

# ★ Let US Teach That For You!

## *So You Want to Be a Cattle Baron: Decisions*

**Overview:** The following learning activity allows students to respond to scenarios involving frontier travel and a cattle drive, in which informed decision-making is required.

### Objectives

**Students will:**

1. Make predictions about travel problems on the frontier.
2. Consider cause and effect in making good decisions.
3. Understand the travails of westward settlement.

### Materials

**Educational Material Provided by Frontier Texas!:**

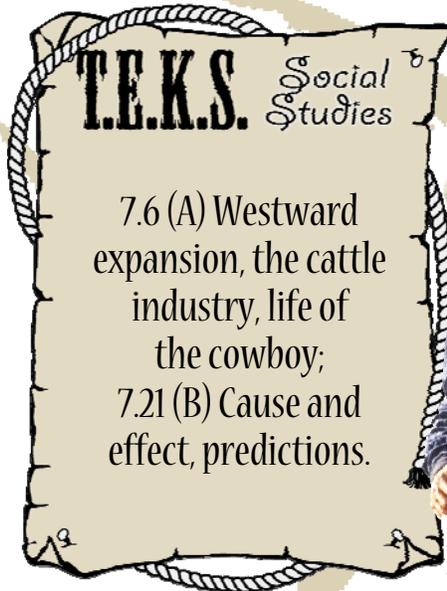
Spirit Guides Cynthia Ann Parker (21), George Reynolds (38) and Elizabeth Clifton (58), Chuck Wagon (39), Frontier Experience Theater (45), Information Station (57), and Frontier Women Rotator (61)

**Materials Needed:** Decisions, Decisions! Game cards and answers (Attachment 1), index cards for each student

### Teaching Strategy

**Pre-Visit Introduction**

1. Review material on cattle drives and westward expansion, focusing on the dangers involved in both ventures.
2. Ask students to discuss decision-making. "When faced with a tough decision, do you:
  - a. go with what experience has taught you
  - b. gather information first
  - c. don't spend too much time thinking about it, just go with your gut instinct.
3. Often cowboys and settlers were out on the plains without any way to gather information or get help from someone else and had to make major decisions on the spot. Students will observe some of these instances at Frontier Texas!



### Museum Instruction

1. Students will enjoy learning about cattle drives and the perils of settling the frontier from Spirit Guides Cynthia Ann Parker (21), George Reynolds (38), and Elizabeth Clifton (58), as well as the Chuck Wagon display (39), Frontier Experience Theater (45), Information Station (57), and Frontier Women Rotator (61).
2. Remind students to observe decisions that had long lasting implications for the failure or success of life on the trail.

### Post-Visit Synthesis Activity

1. Play “Decisions, Decisions!” game in which the smartest decisions will be rewarded. Give each student an index card with an **A** on one side and a **B** on the other side.
2. All students will stand by their desks. As a scenario is read, students are asked to make a decision that will affect their travel. Students will respond to the two possible answers by holding up the **A** or **B** side of the card.
3. The teacher will then read the correct answer to the question. If a student has chosen the wrong answer, he/she will sit down.
4. The next scenario is read and question asked. Repeat with each scenario, having students be seated if they get the wrong answer, but continuing on their journey if the right answer is given.
5. The students left standing after all questions have been answered make up the most successful pioneers and should be awarded a prize.
6. There are two stories to use. One is “So You Want to be a Cattle Baron” (four questions) about a cattle drive, and the other is “On the Wagon Trail” about moving west (three questions).

## Student Assessment

Assess student understanding by the answers given in the game.

## Enrichment Activity

Students will write a “Tips for Travelers” guide for settlers moving west.

*Created for Frontier Texas! by Jeanne Wray*

# Decisions, Decisions! Game Cards

## On the Wagon Trail

Life on the wagon trail was extremely difficult. Thousands of people flocked to the West hoping to find gold and instant wealth. Others hoped to own acres of land and improve their standards of living. But these courageous settlers experienced numerous obstacles along the way. Pioneers faced stampedes and treacherous river crossings. Because most, if not all, family members walked on foot over rugged ground, accidents were frequent. Many families lost relatives to cholera and other illnesses. Despite these horrific circumstances, the brave pioneers continued on the journey west with promises of a better life to come.

