



## Co-op Collages

**Suggested Grade Level:** 3-5

**Time:** 45 minutes

**Subject:** Social Studies, Kansas History, Communities, English Language Arts, Speaking and Listening, Visual Arts, Creating, School Counseling, Career Development, Social and Emotional Development, Agriculture, Agricultural Economics

**Overview:** Students will discover how cooperatives strengthen Kansas communities and agriculture. Through videos and class discussion, students will learn the key principles that guide cooperatives. Working in small groups, they will create collages that encourage teamwork, creativity, and artistic expression and illustrate how cooperatives support communities and farmers.

### Objectives:

1. Explain what a cooperative is and name its three main rules in simple words.
2. Create a collage to illustrate how cooperatives support communities.
3. Utilize various art materials and tools to convey ideas creatively and accurately.

### Background Information:

The cooperative business model is a distinctive, community-centered approach to doing business. Cooperative businesses are owned and run by the people who use their services, not by outside investors or corporate bosses. Members benefit directly from the services the cooperative offers and share in its success. The more members use the cooperative, the more they benefit.

Cooperatives adhere to three core principles that help ensure fairness and a focus on members. The first is the User-Benefits Principle, which means members join cooperatives to obtain goods they need—such as supplies or assistance selling products—that might be difficult to obtain on their own. By working together, members save money and get better deals. When the cooperative earns additional revenue, it allocates those earnings to members based on how much each member uses. The second is the User-Owner Principle, which means that the people who use the cooperative also own it. They help fund the cooperative and keep it running, allowing it to continue supporting members now and in the future. The third is the User-Control Principle, which means members make important decisions by voting. Each member typically receives one vote, regardless of their level of participation in the cooperative. Some members who use it more may get extra votes, but there are rules to keep voting

fair. Members elect leaders to run the cooperative to ensure it serves their needs (Frederick).

The cooperative movement began in the 1840s with the Rochdale Pioneers in England. A group of 28 weavers and artisans established a cooperative store to offer quality goods at fair prices, following their experiences of hardship and unfair treatment by traditional merchants. Their success inspired cooperative businesses worldwide (International). The cooperative business model is adaptable across many industries. Farmer-owned cooperatives help farmers market, store, and process their crops while lowering costs through shared purchasing. Consumer-owned rural utility cooperatives provide electricity, broadband, and phone service to rural areas that for-profit companies often underserve. Financial cooperatives, such as credit unions, offer credit and financial services (Co-ops).

### **Kansas Industry Information:**

Did you know that there are cooperatives in nearly every Kansas county? Kansas is home to many different types of cooperatives, also known as co-ops, that all play a crucial role in supporting local communities. Agricultural co-ops help farmers and ranchers by providing seed, fertilizer, fuel, feed, and transportation. They also operate grain elevators, which are crucial for storing harvests and preventing grain from spoiling. Utility co-ops are also common in rural Kansas. They provide services known as utilities, such as electricity, water, and telephone service, to areas that conventional utility companies often don't reach. You may also be familiar with financial cooperatives, or credit unions. Credit unions are similar to banks in that they offer savings accounts, loans, and financial education; however, the people who use them also own and help run them. Beyond these, there are many other types of co-ops—consumer, business, housing, and others—that strengthen Kansas communities by bringing healthy food to areas without adequate options, sharing the cost of expensive equipment, improving neighborhoods, and connecting people with similar goals.

Kansas is also strongly supported by its agricultural industry, with much of the land used to grow crops or raise cattle. Many Kansans live in rural areas where towns are smaller and more widely dispersed, which can make it harder to obtain supplies or services. Cooperatives help fill this gap by bringing businesses, jobs, and essential services to communities across the state. The Kansas Cooperative Council reports that the cooperative system brings in billions of dollars each year through sales, wages, and investments. Because cooperatives are locally owned and operated, the money they generate remains within their communities. In rural areas, cooperatives in particular provide steady employment and local leadership. They also add to the local tax base, which helps pay for schools, roads, and other important public services.

### **Materials:**

- Collage supplies: magazines, printed pictures, drawing materials, words, and letters
- Scissors



- Glue or tape
- Other items such as markers, etc.)
- **or** access to technology (E.g., PicCollage, Canva)

### **Instructional Format:**

1. Review Background Information and Kansas Connections.
2. Conduct an engagement exercise.
3. Lead a class discussion.
4. Complete the activity.
5. Review the vocabulary and career information.

