

“Grow west, young man”

Westward expansion saw the United States grow into a nation that stretched from coast to coast. Looking back, it may seem that the growth of our country was “destined” to occur, but was that really the case? In these activities, students will examine the myth of the Western Frontier and use their creativity to imagine an alternate history of the United States.

- What is appealing about idealized versions of the West?
- Whose stories are included when we record history, and whose are left out?
- How did westward expansion change the course of history in the United States?

Promoting Your Town

Estimated time: 30-45 minutes

Early pioneers had a variety of motivations for moving West. Advertisements from the time period promised land at low prices, a life full of adventure, and—most appealing of all—freedom. The West was considered a land of opportunity, where anyone could make their way and pursue the American Dream.

Instructions

Consider your own town and what might motivate people to move to your area. What factors influenced the growth of your community? Are there specific resources or goods that your town is known for? Are there employers that promise job security or attractions that draw in tourists? What do you love most about your community?

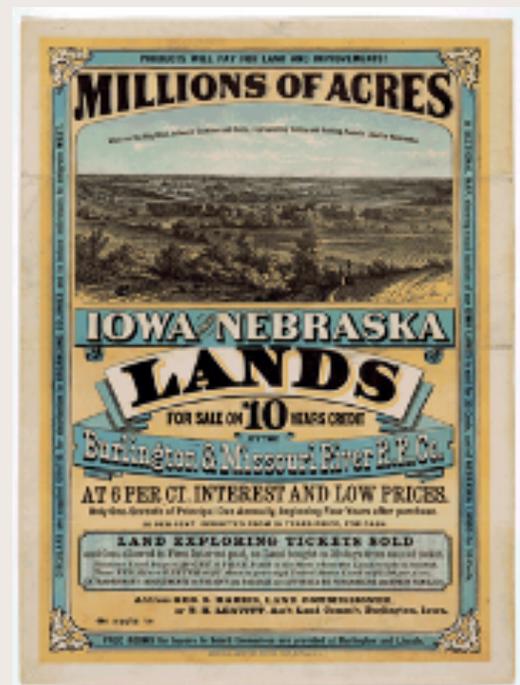
Design your own poster advertisement for your town.

This can be a digital or physical creation. Your poster must include:

1. Title and subtitle (don't forget to identify the name of your town!)
2. Photographs or drawings
3. Captions and descriptions

Use a combination of appealing images and descriptive language to promote your town.

Image source: <https://www.loc.gov/item/rbpe.13401300/> (Library of Congress)



Lights, Camera, Action!

Estimated time: 45-60 min

The West has a special place in American culture. Stories about cowboys, wide-open landscapes, and striking it rich capture our imagination. In the early days of westward expansion, artists depicted an idealized view of the West, but what did their paintings leave out? How does Hollywood today continue to simplify the narrative of westward expansion?

Resources

Learn about westward expansion in this *Crash Course* video
WATCH: [youtube.com/watch?v=Q16OZkgSxM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q16OZkgSxM)



Analyze a painting from the Smithsonian American Art Museum
WEBSITE: americanexperience.si.edu/historical-eras/expansion/pair-miners-union-diggings/



Instructions

Find a painting that depicts the American West. Artists like Albert Bierstadt, Thomas Moran, and George Catlin are a great place to start! Once you have your painting, put on your director's hat and imagine a movie scene that could take place in the setting depicted. **Pick one myth of the West to debunk in your scene.**

Consider the following:

- Who are the main characters in your scene and what will they be doing? Don't be afraid to include dialogue!
- What action takes place in your scene?
- How does this scene reveal your character's motivations, hopes, or beliefs about the West?
- What about the natural landscape makes it the ideal setting for your scene?

Create! Your final product can be a one-page written narrative or a visual storyboard addressing all four questions above.

Writing an Alternate History

Estimated time: 90-120 minutes

Have you ever wondered what would have happened if Great Britain won the American Revolution or Abraham Lincoln was never assassinated? These questions are examples of counterfactual history. Counterfactual history is an approach to history that is based on asking the question “What if?” and imagining an alternate timeline.

Resources



Read this *Mental Floss* article for examples of “What if?” prompts

WEBSITE: mentalfloss.com/article/54464/what-if-19-alternate-histories-imagining-very-different-world



Listen to this NPR series asking the question, “What if World War I never happened?”

WEBSITE: [npr.org/series/286403203/what-if-wwi-had-never-happened](https://www.npr.org/series/286403203/what-if-wwi-had-never-happened)

Instructions

Imagine the Louisiana Purchase never happened. Thomas Jefferson did not succeed in negotiating with the French, and the size of the United States did not double overnight. How does this change the course of history? What are some possible ramifications, both big and small?

Create a newspaper for residents of the United States that reflects how life has changed in the alternate timeline. Your newspaper should include the following three features:

- **One news feature.** The news feature must reference an event that could only have occurred in the alternate timeline.
- **One trend story.** A trend story captures something exciting and new in the worlds of art, music, film, technology, or culture.
- **One profile piece.** A profile piece covers the life and accomplishments of an individual. Who is someone whose life has changed in the alternate timeline?

Each story should include several robust paragraphs (5-7 sentences each). Don't forget a catchy headline and a creative name for your publication!



Image Source: <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/594889> (National Archives)

Map of the Louisiana Purchase Territory, 1903

Students! Answering our questions? Using our strategies? Share them with us at discovery@worldstrides.com.