A gunshot fired. A cannon roared. Horses startled and wagons sprang to life. On April 22, 1889, settlers flooded into the region of central Oklahoma known as the Unassigned Lands. President Benjamin Harrison signed a proclamation on March 23, 1889, opening the land, and people came from across the country to claim it. According to the Homestead Act of 1862, if a settler could stay on the land they claimed for five years and improved it, the land would be theirs free and clear. Some people were very excited about the 1889 Land Run and were ready to try to make a new life in Oklahoma Territory. There were also people, however, who did not want new settlers to come into the territory.

This exhibit will show the 1889 Land Run from the perspectives of five different players: David Payne, leader of the Boomer movement; Lew Carroll, a settler who came to stake a claim but was unsuccessful until a later land run; American Indians, who were placed on reservations and whose land was allotted and taken from traditional communal control to create the Unassigned Lands; Elias Boudinot, a Cherokee man who welcomed white settlers for his own economic gain; and the women who had to set up households on the prairies using what little they had in their wagons or strapped to their horses.

Photo of the Oklahoma land run of September 16, 1893 (Barney Hillerman Collection, OHS).
Land office in Kingfisher (OHS Collections).

Map of Indian and Oklahoma Territories (ITMAP.0023, Oklahoma Historical Society Map Collection, OHS).
Oklahoma Land Openings

Map of the Oklahoma Land Openings (OHS).

- **Lands Opened By Allotment**
  - 1891 - Tonkawa
  - 1892 - Pawnee
  - 1904 - Ponca
  - 1904 - Oro-Missouri
  - 1906 - Osage
  - 1906 - Kaw

- **Lands Opened By Run**
  - April 22, 1889 - Unassigned Lands
  - September 22, 1891 - Iowa,
    - Sac & Fox,
    - Pottawatomie
    & Shawnee
  - April 19, 1892 - Cheyenne & Arapaho
  - September 16, 1893 - Cherokee Outlet
  - May 23, 1895 - Kickapoo

- **Lands Opened By Lottery**
  - July 9 to August 6, 1901 - Wichita and Caddo
  - Comanche, Kiowa & Apache

- **Lands Opened By Sealed Bid**
  - December 1906 - Big Pasture
Women in the Land Run

Several women, white and African American, participated in the 1889 Land Run alongside the men. They were also lured by promises of inexpensive land and further opportunities. Married women followed their husbands, sometimes unhappily, to what was considered the uncivilized frontier. Single and widowed women also made the race themselves for the same reasons. The Homestead Act stated, in regards to gender, that women must be single or widowed, at least twenty-one years of age, and the head of household to claim a homestead. Upon arriving and staking a claim, women worked alongside men to build their homes and begin their farms. Along with taking care of any children, they also labored to take care of a household, often within a primal sod home and without the same conveniences of their former lives in the East. The women were forced to be versatile, using what they could find to keep their homes. For example, they gathered cow chips to burn for cooking; chased out intruding mice, snakes, and bugs; and cooked while sometimes having to shield falling dirt and mud from the food. They also served as mediators, politicians, leaders, and teachers until towns could be established.

A woman holding down a claim on a town lot in Guthrie, Oklahoma Territory, following the 1889 Land Run (15727, D. S. Mitchell Collection, OHS).

Two women and one man on horseback in front of the Southwestern Lumber Company just before the run (194127, William F. Harn Collection, OHS).
American Indians and the Land Run

American Indians viewed the land run very differently than settlers. While those who made the run saw the situation as an opportunity to claim free land, American Indians feared they may soon again lose even more of their land. In varying times during the nineteenth century, tribes had been forced from their ancestral homelands to reservations in present-day Oklahoma. Then, tribes were forced to accept individual allotments with the Dawes Act in 1887, which again reduced their land. Some of the land taken from tribal ownership became available for white settlement in various land openings.

