

Identifying Cause and Effect Relationships: Railroads and Cattle Drives

An Archive of Texas History Lesson Plan

The *Archive of Texas History* is an ideal resource for creating engaging, effective lesson plans that support Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). Using primary sources such as historical newspapers and government documents, students learn to improve their critical thinking skills, compare and contrast perspectives and form their own conclusions.

The following *Archive of Texas History* lesson plan is suggested for grades 4-7

Introduction

TEKS requires students to use critical thinking skills to identify cause and effect relationships (§113.7.b.25.b). It also encourages the use of “a variety of rich primary source material” to teach students about state history (§113.23.a.2), including the growth and development of the cattle industry and the impact of railroads on life in Texas (§113.23.b.6.a). The following lesson plan addresses all of these essential topics and skills by prompting students to explore how the construction of railroads affected Texas’ legendary cattle drives.

In this lesson, students will:

- Discuss what they already know about cattle drives and railroads
- Read five brief articles (or selections of articles) from historical newspapers printed between 1865 and 1899
- Analyze the articles in chronological order to determine what changes occurred in the development of the cattle industry during that time
- Brainstorm how the introduction of railroads might have caused these changes
- Create a pictorial representation that demonstrates their understanding of cause and effect

Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students should be able to:

- Use primary sources to help them reach an independent, informed conclusion
- Describe how railroads in Texas eliminated the need for long cattle drives
- Demonstrate an understanding of cause and effect relationships

Background/Preparation

First, discuss what students already know about cattle drives and railroads. Possible questions (and answers) for discussion include:

- Why is Texas a good place to raise cattle? Why did cattle need to be ‘driven’ elsewhere after they were raised in Texas? Can you name some of places that cattle were driven to?
 - Texas is good for raising cattle because of its open plains and abundance of grasses for feed. After being raised in Texas, cattle were driven to rivers or ports where they were shipped to places like New Orleans or Chicago to feed the urban populations there.
- What do you know about cattle drives? Do you think they sound like fun or a lot of work? Have you ever seen any pictures of a cattle drive? What did you see?
 - Answers will vary
- What do you already know about railroads? What are railroads used for?
 - The first railroad in Texas was the Missouri-Kansas-Texas line (or the Katy). It reached Dallas in 1886, Waco in 1888, Houston in April 1893 and San Antonio 1901. The Katy and other railroads were used to carry people, goods and materials both in and out of Texas.
- What do you think Texas was like before there were any railroads? What might have changed after the construction of the Missouri-Kansas-Texas railroad was completed in Texas?
 - Before railroads, Texas was less developed and the population more dispersed on large ranches. With the advent of railroads, towns sprung up and were able to develop quickly. Populations and economies increased.

Second, print the following articles selected from the *Archive of Texas History*. Depending on the abilities and reading level of your students, selections of the articles can be read aloud or students can read each article independently. Please note, however, that because the articles are from authentic 19th century newspapers, the writing style may be unfamiliar to some students. A list of unfamiliar vocabulary they might encounter is provided for your convenience.



- [1865 editorial on the impact of railroads in the south, and a call for railroads in Texas](#)
- [1868 estimates of the year's cattle drives](#)
- [1872 estimates of the year's cattle drives](#)
- [1883 report on new railroad track being laid in Texas](#)
- [1899 report on the cattle industry, covering only cattle shipped on railroad cars](#)



Vocabulary words: head (as in, there were 2,000 head of cattle on the drive), exodus, scarcity, vigorous, immense, thriving, contemplation, drove (noun, as in a herd)

Activities

- 1. Analyze:** After students read all of (or selections from) the five provided articles, they should analyze them chronologically and discuss what changes they see over time. For example, the 1868 and 1872 reports on the cattle industry mention only long cattle drives. The 1868 article reports 150,000 head of cattle spotted by the writer, while in 1872 that number increased to nearly 456,000—showing that the drives were growing exponentially. However, in 1883, the construction of railroads is reported, and by the 1899 article on the cattle industry, traditional drives aren't even mentioned. Instead, cattle are being shipped on railroad cars.
- 2. Draw a conclusion:** Based on the information students extracted from the primary source articles, what can they conclude about the effects of railroads on the cattle industry? Students should be prompted to fully explore their answers.
Sample answer: before the introduction of railroads, the cattle industry consisted largely of traditional cattle drives (large herds of cattle driven across long distances by cowboys). But many Texas citizens noticed how railroads had improved the economies and populations of other southern states, and they wanted to bring railroads to Texas, too. When the tracks were built that connected Texas to markets in other parts of the country, the need for long cattle drives was eliminated, because it was safer and more efficient to ship cattle on railroad cars.
- 3. Depict a cause and effect relationship:** To demonstrate their understanding of the cause-and-effect nature of railroads and cattle drives, students should create a series of drawings, similar to a comic strip, that depict the chain of events they just learned about. Ideally, the first box would be a picture of a small cattle drive, representing the first article from 1868. The second box would show the size of the cattle drives increasing. Then, perhaps, a drawing of railroads being built in the third box, and one of cattle being shipped on railroads in the fourth.

Optional supplementary activities

1. If students show an interest in long cattle drives, they can also read the 1869 article [“The Adventures of a Cattle Drive to California.”](#) This fascinating first-hand account tells of the perils and adventures of a cattle driver who showed up in Waco, Texas, months after being presumed dead by his family and friends.

After reading the article, students can discuss whether they think the end of long cattle drives was positive or negative for the state of Texas and for cowboys. Would they have liked to have been a cowboy on a long cattle drive? Does it sound dangerous, exciting or both?

2. Students can be tested with the [attached sample quiz](#).