

# Don't Fence Me In

## Background

Barbed wire was the first wire technology capable of restraining cattle. Wire fences were cheaper to build than wood or stone fences. When they became widely available in the late 19th century in the United States they made it affordable to fence much bigger areas than before. They made intensive animal husbandry practical on a much larger scale.

In the 19th Century American Southwest barbed wire fencing led to disputes known as range wars between free-range ranchers and farmers. Ranchers needed vast ranges on which to run their cattle, and farmers used barbed wire fences to keep the cattle out of their cornfields. Cattlemen fenced land they owned, land they intended to own and land they were accustomed to using. They fenced thousands of acres of public land. Small farmers and ranchers who the cattlemen had fenced in began cutting fence. For awhile there were parts of the range that were in a state of open warfare. Bands of cutters were threatening bands of fencers. The most violent activity took place in Lincoln County, NM and in Johnson County, WY.

These disputes were settled in favor of the farmers, and heavy penalties were instituted for cutting the wire in a barbed wire fence. Within 25 years, nearly all of the open range had been fenced in under private ownership. For this reason, some historians have dated the end of the Old West era of American history to the invention and widespread use of barbed wire. Barbed wire also put an end to the cattle drives that crossed Oklahoma during that period as homesteaders began fencing their land.

Barbed wire fences remain the standard fencing technology for enclosing cattle in most regions of the US. The wire is aligned under tension between heavy, braced, fence posts (strainer posts) and then held at the correct height by being attached to wooden posts and battens, or steel star posts. The gaps between star posts vary depending on terrain—on short fences in hilly country they may be placed as closely as every 3 yards. In flat terrain with long spans and relatively few stock they may be spaced out up to 30 to 50 yards.

Barbed wire for agriculture use is typically double-strand 12½-gauge, zinc-coated (galvanized) steel and comes in rolls of 1320 ft (402 m) length. Barbed wire is usually placed on the inner (pasture) side of the posts.

## Language Arts/ Social Studies

1. Read and discuss background.
2. Hand out Student Worksheet A.  
—Read out loud as a class, or have students read independently.

## P.A.S.S.

### GRADE 3

**Reading**—3.2; 4.1a,3a,4c;  
5.1b,3; 6.2ab

**Writing**—2.3ab

**Oral Language**—3.2

**Math Process**—1.1,4;  
2.1,3,4; 4.4; 5.1,2

**Math Content**—4.1bc

**Social Studies**—4.4

**Physical Education**—3.3;  
5.2,3

### GRADE 4

**Reading**—2.2; 3.1b,2b,4d;  
4.1a,3ab; 5.1,2ad

**Writing**—1.2,5; 2.4

**Oral Language**—3.2

**Math Process**—1.1,4;  
2.1,3,4; 4.4; 5.1,2

**Math Content**—1.1,2; 4.1ac

**Social Studies**—1.1;

4.1,2,3,5; 5.2,3; 6.3,4; 7.2,5

**Physical Education**—3.3;  
5.2

### GRADE 5

**Reading**—2.2; 3.1d,3a;  
4.1b,2d,3bcd; 5.1,2b

**Writing**—2.5

**Oral Language**—3.2

**Math Process**—1.1,4;  
2.1,3,4; 4.4; 5.1,2

**Math Content**—4.1b

**Physical Education**—4.1;  
5.2,3,5

### Materials

assorted barbed wire  
(optional)

### Additional Activity

Bring in small portions of barbed wire. (Antique or farm stores can be a source for barbed wire if you are interested in purchasing small amounts.)










Have students use the illustrations on the worksheet, and try to determine the type or maker.