After boomers, such as David Payne, continually violated Indian treaties by encroaching on their land, the United States government finally relented and, in 1885, passed an Indian Appropriations Act to allow natives to sell their unoccupied land. Furthermore, in 1889, President Grover Cleveland passed a new Indian Appropriations Act, which opened up these Unassigned Lands to settlers, which was distributed in the land runs.

Elias C. Boudinot

Raised in New England following his father’s assassination, Elias C. Boudinot studied law and dabbled in politics. This background proved instrumental in Boudinot’s future. A loss in a Supreme Court case in 1868 led Boudinot to believe that American Indians should seek the protection of the United States Constitution and property rights as individuals rather than through tribal ownership. During the 1870s, Boudinot worked as a railroad attorney and spent much of his time in Washington.

On February 17, 1879, in a letter to the Chicago Times, Boudinot espoused his claim that fourteen million acres of Indian Territory, including the Unassigned Lands, should be considered public domain and opened to non-Indian settlers. Boudinot’s letter spread to other papers throughout the United States, motivating David Payne and other homesteaders to seek land in the territory.

Boudinot died in Fort Smith on September 27, 1890, just a year after the first land run.
Ledger book from the 1890s to record rations of American Indians (American Indian Archives Collection, OHS).

Ration ticket bag used to hold ration cards assigned to American Indians at that time (American Indian Collection, OHS).

Memorial of Elias C. Boudinot to the forty-second US Congress to accompany House Resolution 603 regarding the sale of Indian land (image courtesy of the National Archives).
David L. Payne helped launch the campaign to open the Unassigned Lands in Indian Territory to homesteaders. Moving to Kansas in 1858, Payne was elected to the Kansas legislature and eventually held minor political posts in Washington where he learned about the possibility of obtaining land if the "Oklahoma" country was opened to settlement. In August 1879 he began organizing settlers to move into the Unassigned Lands. Between 1879 and 1884, Payne led a number of expeditions into the Unassigned Lands. Each time, Payne was arrested and returned to Kansas by the U.S. Army because it was illegal to settle on American Indian lands.

During an early expedition, Payne and his followers erected a stockade, platted their town, and began opening the fields for planting before soldiers from Fort Reno arrested the group and escorted them to Kansas. The government maintained treaty stipulations with the Indian nations denying the Boomers access to the Unassigned Lands and eventually tried Payne before Judge Isaac C. Parker in Fort Smith. Payne continued to push for the settlement of the area. In 1884 he went on a speaking tour to raise money for the Boomer movement. Payne died in a Wellington, Kansas, hotel on November 28, 1884. Despite his death, the campaign for opening the Unassigned Lands continued until the opening of the territory in 1889.
Lew F. Carroll

Not all who made the 1889 Land Run got a claim. Thanks to the diary he left behind, generations of Oklahomans can learn the story of Lew F. Carroll and his family, who ran but did not obtain a claim in 1889.

The Carroll family left their home near Chetopa, Kansas, on April 11, 1889, to trek to the opening of the Unassigned Lands in Oklahoma Territory. They loaded their wagon with a tent and camping supplies, food for themselves and their team of horses, a compass, an ax, a single-barrel shotgun, a revolver, and a map of Indian Territory. In preparation for finding a new farm, Lew Carroll tied his sod plow to the side of his wagon. On the way to the Land Run, the Carrolls encountered other settlers on their way to the starting line and American Indians from the area who were, in Lew Carroll’s words, “none too friendly, thinking that their country might soon be taken from them.”

The Carrolls joined the frenzy at the starting line at noon on April 22, 1889, for “Harrison’s Horse Race.” At twelve o’clock sharp, the settlers dashed off to claim their land. Lew Carroll and his family searched all day but found nothing available that suited them. They continued their search the next day, but by April 24 they decided to make their way home to Kansas. On May 2, 1889, Lew Carroll reached his home near Chetopa feeling “a little out of sorts, but will be all right soon.”

Lew Carroll did not give up on obtaining land in Oklahoma Territory. In the spring of 1890 he and his family moved to the Oklahoma state line near Arkansas City, Kansas to be close in anticipation of the opening of the Cherokee Outlet. Lew Carroll staked his claim in that Land Run in 1893.

