamo: The Story of a Texas Girl* by Dorothy Hoobler, Thomas Hoobler, and Carey Greenberg Associates
- *Where the Broken Heart Still Beats: The Story of Cynthia Ann Parker* by Carolyn Meyer
- *Grasshopper Summer* by Ann Turner

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. After viewing this program, you may have the impression that the frontier consisted only of wide-open spaces and beautiful land, but what other meanings did the frontier have for 19th-century Americans? What were some of the negative aspects of life on the frontier? What are some of the positive and negative aspects of the legacy of the frontier apparent in American society today?
2. How did European Americans' and Native Americans' views of the land differ? How did these opposing points of view affect the growth and development of the United States?
3. How did the concept of manifest destiny affect both Americans and their neighbors during the 19th century? Are there other historical periods where thoughts of manifest destiny may have influenced the ways in which events developed?
4. What role did the railroads play in the westward movement of the 19th century? What impact did they play on the settlement of the frontier?

## EVALUATION:

You can evaluate students' essays using the following three-point rubric:

**Three points:** presents a strong thesis statement; writes strongly cohesive, unified paragraphs; writes prose that is free of errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics

**Two points:** presents an adequate thesis statement; writes moderately cohesive, unified paragraphs; makes some errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics

**One point:** lacks adequate thesis statement; lacks paragraph cohesion and unity; makes many errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics

## EXTENSION:

### Modern Pioneers

In the concluding segment of *Rediscovering America: The Frontier*, the narrator ties the concept of the frontier to the concept of land, reinforcing the point made at the beginning of the program. However, there are other frontiers as well—a state of mind, a yearning for something that goes beyond the mere issue of land. Many people would consider new worlds of any kind as frontiers and would equate those conquering them with 19th-century frontiersmen and frontierswomen. Ask students to suggest women and men who have assumed those roles in more modern times—space scientists, entrepreneurs of the computer revolution, genetic researchers, and so on. Have students identify a particular person who has been or is on the cutting edge, research that person, and give a brief oral presentation on why the person qualifies as a frontiersman or frontierswoman.

### **Women on the American Frontier**

Ask students to investigate the roles that women played on the 19th-century frontier. Suggest that students focus on women of one ethnic group—say, immigrants from China, immigrants from various eastern European countries, Irish Americans, African Americans, and Hispanic Americans. Specify that students should determine by means of research whether women in these groups were victims of prejudice and discrimination. Then, with that answer in mind, have students write first-person narratives of the frontier experience as a woman.

### **SUGGESTED READINGS:**

#### **“The American Frontier : Opposing Viewpoints”**

Mary Ellen Jones, Greenhaven Press, 1994

### **WEB LINKS:**

#### **Native Americans and the Frontier West**

This is a comprehensive collection of 80 links on the topic of Native Americans and the American frontier, which satisfy the curiosity of most and serve as a wonderful starting point for everyone else. Created by Dennis Boals, it includes topics such as the “Index of Native American Resources on the Internet,” the “Pueblo Cultural Center,” “Art of the American Indian Frontier,” “The Cherokee's Home Page,” “Southwest Weavings,” Wild West - the Home Page,” “Indigenous Nations of North America,” and the “National Museum of the American Indian.”

<http://www.execpc.com/~dboals/a-part1.html>

#### **The West and The Frontier in American Culture**

“The West” is an eight-part, 1"-hour documentary created by Ken Burns and Stephen Ives. “The Frontier in American Culture” is a traveling exhibition, based on the 1994 Newberry Library exhibit of the same name. It will rotate to 44 libraries from September 1996 through the end of 1998. If you can't visit the exhibit, the Web site is the next best thing.

<http://www.ala.org/West>

### **VOCABULARY:**

#### **frontier**

The area or region just beyond the settled and developed part of a territory.

#### **Context:**

Frontier is a word that was invented by the white man.

**imperial**

Relating to an empire or of having sovereign rights over a territory.

**Context:**

Jefferson had an imperial vision for America.

**manifest destiny**

The 19th century political philosophy that held it was the right and duty for the United States to expand throughout the North American continent.

**Context:**

A cluster of incompatibles, manifest destiny and tribal survival.

**technology**

The practical application of scientific knowledge to a particular area, often business or industry.

**Context:**

Why do we continue to seek new circumstances to describe a frontier - space or technology or thought?

**ACADEMIC STANDARDS:****Grade Level:** 9-12**Subject Area:** geography

**Standard:** Understands how geography is used to interpret the past.

**Benchmarks:** Understands the ways in which physical, economic, environmental and psychological factors have influenced the development of the American frontier.

**Grade Level:** 9-12**Subject Area:** U.S. history

**Standard:** Understands how the rise of big business, heavy industry, and mechanized farming transformed American society.

**Benchmarks:** Understands the role of race, gender, and religion in western communities in the late 19th century.

**Grade Level:** 9-12**Subject Area:** language arts

**Standard:** Demonstrates a familiarity with selected literary works of enduring quality.

**Benchmarks:**

Demonstrates an understanding of why certain literary works dealing with the American frontier may be considered classics or works of enduring quality and substance.

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## Video Information and Comprehension Questions



### Video Description

Discover how European techniques of gold mining changed the centuries-old methods of the Native Americans and how European hunters, trappers and skimmers changed the balance of nature in frontier lands.

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[Download Comprehension Questions & Answers](#)

The Comprehension Questions are available to download as an RTF file. You can save the file to your desktop and open it in a word processing program.

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**TITLE OF VIDEO:**

Rediscovering America: The Frontier

**VIDEO COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS:**

1. How did historian Frederick Jackson Turner define the frontier?
2. What was Thomas Jefferson's imperial vision for the United States, and how long did it take to achieve it?
3. What was the population basis for the Census Bureau's definition of a frontier, and when did the frontier cease to exist in the continental United States?
4. What major factor caused the Indian Wars of the 19th century?
5. What government act opened the American West to large-scale settlement?

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## Rediscovering America: The Frontier

### **VIDEO COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:**

**1. How did historian Frederick Jackson Turner define the frontier?**

Turner defined the frontier as opportunity in the form of land.

**2. What was Thomas Jefferson's imperial vision for the United States, and how long did it take to achieve it?**

Thomas Jefferson envisioned the expansion of the United States as extending from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. In 90 years, the United States achieved his goal of an East Coast to West Coast empire.

**3. What was the population basis for the Census Bureau's definition of a frontier, and when did the frontier cease to exist in the continental United States?**

Fewer than two people per square mile constituted a frontier, which ended in the continental United States in 1890, according to the Census Bureau.

**4. What major factor caused the Indian Wars of the 19th century?**

Different concepts of land ownership caused the wars between Native Americans and the American government.

**5. What government act opened the American West to large-scale settlement?**

The Homestead Act of 1862 promised cheap land to settlers, which encouraged many Americans to move west.

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