### **Engagement:**

Introduction: To introduce this lesson to your students, play this short video. The YES Camp: The First Consumer Co-op: The True Story of the Rochdale Pioneers

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=asYtw8\\_CfBw&t=4s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=asYtw8_CfBw&t=4s). Then, ask your students to summarize the video. Ask questions to guide their answers. Examples:

- Who started the first cooperative?
- Why did they decide to work together?
- How did their store help their town?

### **Procedures:**

#### *Discussion*

Use the lesson background information to explain to the class that cooperatives are businesses owned and operated by the people who use their services, also known as members.

Explain the three core principles that ALL cooperatives follow:

- The User-Benefits Principle means members join cooperatives to access helpful services and receive rewards or benefits based on their level of use.
- The User-Owner Principle means the people who use the cooperative also own it and help pay for it to keep it running and growing.
- The User-Control Principle means that members control the cooperative by voting on important decisions and selecting leaders to ensure fair governance.

Cooperatives are essential in several industries, like agriculture (farming), finance (money), and utilities (for example, electricity), and they play a crucial role in Kansas, particularly in rural areas where access to essential resources (things that are needed) can be challenging. Cooperatives help farmers and families by sharing resources and working as a team.

Show this 20-minute virtual field trip video for the class. Discovery Education: The Power of Cooperatives Virtual Field Trip: | Discovery Education and CHS Foundation

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cYxGPkdbYHk>.

- How do cooperatives support communities?



- Do you know of any local cooperatives in your area?
- How do local cooperatives influence your community?

If necessary, students may need to do some research to explore local cooperatives. The *Kansas Cooperatives List* in *Materials* is available for reference.

### Activity

1. Divide students into small groups of 2–3.
2. Provide each group with the materials listed above to create a collage, **or provide** access to PicCollage or Canva so that groups can make a collage illustrating how cooperatives support Kansas communities. The collage should include words and pictures that show what cooperatives do and how they help communities. Give your students at least 15 minutes to work.
3. Have each group share their collage with the class. Encourage them to briefly explain why cooperatives are essential to Kansas communities, particularly in agriculture. Prompt them to discuss how cooperatives support farmers and how they support other people in the community.

### Discussion

Use the background information to explain that many of the students may be familiar with the local cooperatives, especially those that have a big grain elevator. They may even know someone who works at one!

- “Does anyone know a grain elevator operator?”
- “Does anyone know what a grain elevator operator does?”

A grain elevator operator assists in storing and transporting grain, such as wheat and corn, for farmers. Grain elevator operators help farmers by keeping their crops safe and preparing them for sale. In Kansas, cooperatives like Mid Kansas Cooperative (MKC) and Garden City Co-op run grain elevators to support local farmers. People in this career usually have a high school diploma and learn on the job or at a trade school.

To wrap up this lesson, ask students to consider all of the ways cooperatives support Kansas communities.

- “Tell me the types of cooperatives that help communities?”
- “What is one way cooperatives help people that stood out to you today?”

### Vocabulary:

- **Cooperative:** A business owned and run by the people who use its goods or services
- **Member:** A person who owns part of a cooperative and helps make decisions.



- **User-Benefits Principle:** Members join cooperatives to get helpful services and get paid based on how much they use the co-op.
- **User-Owner Principle:** The people who use the cooperative also own it and help pay for it to keep it running and growing.
- **User-Control Principle:** Members control the cooperative by voting on important decisions and selecting leaders to ensure fair governance.
- **Business:** An organization that sells goods or services to meet people's needs or make a profit.
- **Resource:** Something that is used to help meet a need or complete a task, such as tools, money, or information.

### **Career Information:** Grain Elevator Operator

A grain elevator operator helps farmers store and sell the crops they grow, like wheat, corn, and soybeans. Many grain elevators are owned by the farmers who use them. Operators weigh the grain, keep it dry and safe, and load it onto trucks or trains when it's time to sell. Their job helps ensure farmers receive fair prices and that food reaches stores and people. Most grain elevator operators need a high school diploma and learn on the job. Some may take extra classes in agriculture, safety, or machine operation at a community college or trade school. They need to be good at working with machines, paying attention to details, and helping customers.

**Assessment:** The group collage project will serve as the assessment. When evaluating, consider understanding of cooperatives, teamwork, creativity, craftsmanship, and clear communication.

### **Kansas Standards:**

#### ***Language Arts***

#### ***3rd Grade***

#### **Language In Reading: Informational**

RI.3.11 Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases to expand language comprehension.

RI.3.12 Demonstrate understanding of word relationships and nuances in word meanings.

RI.3.12.b Identify real-life connections between words and their uses.

#### **Writing**

W.3.2.a Introduce a topic and group related information together; include illustrations when useful to aiding comprehension.

