



# Cattle in California History

*Grade Level: 3-5*

## *Lesson Objectives:*

- ▶ Students will map the history of cattle migrating to California with early explorers and settlers.
- ▶ Students will describe how cattle have been important to people throughout different times in history.

## *Time:*

One to two 50-minute sessions

## *California Standards:*

### **Common Core**

#### **English Language Arts**

**Grade 3:** L.3.1i, RL.3.1, RI.3.2, RI.3.3, RI.3.10, W.3.7, W.3.8, SL.3.1

**Grade 4:** L.4.1f, RL.4.1, RI.4.3, RI.4.10, W.4.4, W.4.8, SL.4.1

**Grade 5:** RL.5.1, RI.5.3, RI.5.10, SL.5.1

## *Materials:*

- ▶ World map that can be projected onto a screen
- ▶ Student reading: Cattle in California History
- ▶ Student worksheet: Cattle in California History

## *Procedure:*

1. Explain to students that they will be learning about the importance of cattle in California's history by researching where the cattle came from and how they got to California.
2. Instruct students to read the Cattle in California History handout. You can also read it as a class depending upon the reading level of your students. Students should highlight text regarding dates, places, and people involved in the migration of cattle. Paragraphs are numbered for easy reference. Display a world map on your whiteboard or screen and point out locations that are important in the text. You can also have student volunteers place sticky notes on the display map to help the class identify different regions as they read about them.
3. Distribute the student worksheet to students and have them work in pairs. Instruct them to discuss important information from the reading and complete the questions.
4. After students have completed the assignment, discuss their understanding of why cattle have been important to people throughout history and today. Show students a video that demonstrates the preparation of a healthy recipe with beef. [www.LearnAboutAg.org/bonalabeef](http://www.LearnAboutAg.org/bonalabeef)

## *Extension Ideas:*

- Show the class the "Homes on the Range: An Introduction to California Rangelands" PowerPoint to further explain the importance of rangeland for cattle, people, and wildlife. [www.learnaboutag.org/stem](http://www.learnaboutag.org/stem)



## Cattle in California History

Student Reading

1. Thousands of years ago, the ancestors of modern day cattle roamed Europe, Asia, and North Africa. These wild cattle were known as aurochs [awr-oks] and were much larger than cattle raised on ranches today. People probably began taming aurochs around 10,000 years ago. The aurochs provided people with food, hides for clothing, and helped with farm work by pulling carts and plows. Over time, the careful breeding of aurochs gave rise to modern day cattle.
2. Cattle were first brought to North America by Spanish explorers. Christopher Columbus and a group of settlers sailed to the Caribbean [kar-uh-bee-un] islands in 1493 and brought with them cattle from the southwest region of Spain (longhorn cattle), which were known for their ability to survive in harsh climates. The cattle were an important source of food for the Spanish settlers as they made their new homes in the Caribbean.
3. In 1519, Hernando Cortez led another group of Spanish explorers from the Caribbean islands to the Yucatan [yoo-kuh-tan] Peninsula region of Mexico in search of gold and other treasures. Once again, the Spanish brought their cattle with them for food. The cattle roamed free and increased in numbers. As the Spanish explorers moved north through Mexico, so did their cattle.
4. Cattle first came to California from Mexico in 1773 when Spanish explorers Juan Bautista de Anza and Gaspar de Portola organized a journey from Mexico to California. The explorers brought 200 of the Spanish longhorn cattle to supply the California missions with food, hides, and tallow. Twenty one Spanish missions were built in California as military and religious stations when Spain was trying to settle the pacific coast of North America. These longhorn cattle played a role in sustaining the people who built those missions.
5. In 1821, Mexico won its independence from Spain and the Mexican government took over what is now California. Land that was held by the Spanish missions was divided into large land grants and awarded to Mexican ranchers. These Mexican ranchers raised cattle on parcels of land that were called "ranchos". Mexican ranchos began to thrive and their cattle were valued for hides and tallow. Traders bought hides and delivered them to Boston on ships to be made into shoes and other leather goods. Tallow was sold to candle and soap factories in South America.



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Student Reading

6. The Mexican-American War of 1846-1848 resulted in the United States gaining nearly one third of the land that was controlled by Mexico. This included areas that are now California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico. Shortly after the war, the California Gold Rush began when James Marshall discovered gold at Sutter's Mill, in present-day Coloma, California. As large numbers of miners and merchants began moving to California the demand for beef rose. Trucks and highways did not yet exist, so beef cattle were moved in cattle drives.
7. Depending upon the distance, cattle drives could take as long as two months. In order to keep the cattle healthy, the cowboys only moved the cattle 10 to 15 miles per day. Driving a herd of 1,500 to 3,500 cattle required at least ten cowboys, with five to ten horses each, and helpers to manage the extra horses. Cowboys worked in shifts around the clock to protect cattle from thieves, predators, and to prevent them from stampeding. Cattle drives also required a "chuck wagon", which is where the food was prepared. The chuck wagon was driven by the cook and pulled by a team of oxen. Typical food supplies in the chuck wagon included flour, baking powder, beans, sugar, coffee, molasses, salt, lard, bacon, and beef. Cowboys earned around forty dollars per month, this is similar to approximately \$1,200 today.
8. The California strain of Spanish longhorn cattle was eventually phased out as a result of people consuming too many cattle without restocking the herds. Additionally, the longhorn cattle were bred with English cattle that were brought from the Midwestern United States to provide food for Gold Rush towns. Today, common breeds of beef cattle raised on California ranches include Black Angus, Red Angus, Hereford, and Shorthorn. Cattle continue to be raised to provide people with food and many by-products such as leather shoes, chewing gum, and soap, all of which remain useful today. Beef is an excellent source of zinc, iron, and protein (ZIP), which are important for good health.

### References:

Skaggs, Jimmy M. "CATTLE TRAILING". Handbook of Texas Online. Texas State Historical Association.  
Calisphere California Cultures, University of California  
Jensen, James M. "Cattle Drives From the Ranchos to the Gold Fields of California" *Arizona and the West*. Vol. 2, No. 4 (Winter, 1960), pp. 341-352 *Journal of the Southwest*.  
Casey, Michael. "California Longhorns Vs. Texas Longhorns of Yesteryear and Today – A Comparative Study.  
Early California History: An Overview. The Library of Congress. [www.memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html](http://www.memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html)

# Cattle in California History

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Directions:

1. Read about the history of cattle in California. Highlight important people, dates, and locations that were significant in the history of cattle making their way to California.
2. In the boxes below, use what you learned from the reading to name the country or region and the people involved with cattle migrating from different parts of the world to California.

1 1493	2 1493-1519	3 1519	4 1773
Country of origin of cattle: _____	Cattle were brought to these islands: _____	Cattle were brought to this country: _____	Cattle were brought to this state: _____
	Explorer: _____	Explorer: _____	Explorers: _____
Color this country green.	Color this region red.	Color this country yellow.	Color this state blue.