- Students will answer the questions at the bottom of the page.
- Discuss answers as a class.
- 3. Hold a class debate.
  - Students will research to find information about the range wars.
  - Assign some students to be cowboys from a cattle company and some students to be the new farmers or settlers who want to build fences.
  - Have some students be the moderators and interviewers. The remaining students can be supporters for the different views.
  - Invite another class in to hear the debate and vote on the side they feel presented the best argument. If possible, invite several classes in for a series of debates.
- 4. As a class read (or sing) the words to the song “Don’t Fence Me In,” on Student Worksheet B.
  - Students will underline any words they don’t understand and look them up in a dictionary. Discuss the words.
  - Students will answer the questions at the bottom of the page.
  - Students will rewrite the song in prose, as a journal entry. (Example: “I don’t like fences. I would rather ride around in the wide open country. I don’t want to be around a bunch of people. I want to be by myself in the quiet so I can hear the wind in the trees. I would rather be sent away forever than to be fenced in. . . .”)
- 5. Students will write research papers about the history of barbed wire and the range wars that resulted from fencing the range.

### Math

1. Students will use the numbers included in the last two paragraphs of the background to plan fencing for a specified area. “In flat terrain with long spans and relatively few stock (star posts ) may be spaced out up to 30 to 50 yards. . . . Barbed wire for agriculture use . . . comes in rolls of 1320 ft (402 m) length.”)
2. Hand out Student Worksheet C.
  - Review the following geometric terms: point; line; line segment; and ray.
  - Demonstrate the mathematical concepts on the board so students may practice before attempting this activity.
  - Students will complete the worksheet.

## Answers to Student Worksheet C:

1.  , ray QR
2.  ,  line segment DE
3.  ,  line MN
4.  ,  line segment GJ
5.  ,  ray PT

## Physical Education

### Game: Wood Fence, Stone Fence, Barbed Wire

- Divide students into two groups—fence and cattle.
- Groups line up facing each other.
- Cattle group counts off by fives.
- When the teacher calls “stampede ones,” the ones in the cattle group take off running toward the fence.
- When the cattle get near the fence, the teacher calls out “wood fence,” “rock fence,” or “barbed wire.”
- The fence responds by doing one of the following:
  - Wood Fence—Students on the fence team stand straight, side by side with arms at their sides.
  - Rock Fence—Students on the fence team stand side by side with their arms crossed in front of them.
  - Barbed Wire—Students on the fence team stand side by side with their elbows hooked.
- The cattle try to get through the fence. Those who get through return to the cattle side. Those who don’t get through join the fence.
- After all the cattle groups have been called, reverse the teams.

Variation: In addition to running, cattle groups may be asked to walk, skip, hop, gallop, etc.

## Extra Reading

- Bender, Lionel, *Invention*, Eyewitness Books, Knopf, 1991.  
Granfield, Linda, *Cowboy*, Ticknor and Fields, 1994.  
McPherson, James M., *Into the West*, Atheneum, 2006.  
Miller, Brandon Marie, *Buffalo Gals, Women of the Old West*, Lerner, 1995.  
Schlissel, Lillian, *Black Frontiers: A History of African American Heroes in the Old West*, Simon and Schuster for Young Readers, 2000.

## Vocabulary

**barbed wire**—Twisted strands of fence wire having sharp barbs at regular intervals.

**corral**—An enclosure for confining livestock.

**frontier**—The margin between the occupied land and the wilderness in the settlement of the US.

**herd**—A group of cattle or other domestic animals of a single kind that are kept together for a specific use.

**homestead**—Land claimed by a settler or squatter, especially under the Homestead

Act.

**line**—A geometric figure formed by a point moving along a fixed direction and the reverse direction.

**line segment**—A continuous mark between two points.

**patent**—A grant made by a government that confers upon the creator of an invention the sole right to make, use, and sell that invention for a set period of time.

**point**—A dimensionless geometric object having no properties except location.

**ray**—A straight line extending from point to point.

**stampede**—A sudden headlong rush of startled animals.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

# Don't Fence Me In

# A

Up until 1874 fences were a luxury, usually made of wood or rocks from the surrounding countryside. These materials were hard to find on the western frontier. Cattle left to roam freely were often taken by cattle thieves who claimed them as their own.