Hunting a claim in the 1889 Land Run (15728, D. S. Mitchell Collection, OHS).
Lew F. Carroll and his wife near the wagon the rode in the 1889 and 1893 land runs (8596, Joseph Thoburn Collection, OHS).

Map of the area of the 1889 Land Run (ITMAP.0164. Oklahoma Historical Society Map Collection, OHS).
Glossary

**Allotment**: A piece of land given or obtained by an individual or family.

**Boomers**: Settlers, like David Payne, who tried to live on land that was not open to the public.

**Claim**: Piece of land obtained in the land run.

**Communal**: The sharing of ownership or resources.

**Conveniences**: Tools or technology that make life easier.

**Cow chips**: Pieces of manure that were often burned for warmth by pioneers on the Great Plains.

**Frontier**: Wilderness or areas with few settlers or towns.

**Homesteaders**: Pioneers or people who live in sparsely populated areas that require self-sufficiency.

**Improvements**: Building a home, barn, shop, etc. on one’s land claim to prove that they were using it appropriately.

**Proclamation**: A public or official announcement.

**Public domain**: Belonging to the state or national government.

**Reservation**: A area where many American Indians were confined to along with other tribal members before the Dawes Act split up Native land into individual allotments.

**Settlers**: A person who lives in an area with few people.

**Sod home**: A sort of hut made with walls of dirt and mud or dug out of the side of a hill.

**Treaties**: Written agreements between parties or people.

**Unoccupied**: Empty.

**Widow**: A woman whose husband has died.
Activities

Make a Compass Activity

Those who made the land run often carried compasses to ensure they traveled in the desired direction. Two types of compasses are included in this activity, with the box compass more complicated and needing further materials than the water compass. The water compass can very easily be made during a class period at school or quickly at home.

Create a Box Compass

Materials:
• Square box with sides no more than 2” high (the bottom a half-gallon milk container will do also)
• Cardboard circle small enough to lay flat in the bottom of box
• 1 ½” nail with head
• 1 large paper clip, straightened
• Compass rose (download at http://www.wilderspin.net/School%20stuff/Pirates/compass-rose-coloring.gif)
• Magnet (one from the refrigerator will do)
• Glue or tape
• Wire

Directions:
• Pierce the center of the box bottom with the 1 ½” nail from the bottom up into the box
• Take the straightened paper clip and compare it to the diameter of your compass rose (if longer, trim)
• Rub the paperclip against the magnet for several minutes
• Glue or tape wire to the cardboard circle, slightly off center
• On the same side, mark the center of cardboard circle and pierce halfway through. Place the cardboard circle on the point of the nail in the box. Let the circle settle. It will turn gently until one end of the needle points north
• Create a compass rose by printing off the example or drawing your own. It should be the size of your cardboard circle
• Glue the compass rose to the cardboard circle with the top placed where the needle end points to north

Create a Water Compass

Materials:
• Small paperclip, straightened
• Small piece of Styrofoam (packing peanuts work great too)
• Bowl or glass of water
• Magnet (one from the refrigerator will do)
• Permanent marker

Directions:
• Rub the paper clip with the magnet for several minutes
• Pierce the paper clip through the Styrofoam
• Gently place on the surface of water. Allow the needle enough time to align along the magnetic fields of the earth. It will then point north. Test this by gently blowing on the needle to push it out of alignment. The same end of the needle should always return to the same direction. Mark the north end of the needle with permanent marker

From EasyFunSchool.com Homeschool Resource
Make a Land Run

1. Conduct a Land Run. Secure the use of a football field, track, playground, or city park for a land run. Divide the area into a 7 X 7 grid. Mark each square as a claim, using flour, paint, chalk or other acceptable material. Use handkerchiefs or scraps of fabric attached to sticks as claim flags.

2. Assign a number to each claim and write the number in the square. Make less claims than students; this will show that not everyone received a portion of land.

