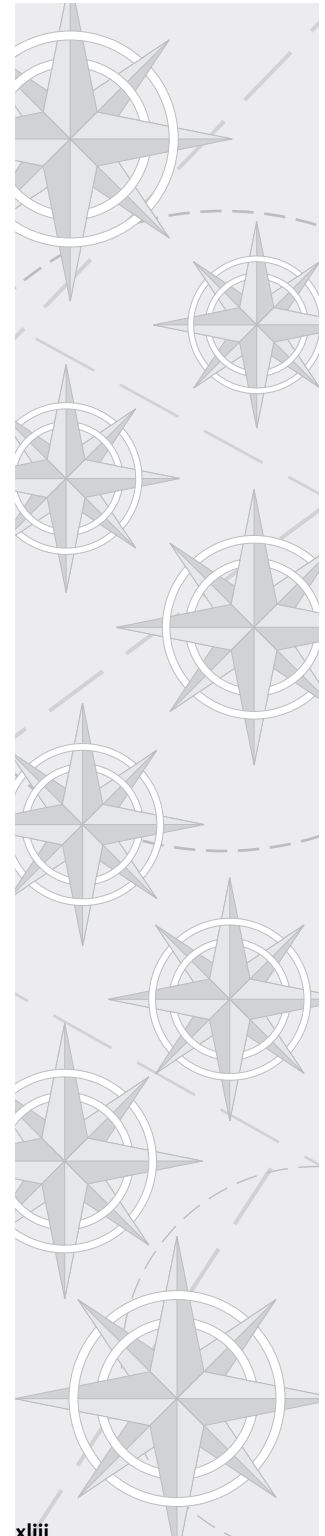


## Research and Activity Ideas

The following list of research and activity ideas is intended to offer suggestions for complementing social studies and history curricula, to trigger additional ideas for enhancing learning, and to suggest cross-disciplinary projects for library and classroom use.

**Traveling West:** You're living in the east in 1849, and hear rumors of gold in California. You decide to pack up your belongings and travel west in search of your fortune. What will you need to pack? How will you get there? Will you go alone or with a group of other goldseekers? Draw up a plan for your journey that includes a list of those things you will take and a description of the route on which you will travel. Your plan should address problems you may encounter and what preparations you've made to overcome these obstacles.

**Indian Cultures Before and After Contact:** There were hundreds of Indian tribes living throughout North America in the years before Americans claimed the continent for their own, and every one of these tribes changed when they came into contact with white



people. Choose one Indian tribe and try to understand how their lives changed as the result of contact. Write a “before contact” description that describes Indian social practices, religious beliefs, and economic practices. Then, write an “after contact” description of how Indian culture changed as a result of contact with whites.

**The Wild West:** Many people have formed opinions of the American West by watching movies. But do movies tell an accurate story about life in the West? Watch one of the many classic film Westerns—*Shane*, *Stagecoach*, *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*, *High Noon*, *The Searchers*, or a film suggested by your teacher—and compare and contrast the image of the West offered by the film with your more balanced understanding of the true nature of Western settlement.

**Home on the Range:** As settlers moved onto Western lands one of their first tasks was to build some form of shelter. In the east, log cabins were the first structure built; on the Plains, the first settlers built sod houses. Research one form of shelter that interests you, and discover what was needed to build it. Draw up a plan for constructing your first home on the range.

**Judging Atrocities:** When we look back at the way Americans treated Native Americans, we are often appalled at the cruelty and violence of Americans’ attacks on Indian cultures. But Americans in the nineteenth century viewed things differently, believing that there were legitimate reasons for waging war on the Indians. Stage a class debate concerning American treatment of Indians in the nineteenth century. You might consider the following: Was the Indian Removal Act of 1830 a fair way to deal with conflicting claims to the lands? What role did Manifest Destiny play in American relations with Indians? Were Indians justified in their violence towards whites? Were army attacks on Indians at Sand Creek and Wounded Knee justified?

**The Vastness of the West:** Using a map of the United States, use pushpins to mark some of the major landmarks in the West. You might mark the site of the California Gold Rush; the Black Hills of South Dakota; Indepen-

dence, Missouri, the staging point for trails west; Santa Fe, New Mexico; and other sites that interest you. Now figure out the distance between these points. Keeping in mind that travelers in the old West could usually cover ten to fifteen miles in a day, figure out how long it would take you to travel by wagon between different sites. How long would it take you to travel these same distances by car or by airplane?

**Dinner is Served:** Travelers on Western trails were said to live on a diet of coffee and hard biscuits. Using your library or the internet, locate and prepare some of the dishes that westerners ate every day on cattle drives or on wagon trains. What would it be like to eat these foods every day?

**Your Town and the West:** If you live west of the Appalachian mountains you live in an area that was once considered the frontier. Use your local library to learn about the role your town (or a town you are interested in) played in the expansion of the United States. Why was your town founded where it is? Is it near a river or a railway line? How did your town change as it moved from frontier village to an established town? Create a presentation to share what you've learned with your classmates.

**Women and the West:** Imagine you are a woman whose family has moved west to homestead on the Plains in the 1870s. What is a woman's role in establishing a homestead? Discover how women contributed to the settling of the West. Write a to-do list for one day or one week. Outline your tasks and describe how you will complete each task.

**Negotiating a Treaty:** You are an Indian leader and you must negotiate a treaty with a territorial governor who wants you and your people to move off the lands you've lived on for as long as you can remember. The governor offers you land in Indian Territory, and promises you that the "Great White Father" will always protect you—but he also suggests that his army will force you off the land if you don't leave peacefully. How would you argue for your right to stay? What arguments can you give that will make the governor

agree to let you stay where you are? Either write a speech that this Indian leader will give, or stage a debate between the governor and the leader.