### Beginning the Trip

Your life as a pioneer has been hard. Your dad brought your family to eastern Colorado, but times are tough there and now you have your own family to care for. You decide to head for Buffalo Gap, Texas to start a new life. The railroad is supposed to be built through that town soon, and maybe you can start a dry goods business. But first you face life on the trail, and that's not easy. You have a lot of decisions to make. You've got to get to Texas quickly and safely. You choose to travel an established route, the Goodnight-Loving Trail. Before you can embark on your journey, you must decide what to take with you. You have \$500 in your pocket, and it is time to buy the animals to pull your wagon. You can buy a pack of mules. Mules are fast and cheap, costing \$15 each. Or you can buy a few oxen. Oxen are slow and more expensive, costing as much as \$35 per animal.

What do you do?

- A. Purchase six mules
- B. Buy four oxen

## **Paying the Toll**

You are making headway on the Goodnight-Loving Trail. You come to Raton Pass in New Mexico, the very place where Charles Goodnight passed in 1867. However, a tough character called Uncle Dick Wooten wants to charge you a \$50 toll to travel the pass. You're trying to save what little cash you have left after buying supplies to start that dry goods business.

What do you decide to do?

- A. Pay the toll, wondering if other settlers have done the same.
- B. Try your luck and find another route. You save money and could possibly go down in history for finding a faster, cheaper route to the West.

## **River Crossing**

It's been a hard trip through eastern New Mexico but you've made good progress. You even met up with some cowboys headed north with a huge herd and were able to buy some flour from their cook. You are starting to imagine your store in Buffalo Gap.

But there's more to this long journey. You reach the infamous Horsehead Crossing of the Pecos River and the river is at flood stage. Crossing here is dangerous business under the best circumstances. But supplies are low again, the baby's got a bad cough, and you don't want to delay.

What do you do?

- A. Wait out the flood for three days
- B. Hustle the family into the wagon and drive it into the river

## **So You Want to be a Cattle Baron?**

As the American population grew in the 1800's there arose a greater demand for beef. Hundreds of men found business opportunities and wage work driving huge herds of cattle from Texas to markets to the north.

The average herd consisted of 2500 head of cattle, and 11 or 12 men could handle a herd this size. The crew was made up of a trail boss, the cook, and 9 or 10 drovers who helped manage the cattle. Many ranchers and cowboys who began their journey in Texas headed to Abilene, Kansas, where they could sell cattle for beef to be shipped by rail all over the country. In 1871, over 700,000 Texas cattle were driven to Kansas!

Many dangers confronted these men during their travels, including thunderstorms and encounters with Indians. And once they reached Kansas, their troubles were not over. The market was extremely competitive in Abilene, and there was no telling whether a would-be cattle baron would boom or bust.

## Choosing a Trail

Your journey begins in San Antonio, TX. You have 2500 head of cattle and need to get to Abilene, Kansas. Many cattle trails leave from San Antonio, and before you begin your journey, you must choose which trail you want to take. You may choose the Chisholm Trail or you can create your own path. The Chisholm is the most popular trail from Texas to Kansas. It has substantial prairie grounds for grazing, better stream crossings than other routes, and fewer Indian taxes and Indian assaults. If you choose to make your own way, you must account for river crossings, ample food supply, and bring enough money to pay the unknown Indian taxes. However, by plotting your own trail you may save yourself a week or two in travel time, and time is money when you are paying cowboys.

What would you like to do?

- A. Take the Chisholm Trail
- B. You are a lone rider. Create your own trail

## Indian Encounter

After you pass through Texas, you cross the Red River into Indian Territory. This land still belongs to the Indians, and you hope you will pass through unnoticed. But as luck would have it, a party of Indians on horseback spots you. They swiftly travel to head you off. The leader approaches and signals with sign language that he wants 500 head of your cattle for the privilege of passing through his territory. This cow tax will allow you passage and grazing along the way, but 500 cattle is a steep price to pay.

What do you do?

- A. Tell the leader "no." Your persuasive personality can win the Indians over.
- B. Pay the cow tax. Better safe than sorry.

## The Thunderstorm

On the horizon you see dark storm clouds, and your instincts tell you trouble is brewing. Sure enough, as you approach the storm, lightening flashes and a loud BOOM erupts. But another sound follows, and the ground trembles. It sounds like a stampede! The herd becomes scared and frantically runs off course. You may run for cover, let the herd run off, and round them up when the storm passes OR you may circle around the herd to try and steer the direction of the stampede.

Which would you like to do?

- A. Run for cover! There is no way you are going to get trampled.
- B. Race after the cattle to try to stop the stampede.