3. Have students gather their belongings—backpacks, coats, etc.—to simulate the pioneer family carrying all their belongings.

4. Explain that in the land run of 1889, homesteaders lined up all around the perimeter of the Unassigned Lands. Have students line up all around the perimeter of your area.

5. With great fanfare, stand in the middle of the area and start the race, or assign helpers around the perimeter, to start the race on all sides, all at the same time.

6. Encourage students to run as far as they possibly can. As students become tired, have them sit down in a square. Scatter helpers around the area to resolve disputes.

Discussions

1. Brainstorm the difference between the lifestyles of people back in land run days and contemporary lifestyles.

2. What would have made people back then healthier? (more exercise, no TV, no video games).

3. What factors make us healthier? (more varied diet, advances in medicine, more knowledge of nutrition).

4. Have students walk back to their claims and count the steps (or use pedometers, if available).

5. Ask students how often they think they could walk or run that distance every week? Every day?

6. Challenge students to set goals to walk or run at least that distance once or twice a day.

7. Challenge students to walk a set number of steps every day until they have walked the equivalent number of miles from starting line to claim.

From Oklahoma State University http://oklahoma4h.okstate.edu/health/landrun.pdf
What Do You Take?

Participating in a land run requires some planning to determine what tools and supplies you may need. In this lesson, students in grades 3-5 role play making plans to participate in the Oklahoma land run and apply the economic concepts of goods and services, productive resources, scarcity, and opportunity costs to their plans.

Objectives

- After completing this activity, students will be able to:
- Make decisions as to which resources they would need to pack to take along for the land run in Oklahoma.
- Identify resources as to natural, human, and capital (tools).
- Define and give examples of scarcity and opportunity cost.

Materials

- Enough play dough for each student to produce a small sculpture
- Examples of goods
- Pictures of natural, human, and capital resources
- 3”x5” cards
- Shoe box (decorated to look like a travel trunk)
- Play money
- Play dough

Procedure

1. Discuss with students the story of the Oklahoma land run. Emphasize that this was the last large parcel of land in the United States to be given away by the federal government, and that many people wanted to get some of this scarce land.

2. Have students brainstorm the resources that they think they would need to take along in order to be successful in claiming and settling the land. For example, a hammer, stakes, food, pots, pans, water, tents, horses, etc. List them on the board. Classify the resources suggested as to whether they are natural, human, or capital resources.

3. For younger students (grade 3 or below) skip to #10. For grades 4-5 proceed to #4.

4. Divide students into those who want to make the run, and those who would like to provide goods and services. Distribute play money to students who want to make the run. Students should have differing amounts of money; not everyone had the same resources.
5. Draw or cut out pictures of resources and put them on 3 x 5 cards. Put a price on each card. Make enough cards so that more than one student can purchase an item.

6. Set up a desk as a sort of general store or place to get resources for the run. Be sure to include train tickets for sale as well, and a livery stable selling horses. Make enough cards so that everyone can purchase something.

7. Give students time to make purchases. Some will not have as many resources as others. Discuss the concepts of scarcity and opportunity cost.

8. Hand out play dough. Have students make sculptures of items they wanted to take along, but couldn’t get.

9. Have each student show his/her sculpture and tell the class about it. Review the economic concepts of scarcity, opportunity cost, and productive resources.

10. For younger students: Hand out play dough. Have students make a good that they would like to take on the run. Have each student show his/her sculpture and tell the class about it. Review the economic concepts of scarcity, opportunity cost, and productive resources.

Extension

For older students you may want to add the concepts of goods and services and have them identify the various goods and services needed to participate in a land run.

- Goods: tangible items that satisfy peoples’ wants, such as shirts, wagons, food, etc.
- Services: activities that satisfy people's wants.
- Students may draw pictures of the items they would want to take on the land run.
- Students may also write a story about someone who participated in the land run.

From the Tales of Oklahoma Project by the Oklahoma Council on Economic Education
Bibliography


Activities


For Further Reading


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