#### **Research to Build and Present Knowledge**

W.3.8 Recall information from experiences or gather information from print and digital sources; take brief notes on sources and sort evidence into provided categories.

#### **Language in Writing**

W.3.10 Demonstrate knowledge of language and command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing.

W.3.10.a Choose words and phrases for effect.

#### **Speaking and Listening**

SL.3.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups and teacher-led) with diverse on third grade topics and texts, building on others' ideas and



expressing their own clearly.

SL.3.1.d Explain their ideas and understanding in light of the discussion.

SL.3.2 Determine the main ideas and supporting details of a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively and orally.

#### 4th Grade

Language in Reading: Informational

RI.4.10 Apply acquired skills in writing and speaking.

RI.4.11 Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases to expand language comprehension.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge

W.4.8 Recall relevant information from experiences or gather relevant information from print and digital sources; take notes and categorize information and provide a list of sources.

Language in Writing

W.4.10 Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar, spelling, usage when writing.

Speaking and Listening

SL.4.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups and teacher-led) with diverse partners on fourth grade topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

SL.4.3 Identify the reasons and evidence a speaker provides to support particular points.

Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas

SL.4.5 Add audio recordings and visual displays to presentations when appropriate to enhance the development of main ideas or themes.

#### 5th Grade

Language in Reading: Informational

RI.5.11 Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on fifth grade reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge

W.5.8 Recall relevant information from experiences or gather relevant information from print and digital sources; summarize or paraphrase information in notes and finished work and provide a list of sources.

Language in Writing

W.5.10 Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing.

Speaking and Listening

SL.5.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups and teacher-led) with diverse partners on fifth grade topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

SL.5.2 Summarize a written text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively and orally.

SL.5.3 Summarize the points a speaker makes and explain how each claim is supported by reasons and evidence.

Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas

SL.5.4 Report on a topic or text or present an opinion, sequencing ideas logically and using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes; speak clearly at an understandable pace.

#### ***History, Government, and Social Studies***

Standard 3: Societies are shaped by the identities, beliefs, and practices of individuals and groups.

1. The student will recognize and evaluate how societies are shaped by the identities, beliefs, and practices of individuals and groups.



2. The student will analyze context and draw conclusions about how societies are shaped by the identities, beliefs, and practices of individuals and groups.
3. The student will investigate and connect how societies are shaped by the identities, beliefs, and practices of individuals and groups with contemporary issues.
4. The student will use their understanding of how societies are shaped by the identities, beliefs, and practices of individuals and groups to make a claim or advance a theory using evidence and argument.

### ***School Counseling***

#### Career Development

Standard 1: The student will acquire the skills to investigate careers in relation to knowledge of self and to make informed career decisions.

Benchmark 1: The student will develop career awareness.

3-5.1. The student develops awareness of career interests and related occupations.

3-5.3. The student recognizes and describes the various life roles people play.

3-5.4. The student recognizes that all work has value.

Benchmark 2: The student will develop employment readiness.

3-5.2. The student demonstrates cooperative work habits.

3-5.3. The student demonstrates being a positive team member.

3-5.4. The student demonstrates effective communication skills.

Standard 2: The student will employ strategies to achieve future career goals with success and satisfaction.

Benchmark 1: The student will acquire career information.

3-5.1. The student identifies career fields.

3-5.2. The student describes business and industry in the community and its contribution.

Standard 3: The student will understand the relationship between personal qualities, education, training, and career success.

Benchmark 2: The student will apply skills to achieve career goals.

3-5.3. The student demonstrates problem-solving and decision-making skills.

3-5.4. The student works cooperatively.

#### Social and Emotional Development

Standard 1: The student will acquire knowledge, attitudes, and interpersonal skills to understand and respect self and others.

Benchmark 2: The student will acquire and use interpersonal skills.

3-5.1. The student demonstrates effective communication skills.

3-5.5. The student learns that cooperation takes thought and planning.

### ***Visual Art***

#### 3rd Grade

##### Creating

Cr1.1.3 Elaborate on an imaginative idea.

Cr2.3.3 Individually or collaboratively construct representations, diagrams, or maps of places that are a part of everyday life.

Cr3.1.3 Elaborate visual information by adding details in an artwork to enhance emerging meaning.

#### 4th Grade

##### Creating

Cr1.2.4 Collaboratively set goals and create artwork that is meaningful and has purpose to the makers.

##### Connecting

Cn10.1.4 Create works of art that reflect community cultural traditions.

#### 5th Grade

##### Creating

Cr2.2.5 Demonstrate quality craftsmanship through care for and use of materials, tools, and equipment.