One settler, Joseph Glidden, began to experiment with spiked fencing. On November 24, 1874, Glidden received US Patent No. 157,124 for an invention that would change the face of the western frontier. He had developed a string of wire with sharp barbs. The wire was strung between wooden posts and fastened to the posts with U-shaped pieces of metal.

A salesman, John Gates, set up an amazing demonstration in San Antonio, Texas, to introduce Glidden's barbed wire to the common cowboy. Gates set up a barbed wire corral in the town square and had 25 excited longhorns driven in. The stampeding animals charged the fence. The fence held. They tried again. The fence continued to hold. Soon Gates was taking orders as fast as he could write them down.

The invention of barbed wire solved one problem for settlers but created another one— range wars between settlers and cowboys. As fast as settlers put up the new fencing, cowboys would come along and cut the wires. Cowboys were accustomed to driving large herds of cattle across the wide open spaces of the western frontier. Fences around homesteads slowed them down. Many of the resulting disagreements turned to bloodshed, and many lives were lost before a compromise was reached. In the end, the fencing of the West meant an end to cattle drives and big, open ranges.



1. Why did Joseph Glidden invent barbed wire?
2. What was the cause of the range wars between cowboy and settlers?
3. How did John Gates convince settlers that barbed wire would work?
4. Number the statements below in the correct order? Underline the main idea.
  - \_\_\_ Settlers bought the barbed wire.
  - \_\_\_ A compromise was reached between the cattlemen and the settlers.
  - \_\_\_ Cattlemen cut the barbed wire because they couldn't run their cattle across the range.
  - \_\_\_ Fencing ended cattle drives and big, open ranges.
  - \_\_\_ Joseph Glidden invented barbed wire.
  - \_\_\_ Settlers needed fencing but couldn't afford it.
5. Why did the fencing of the West mean an end to cattle drives and big, open ranches?

Name \_\_\_\_\_

# Don't Fence Me In (answers) A

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1. Why did Joseph Glidden invent barbed wire?  
Because settlers needed something to keep their cattle in that wasn't too expensive (so cattle thieves wouldn't steal them).
2. What was the cause of the range wars between cowboy and settlers?  
Cowboys were accustomed to driving large herds of cattle across the wide open spaces of the western frontier. Fences around homesteads slowed them down.
3. How did John Gates convince settlers that barbed wire would work?  
He set up a barbed wire corral and drove some cattle in to show that the barbed wire would hold them.
4. Number the statements below in the correct order? Underline the main idea.
  3. Settlers bought the barbed wire.
  5. A compromise was reached between the cattlemen and the settlers.
  4. Cattlemen cut the barbed wire because they couldn't run their cattle across the range.
  6. Fencing ended cattle drives and big, open ranges.
  2. Joseph Glidden invented barbed wire.
  1. Settlers needed fencing but couldn't afford it.
5. Why did the fencing of the West mean an end to cattle drives and big, open ranches?  
Because the fencing slowed down the cattle as they were driven across the range.

# Don't Fence Me In

# B

Oh, give me land, lots of land, under starry skies above.  
Don't fence me in.  
Let me ride through the wide open country that I love.  
Don't fence me in.  
Let me be by myself in the evenin' breeze  
Listen to the murmur of the cottonwood trees.  
Send me off forever, but I ask you, please, Don't fence me in.

Just turn me loose, let me straddle my old saddle  
Underneath the western skies.  
On my Cayuse, let me wander over yonder  
Till I see the mountains rise.

Chorus: I want to ride to the ridge where the west commences  
And gaze at the moon till I lose my senses.  
I can't look at hovels and I can't stand fences.  
Don't fence me in.