## The Market

Welcome to Kansas! You have survived the thunderstorm and Indian encounter, but now you must try to sell the cattle at market. After securing the herd in a corral, you can either sell the herd for \$ .02 per pound now, earning \$20,000 OR you can search for a buyer who will pay \$ .03 per pound and earn \$30,000.

What would you like to do?

- A. Sell at \$ .02 per pound now
- B. Hold out for \$ .03 per pound

# Decisions, Decisions! Answers

## On the Wagon Trail

### Beginning the Trip

- A. Unfortunately, purchasing the mules was a bad choice. Due to the mean temperament of these animals, one of them has run away just as the trip starts, almost trampling you in the process. While you survived, the rest of the mules are worn out and won't move another inch. You and your family are now stranded. You are forced to wait for another wagon team. You hope they will have some room for you and maybe your supplies, but that's not likely.
- B. Good choice! Even though oxen are slower, their strength is an invaluable asset. These powerful animals possess a lot of stamina, and they are much easier to work with than a pack of moody mules. You and your family are off to a good start.

### Paying the Toll

- A. Congratulations! You and your family are able to travel the pass successfully, but not before griping to Uncle Dick that you don't appreciate his greed.
- B. Your detour becomes impassable forty miles east of Raton Pass because of sandy ground. You have to turn around and make your way back to Raton Pass. You add several days to your trip. Hope your food supply is going to hold up!

## River Crossing

- A. Good choice! Plains floods subside quickly and soon enough for you to make safe passage. The oxen are rested and plow ahead quickly on the last segment of the trip. You treat the baby with a tonic you make from sunflowers and his cough is gone. And you still have almost \$250 of savings left to start that business. Welcome to Buffalo Gap!**
- B. Bad idea. Strong as the oxen are, they can't keep the wagon from swinging sideways into the current. It pitches over. There goes that barrel of flour you bought, along with some of your furniture and, worst of all, the money sack you hide under the wagon floor. You, your spouse (clutching the baby), and the kids make it back to the bank, thank goodness. You wait three days for some cowboys to show up, and they help you finish the trip, but you arrive broke and heartsick.**

# Decisions, Decisions! Answers

## So You Want to be a Cattle Baron?

### Choosing a Trail

- A. **Good idea! The Chisholm Trail gives you the best chance of making it safely to Kansas. But beware. Many dangers still await you on the trail ahead.**
- B. **One week into your trip as a trailblazer, trouble begins. Your route west of the Chisholm Trail takes you into the Texas Hill Country, where a dry spell has decreased the usually plentiful grazing. The cattle become too weak to move quickly, and yet it's a gamble to stay put and wait for rain. After stalling in the hills, you press the herd forward, but so many head die that you know it will become very hard to break even in Kansas. You sell off the remaining head to local folks for a little money, pay the cowboys what you can, and send them home. Better luck next time, pardner.**

### Indian Encounter

- A. **You are not as persuasive as you thought you were, or perhaps your sign language is a little rusty. Some Indians draw their weapons, but they seem more concerned with running you off their land than causing any real trouble. You retreat, managing to drive some of the herd with you, but the Indians are left with a hefty percentage. And, you now have to make a detour around their range, adding fourteen days to your travel time.**
- B. **You smile and part with 500 head. You've still got almost 2000 for yourself. The Indian leader thanks you, and you continue on your journey in one piece.**

## The Thunderstorm

- A. While you try to stay safe under the wagon, the herd disperses in all directions for a mile or more. You spend an extra three days rounding up the herd and find that over a hundred head are dead from stampeding into draws. And, your best rider has two broken legs and you must pay some mule drivers to give him a ride back to San Antonio. All these losses add up when you get to Kansas. You don't break even.
- B. By riding hard through the flashing and downpour, you and the drovers are able to get the herd running together, and it's even running northward. When the thunderstorm passes, the cattle, as well as your horses, are exhausted, and you are able to settle in for the night. Good job!

## The Market

- A. You sell all cattle for \$ .02 per pound and receive \$20,000. You settle up with your cowboys, put aside \$700 to pay for supplies bought on credit in San Antonio, and still head home with a healthy profit.
- B. There is no buyer for \$ .03 per pound because some other herds are coming up the trail behind you. The corral owner gives you one hour to move your herd. You must ship the herd to Chicago for \$2.25 per 100 lbs. The railroad charges you \$150 per car. You wind up owing \$23,000. Guess you'll have to go back to San Antonio and try again so you can get out of debt. Better luck next time.