##### Responding

Re7.2.5 Identify and analyze cultural associations suggested by visual imagery.



### **National Agricultural Literacy Standards:**

#### **Food, Health, and Lifestyle**

- Diagram the path of production for a processed product, from farm to table (T3.3-5 b.)

#### **Culture, Society, Economy, and Geography**

- Explain how agricultural events and inventions affect how Americans live today (e.g., Eli Whitney - cotton gin; Cyrus McCormick - reaper; Virtanen - silo; Pasteur - pasteurization; John Deere - moldboard plow) (T5.3-5 c.)
- Explain the value of agriculture and how it is important in daily life (T5.3-5 d.) and/or state (T5.3-5 d.)

### **Supporting Resources:**

Britannica Kids Cooperative Facts

<https://kids.britannica.com/students/article/cooperative/273799>

Desjardinsgroup: What is a cooperative?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eJaFFtnxsfk>

TED-ed: These companies with no CEO are thriving

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4M6lrhuiPv0>

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### **References:**

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International Cooperative Alliance. (n.d.). *The Rochdale Pioneers*. Retrieved August 4, 2025, from <https://ica.coop/en/rochdale-pioneers>

Arthur Capper Cooperative Center. (2019, August 27). *Evolving KS co-op landscape video* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P5stNZZK-tA>

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U.S. Federation of Worker Cooperatives. (n.d.). *Directory*. Retrieved August 18, 2025, from <https://www.usworker.coop/directory/>



## Types of Cooperatives

### Agricultural Cooperatives

As of 2019, there are 62 farmer (agricultural) cooperatives in the state of Kansas. These member-owned organizations enable local farmers to collaborate on marketing, storage, and processing of their crops and livestock. They also supply essential inputs, such as seed, fertilizer, and feed, and provide services, such as equipment sharing and agronomic support.

Examples:

Servi-Tech, Inc., Dodge City

Mid-Kansas Co-op, Moundridge

American Plains Co-op, Great Bend

### Utility Cooperatives

Utility co-ops were formed in the early 1900s to provide certain essential services to rural, underserved areas. They typically offer electricity, telecommunication, and water/sewage services. Members of a utility cooperative collectively own the cooperative that serves them and influence decisions regarding infrastructure and service quality.

Examples:

Nemaha-Marshall Electric Cooperative, Axtell

Flint Hills RECA, Council Grove

DS&O Rural Electric Cooperative Assn., Inc., Solomon

### Financial Cooperatives

Financial cooperatives, such as credit unions, are similar to banks. They provide personal and business banking, lending, and investment services. However, unlike traditional banks, their primary focus is on serving the needs of their members and community, rather than generating profits for shareholders.

Examples:

Golden Plains Credit Union, Garden City

Azura Credit Union, Topeka

Credit Union of Emporia, Emporia

### Consumer Cooperatives

Consumer cooperatives enable individuals to pool their purchasing power, thereby enabling them to access goods and services at lower prices and higher quality. One example of a consumer cooperative is a food cooperative, which is like a grocery store. Food cooperatives can help address food deserts, which are regions without easy access to nutritious food.

Examples:



KC Kosher Co-op, Kansas City  
The Merc Co+op, Lawrence

### **Business Cooperatives**

Business cooperatives are formed by organizations or companies in the same sector to purchase supplies, share services, or collaborate on projects. By collaborating, members reduce operational costs and gain greater market influence.

Examples:

Sunflower Electric Power Corporation, Hays  
Kansas Electric Power Cooperative Inc. (KEPCo)

### **Housing Cooperatives**

Housing cooperatives enable residents to collectively own and manage residential properties, including apartments, single-family homes, or senior housing. Members contribute to operating expenses and participate in the decision-making process.

Examples:

People's Owned and Operated Collective Housing (POOCH), Lawrence  
Prairie Glen Townhouses, Manhattan

### **Worker Cooperatives**

Worker cooperatives are owned and run by the employees. Members share profits and make key decisions together, thereby giving workers greater control over their work and the direction of the business. These cooperatives are less common – according to the United States Federation of Worker Cooperatives, there are no documented worker cooperatives in the state of Kansas as of 2025.

Examples:

Ward Lumber, Jay and Malone, NY

### **Multi-Stakeholder Cooperatives**

Multi-stakeholder cooperatives bring together diverse members (such as producers, consumers, and community members) who benefit in different ways. By collaborating, these groups address shared challenges, support local economies, and create value for all participants.

Examples:

Farm and Home Cooperative, Kansas and Missouri