—*Cole Porter*

1. What is the occupation of the speaker in this song?
  - a. fence builder
  - b. cowboy
  - c. lumberjack
2. Underline three examples of alliteration in this song.
3. The speaker in this song was describing what period in American history?
  - a. Colonial Period
  - b. Great Depression
  - c. Old West

5. Underline the rhymed words in this song.
6. Imagery is the use of language to create vivid pictures in the reader's mind. What vivid pictures come to your mind as you read the words to this song?
7. What does the fence symbolize for the song writer?
8. What do the starry skies above symbolize?
9. How does the rhythm of the words in the song relate to its subject?

Name \_\_\_\_\_

# Don't Fence Me In (answers) B

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1. What is the occupation of the speaker in this song?

b. cowboy

2. Underline three examples of alliteration in this song.

land, lots of land

starry skies

4. The speaker in this song was describing what period in American history?

a. Colonial Period

b. Great Depression

c. Old West

5. Underline the rhymed words in this song.

6. Imagery is the use of language to create vivid pictures in the reader's mind. What vivid pictures come to your mind as you read the words to this song?

Wide open spaces, starry skies, gentle breezes through cottonwood trees, sitting on a horse, mountains in the distance

7. What does the fence symbolize for the song writer?

8. What do the starry skies above symbolize?

9. How does the rhythm of the words in the song relate to its subject?

The rhythm feels like riding a horse.

# Don't Fence Me In C

In 1874, Joseph Glidden took out the first patent on a fence with prickly hedges which came to be known as "barbed wire." Rock and wooden fences were too expensive for the Plains. Wire fences could not hold up when cattle or horses stampeded. Within a decade, 120 million pounds of barbed wire were sold and stretched across the prairies to change the face of the Plains forever.

Nearly 1,000 designs for barbed wire have been patented since Glidden patented his. Five popular barbed wire designs are pictured below, along with the names of their creators and the years in which they were patented. Scutt's Arrow Plate (1878) is the one most similar to the standard barbed wire used by today's farmers and ranchers.

Look at the figures and name them, using the geometric terms at left. Then write them in words.

**Geometric Terms**

**A**  
• A point shows an exact location in space. It is named by a capital letter.

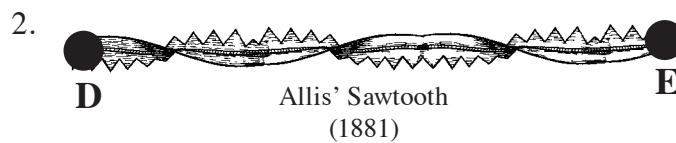
**BC**  
↔ A line is made up of points. It goes on in opposite directions. A line is named by two points.

**DE**  
— A line segment is part of a line. It has two endpoints.

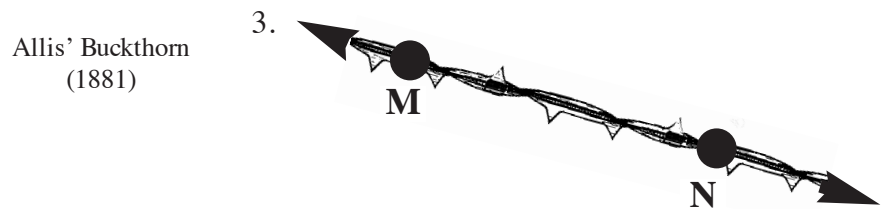
**FG**  
→ A ray is part of a line. It has one endpoint and goes on and on in one direction.



\_\_\_\_\_ , \_\_\_\_\_ ray QR



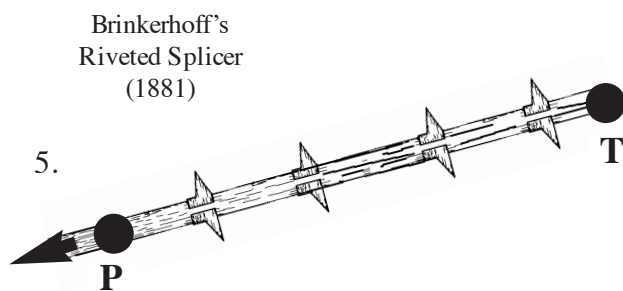
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