

A Hundred Bales of Hay

Objective

Students learning about hay and its connection to humans and animals.

Background

Before there were cars, trucks and farm equipment, it was workhorses that provided transportation and helped with work on the farm and in other industries. Hay was the fuel that made the horses go. Farmers needed huge quantities of hay for their cattle and their sheep. Horses were also used in the mining, lumbering, and road building industries. Horse used for hauling and personal transportation in cities needed fodder, too. Farmers put up hay for their own use and sold the extra in local markets or baled it and shipped it to markets farther away.

Haymaking involved cutting, gathering, drying and storing grasses or legumes, like alfalfa or clover. Hay was best made during late June, July and August. First the hay was cut with a scythe or a mower. Then sun and wind dried the hay as it lay in the field. When the moisture content was low enough, the hay was raked up and stored in stacks in the field or loaded on a hay rack or elevator (conveyor) and hauled to the yard. Here it could be stored in stacks or in the mow (loft) of a barn. The loose hay would continue to dry in the mow and was fed out by pitching it down to the animals below.

Most haymaking was done by family members, male and female, working with neighbors and casual help. Hired men usually got the heavy work, such as pitching hay or building stacks. Women and older children often did the raking and drove the teams of horses. Smaller children brought lunches and cold drinks to the hayfield.

Farmers today still need hay to feed their animals, but now machinery does much of the work. Most hay is now baled in huge round bales, usually by just one person. Round balers produce bales weighing 600-2000 pounds. The bales are either left in the field until they are used or moved to a covered storage area.

Oklahoma has excellent conditions for growing hay, which requires plenty of rain, and then hot dry weather for harvest. In 2015, hay ranked number four of all the state's agricultural commodities. Some of the premium alfalfa hay goes to feed the state's large equine (horse) population.

Common plants used for making hay in Oklahoma are alfalfa, wild and prairie grasses, sorghum/sudan crosses, sudan, Bermuda, lespedeza, soybean, peanut, and small grains like wheat, rye and oats.

Many people confuse hay with straw. The square bales often sold in the fall for Halloween decorations are actually bales of straw. Straw is the stubble that is left after the grains from plants like wheat, oats and rye are threshed from the plant. It is most commonly used in animal bedding, as mulch for gardens and, in some cases, even in the walls of houses.

Oklahoma Academic Standards

GRADE 3

Critical Reading and Writing:
R.4; W.1

GRADE 4

Critical Reading and Writing:
R.4; W.1

GRADE 5

Critical Reading and Writing:
R.4; W.1

Vocabulary

bale—a large package of raw or finished material tightly bound with twine or wire and often wrapped

feed—food for livestock

fodder—feed for livestock, often consisting of coarsely chopped stalks and leaves of corn mixed with hay

hay—grass or other plants, such as clover or alfalfa, cut and dried for animals to eat

legume—a family of plants which convert nitrogen from the air to build up nitrogen in the soil

scythe—an implement consisting of a long, curved, single-edged blade, with a long, bent handle, used for mowing and or reaping

straw—stalks of grain after threshing, often used for bedding

Procedures

1. Read and discuss background and vocabulary.
 - Hand out copies of the Reading Page included with this lesson.
 - Students will read individually or as a class.
 - Students will answer the discussion question in complete sentences.
2. In light of what they have learned about hay, students will explain the meanings of these three old sayings:
 - “You’ve got to make hay while the sun shines.”
 - “It’s like trying to find a needle in a haystack.”
 - “It’s time to hit the hay.”

—These statements are examples of figurative language. Students will identify each as:

 - —simile (a comparison that uses like or as)
 - —metaphor (an implied comparison)
 - —hyperbole (an exaggeration for effect)
 - —personification (a description that represents a thing as a person)

—Can students think of other sayings that refer to hay?
3. Students will write a fictional journal or draw pictures depicting a day baling hay.
 - Students may take the perspective of the hired hand, the older children, the parents or the younger children. (See background material and reading page.)
 - Students will share their stories with the class.

Name _____

A Hundred Bales of Hay

Before there were cars, trucks, and farm equipment, it was work horses that provided transportation and helped with work on the farm. Hay was the fuel that made the horses go. Farmers needed huge amounts of hay for their cattle and their sheep. Work horses needed hay, too. Farmers put up hay to feed their own animals and sold the extra to people in town who needed it for their horses.

Haymaking involved cutting, gathering, drying and storing grasses or legumes, like alfalfa or clover. Hay was usually made during late June, July and August.

First the hay was cut with a scythe or a mower. Then sun and wind dried the hay in the field. When the hay was dry enough, workers raked it up and made hay stacks in the field or hauled it to the barn. The farmer could feed the animals by pitching the hay to the animals below.

Everyone in the family helped with haymaking, male and female. The hired men usually got the heavy work, such as pitching hay or building stacks. Women and older children did the raking and drove the teams of horses. Smaller children brought lunches and cold drinks to the hayfield.

Farmers today still need hay to feed their animals, but machinery does more of the work now.

THINK ABOUT IT

Explain this statement: "Hay was the fuel that made the horses go."

This statement is an example of figurative language. Which is it? (Check one.)

- simile? (a comparison that uses like or as)
- metaphor? (an implied comparison)
- hyperbole? (an exaggeration for effect)
- personification? (a description that represents a thing as a person)